HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

A MULTIDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

Edited by
Aparna Sharma, Anil Sehrawat
and Tapan Kumar Chandola

ROUTLEDGE

HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

This compilation of original, peer-reviewed papers takes a multidisciplinary approach to address a diverse range of topics in the humanities and social sciences. It explores traditional knowledge systems and their relevance to sustainable development, leadership, health, and ethics.

The book delves into various themes of Indian Knowledge System, Global Relations, Governance, Policy, and Political Dynamics, Geographical Innovations, Revisiting Indian History and Culture, Contemporary Sociological Imagination, Dialogues in Literature and Literary Discourse, Communication and Language Studies, Contemporary Issues in Mental Health and Well-being, Law, Gender, Human Rights and Teacher Education. With a special emphasis on historical and cultural developments, it provides a comprehensive understanding of society, economy, human behaviour and policy in the modern world through novel academic perspectives.

This volume serves as a valuable resource for academicians, researchers and students in the field of humanities and social sciences. It also addresses concerns of policymakers, educators, civil society members, and professionals working in NGOs, governance, law, business, media, and environmental advocacy.



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Humanities and Social Sciences

A Multidisciplinary Approach

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Preface

It is with great pride and scholarly enthusiasm that we present the proceedings of the International Conference on Multidisciplinary Approaches to Humanities & Social Sciences (MDAHSS 2025). This volume, curated from a globally diverse pool of academic contributions, stands as a testament to the enduring and evolving power of interdisciplinary research in addressing the complexities of our contemporary world.

Fostering intellectual synergy across the humanities and social sciences, MDAHSS 2025 convened scholars, researchers, educators, and practitioners to reimagine the contours of academic dialogue. The conference served as a vibrant platform to engage in rigorous discourse that bridges the traditional and the contemporary, the local and the global, the empirical and the theoretical parameters.

This conference featured fourteen thoughtfully curated tracks—ranging from Indigenous Knowledge Systems, global governance, and sociological transformations to legal paradigms, literary discourses, educational innovation, and media transitions. Each track invited inquiry across disciplinary boundaries, encouraging participants to challenge existing frameworks, explore novel methodologies, and offer insights with real-world impact. Together, these contributions reflect a collective aspiration: to cultivate research that is inclusive, sustainable, and socially relevant.

The emphasis of the conference on Indian Knowledge Systems, historical reconstructions, and cultural dialogues not only honours the past but repositions it within the context of present-day global challenges. Equally, the engagement with mental health, gender equity, education, and technological innovation underscores the urgent need to adapt scholarship to evolving human and societal needs. These proceedings offer a rich tapestry of ideas that are at once deeply rooted and forward-looking. From exploring philosophical intersections in literature to addressing political decentralization, from analysing the socio-environmental implications of climate change to navigating the legal transformations shaped by technology, the articles herein exemplify the multidisciplinary essence of MDAHSS.

On behalf of the editorial team, we extend sincere gratitude to all contributing authors, peer reviewers, track chairs, and organizing committee members for their rigorous work and unwavering commitment to academic excellence. Special thanks are also due to Taylor & Francis for their partnership in disseminating scholarly knowledge to the wider academic and policy-making communities.

As readers navigate this volume, it is our hope that these collected works inspire new lines of inquiry, foster enduring collaborations, and contribute meaningfully to the shaping of a more thoughtful, inclusive, and equitable world.

Editors
Aparna Sharma
Anil Sehrawat
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Foreword by Uma Bhardwaj

It gives me immense pride and pleasure to share the proceedings of the International Conference on Multidisciplinary Approaches to Humanities & Social Sciences (MDAHSS 2025), organized by the School of Liberal Arts, Noida International University.

The significant academic gathering, held under the theme of fostering intellectual synergy across the humanities and social sciences, reflects the University's unwavering commitment to adopt interdisciplinary research and critical engagement with the contemporary global challenges. The proceedings compiled in this volume is a witness to the depth and breadth of the scholarly inquiry that MDAHSS 2025 inspired—an effort that brings together voices from diverse geographies, disciplines, and perspectives.

The fourteen tracks of the conference, ranging from Indigenous knowledge systems and global governance to literary discourses and digital transitions, have encouraged participants to transcend traditional academic boundaries and engage in dialogues that are both rooted in cultural understanding and forward-looking in their vision. I am particularly pleased to see the emphasis placed on Indian Knowledge system, historical reconstructions, gender equity, mental health, and sustainable development, areas that are not only academically vital but socially transformative.

In today's interconnected world, the need for inclusive, multidisciplinary approaches to knowledge creation cannot be overstated. The proceedings demonstrate such approach, by showcasing research that is theoretically robust, methodologically diverse, and oriented towards the real-world impact. The thoughtful contributions presented herein reaffirm our belief that academia must continually evolve to remain relevant, responsive, and responsible. I extend my heartfelt appreciation to all the scholars, researchers, educators, peer reviewers, and track chairs who have made this publication possible. My special thanks to the editorial team and the School of Liberal Arts for their vision and dedication, and to Taylor & Francis for their collaboration in presenting this critical work to the global academic community.

As you explore the pages of this volume, I invite you to engage deeply in the ideas presented and to carry forward the spirit of inquest, collaboration, and innovation that defines MDAHSS 2025.

Warm Regards
Prof. (Dr.) Uma Bhardwaj
Vice Chancellor
Noida International University



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Our sincere thanks go to the distinguished Chief Guests and the Keynote Speakers, whose insightful addresses and thought-provoking deliberations enriched the intellectual value of the conference. Their perspectives have significantly contributed to advancing discussions in the fields of Humanities and Social Sciences.

We also acknowledge the valuable contributions of the Reviewers (internal and external), whose meticulous efforts ensured the academic rigour and quality of this volume. Their dedication in reviewing submissions and guiding authors has been instrumental in shaping the final outcomes presented here.

Special appreciation is extended to the Conference team of Chairs, Co-Chairs, Convenors, Co-Convenors, Organising Committee Members for their commitment, teamwork, and tireless efforts in planning and executing the conference with precision and professionalism. Their collective hard work reflects in the success of this event and the publication of these proceedings.

Finally, we express our gratitude to all contributors and participants for their scholarly engagement and for sharing their research and perspectives. Their enthusiasm and dedication continue to strengthen the spirit of academic collaboration that lies at the heart of Noida International University's mission.



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Editor biographies

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Keynote session addresses

The Possibility of a Hybrid Knowledge System: Some Remarks

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The Indian knowledge system (IKS) is characterized by a multitude of key components that underscore its extensive historical and cultural foundations. At the core of the IKS are the notions of knowledge (skrt. *jñāna*), science (skrt. *vijñāna*), and a philosophical worldview as the path of life (skrt. *jīvan darśana*, which have evolved through methodologies of observation, experimentation, comprehensive analysis and philosophical reflection. This tripartite framework, which was transmitted textually, orally, artistically or via literature and poetry, to mention just a few ways of its diffusion, establishes the basis of a knowledge system that integrates its multiple and various fields such as arts, education, legislation etc. It is also recognized as a crucial element of the intellectual and cultural heritage of indigenous peoples, contributing to their social identity and sustainable development. The Indian knowledge system constitutes therefore a complex construct that incorporates diverse forms of knowledge, classification systems, which arose in different historical and civilisational context and can be said to have often arisen when confronted with a different or foreign worldview.

In my talk, I would like to discuss a case of such a confrontation which took place in the colonial Bengal during a period of a lively exchange of ideas between representatives of the "East" and "West". From the late 18th century through the 19th century, at the initiative of the British, Bengal saw an era of mass translations of Sanskrit, Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Hindi and Bengali works into English, the publication of grammars and textbooks for the study of languages including Bengali, Sanskrit, Telugu and Marathi, and many dictionaries. Such publishing and educational policies developed a new framework for scientific and literary discourse in the conquered area. On the one hand, the foreign newcomers, from their own cognitive perspective, produced a particular image of Indian culture, including literary culture, and were highly influential in shaping the scientific discourse on India. On the other hand, as a result of their exposure to Western thought, its ideas of modern society, and its cultural heritage, there was a tremendous intellectual ferment among the educated section of the indigenous people of Bengal, including through publications produced by the British.

As a result of the dynamic intellectual and cultural interaction in Bengal, a movement called the Bengal Renaissance was born, in which ideas and ideals were exchanged between representatives of 'East' and 'West', and some of them strived to transcended social and symbolic limitations of their source cultures, even if only for a while, in order to create what I would like to call a hybrid knowledge system. This hybrid knowledge system arose in Bengal due to the work of the "translators of cultures and translators of worlds", who decided to transgress the limitations of their own traditions.

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21st-Century Education: A Key to Adaptability, Sustainability and Autonomy

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Before beginning today's sharing, I ask you to follow me in conducting a simple breathing exercise, enabling us to focus away from the logical, intellectual mind for a moment and instead place attention on the heart center. Too often, in our attempt to control outcomes and manage situations outside of ourselves, we lose the ability to feel into our actions and cut ourselves off from a greater wisdom that is ever present but seldom considered. Intuition or gut feelings are often dismissed as irrational, but throughout this presentation I ask you to consider the points raised from the emotion it generates within your heart for this is an important indicator you are not often directed to follow.

While most people go through life thinking that the reality they experience is random and therefore largely outside of their ability to control, this is a limiting belief that can be altered with intentional focus. Before beginning to understand how this mindset shift can happen, the realization that everything is energy and is emitting a vibrational frequency must be acknowledged. We know that all our sensory organs are in fact receiving energetic (vibrational) frequencies that our mind translates - essentially, we are transmitting and receiving mechanisms, this was confirmed by the 2012 Nobel prize in Physics for discovery of the Higgs Boson field. As pure energy passes the Higgs field then and only then does it take on mass, so all matter we perceive in our physical reality was both created by and remains energetic. Our thoughts and emotions too are vibrational and emit a specific frequency as do our words. Similar to how a radio operates the vibrational frequency we transmit determines what frequency we are attuned to – one who is depressed perceives a reality that confirms this feeling state and in like matter one who is joyful perceives a very different reality despite being in close proximity to one another (Abdullah, 2020). Monitoring our emotional output gives us power to control the reality we experience.

Don't worry, I do plan on focusing on the subject at hand; however, it is important to understand that there is a guidance system within us that has perhaps been overridden by socialization and systems of control. You may think it strange that my choice of focus for this conference seems to be so limited in its disciplinary approach, perhaps it is pertinent to explain that in my use of the term education I am not only referring to the systematic tertiary and nontertiary learning processes that have become such an important aspect of human life as to be considered a human right, but the personal educational experience that each and every soul engages in with every interaction we encounter. Within this context, education is synonymous with the evolution process we experience both as individuals and a collective and encompasses all aspects of the lived experience.

Let's take a moment to understand why we need to place attention on 21st century education in particular. Those in the audience represent a generational cross section of representatives spanning from as early as 2000 and beyond. 2010 the first iPad was released in the US. Social media sites with widespread use, such as Facebook and Twitter; didn't exist prior to 2004, E-readers, such as the Kindle, were not in popular use until 2007. YouTube was a "revolutionary" concept as recently as 2005. Consider for a moment what this means, those who are presently enrolled as undergraduates have no recollection in their lifetime of the prevalence for rotary dial-landlines over smartphones, nor can they conceptually grasp the idea of cassette recorders or video cartridges. The 21st century world grows increasingly more complex, so the need for our collective expansion is essential. Yes, you are correct in arguing that change has always been constant, but not many of you would dismiss the rapid expansion of change witnessed in the first 25 years of this century. The democratization of knowledge in what we refer to as the information age.

Emotional Intelligence for Contemporary Leaders: Navigating the Human Side of Leadership

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In today's rapidly evolving workplace, traditional conceptions of leadership that emphasized authority, strategic thinking, and technical competence are being redefined. Contemporary organizations operate in environments marked by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity – commonly referred to as VUCA conditions. Within this dynamic context, leaders are increasingly expected to do more than manage processes or drive results; they must also inspire people, foster trust, and cultivate emotionally intelligent responses to rapidly shifting organizational landscapes.

Emotional Intelligence (EI), often defined as the ability to perceive, understand, and regulate emotions in oneself and others, has emerged as a cornerstone of effective leadership. It is no longer a supplementary or "soft" skill but a critical leadership competency essential for driving employee engagement, promoting collaboration, and sustaining performance. As challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the mental health crisis, and digital transformation continue to reshape work structures and interpersonal dynamics, the importance of EI in leadership has gained unprecedented relevance.

Leaders today must not only navigate operational complexities but also address the emotional and psychological needs of their teams. The demands for inclusivity, psychological safety, and empathy in workplace culture underscore the essential nature of emotionally intelligent leadership. Human Resource Development (HRD) professionals are increasingly called upon to support leaders in developing these skills, ensuring that organizations can maintain resilience and thrive in this era of continuous disruption.

Conceptual Foundations of Emotional Intelligence in Leadership

The theoretical framework of emotional intelligence in leadership is most commonly attributed to Daniel Goleman, who expanded upon earlier works on the subject by other scholars. Goleman outlined five core competencies that form the foundation of emotionally intelligent behavior:

(1) **Self-Awareness**: The ability to recognize and understand one's own emotions and how they affect thoughts and behavior. Self-aware leaders are attuned to their emotional responses, strengths, and limitations, which enables more grounded and authentic leadership.
(2) **Self-Regulation**: The capacity to manage one's emotional reactions, especially in stressful or challenging situations. Leaders with strong self-regulation avoid impulsive decisions, remain calm under pressure, and exhibit integrity and adaptability.
(3) **Motivation**: The internal drive to pursue goals with passion and persistence, even in the face of adversity. Motivated leaders inspire others through their vision, optimism, and commitment to excellence.
(4) **Empathy**: The ability to understand and respond to the emotions of others. Empathetic leaders are skilled in recognizing emotional cues, showing concern for employees' well-being, and navigating diverse interpersonal dynamics.
(5) **Social Skills**: Proficiency in managing relationships, building networks, and fostering collaboration. Leaders with strong social skills communicate effectively, resolve conflicts constructively, and build high-performing teams.

These competencies are not innate or fixed. They can be developed over time through reflective practice, experiential learning, coaching, and structured training. Emotional intelligence is thus a dynamic skill set that empowers leaders to respond adaptively to the human complexities of organizational life.

Link Between Emotional Intelligence and Leadership Effectiveness

A substantial body of empirical research has confirmed the positive correlation between emotional intelligence and effective leadership. Multiple meta-analyses and systematic reviews have shown that EI is a significant predictor of leadership success across various organizational contexts.

For instance, a comprehensive review published in *MDPI (2023)* found that emotionally intelligent leaders were more effective in fostering trust, promoting innovation, and enhancing employee satisfaction. These leaders demonstrated a greater ability to adapt to changing circumstances, resolve interpersonal conflicts, and build psychologically safe work environments.

Research conducted in the real estate sector revealed that brokers with high EI were perceived as more trustworthy and credible by their teams. These perceptions translated into improved job satisfaction, better performance outcomes, and reduced employee turnover. Similarly, studies in educational leadership have found that principals and administrators with high EI contributed to improved teacher morale, reduced burnout, and enhanced student outcomes.

The capacity of emotionally intelligent leaders to maintain team cohesion, model constructive emotional behavior, and foster mutual respect is especially critical during crises or organizational change. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted this reality, as leaders were compelled to manage both operational disruptions and the emotional fallout experienced by employees.

Additionally, emotional intelligence has been linked to ethical leadership. Leaders with strong EI are better equipped to act with integrity, demonstrate fairness, and uphold ethical standards in decision-making. This alignment between emotional intelligence and ethical behavior reinforces the role of EI in cultivating sustainable and values-driven leadership.

Emotional Intelligence and Organizational Culture

Leadership is a central determinant of organizational culture, which refers to the shared values, beliefs, and behavioral norms within an organization. Emotionally intelligent leaders play a key role in shaping culture by modeling empathy, active listening, and transparent communication.

Such leaders create environments where employees feel heard, respected, and empowered. They foster cultures that prioritize collaboration over competition, inclusion over hierarchy, and well-being over relentless performance pressure. In turn, these cultural attributes contribute to higher levels of employee engagement, innovation, and resilience.

Emotionally intelligent leaders have been found to establish supportive learning environments characterized by high work satisfaction and employee achievement. In corporate environments, leaders who exhibit EI promote open communication, psychological safety, and team cohesion – attributes that are essential in navigating change, managing diversity, and addressing employee mental health.

Organizational culture does not evolve in isolation; it is a direct reflection of leadership behavior. When leaders model emotional intelligence, they legitimize emotional expression, normalize vulnerability, and create space for authentic human connection. This enables organizations to retain talent, nurture creativity, and remain agile in the face of disruption.

The Dark Side: Emotional Intelligence and Toxic Leadership

Despite its many benefits, emotional intelligence is not inherently positive. Like any skill, it can be misused. Emerging research has begun to explore the darker side of EI, particularly when used manipulatively by toxic leaders.

Leaders who possess high emotional intelligence but lack ethical grounding may use their interpersonal awareness for self-serving purposes. This can manifest emotional manipulation, gaslighting, passive-aggressive behavior, or exploiting team dynamics to maintain

control. Such misuse of EI undermines trust, demoralizes employees, and leads to toxic work environments.

The absence of EI, too, has damaging effects. Leaders with low emotional intelligence often struggle with interpersonal communication, conflict resolution, and empathy. These deficits result in poor morale, high turnover, and chronic workplace dissatisfaction. Employees under such leadership frequently report feeling undervalued, stressed, and disengaged.

Research confirms that emotionally unintelligent leaders are more likely to exhibit abusive behaviors, including micromanagement, favoritism, and emotional neglect. In contrast, leaders with strong EI are more likely to de-escalate conflicts, demonstrate compassion, and create inclusive teams.

The above discussion highlights the necessity of cultivating emotional intelligence ethically and intentionally. Leadership development programs must therefore embed ethical principles into EI training, ensuring that emotional awareness is coupled with integrity, accountability, and a commitment to the well-being of others.

Developing Emotional Intelligence in Leaders

Recognizing the strategic value of emotional intelligence, many organizations have begun incorporating EI development into their leadership training programs. These initiatives aim to build emotional competencies through self-assessment, experiential learning, coaching, and mentoring.

Effective EI development programs often follow a multi-layered approach:

- **Assessment**: Leaders begin by using validated tools (e.g., EQ-i 2.0, MSCEIT - Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test) to gain insights into their emotional strengths and blind spots.
- **Training Workshops**: Interactive sessions help participants build specific competencies such as empathy, emotion regulation, and active listening.
- **Coaching and Feedback**: Personalized coaching allows leaders to reflect on their emotional patterns, practice new behaviors, and receive feedback in a safe environment.
- **Peer Learning**: Group settings offer opportunities for collaborative learning and shared growth.

Such programs have been associated with significant improvements in organizational climate, staff relationships, and conflict resolution. Emotionally intelligent leaders are better able to manage high-stress environments, support team members' emotional needs.

Despite these successes and potential, there also exists a set of challenges. Common barriers to EI development include scepticism about its value, limited resources, and resistance to behavioral change. Some organizational cultures still view EI as secondary to technical or analytical skills, thereby undervaluing its impact.

To address these barriers, EI development must be integrated into broader leadership frameworks, including performance management, talent development, and succession planning. When emotional intelligence is positioned as a core leadership competency—rather than a peripheral skill—organizations are more likely to embrace and sustain its development.

Future Research Directions in EI

Although substantial progress has been made in understanding the role of emotional intelligence in leadership, several areas remain underexplored. Future explorations in the domain should consider the following directions:

- **Multicultural and Cross-Cultural Perspectives**: How does emotional intelligence manifest across different cultural contexts? What are the implications for global leadership?

- **Longitudinal Impact**: How do EI development programs influence leaders and organizations over time? Are the benefits of training sustainable in the long term?
- **EI and Other Leadership Competencies**: How does EI interact with cognitive intelligence, technical skills, and strategic thinking in predicting leadership effectiveness?
- **Sector-Specific Applications**: What unique EI competencies are most relevant in high-stakes fields such as healthcare, education, and emergency management, etc.?
- **Digital and Remote Work Contexts**: How can leaders effectively demonstrate EI in virtual environments where face-to-face interaction is limited?
- **Measurement and Evaluation**: What are the most reliable tools for assessing EI and its impact on organizational outcomes?

By addressing these questions, future investigations in the domain can offer deeper insights into how EI contributes to resilient, ethical, and high-performing leadership across diverse settings.

Conclusion

Emotional intelligence is no longer a supplementary trait for leaders – it is an essential capability that underpins effective, ethical, and people-centered leadership. In an era defined by complexity and disruption, leaders must be adept not only at solving problems but also at managing relationships, understanding emotions, and responding with empathy and authenticity.

Emotionally intelligent leaders cultivate organizational cultures where employees feel respected, heard, and empowered to contribute meaningfully. They are better positioned to mediate conflict, foster collaboration, and lead with integrity. As research continues to highlight the transformative power of EI, organizations must prioritize its development across all levels of leadership.

Ultimately, emotional intelligence offers a roadmap for navigating the human side of leadership. It is the bridge between strategy and empathy, performance and compassion, authority and connection. In embracing and investing in EI, contemporary leaders can rise to the demands of a complex world while building inclusive, resilient, and thriving organizations. Ultimately, EI is not just a valuable leadership trait but a necessity for thriving in the modern workplace.

The Power of Positive Thinking: How Digital Tools and AI Shape Mental Health and Mindset

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It is with great honour and deep appreciation that I join you as a keynote speaker at the International Conference on *Multidisciplinary Approach to Humanities & Social Sciences*, hosted by Noida International University. The theme I present today is both timely and transformative: "The Power of Positive Thinking: How Digital Tools and Artificial Intelligence Shape Mental Health and Mindset."

In a world marked by rapid technological shifts, emotional upheavals, and post-pandemic recovery, the role of mental health and mindset has taken centre stage. Our personal and collective well-being is no longer just a private concern—it is a societal imperative. As we navigate this new age of uncertainty, artificial intelligence and digital platforms offer both a challenge and an unprecedented opportunity to reshape the way we understand and sustain our mental and emotional health.

The COVID-19 pandemic served as a powerful catalyst that not only disrupted global health systems but also profoundly transformed how mental health is perceived and managed across the world. As social distancing, lockdowns, and prolonged isolation became the new norm, the psychological toll on individuals—from anxiety and depression to burnout and grief—intensified dramatically. This unprecedented crisis created an urgent surge in the demand for mental and emotional support, while simultaneously limiting access to traditional face-to-face therapeutic interventions due to mobility restrictions and overwhelmed healthcare services.

In response to this growing need, a new wave of digital mental health solutions emerged, providing accessible, scalable, and flexible forms of support. AI-driven applications, mental wellness chatbots, teletherapy platforms, and mobile-based self-help interventions quickly became not just supplementary resources, but primary tools for psychological care for millions of users globally. Platforms like Talkspace, BetterHelp, Wysa, and Woebot gained prominence by offering real-time, conversational support, guided interventions, and behavioral therapy modules—all while maintaining the convenience of being available 24/7.

While these tools were initially conceptualized to bridge an emergency gap, we are now beginning to recognize and embrace their long-term transformative potential. These digital technologies, when carefully crafted with psychological insights and ethical considerations, are capable of reshaping how we cultivate emotional well-being. Unlike conventional tools that primarily react to mental health breakdowns, AI-powered platforms can serve as proactive mechanisms that detect early warning signs, foster emotional awareness, and intervene before distress escalates. They can promote a mindset of psychological resilience, instill hope during periods of uncertainty, and enhance emotional agility.

Moreover, these tools do more than provide mental health "support"; they actively facilitate cognitive restructuring by encouraging users to reframe negative thoughts, monitor emotional patterns, and engage in daily practices that reinforce positive thinking. The integration of mood-tracking, gratitude journaling, mindfulness exercises, and AI-guided affirmations creates an ecosystem of care that is user-centered, personalized, and growth-oriented. In doing so, these platforms nurture optimism, promote reflective thinking, and help users regain a sense of agency and control over their inner narrative—elements that are vital for mental strength and sustained psychological growth.

Positive thinking is not mere optimism. Rooted in positive psychology, it emphasizes the development of traits like gratitude, self-efficacy, emotional regulation, and cognitive reframing. These elements play a crucial role in building mental resilience, improving focus, and enhancing life satisfaction.

Today, Artificial Intelligence has the remarkable ability to deliver core principles of positive psychology—such as self-awareness, cognitive reframing, and emotional resilience—at an unprecedented scale. Thanks to significant advancements in natural language processing (NLP), machine learning, behavioral analytics, and digital personalization, AI-powered systems are now equipped to interact with users in dynamic, context-sensitive ways. These systems can not only detect sentiment and assess emotional tone in real-time, but also offer nuanced, empathetic, and psychologically grounded responses that resonate with individual users. The result is a new era of mental health support that is both scalable and deeply personal.

By leveraging vast datasets and user feedback, AI tools can tailor their interventions to each individual's behavioral patterns, emotional needs, and communication style. This makes them highly effective in delivering therapeutic strategies, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), dialectical behavior therapy (DBT), or mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), in formats that are accessible, non-judgmental, and available on demand. These platforms are especially valuable for individuals who might be hesitant to seek traditional therapy due to stigma, logistical challenges, or cost barriers.

For instance, digital journaling apps powered by AI use reflective prompts and mood tracking to help users process their emotions and identify thought patterns. These tools encourage practices like gratitude listing, goal setting, and self-compassion exercises—each of which contributes to the development of a more optimistic and future-oriented mindset. Chatbots such as *Woebot* and *Wysa* go a step further by engaging users in text-based conversations that simulate therapeutic dialogue. They use evidence-based psychological frameworks to deliver interventions that help users manage anxiety, reframe negative thoughts, and build emotional regulation skills.

Similarly, mindfulness and meditation platforms like *Headspace*, *Calm*, and *Insight Timer* utilize artificial intelligence to offer personalized meditation tracks, breathing exercises, and stress-relief activities. These platforms adjust content recommendations based on usage patterns, time of day, and self-reported mood states. Over time, they become digital companions that not only track users' mental health progress but also adapt and evolve with their psychological needs.

This seamless blending of emotional intelligence with technological capability represents a powerful shift in how mental health is supported. It moves beyond the reactive, one-size-fits-all approach to wellness and toward a model that is interactive, proactive, and deeply individualized. In effect, AI is not replacing human compassion—it is augmenting it, making the tools of emotional well-being more accessible to more people, more often, and in more meaningful ways. As such, these platforms stand as a testament to how far we have come in merging the science of the mind with the logic of machines—creating a future where technology is not just smart, but emotionally attuned.

Mindset refers to a person's prevailing attitude—whether fixed or growth-oriented—toward learning, challenge, and adversity. Research shows that positive mindset is associated with better stress management, reduced anxiety, and greater success across domains.

Digital tools can reinforce a growth mindset by encouraging users to adopt adaptive thought patterns. AI-guided feedback systems offer positive reinforcement, monitor progress, and promote self-belief. For example, fitness and habit-building apps that celebrate small milestones contribute to an individual's belief in their capacity for change—a core tenet of a growth mindset.

Moreover, gamification, personalized nudges, and sentiment-sensitive responses further engage users and promote emotional stability. By using behavioral data and psychological modeling, digital tools become companions in users' mental health journeys, supporting them not only in moments of crisis but in the everyday cultivation of mental strength.

While the power of digital tools in shaping mental health is undeniable, it is equally critical to address the limitations, risks, and ethical challenges. Not all individuals have access to smartphones, stable internet, or the digital literacy needed to benefit from these

tools. Furthermore, concerns about data privacy, algorithmic bias, emotional manipulation, and the risk of replacing human connection with machine interaction must be addressed with urgency.

As responsible scholars, technologists, and educators, we must advocate for digital mental health solutions that are equitable, inclusive, and culturally sensitive. Technology must be a bridge—not a barrier—to well-being. It must supplement—not supplant—the critical role of trained mental health professionals and social support networks.

The ethical design of mental health AI systems should include transparency in data usage, informed consent, accessibility features for neurodiverse users, and options for human referral when necessary. Moreover, we must invest in public digital education campaigns that build digital confidence and emotional awareness.

The integration of AI into mental health care does not signal a dehumanized future—it invites us to imagine a future where humans and machines collaborate for deeper healing and empowerment. Imagine schools using AI to identify students at emotional risk and provide early interventions. Picture workplaces offer employees daily well-being check-ins through digital wellness dashboards. Envision rural communities accessing mental health resources via AI tools in local languages.

Such a future is not far. But to realize it, we must blend technical excellence with human compassion. We must involve psychologists, educators, technologists, designers, and policymakers in co-creating tools that reflect the diversity and complexity of human mental life.

As participants of this conference, we form a vibrant and critical community of interdisciplinary thinkers—individuals who bridge the worlds of education, law, humanities, psychology, public policy, and the social sciences. This diversity is not just our strength—it is our responsibility. In a time when technology is evolving faster than our ethical frameworks and digital innovations are permeating even the most intimate aspects of human life, our collective role becomes all the more crucial. Whether we serve as educators guiding the next generation, legal scholars shaping governance structures, or social scientists interpreting human behavior, we all share a profound stake in shaping a future that is healthier, more inclusive, and deeply mindful of human dignity.

Our challenge is not simply to keep pace with innovation, but to shape its trajectory with wisdom and compassion. As stewards of knowledge and ethical inquiry, we must ensure that artificial intelligence remains grounded in human-centered values—that its progress is aligned with our moral compass, and that efficiency never eclipses empathy. As digital tools and platforms become increasingly embedded in education systems, mental healthcare, and public discourse, the call to anchor technological growth in ethical reasoning becomes not optional—but essential.

To this end, we must foster and amplify cross-disciplinary collaboration that pushes the boundaries of how we understand and apply AI in the context of mental wellness. There is immense potential in uniting data scientists with psychologists, software engineers with educationists, and AI ethicists with cultural theorists to design tools that are both technologically advanced and emotionally intelligent. Special attention must be given to marginalized and vulnerable populations—students from underserved communities, individuals living with trauma or disability, artists facing creative burnout, and educators under chronic stress. These groups often fall through the cracks of mainstream mental health care but can benefit greatly from inclusive, culturally responsive digital interventions.

Universities and academic institutions must play a leading role in this movement. It is time to embed digital mental health literacy into formal curriculum structures—not just as an add-on, but as a core competency. Teacher education programs should train future educators to recognize mental distress and responsibly use digital wellness platforms. Counseling and psychology courses should include modules on the ethical use of AI, chatbot therapy, and digital behavior analysis. Youth-focused initiatives, mentorship programs, and campus wellness centers should actively deploy AI-powered mental health tools to promote proactive care and early intervention.

Moreover, the humanities and social sciences hold a uniquely critical lens through which we must examine the ripple effects of AI. These disciplines give us the conceptual frameworks to explore how technology influences our sense of self, our relationships, our cultural values, and the very language we use to describe mental health. They help us interrogate who controls digital narratives, how algorithmic systems shape perception, and what biases may be embedded in data. Through literature, philosophy, ethics, history, and sociology, we humanize digital conversation and ensure that AI applications in mental wellness do not become merely transactional—but transformative.

By integrating these perspectives into the design and governance of digital mental health ecosystems, we enrich the field with nuance, accountability, and depth. The result is not just smarter tools—but wiser ones—tools that acknowledge the complexity of human emotion, respect the diversity of lived experience, and aspire not just to treat symptoms, but to nurture flourishing lives.

In closing, I extend my sincere thanks to the organizing committee of Noida International University for offering this important platform for dialogue. As I address you on this vital theme, I am reminded that mindset is both a mirror and a map: it reflects our current state and directs us toward future possibility. Positive thinking, when empowered by digital innovation, can transform not just individuals—but societies.

Let us use this conference to reflect, collaborate, and innovate together. Let us advocate for a future where technology and humanity walk hand in hand—where Artificial Intelligence supports Emotional Intelligence—and where every digital click opens a door to inner calm, self-belief, and hope.

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Ancient wisdom, modern glow: *Rasa Ratnakar* and the evolution of Indian beauty practices

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ABSTRACT: This paper examines what was historically meaningful as what is relevant now of *Rasa Ratnakar*, an ancient Indian text on beauty practices authored by Nagarjuna. The manuscript illuminates just how Indian beauty traditions have always integrated physical appearance with holistic wellness because they view beauty as an expression of a balanced body and mind and spirit. This research reveals these old treatments foreshadowed current ideas within beauty study. Key formulations that were analysed include *Suvarna Bhasma*, *Abhrak Bhasma*, and *Shilajit*. The paper traces the evolution of these practices from historical obscurity during colonial periods to their current global renaissance inside "clean beauty" and "wellness-integrated skincare." Modern scientific validation of these customary formulations has catalysed their incorporation into international beauty markets, which reveals how ancient Indian knowledge traditions continue to define contemporary beauty models worldwide while maintaining their cultural authenticity.

Keywords: *Rasa Ratnakar*, Ayurvedic cosmetics, Traditional beauty formulations, Holistic wellness, Indian alchemy

1 INTRODUCTION

Among the many ancient and rich cultures of the world, Indian civilization and culture hold a prominent place. In Indian culture, since ancient times, many important research and experience-based Indian knowledge traditions have been developing in areas such as medicine, philosophy and beauty (शमा 2010). This is also a symbol of the Indian knowledge tradition. Indian culture describes that beauty is not limited to external attraction only, but real beauty is deeply related to physical health, mental balance and purity of soul (कुलकर्णी 2012; Doniger, 2009).

During the time of Indo-Greek rulers, the Greeks influenced Indian culture and medical practices, which brought about a significant change in the development of beauty practices. The *Unani* system of medicine was famous for its natural remedies and medicines. This system provided a new perspective to Indian beauty practices and also presented a mixture of many treatment methods, due to which a new beauty approach came into existence in India.

Many words have been mentioned in the *Rigveda*, such as "*Rupam*", "*Kanti*", and "*Saumyaata*", through these words female and male beauty has been supported, that is, beauty has been described. It has been clarified that beauty does not mean only the body but is related to the energy and the characteristics of the character of the human being (Wujastyk 2003). India's *Ayurveda* is a special type of medical system (Lad 1984). Many methods based on the balance of the body, mind and soul of man have been defined in a balanced manner. Indian texts such as *Charak Samhita* and *Sushruta Samhita* etc. describe many types of

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medicines and formulations for the care of our skin, hair and special parts of the body. These medicines and formulations are being used in today's language as "cosmetic medicine" (कु ममार 2018; Zysk, n.d.). Texts such as *Rasa Ratnakar*, written on the basis of Indian knowledge tradition, confirm the view of real beauty and health together (सिंह 2005). This text is believed to have been written by sage Nagarjuna and describes many methods of enhancing the beauty of the human body through many metallic and chemical formulations (Mishra 2011).

At present, the demand for natural and *Ayurvedic* beauty products is increasing rapidly in the world, so now it becomes necessary that ancient Indian texts should be scientifically interpreted and presented in a modern context (Mukherjee *et al.* 2012) so that their importance can be described. One such ancient historical source is *Rasa Ratnakar*. This text holds special importance for the world of 'cosmetic science'. This treatise proves that beauty or cosmetic medicine is not a new concept in India but the system of cosmetic medicine has been developing in India since ancient times (Wujastyk 2003). It also reflects the characteristics of ancient Indian knowledge traditions.

2 RASA RATNAKARA

In the rich tradition of medical science in ancient Indian knowledge traditions, *Rasa Ratnakar* is a very important book. This book has been written mainly focusing on the subject of alchemy and *Ayurvedic* medicine making (Wujastyk 2003). The author of this book is Nagarjuna, who is famous as a great chemist, *Ayurvedacharya* and *Tantric* science of ancient India (Zysk, n.d.). Nagarjuna has left a deep impact on medicine and chemistry through his works (Filliozat 1964). In Indian history, the time of Nagarjuna is considered to be around the first century AD, the major books written by him are *Rasa Ratnakar*, *Rasarnav*, *Rasahridaya Tantra* etc (Dwivedi 2015). "The powers of a democratic government, a trade union, a court of justice, and a technological institution were all united in the ancient Indian guilds, which represent a distinctive and multifaceted type of organization" (Jain and Mohanan 2024).

Rasa Ratnakar mainly describes the composition of metals, minerals and medicines, their purification, calcination, ash preparation and their medicinal and beauty enhancing uses (Dash and Junius 1983). It is mentioned in the *Rasa Ratnakar* book that many compositions have been used for rejuvenation and beauty enhancement—like gold ash, mica ash, *Shilajit*, camphor, saffron, sandalwood etc., which are even today used in many *Ayurvedic* cosmetics. In the texts of traditional Indian medicine, *Suvarna Bhasma* is considered a "complexion-enhancer" that brings radiance to the skin and slows down the aging process (Baghel 2005).

Nagarjuna has described the use of medicines as well as lifestyle, diet, bath, scrub, and fragrances in *Rasa Ratnakara*—which is very close to modern-day holistic skincare (Lad 1984). The special thing is that his approach was not limited to just "applying on the skin", but it has been talked about nurturing beauty from within the body (Gogte 2000). In modern times, scientific studies also confirm that *Bhasma*, if prepared in the right way, is beneficial for the skin and helps in cellular rejuvenation (Patwardhan and Vaidya 2010). For example, some special research has also been done on *Swarn Bhasma*, such as Nanomedicine research etc. Research has shown that it has antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties that can slow down the aging process of our skin (Jain 2014). Thus, *Rasa Ratnakara* is not only a medical treatise, but it is also an ancient treatise on beauty science, which shows that Indians had linked beauty with *Ayurvedic* science long ago (Mishra 2011).

3 EVOLUTION AND MODERN INFLUENCE OF INDIAN BEAUTY TRADITIONS

Beauty traditions have been developing in India for centuries and with time they have been influenced by *Ayurveda*, *Yoga*, religion, and social rules (Doniger 2009). In Indian

knowledge traditions, beauty has always been based on 'inner-outer harmony', in which the balance of mental and physical health has been considered the basis of beauty (Wujastyk 2003). A pleasant work environment was provided by the skilled guild employees. They found markets for the sale of manufactured items, managed the quality and pricing of the goods produced, and procured raw materials for manufacturing (Maurya *et al.* 2024).

In ancient Indian texts like *Charaka Samhita* and *Sushruta Samhita*, beauty of skin, hair and eyes has been considered a sign of health, and many measures have also been suggested for the protection and nourishment of these organs (Sharma 2001). For example, *Sushruta Samhita* mentions the use of collyrium to increase the shine of the eyes, herbal scrub and *abhyanga* (oil massage) to increase the glow of the skin (Bhishagratna 1970). All these are indicative of the ancient Indian knowledge tradition. These methods are known in today's cosmetic science as "natural skincare routines" or "botanical cosmeceuticals" (Mukherjee 2012). For example, the concept of *ubtan* is the *Ayurvedic* form of modern exfoliating face packs (Aburjai and Natsheh 2003). Not only external beauty, internal purity has also been given special importance in Indian traditions. Purity of the body, mental balance, and diet are believed to enhance beauty (Gandotra and Jain 2023; Lad 1984).

This idea has similarities with modern "holistic beauty" concepts such as "wellness-integrated skincare" (Baumann 2007). These traditional methods were sidelined as "non-scientific" during the British colonial period, but when *Ayurveda* and *yoga* were rediscovered in the West in the late 20th century, Indian beauty principles also started gaining importance again (Alter 2004). The integration of AI technologies not only digitizes and restores old texts but also offers innovative solutions to challenges such as deciphering ancient scripts, automating the transcription of handwritten documents, and identifying connections between disparate pieces of historical information (Jain *et al.* 2024). This technological advancement has enabled researchers to better understand and contextualize ancient beauty practices documented in texts like *Rasa Ratnakar*. Today, many international companies are producing *Ayurveda*-based skincare products, which are becoming popular in the global market in the name of "clean beauty" and "organic" (Kaur and Singh 2021). For example, products based on ingredients such as turmeric, aloe vera, basil, sandalwood, and neem are now being used extensively in the US, Europe and Japan (Mukherjee and Wahile 2006). In India too, in the last two decades, *Ayurvedic* cosmetic brands such as Forest Essentials, Biotique, Kama Ayurveda and Himalaya have established a new market by combining traditional knowledge with modern scientific techniques (Chopra and Jain 2022; Subramanian 2013). The most important aspect of this is That *Ayurveda* did not limit beauty to just "skin," and it also incorporated psychology, diet, *yoga*, and daily routine, which is the ancestor of today's concepts of "mindful skincare" and "wellness beauty." (Jain and Singhal 2020).

4 MAJOR BEAUTY FORMULATIONS MENTIONED IN *RASA RATNAKAR*

Rasa Ratnakar mentions several alchemy-based formulations for beauty enhancement, aimed at rejuvenation, complexion enhancement, treatment of skin diseases, and overall beauty enhancement. This treatise is mainly based on chemistry, in which formulations are prepared by combining both metals and medicines.

4.1 *Suvarna Bhasma*

Suvarna Bhasma is mentioned in the *Rasa Ratnakar* treatise as a major rejuvenation medicine. It is considered to enhance skin glow, reduce wrinkles, and provide longevity (Dash and Junius 1983). Modern studies also prove that gold nanoparticles are found in *Suvarna Bhasma*, which have antioxidant and anti-aging properties (Jain et al. 2014).

4.2 *Abhrak Bhasma*

The use of *Abhrak Bhasma* is considered extremely important in Rasa Shastra. It boosts the skin's immunity, and reduces pigmentation. Its nano form is still used in research on skin regeneration (Shah *et al.* 2012).

4.3 *Shilajit*

Shilajit is considered a wonderful rejuvenator. It contains fulvic acid, humic acid and other minerals that nourish the skin from within and slow down the signs of aging (Ghosal *et al.* 1989). It is also being used in modern nutricosmetics (Wilson and Costello 2021).

4.4 *Sandalwood, Saffron and Camphor-based formulations*

These aromatic substances have been used for beauty as well as mental balance. Sandalwood cools the skin, saffron improves complexion, and camphor is a disinfectant (Sharma 2010).

4.5 *Triphala, Neem and Haridra based formulations*

All these are skin purifying, disease-destroying and beauty enhancing medicines. *Rasa Ratnakar* describes their use for skin diseases like pimples and pigmentation (Sharma 2010). Modern research confirms its antimicrobial and antioxidant actions.

5 FROM ANCIENT TO MODERN: THE GLOBAL INFLUENCE OF *AYURVEDIC* BEAUTY PRACTICES

India's ancient beauty traditions have not only remained alive within the country, but have also influenced the modern beauty industry globally. This influence intensified in the late 20th century when Western countries began to take an interest in naturopathy, holistic health and *Ayurveda* (Sivaramakrishnan 2011).

5.1 *Ayurveda as a global beauty trend*

Since the 2000s, "*Ayurveda*-inspired skincare" has become a global trend, especially in countries like the US, Europe and Japan. Major cosmetic companies such as L'Oréal, Estée Lauder and Unilever have incorporated Ayurvedic ingredients such as neem, turmeric, sandalwood and aloe vera in their products (Ghosh 2021).

5.2 *Nutricosmetics and inner beauty concepts*

Ayurveda believes that beauty is not just derived from external cosmetics, but from inner purity and nutrition. This concept laid the foundation for "nutricosmetics" — nutritional supplements that enhance the beauty of skin, hair and nails from within. Modern nutricosmetic brands such as HUM Nutrition, The Nue Co., and Moon Juice have incorporated *Ayurvedic* ingredients such as *Triphala, Brahmi*, and *Ashwagandha* into their product ranges (Jain and Singh 2022).

5.3 *Rise of Ayurvedic Spas and Panchakarma Tourism*

Ayurvedic beauty therapy is no longer limited to products but has also become a mainstay of relaxation and wellness tourism. States like Kerala, Uttarakhand and Goa have now become major destinations for international tourists for "*Panchakarma* Retreats" and "*Ayurveda*

Spa Destinations" (Smith and Puczkó 2014). *Panchakarma* methods like *Virechan, Basti, Abhyanga* and *Shirodhara* are now being adopted in Western countries as detox and rejuvenation procedures (Zysk 1991).

6 GREEN BEAUTY AND ETHICAL COSMETICS

Modern consumers are now moving towards "clean beauty" and "ethical sourcing" which are directly linked to the principles of *Ayurveda* – harmony with nature, purity and non-violence. *Ayurvedic* brands like Forest Essentials, Just Herbs, and SoulTree have established the credibility of ethical and natural products in the global beauty market (Banerjee 2023).

7 CONCLUSION

Indian beauty traditions, especially the knowledge described in *Ayurvedic* texts like *Rasa Ratnakara*, not only hold historical significance but are also deeply influencing today's global beauty landscape. Through Indian beauty practices, it is evident that the concept of beauty in ancient India was not limited to mere external attractiveness but was based on the complete purity and balance of body, mind, and soul.

Suvarna Bhasma, Abhrak Bhasma, *Shilajit*, *Triphala*, and other formulations described in *Rasa Ratnakara* continue to hold their relevance even today — whether it is for rejuvenation, in the treatment of skin diseases, or in the context of overall beauty enhancement. The effectiveness of these formulations is now being proven by modern science, giving these ancient methods a scientific basis. The popularity of *Ayurvedic* beauty practices globally, be it nutricosmetics, ethical cosmetics, or wellness tourism, is proof that India's traditional knowledge has now become an integral part of the global beauty industry. The concepts of 'holistic beauty' and 'clean beauty' in western countries are inspired by the Indian approach. Thus, texts like *Rasa Ratnakar* are not only memories of the past, but they can also become guides for the future, if they are properly read, understood and presented in a scientific way. This approach is indicative of Indian civilization, culture and ancient knowledge tradition.

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Ecological wisdom in Jain Dharma: Ancient environmental ethics for contemporary sustainability challenges

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ABSTRACT: This research examines the applications that it has to contemporary sustainability challenges and the environmental ethics as embedded in Jain philosophy. The study analyzes primary Jain texts as well as principles such as *ahimsa* (non-violence), *aparigraha* (non-possession), and *anekantavada* (many-sidedness), thereby establishing connections between ancient Jain ecological consciousness along with modern environmental concerns. Researchers explore the ways that Jain dietary practices conserve resources and revere every single life form, and this offers practical frameworks that allow people to be able to live sustainably. Many case studies do show the effectiveness for Jain communities, which implement these principles, in a reduction of ecological footprints. As a conclusion, it proposes a model for integrating Jain environmental ethics into mainstream sustainability discourse. These substantial contributions can comprehensively address climate change, biodiversity loss, and resource depletion. This interdisciplinary approach bridges customary knowledge systems with contemporary environmental science and offers valuable understandings for sustainable development.

Keywords: Jain environmental ethics, Aparigraha (non-possession), Sustainable living principles, Ecological consciousness, Religious environmentalism

1 INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, environmental degradation presses upon humanity as a most pressing challenge, so scholars explore diverse knowledge systems for sustainable solutions. Jainism and other deep ancient Indian philosophical traditions offer rich ecological understandings. These understandings remain largely unexplored within contemporary sustainability discourse (Chapple 2006). This research thoroughly examines the environmental ethics embedded in Jain philosophy and their potential applications to modern sustainability challenges. It addresses itself to a meaningful gap that exists in both religious studies and environmental science literature.

Jainism presents a thorough worldview centered on non-violence (*ahimsa*), non-absolutism (*anekantavada*), as well as non-possession (*aparigraha*); it is one of the oldest living religions originating in the Indian subcontinent around the 6th century BCE (Gandotra and Jain 2023). These principles extend to include all living beings as well as

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natural resources (Singhvi 1990). Human relations are not the single thing to which they extend themselves. Jains regard the universe as populated by a countless number of various life forms, also including those elements that are customarily considered inanimate within Western thought, thus establishing a unique ecological perspective which predates modern environmental consciousness by millennia (Tobias 1991).

This research addresses exactly three primary questions, including how Jain environmental ethics conceptualize human-nature relationships. From Jain teachings, what are the sustainable living principles that do practically emerge? In exactly what ways could these principles help solve today's specific environmental problems? This study employs a mixed-methods approach to considerably bridge ancient wisdom with modern sustainability science (Sharma *et al.* 2014) through detailed textual analysis of primary Jain scriptures like the *Acaranga Sutra* and *Tattvartha Sutra* and careful ethnographic observations of Jain communities that practice customary ecological principles.

The employed methodology of this research combines hermeneutical analysis of classical Jain texts with various case studies of contemporary Jain environmental initiatives. Original Prakrit and Sanskrit primary sources are examined, plus careful attention is paid to translation subtleties that might affect ecological interpretations. Rankin (2018) details Jain environmental ethics via various theoretical frameworks, furnishes a historical context, examines practical applications with several case studies, offers some comparative analysis alongside modern sustainability frameworks, explores the various challenges throughout contemporary implementation, and ends up with recommendations, so such principles may be integrated within environmental policy and education (Gehlot *et al.* 2023).

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: CORE PRINCIPLES OF JAIN ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

Jain environmental ethics rests firmly upon a more thorough ecological framework, along with several foundational principles that then form it. Ahimsa, or the concept of non-violence, is to be considered foremost among all of these. It thoroughly extends to every living being, rather than just human interactions. In Jainism, this principle recognizes sanctity of life in its myriads of forms that include microorganisms invisible to the naked eye. According to the *Acaranga Sutra*, "one should not injure, subjugate, enslave, torture, or kill any living being" is stated explicitly in it (Tatia 2006). This wide conception of non-violence does create a kind of ecological consciousness, which predates modern environmental ethics by millennia through establishing natural value in each of the life forms regardless of their utility to humans. *Ahimsa's* ecological dimension manifests itself in a considerate deliberation regarding one's very own impact upon the water, air, as well as the soil. There are countless beings that inhabit each of these elements.

Aparigraha (non-possession) functions as a principle regarding resource conservation and complements ahimsa. Jainism promotes a lifestyle with minimal environmental impact by its limiting of acquisition and attachment to material goods. Practitioners are encouraged by this principle to "take solely what is necessary and absolutely no more" (Dundas 2003) definitively established a framework for sustainable resource management. *Aparigraha* has deep ecological implications, in addition to providing a philosophical foundation that addresses contemporary issues of overconsumption as well as resource depletion.

Acknowledging reality's meaningful complexity and substantial multidimensionality, a notably unique ecological perspective is provided by *Anekantavada* or many-sidedness. This epistemological principle fully recognizes that truth has many aspects; it promotes a thorough approach to environmental issues that considers diverse perspectives and carefully avoids absolutist positions. In several ecological contexts, *anekantavada* encourages people

to consider many stakeholders. Also, *anekantavada* recognizes the detailed relationships that exist within ecosystems in (Chapple 2006).

Parasparopagraho jivanam's principle (mutual sustenance among all life forms) clearly articulates how ecological systems are interdependent. This sutra of the *Tattvartha Sutra* establishes that all life forms exist in a complex web of relationships that support each other's existence (Jain 2016). Ecosystem services and biodiversity are understood from an ecological perspective in modern times in such a way that this principle aligns quite remarkably with.

Jain cosmology additionally reinforces environmental consciousness when it conceives of the universe as eternally existing as well as fills it with many *jivas* (souls) that evolve spiritually in various stages. This kind of cosmological framework particularly places human beings within such an enormous ecological community instead of above the community. It encourages a sense of responsibility in relation to all of creation. Jains understand karma decidedly affects how one treats all life forms, so this creates a cosmic accountability for environmental actions and Kothari (2010) describes this accountability as "perhaps the world's first comprehensive ecological ethics".

3 HISTORICAL CONTEXT: ENVIRONMENTAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN JAIN TEXTS

The environmental consciousness in Jain texts is representative of an early articulation for ecological ethics in human history. Composed in approximately the 5th-4th century BCE, the *Acaranga Sutra* extensively details how natural elements are sacred, and morally requires an avoidance of harm toward all life forms. The text declares in its first chapter that "One should not injure, subjugate, enslave, torture, or kill each and every living being including animals, insects, plants, or the elements of earth, air, fire, and water". This is in fact what the text says in its very first chapter. Since Western thought recognizes sentience within customarily inanimate elements, such recognition establishes a deep ecological perspective valuing the entirety of natural world components.

Umasvati did compile The *Tattvartha Sutra* at some point around the 2nd-5th century CE. Through its more systematic exposition of Jain metaphysics, it does further develop this ecological consciousness. The classification of *jivas* (souls) into plentiful categories based on sensory capacities, along with its quite detailed taxonomy of life forms, creates a thorough framework for understanding biodiversity. The text asserts *"parasparopagraho jivanam"* (souls render service to one another), in addition to thus articulating ecological interdependence early (Tatia 1994). This principle recognizes each of the mutual relationships with which to sustain ecosystems, and it also predates modern ecological science by thousands of millennia.

Ethical principles are often depicted via Jain narratives as well as parables that are employing ecological themes. Mahavira attained enlightenment beneath a certain sal tree which indeed stresses the spiritual importance of natural settings. Kings established *abhayaranya* to further promote wildlife conservation (Chapple 2006). These narratives functioned as vehicles that served for transmitting environmental values across generations and embedding ecological consciousness deep in cultural memory.

In historical times, Jain practitioners applied these textual principles in a practical manner. Jeev *raksha kendras*, otherwise known as animal shelters, were already established during ancient times, and the filtering of water to avoid the harming of microscopic organisms represents an early form of pollution prevention (Singhvi 1990). Seasonal adjustments to diet and lifestyle based on ecological considerations reflect deep environmental awareness such as avoiding root vegetables during monsoon when soil organisms are exceedingly abundant. In historical terms, the prohibition against night travel, meant for the prevention of inadvertent harm to insects, further depicts how ecological consciousness permeated throughout daily life in Jain communities (Lodrick 1981).

4 PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS: JAIN SUSTAINABLE LIVING PRINCIPLES

Jain sustainable living principles are in fact most prominent within dietary practices for reducing environmental impact in a large way. The Jain vegetarian diet excludes root vegetables that harbor many microorganisms, and it expresses ecological consciousness through food choices as one of history's truly earliest examples (Jain *et al.* 2021). Present-day research goes on to confirm the environmental benefits that come from this approach, plus studies do indicate that Jain dietary practices can result in substantially lower carbon footprints in comparison to more conventional diets (Pathak and Pandey 2024). Avoiding consumption after sunset is typically practiced, and it additionally reduces resource use, while the *bhojana-matra* principle (eating in moderation) specifically minimizes food waste. A sustainable food system for minimizing land use, with water consumption, and in greenhouse gas emissions was inadvertently created by these dietary restrictions, originally formulated for preventing harm to living beings.

An additional meaningful dimension of Jain sustainable living involves a degree of water conservation. Water undergoes careful filtering to remove microorganisms prior to consumption and then used water undergoes precise collection with the goal of appropriate disposal or reuse through customary practices. Jains perform the ritual that is known as *pratikramana*, and that includes confessing any violence against beings with water bodies. This greatly reinforces consciousness about water usage (Dundas 2003). Because they deeply revered water as a living entity, they translated this into remarkably advanced conservation systems in Jain temples and households, and many systems predate modern water management approaches by centuries.

The Jain principle of *aparigraha* meaning non-possession leads, in a natural way, to waste reduction as well as minimalism. Throughout history, Jain practitioners have generated a minimal amount of waste by limiting the things that they acquired to only important items and by carefully maintaining their possessions to extend the lifecycle of those possessions. *Iccha-parimana* (limiting desires) almost perfectly aligns with contemporary zero-waste movements when it definitively establishes internal constraints on consumption (Babb 2015). Customary Jain households practice precise sorting of waste in general. Organic materials are thus returned to natural systems through carefully deliberated methods that minimize harm to soil organisms.

Jain practice has certain resource consumption limits. These limitations impact almost all community-level systems, in addition to almost all individual choices. Professions as well as economic activities that cause environmental harm are discouraged by the principle of *samyak-ajiva* or right livelihood, effectively creating an early framework for sustainable economics (Cort 2001). For Jain ecological awareness, it is advanced perhaps most of all in seasonal adaptations. These adaptations are quite representative of that level of sophistication. Ecological sensitivity is quite remarkably shown by adjusting diet, by adjusting travel, and by adjusting resource use based on seasonal conditions. During the monsoon seasons, insect and microbial life proliferate, so customary Jain communities limit movement and modify consumption patterns to minimize impact upon these beings (Laidlaw 1995). This seasonal consciousness creates a lifestyle in which human activity synchronizes with natural cycles, and people establish a harmonious relationship with ecological systems that contemporary sustainability frameworks only begin to appreciate.

5 CASE STUDIES: CONTEMPORARY JAIN ENVIRONMENTAL INITIATIVES

Contemporary Jain communities have translated their customary ecological ethics into several concrete environmental initiatives which do indeed show the ancient principles' practical relevance regarding modern sustainability challenges. Established in the year of 2012 by the Jain Social Group International Federation, the Ahimsa Environmental Park

that is in Maharashtra, India, thereby represents a meaningful as well as community-led conservation project. This project has successfully restored 200 acres of considerably degraded land into a thriving ecosystem. This initiative combines certain customary Jain principles alongside contemporary conservation science. It creates wildlife corridors and implements water harvesting systems for an increase of local biodiversity by approximately 40% within five years (Torri and Herrmann 2011). Comparable Jain-led conservation efforts have steadily emerged globally, including the Jain Wildlife Sanctuary specifically in Gujarat and diverse community forests that diaspora communities carefully maintain in North America and the United Kingdom.

Jain temples and related institutions show definitive ecological principles actively in practice through their naturally sustainable design. Their work offers persuasive illustrations as well. The Palitana temple complex in Gujarat has implemented several thorough sustainability measures which do include solar energy systems, that generate about 120 kW of power, rainwater harvesting infrastructure, capturing nearly 2.3 million liters on an annual basis, and zero-waste management systems (Jain and Tiwari, n.d.). Through these initiatives, the temple's ecological footprint is reduced by an estimated 62% relative to the conventional operations at institutions of similar size. The Jain Center of Southern California likewise incorporates sustainable building practices in addition to its use of recycled materials as well as energy-efficient systems that have earned LEED certification.

Jain communities are increasingly formalizing environmental education, as well as *pathshalas*, also known as religious schools, integrating ecological teachings into their curricula (Maurya *et al.* 2025). The Young Jains of America organization developed the "Ahimsa and Environment" program, and it reached more than 5,000 youth since 2010 as it combined customary Jain principles with contemporary environmental science (Jain 2012). Quantitative assessments of these initiatives show certain important ecological benefits. Based on what a study from 2017 found, the carbon footprint on average of 500 Jain households in Mumbai was around 1.8 tons of CO2 equivalent per capita annually; this is about 70% less than the Indian urban average and is 85% less than what American households produce. This reduction stems mainly from the dietary choices of minimal consumption and resources that people tend to conserve because these happen to be practices directly linked in effect to Jain ethical principles, which then shows concrete environmental benefits at such times when people apply these ancient teachings within contemporary contexts.

6 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: JAIN ETHICS AND MODERN SUSTAINABLITY FRAMEWORKS

Jain environmental ethics do share outstanding parallels with deep ecology especially because they do recognize intrinsic value in all life forms. Deep ecology emerged specifically in the 1970s on account of the work done by Arne Naess. For more than two millennia, Jainism has been advocating in favor of biocentric principles that are like deep ecology. Both frameworks reject anthropocentrism and do stress that each of the beings is linked and Jainism grounds its own approach in spiritual metaphysics rather than in secular ecology (Chapple 2006). Jains conceptualize ahimsa. It protects those entities that even deep ecology sometimes overlooks, such as even air and water bodies. This concept represents a more thorough ethical framework as well. It recognizes sentience within elements that are customarily considered to be inanimate in Western thought.

The circular economy principles, which enjoy important prominence in sustainability discourse, find an ancient precedent in Jain resource management practices. According to Jain, minimization of waste, extension of product lifecycles, and regeneration of natural systems aligns precisely with contemporary frameworks for circular economy (Korhonen *et al.* 2018). The principle of *aparigraha* (non-possession) established resource circulation

systems inside Jain communities several centuries before the formal articulation of circular economy theory; this shows the prescience of Jain environmental thought.

Multiple UN Sustainable Development Goals considerably intersect with Jain ethics, particularly SDG 12, Responsible Consumption and Production, and SDG 15, Life on Land. Jains consume in a certain limited way as well as protect biodiversity offering practical pathways for fully achieving these goals though Jain ethics extend beyond such anthropocentric framing that sometimes characterizes UN sustainability frameworks (Bassett *et al.* 2000). Jain ethics consider the welfare of all sentient beings as intrinsically valuable, because SDGs mainly focus on human wellbeing.

Jainism's particular approach does differ in a distinct way from other religious environmental ethics. Its thorough classification of life forms and graduated ethical responses are based on sensory capacity. Jainism positions humans squarely within the entirety of the natural world rather than distinctly above it, unlike certain Abrahamic traditions that particularly stress stewardship over creation. Buddhist environmental ethics share of nonviolence principles with Jainism; however, the more thorough ecological framework comes from the latter's wide-ranging dietary restrictions and classification of elemental life forms (Sahni 2007). This unique contribution to interfaith environmental dialogue, in conjunction with practical sustainability initiatives, are commonly offered via this particularly distinctive approach.

7 CHALLENGES AND ADAPTIONS

Contemporary Jain communities encounter difficulties that are particularly meaningful because maintaining customary environmental practices is difficult during modernization pressures. Urban development frequently disrupts transmission of customary ecological knowledge, and globalized consumer culture commonly conflicts with principles of *aparigraha* (non-possession). Younger generations of Jains increasingly battle to maintain remarkably strict dietary and consumption restrictions according to available research particularly in various diaspora communities since external environments do not adequately support these practices. For Jain families integrating into mainstream economic systems, there has sometimes been a necessity for occupational choice compromises because of the customary avoidance of environmental impact.

As a mindful and creative response to a few of these specific challenges, the potential adaptation of Jain principles to diverse urban contexts has gradually emerged. Urban Jain communities approach apartment composting, community gardens, and shared transportation systems in inventive ways and fully translate customary values into contemporary settings. The concept of "graduated practice" has gained acceptance among people, so they can implement environmental principles progressively rather than in an absolute manner. This kind of approach does acknowledge the fact that perfect adherence is practically quite difficult, while at the same time it maintains the aspirational framework of Jain environmental ethics.

Jain communities, in several instances, still negotiate to balance religious observance and practicality. Certain customary Jain practices are viewed as relatively impractical within various modern contexts by some critics. These critics do also suggest that economic participation may indeed be limited by them. The research from Chan and Ananthram in 2019 shows that integration of modified Jain practices into contemporary lifestyles can often succeed without any compromise of core values. The principle of *anekantavada* or of many-sidedness itself provides a philosophical framework for adaptation. It allows for contextual application of principles rather than for rigid adherence. Jain environmental ethics has remained relevant on account of this flexibility despite meaningful social and economic transformations, as questions about which adaptations preserve important principles, and which might compromise the tradition's ecological integrity remain (Jain *et al.* 2025).

8 CONCLUSION

This research has demonstrated that Jain environmental ethics comprehensively frame sustainable living and predate by millennia modern ecological consciousness. The principles of ahimsa non-violence, *aparigraha* non-possession, and *anekantavada* many-sidedness, establish a more advanced ecological perspective that recognizes the intrinsic value of all life forms along with natural systems. Contemporary case studies reveal that these ancient principles remain relevant as well as effective in addressing modern environmental challenges; Jain communities show greatly reduced ecological footprints compared to mainstream populations. Jain ethics are strikingly like emerging sustainability frameworks like deep ecology and circular economy principles. These parallels further validate how deeply relevant this ancient tradition remains today.

Policymakers could substantially benefit environmental policy development if they incorporate Jain perspectives, especially when limiting consumption and protecting biodiversity for it. Jains navigate various ethical responses that are graduated and ground those responses in the sensory capacity natural to different life forms, providing a framework that is subtle for the environmental regulation which balances ecological protection with human needs (Chapple 2006). Policy initiatives incentivize a reduced level of resource use and promote diets based upon plants. These various initiatives do align with certain Jain principles and further address specific pressing climate and biodiversity concerns. Another promising application is represented by the integration of Jain environmental ethics into sustainability education within. Educational programs with a comprehension of the Jain linkage and the practice of non-violence toward all life forms could foster a deeper ecological consciousness than approaches for the management of resources or the production of technological solutions (Rankin 2018).

Future research should explore assessments that are quantitative in nature with respect to environmental benefits derived from specific Jain practices, such as biodiversity protection, resource conservation, as well as carbon sequestration. Comparative studies that examine how different Jain sects interpret as well as implement environmental principles could, in fact, provide valuable understandings into adaptive strategies. A further promising direction is advanced research on the psychological dimensions of Jain environmental ethics, specifically focusing on how key principles such as *anekantavada* substantially influence environmental decision-making. Revolutionary sustainability frameworks could also be further developed through interdisciplinary collaborations among Jain scholars, policy experts, as well as environmental scientists, given that they integrate customary wisdom along with contemporary ecological knowledge. The specified research would indeed contribute to environmental protection. Such valuable cultural knowledge might otherwise be marginalized in sustainability discourse dominated by Western scientific models so its preservation would also be achieved (Bassett *et al.* 2000).

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Traditional ecological knowledge and climate adaptation: Quantifying indigenous forest management practices in the Nilgiris biosphere reserve

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ABSTRACT: The research aims at exploring the indigenous knowledge system of Particularly Vulnerable Tribes of Nilgiris Biosphere Reserve in India. The research is driven with the purpose of documenting and analyzing as to how it can serve as nature-based solutions for strengthening climate resilience. Qualitative research methods including in-field visit, semi-structured interviews and focused group discussions were conducted to understand and explore community knowledge and mechanism to cope with climate change.

Findings suggest that these communities possess extensive Traditional Ecological Knowledge that can offer valuable strategies for climate resilience, including sustainable agro-forestry practices and bio-diversity conservation. TEK is a knowledge-practice-belief complex, handed down through generations by cultural or oral traditions. The communities of NBR holds a rich tapestry of that has significant potential of carbon sequestration through indigenous land management practices.

The study advocates for combining indigenous knowledge with contemporary scientific approaches to create a culturally sensitive framework for climate change adaptation as well as strengthening climate resilience. It emphasises upon the importance of bottom-up approach, where indigenous communities should be included in decision making process of environmental management and climate policy.

The research amplifies these unheard voices in climate discourse, while highlighting the potential of their knowledge system in developing effective, sustainable nature-based solutions for strengthening climate resilience.

Keywords: Indigenous knowledge systems, Climate resilience, Nilgiris Biosphere Reserve, Traditional ecological knowledge, Sustainable resource management

1 INTRODUCTION

The accelerating impact of climate change has necessitated transformative approaches to sustainable development that can integrate traditional wisdom (Indigenous Knowledge system) with contemporary science. Particularly in the context of forest ecosystems and food systems, the importance of indigenous knowledge in improving climate resilience has drawn a lot of attention. In this regard, the role of indigenous knowledge in augmenting climate resilience, has garnered noteworthy attention.

In context to strengthen climate resilience, Indigenous knowledge system offers a wealth of insights into environmental stewardship, and sustainable food systems that have been established and refined over millennia. This indigenous knowledge, wisdom and understanding of ecological processes provides an exceptional perspective on sustainable resource management and food production that can complement modern scientific approaches to climate change mitigation and adaptation.

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The Nilgiris Biosphere Reserve (hereinafter NBR) located in southern India serves as a persuasive case-study for an in-depth analysis of how indigenous knowledge can be instrumental for a holistic approach towards forest management, carbon sequestration and food security in the face of climate change essentially serving as nature-based solutions (NbS) - actions that work with and enhance nature to help address societal challenges (JP Puyravaud 2013). Not only NBR is a first designated Bio-reserve in India and is also declared as an ecological hotspot but it plays a crucial role in creating carbon sink and thus, regulating the climate (Daniels 1993).

NBR is also a habitat for six Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) viz, Todas, Irulas, Kurumbas, Kotas. Paniyas and Kattunayaka whose Traditional Ecological Knowledge has sustained biodiversity hotspots for millennia (JP Puyravaud 2013).

Over centuries the indigenous communities of NBR have developed an intricate knowledge system that involves a synergy between several aspects of their environment, including the species composition, soil management, food systems, and forest structure. Their expertise is crucial for maintaining biodiversity as well as for sequestering carbon and guaranteeing food security. To strengthen climate resilience, carbon sequestration is a very critical process for which maintain natural reservoirs is paramount. In this regard maintaining grassland and the entire forest landscape is very important as they offer a huge opportunity for creating carbon sink (Berkes, 2004). To substantiate it the indigenous communities of NBR offer extremely valuable insights that can contribute in enhancing both above ground carbon and below ground carbon.

However, the integration of this indigenous knowledge system into modern forest management and food production strategies presents both opportunities and challenges. Although TEK provides insightful information on sustainable behaviours, it needs to be properly placed in larger ecological and social frameworks. Creating successful and culturally relevant methods for food security, climate change mitigation, and forest management requires bridging the knowledge gap between traditional and modern science.

Thus, the research employs trans-disciplinary framework, aimed at stakeholder identification and engagement for knowledge co-production for strengthening climate resilience. Transdisciplinary approaches are inclusive epistemology, aimed at the co-production of innovative, context-relating knowledge that occurs as the collaborative exchange of different kinds of contents – practical, relational, traditional, political, technical, organizational – and through the encounter of the actors who hold these kinds of knowledge (Lawrence 2015).

The agroforestry mechanism practiced by the indigenous communities showcases a feasible way for sustainable land use that can enhance carbon sequestration and thus, proves to be beneficial for fulfilling both the objectives of mitigating climate change and food production.

As we face the intensified issue of global climate crisis and food security, the wisdom imbibed in the indigenous knowledge system provides a huge prospect for creating resilient and sustainable strategies. By taking NBR as a case study, the research focuses on more such

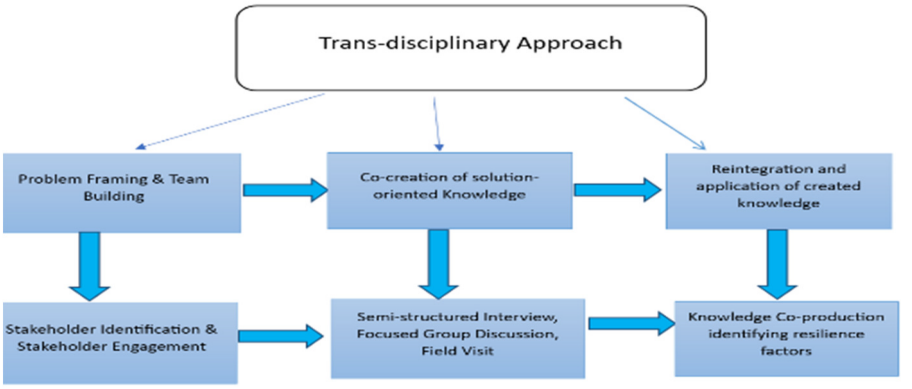


Figure 1. Application of trans-disciplinary approach.

strategies that can be applied for global efforts to mitigate climate change and sustainable management of ecosystem.

At the same time, it is extremely important to acknowledge that indigenous knowledge systems are not supposed to remain in isolation as a static frozen repository. Rather their knowledge system needs to be recognised as dynamic and ever evolving science manifesting harmony with socio-ecological shifts and changes. Integration of indigenous knowledge system with contemporary scientific methods offer an extremely viable opportunity for cross-pollinating climate adaptation efforts.

The findings and analysis of this research does not only focus on carbon sequestration but also an attempt to promote preservation of culture and bio-diversity. It also advocates for sustainable livelihoods and food security and resilience. Thus, this research aims at investigating and evaluating the adaptive capacities ingrained in indigenous knowledge that the communities in NBR possess, which has existed over generations now. The aim is to bridge the knowledge gap existing between indigenous wisdom and contemporary scientific understanding in sustainable agriculture and forest management by looking at traditional techniques through both cultural and scientific lenses.

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

(I) To conduct a comprehensive review and documentation of indigenous knowledge to create an all-inclusive, co-operative and collaborative approach to climate resilience.
(II) To assess and emphasize upon the vulnerabilities of indigenous communities to climate change impacts and potential risks to their cultural and ecological systems.
(III) To analyze the role of indigenous knowledge in institutional capacity building.
(IV) To promote more meaningful participation of indigenous people integration of their indigenous knowledge into climate change policy framework.
(V) To provide evidence-based recommendations to policy makers for strengthening sustainable development through indigenous knowledge.
(VI) To bridge the gap by establishing a trans-disciplinary framework for integrating indigenous knowledge with modern scientific understanding to create a comprehensive approach towards climate resilience.
(VII) To assess the Nilgiris Biosphere region as it is significant for carbon sequestration and analyse that whether it in long term can serve as potential trade-off.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The scope of the research is limited to the region of NBR in Western Ghats of India. The research emphasises upon analysing and examining the indigenous knowledge of four out of six Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) of the district viz. the Todas, Kotas, Irulas and Kurumbas.

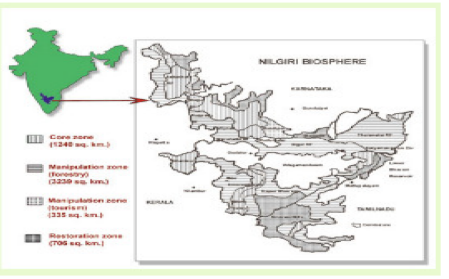


Figure 2. NBR region.

The research methodology employed in this study is a qualitative ethnographic research design primarily to bridge traditional field study methodologies with participatory action research principles specifically to understand indigenous knowledge systems and climate resilience practices within the NBR. The methodological approach extends beyond collecting conventional data in order to embrace the phenomenological understanding of indigenous communities lived-experiences particularly in relation to climate adaptation and resilience. This research design integrates researcher into daily rhythms of community life, facilitating authentic observation of traditional practices in particular traditional ecological knowledge.

The data collection framework employs three inter-connected methods that creates a rich tapestry if documenting indigenous knowledge. Initially, semi-structured interviews were conducted of stakeholders that includes social workers, senior ecologist, environmentalists and community representatives. This became the primary source for capturing detailed accounts of indigenous knowledge system. On the basis of these individual narratives, focused group discussions were conducted to facilitate collective knowledge sharing. This was particularly valuable for analysing intergenerational perspectives and community consensus on climate challenges and solutions.

The cornerstone of this ethnographic research was participant observation. It enabled to witness the direct transmission and application of traditional knowledge. It further enhanced the in-depth understanding and analysis of indigenous practices that might otherwise remain unexpressed. The integration of participatory mapping exercises further empowers communities by recognizing and documenting their spatial knowledge of culturally significant areas, natural resources, and climate-vulnerable zones.

At every aspect of the research design, from initial community engagement through final dissemination ethical considerations were paramount. The framework implements continuous consent procedures, culturally appropriate documentation methods that ensure participating communities derive tangible benefits from the research. This approach facilitated in creating a comprehensive understanding of existing implementation gaps and providing evidence-based recommendations for enhancing legal protections. The research further facilitates and demonstrates how contemporary research can meaningfully incorporate traditional wisdom into climate resilience strategies without compromising either academic standards or indigenous autonomy.

Manual thematic coding technique was used for data analysis, where interview and FGD transcripts were systematically analysed to identify recurring patterns and themes related to traditional ecological knowledge, climate adaptation practices, and community concerns. Both inductive and deductive analysis was involved in coding process. Themes were also cross-verified through triangulation of data sources.

S. No.	PVTGs (Indigenous Communities)	Site Visited	Stakeholder Engagement
1	Irulas	Aracode	Field visit and 21 semi-structured interviews were conducted. • 12 interviews were conducted with the senior members of the community aged between 65years to 70 years • 9 interviews were conducted with the people aged between 30 years to 40 years.
2	Kotas	Trisigadi	Field visit and 3 FGD • Sample size for FGD was between 13-17 people (first with the people above 55 years, second with the people below 40 years and third with mixed age groups)

(*continued*)

Continued

S. No.	PVTGs (Indigenous Communities)	Site Visited	Stakeholder Engagement
3	Todas	Bettumund	Field Visit, 8 semi-structured interviews and 2 FGD • Sample size for FGD was between 12-16 people (first with the males member of the community and second with the female members of the community)
4	Krumbas	Kotagiri	7 semi-structured interviews conducted

4 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The study revealed that indigenous communities of NBR holds a rich tapestry of TEK that has significant potential of carbon sequestration through indigenous land management practices in the NBR. Traditional agroforestry systems, employed specially by the Irula and Kurumba communities, were found to be effective carbon sinks. For instance, the Irula community practices *mixed cropping* of finger millet with legumes, which enhances soil nitrogen and reduces pest incidence by 40% compared to monoculture systems. During the research various components of TEK were identified which can effectively contribute towards the climate resilience.



Figure 3 Components of TEK.

Through the study approximately 90 TEK have been identified that enhances the agroforestry system. 65% of TEK identified and examined contribute towards the agricultural sector whereas 35% contribute for Non-Timber Forest Production (NTFP).

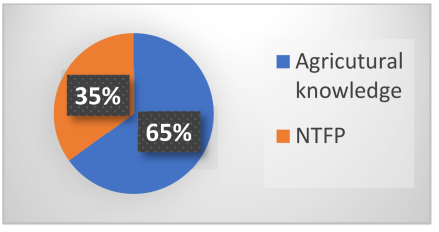


Figure 4 Pie-chart showing TEK.

Although this research establishes that the PVTGs of NBR have a rich heritage of indigenous knowledge, which if adapted can create a huge impact on climate resilience. Yet a steep departure was observed during the field study that the younger generation (population less than 35years of age) is not very keen in practicing the indigenous knowledge system, as they find it to be less rewarding.

Major concerns of the communities are:

1) **Climate Change**: Major concern raised by all the community members was that due to drastic climate change communities are less inclined towards practicing indigenous agriculture system. As in the entire NBR, rain-fed agriculture is practiced, unpredictability of climate creates a drift in the current generation to carry forward indigenous agriculture system. They perceive it to be high-risk and less rewarding and thus, majority of them are willing to work as wage-labourers.
2) **Animal Crop Riding:** During all the FGD and interviews one common concern that was raised by all the communities was the issue of animal crop riding. This being one such issue that few members have abandoned their agricultural lands as it becomes inevitable for the communities to avoid such encounters, resulting in complete destruction of the agricultural produce leaving them with negligible output.
3) **Exploitation by middlemen:** Exploitation by middlemen in the Non-Timber Forest Product (NTFP) trade poses a significant challenge to indigenous communities. Consequently, indigenous communities are often trapped in a cycle of low returns for their labor and resources, unable to capture the true value of their NTFPs. This systemic exploitation not only impacts the economic well-being of forest-dependent communities but also forces them to abandon the practices.
4) **Public Distribution System:** The elder generation was also of the opinion that since they get rice from the PDS, this has substantially discouraged the communities from growing millets which creates a huge impact on ecology.
5) **Land Conversion:** Since most of the Shola Montane Forest has been replaced by eucalyptus and acacia, it has majorly resulted in the reduction of grasslands. This has no doubt impacted the traditional system of Toda Community as they are majorly the pastoralist. However, it has also impacted the huge carbon sink that was created by the grasslands, as scientifically proven.

However, if the Indigenous Knowledge related to TEK and NTFP is practiced, the research establishes that:

- Most of the indigenous knowledge are highly adaptive.
- Many indigenous agricultural methods enhance soil fertility and water retention.
- Reliance on natural resources makes them sensitive to environmental shift.
- Traditional Forest Management techniques frequently increase biodiversity.
- Resilient food and agriculture system: An Ecosystem Based Adaptation for climate resilience (Ensuring food Security).
- Most of the practices can significantly contribute towards creating carbon sink both in above ground carbon in trees (AGC) and below ground carbon in land use land cover classes (BGC in LULC).

5 CONCLUSION

The rich natural heritage of NBR though facing a myriad of issues, it remains crucial and calls for urgent attention so as to enable protection and conservation in a ecologically sensitive manner. Considerable protection has been accorded to the region in the form of national parks, and sanctuaries. However, it has impoverished the communities of NBR and thus, negatively impacted the biosphere. For example, the upper areas of the Nilgiri plateau, where land use changes have forever altered the Toda way of life.

Hence, there is an urgent need for the state to rethink its development strategy and perhaps have certain specific regulations that can protect the interest of the indigenous communities and thereby preserve the ecology of India. This is not something new for Indian landscape. Like, the state of Chattisgarh protecting the lifestyle of Maria community and Himachal Pradesh has placed considerable restriction on purchase of lands. However, this

has not materialized in NBR because it spread across three states. With three governments coming in picture, it would require a significant amount of political will and development thought process that makes eco regions the priority and not necessarily state or districts.

These issues need to addressed through a three-sided prism of conservation, livelihood and enterprise. Accordingly, this research comes up with following recommendations:

1) **Digital Preservation**: As the study represents that there is constant threat to the loss of indigenous knowledge, thus, first and foremost recommendation is the documentation of the indigenous knowledge system so as to preserve it form getting completely eroded.
2) **Indigenous-led carbon credit programmes:** Carbon credit programmes basically function on the principle that one carbon credit is equivalent to removal of one metric ton of carbon dioxide or its equivalent greenhouse gases from the atmosphere. Recently, India also in 2024 has revamped its Carbon Credit Trading Scheme (CCTS), thereby allowing the non-obligated entities to participate in the carbon credit markets. Thus, it provides a huge opportunity for the communities to start Indigenous-led carbon credit programs: this can offer a huge incentive to the indigenous communities
3) **Community Participation:** commercially collected NTFPs are not only a good source of livelihood for the indigenous communities but their knowledge of harvesting also ensures large scale forest conservation. Thus, processing and value addition of these NTFPs will add a greater amount of income for the communities as also proven by the Aadhimalai Pazhangudiyinar Producer Company Ltd. This serves the twin purpose of generating employment and promoting sustainable harvesting techniques.
4) **Indigenous weather forecasting integration:** policy framing should include their wisdom, specifically their weather forecasting knowledge into modern meteorological practices. By combining this indigenous knowledge, meteorologists can enhance the accuracy in weather prediction as well as promote cultural preservation.

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Indigenous maritime weather prediction: A decolonial analysis of Koli knowledge systems in Mumbai (1800–present)

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ABSTRACT: Indigenous maritime knowledge systems represent environmental understanding developed sophisticatedly through centuries along coasts. This study examines Koli weather prediction techniques for Mumbai's coastal areas. It traces the evolution of all these techniques directly from the colonial period (1800-present) and on through to contemporary challenges through its analyzing of historical documentaries of archival sources in addition to ethnographic literature. The research explores how Koli communities maintained complex maritime knowledge systems despite systematic marginalization under British colonial rule along with active urban development pressures. Wind patterns are analyzed, tidal cycles are integrated, and marine ecosystems are observed by Koli forecasters. These actions demonstrated such accuracy when they forecasted the monsoon patterns and the storm events. These knowledge transmission systems continue to be threatened by contemporary challenges which include urban infrastructure projects such as the Coastal Road as well as climate change. The research gives to decolonial scholarship since it places Koli maritime knowledge in the position of legitimate scientific understanding that is important to achieve sustainable coastal management, so it shows how indigenous weather prediction can offer valuable alternatives to meteorological models that are Western-centric.

Keywords: Koli Knowledge System, Ecological space, Covid 19, Environment, Coastal Areas

1 INTRODUCTION

Mumbai's coastline represents a complex intersection of both indigenous knowledge and colonial intervention along with contemporary urban development where advanced maritime weather prediction systems have been maintained for a period of over two centuries by the Koli fishing community. The Koli community understood monsoon patterns as well as tidal cycles. They could forecast weather accurately through this understanding along with knowledge of wind directions and marine ecosystem indicators because it was necessary for safe fishing operations. These knowledge systems show what Santos (2007) terms "knowledges otherwise" for offering alternatives as dominant Western scientific models predict local weather phenomena with outstanding precision.

Coastal commons refer to customary fishing grounds and marine resources that Koli communities have accessed collectively for generations, and these commons do include specific areas around Worli, Mahim, and Versova in which families maintain hereditary fishing rights. The right to the coast represents both customary with legal claims which

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include rights to land fishing boats on customary beaches, access fishing grounds without interference, and maintain settlement patterns in coastal areas.

This research addresses a critical gap by examining into the evolution of Koli weather prediction techniques. Contemporary Mumbai's present-day challenges are examined since the colonial period (1800-1950). This study offers three unique viewpoints: first, it records Koli ways to predict weather showing great knowledge of the environment; second, it looks at how Koli weather wisdom was first rejected then slowly used by colonial powers; third, it views current dangers from urban growth and climate shifts while pushing for these systems' recognition as real science vital to coastal strength.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Existing scholarship for Mumbai's coastal management reveals important gaps because scholars do not understand indigenous maritime knowledge systems, especially when Kolis predict weather. Anand (2022) and Gehlot *et al.* (2023) examine urban coastal challenges within. They focus mainly on governance and pollution not ecological customary knowledge. Gandy (2008) critiques water infrastructure and modernity because they contribute to unequal resource access, and this critique provides context for understanding how colonial interventions disrupted customary knowledge transmission among fishing communities. However, these studies do not adequately address the advanced meteorological knowledge that is enabling successful navigation for Koli communities across centuries.

Perceptions into Koli knowledge systems can be more relevant for coastal contestation literature. Burte and Krishnankutty (2006) as well as Wagh (2017) examine impacts of urban projects on Koliwadas because they investigate land tenure conflicts along with socio-ecological disruptions from urban expansion. Kadri in 2019 and Kandukuri in 2019 critique the total impact of the Coastal Road project. They critique artisanal fishing and community displacement. These studies document physical displacement however they analyze little how infrastructure projects threaten customary knowledge transmits through daily coastal interaction.

Chouhan, Parthasarathy, and Pattanaik (2016) do examine ecological dimensions that coastal conflicts involve. They also analyze Coastal Regulation Zone policy implications for sustainability as well as livelihoods. Walsh and Döring (2018) put challenges in the context of cultural geographies for coastal change. Their work does thus give support to inclusive ecological management approaches.

Documenting specific Koli weather prediction methods as well as their historical evolution within colonial rule reveals such a critical gap within the literature. Santos (2007) as well as Quijano (2007) provide theoretical frameworks for understanding epistemic violence against indigenous knowledge while research is limited on maritime knowledge systems or customary weather prediction techniques persisted despite systematic suppression efforts.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research employs historical documentary analysis to probe Koli maritime knowledge systems across two centuries because it supersedes the earlier purported qualitative fieldwork approach. Archival sources form the basis of the methodology. These include British colonial administrative records within Mumbai State Archives (1800-1947), ethnographic studies of Koli communities, contemporary policy documents related to coastal management, and academic research on indigenous knowledge systems. Political ecology is operationalized by the analytical framework to examine power relations between indigenous communities and state authorities because decolonial theory provides concepts like epistemicides and epistemic violence to analyze knowledge suppression. To contrast indigenous as well as Western

meteorological approaches, the study employs comparative analysis, and discourse analysis examines how colonial and postcolonial narratives represented Koli practices. Limitations exist because researchers did not perform any direct fieldwork and instead relied on secondary sources, and the study acknowledges this issue rather than claiming primary qualitative research methods.

4 HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF KOLI KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS

Koli knowledge systems do include techniques for predicting more advanced weather that developed through millennia of coastal interaction within Mumbai's waters. Customary Koli weather forecasting integrates multiple environmental indicators including wind pattern analysis, where experienced readers distinguish *"Purva"* (easterly winds) signaling monsoon approach and *"Pashchim"* (westerly winds) indicating favorable deep-sea fishing conditions. Tidal cycle integration represents another important component, for Koli terminology differentiates between *"Bhara"* (high tide) and "Olu" (low tide) variations, also they indicate weather stability and optimal fishing periods. We observe the marine ecosystems for they serve in the capacity as early warning systems. Certain fish types are seen close to water surfaces to mean storms will come, and some bird flights show when wind directions shift.

Knowledge was passed by apprenticeships both practical and traditions oral that were structured, and they secured generational survival. Young Koli fishers learned about weather since they observed the coast daily with experienced elders, and this observation helped them develop skills to interpret subtle atmospheric changes invisible to untrained observers (Jain *et al.* 2021). This knowledge production system created detailed seasonal calendars integrating astronomical observations along with environmental indicators, so it often achieved greater accuracy than colonial meteorological services.

British authorities initially dismissed Koli knowledge during the colonial period (1800-1950) because it exemplified what Ndlovu terms "epistemic racism" or primitive superstition. However, colonial records gradually revealed reluctant acknowledgment of Koli forecasting accuracy when colonial maritime methods failed particularly during monsoon seasons. Bombay Port Trust archives cited "local weather informants" during the 1880s. These informants predicted the weather in a more reliable way than official services did, though the Trust consulted with them unofficially and did not acknowledge them in formal documentation.

5 HYDROCOLONIALISM AND URBAN INFRASTRUCTURE IN MUMBAI

Mumbai's transformation from seven islands into one metropolis drastically changed native people's relationship to shore environments via organized colonial involvement. British colonial authorities implemented wide-ranging land reclamation projects which physically separated the city from surrounding waters, as well as disrupting customary Koli knowledge transmission processes since these processes depended on daily coastal interaction. Reclamation endeavors fashioned spatial separations of urban areas with marine settings since the sea shifted from a lively natural area, where Koli groups watched weather, to a still site of urban growth. Mathur and da Cunha highlight this separation, so it severed Koli fishers' intimate connection to the important environmental indicators that were for their weather prediction systems.

Colonial reclaimers controlled natural systems while marginalizing local communities whose knowledge depended upon unmediated coastal access, as Prakash terms "double colonization." Because infrastructure projects included seawalls, breaches, and landfills, these projects physically displaced Koli settlements from customary observation points at

which elders transmitted weather reading skills to younger generations. This type of spatial reorganization did disrupt those apprenticeship systems. Koli weather wisdom remained through these systems for ages.

Urban development prioritization over indigenous knowledge preservation continues this colonial legacy of contemporary infrastructure projects (Jain *et al.* 2025). The Coastal Road project exemplifies hydrocolonialism because it encroaches upon the Koli observation sites and fishing grounds. Ecological and cultural importance, even for indigenous communities, is not recognized at all when modern coastal developments treat marine environments as resources for land creation. This is an approach that perpetuates such colonial attitudes. These attitudes view the sea as empty space so they can capture it, together with they ignore knowledge systems that depend on coastal interaction for their transmission plus evolution.

6 DECOLONIAL KNOWLEDGE AND GLOBAL FUTURES

For Koli maritime knowledge systems offer concrete alternatives for coastal resource management and climate adaptation. These systems do also show just how customary ecological knowledge applies in practice. Santos (2007) identifies epistemic violence as being central to the ways in which colonial knowledge produced itself, where Western modernity "epistemicides" against non-Western knowledge systems through denying that they are scientifically legitimate. The Koli communities navigated the coastal uncertainties with success across many centuries because of how systematic marginalization obscured their advanced environmental understanding. Koli weather prediction techniques can offer valuable perceptions when it comes to contemporary meteorological services. Climate is changing, and services use these to face the problem. They integrate multiple environmental indicators to provide early warning systems that complement rather than compete with modern forecasting methods. Customary seasonal calendars with storm prediction methods accurately show levels that could improve disaster preparedness when combined with contemporary meteorological data. The holistic approach of Koli knowledge systems views natural phenomena as linked factors instead of isolated variables, also it offers integrated perspectives that are necessary for addressing complex environmental challenges. Recognizing indigenous systems is needed to embrace decolonial knowledge. Scientific frameworks with legitimacy deserve institutional integration and support. Koli practices expose limitations of Western scientific models separating social with environmental factors, highlighting human and natural systems' interdependence. For communities globally, Koli knowledge systems offer community-based environmental management models that prioritize sustainability and social justice in coastal areas.

7 CONCLUSION

This research shows that advanced scientific understanding exemplified by Koli maritime knowledge systems persisted despite systematic marginalization as well as colonial epistemicide. Specific Koli weather prediction techniques can show an outstanding accuracy that often exceeded that of colonial meteorological services. These techniques included wind pattern analysis using *"Purva"* and *"Pashchim"* classifications, tidal cycle integration by way of *"Bhara"* and *"Olu"* terminology, along with marine ecosystem observation methods. British authorities slowly recognized Koli forecasting validity according to study analysis. This recognition remained as unofficial, even when their own systems failed in those monsoon seasons. Contemporary urban infrastructure projects as well as climate change continue for to threaten and for to endanger these processes that do transmit knowledge that depend upon sustained coastal interaction. Specific customary techniques contribute documentation empirically, decolonial frameworks contribute application theoretically to

maritime knowledge systems, and indigenous weather prediction contributes value practically for coastal management. Koli seasonal calendars and storm prediction methods prepare people for disasters plus complement modern meteorological approaches. Future coastal management policies should integrate customary knowledge along with contemporary science because they recognize indigenous weather prediction as legitimate scientific understanding, which is important to build community resilience and address environmental uncertainties in an era when climate change accelerates.

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Cultural memory and scientific achievement: The legacy of Mahrauli Iron Pillar in the Indian knowledge traditions

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ABSTRACT: This paper examines the Mehrauli Iron Pillar as a multidimensional symbol that converges scientific innovation with cultural heritage because it represented ancient India. This 7.21-meter pillar represents prominent metallurgical success because it stands for more than 1600 years without substantial corrosion due to its 98% pure iron makeup and protective "Misawite Film." Its unique phosphorus-rich composition, creating natural rust resistance, is analysed by the research—a technique challenging current metallurgical beliefs. Past its technical importance, the pillar concretely evidences that Indian knowledge tradition sophisticatedly integrated spiritual values with scientific inquiry. Sanskrit inscriptions of the Gupta period (circa 375 CE) further illuminate that historical context where science advanced as culture and religion developed. This very enduring monument can inspire the contemporary scientific research. It also reinforces India's historical contributions in regard to global technological heritage.

Keywords: Mehrauli Iron Pillar, Ancient metallurgy, Corrosion resistance, Indian knowledge traditions, Cultural heritage

1 INTRODUCTION

India's civilization is considered one of the oldest and rich civilizations in the world, whose roots extend from Vedas, Upanishads and Puranas to cosmic science and technical achievements. The Indian knowledge tradition has contributed unique to human history not only spiritual and cultural, but also from scientific terms. The tangible evidence of these achievements can be seen clearly in our architectural, metallurgical, mathematics, astronomy, medicine and architecture. One of these is the unique example - the iron pillar located in the Mehrauli region of Delhi, which is a symbol of Indian scientific efficiency and cultural consciousness.

Mehrauli Iron column covers a multi-level heritage. On the one hand, this column reveals the political, religious and architectural vision of the Gupta Empire, on the other hand it presents an example of the scientific heights of ancient Indian metallurgy (Jain and Mohanan 2025). For more than 1600 years, this column has been standing in an open environment and even today it did not rust, which makes it a scientific surprise. This fact is not just a technical achievement, but it is a sign of the broader knowledge tradition in which India deeply assimilated natural sciences and technology.

The cultural and spiritual significance of 'column' in Indian history has also been very deep. The columns have been seen as a symbol of the axis of the universe, which connect the earth and the sky. From Ashoka Pillar to Mehrauli Iron Pillar, these structures have not only

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shown political declarations and religious beliefs, but their architectural vision and technical construction process has also embodied the scientific consciousness of Indian society. Mehrauli iron column not only holds a special place in cultural memory due to its iron structure, but also due to the Sanskrit records, religious purpose and architectural grandeur written on it.

The inscribed on the iron column, which is written in the Sanskrit language and Brahmi script, indicates that the golden era of Indian history when there was intensive harmony in culture, religion and science. It shows the victory of the mentioned king, his religious loyalty and duty towards society. It makes it clear that the Indian state system had coexistence of religion, science and art - a model that reflects the foundation of today's interdisciplinary approach.

When we look at the Mehrauli iron column scientifically, we find that the technology used in its manufacture challenges many rules of modern metallurology. Scientists found that the purity of iron in it is more than 98% and has excessive amounts of phosphorus and deficiency of elements such as sulphur and chloride - which protects it from the moisture and oxygen effects present in the atmosphere. Additionally, a thin oxide layer called 'Misawite Film', protects against war. These specialties have given it a name for 'Corrosion Resistance Iron Pillar'.

Through this research paper, the Mehrauli Iron Pillar is presented not only as a historical monument, but as a multidimensional symbol, including the scientific insight of the Indian knowledge tradition and the depth of cultural memory. This study, while coordinating historical, cultural and technical perspectives, tries to establish that Indian ancient heritage is not only the glory of the past, but they are also a source of inspiration for today's society, science and education (Jain and Chopra 2022).

The purpose of this research is double - first, to highlight the scientific achievements of ancient India through the construction, structure and technical analysis of the Mehrauli Iron Pillar, and the second, while presenting it as a vibrant symbol of cultural memory, showing that the form of knowledge in India is theoretical and practical Both levels have been extremely rich (Jain and Skariah 2022).

It is necessary to mention under the Preamble that in the modern period when science is being defined from the Western point of view, examples such as the Mehrauli Iron column prove that India's traditional learning system was also rich in real testing, long -term exploration and experimental efficiency. This column opens new doors of research in subjects such as metallurology, but also material science, structural engineering, weather resistance, and environmental science (Jain *et al.* 2025).

2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The pillar is currently located in the Qutub Minar complex in Delhi. The weight of which is about 6 tons and the length is about 7.21 meters. But the history of its origin and establishment holds an important place in Indian history, archaeology and cultural discourse (Balasubramaniam 2005).

This pillar is believed to be built in the Gupta period (about 4 AD).The date of construction of this column is considered to be around 370- 375 AD and the date of the article of the column is considered 380-385 AD. In the Brahmi script located on the column, this inscription engaged in Sanskrit language has a discussion of a religious king Chandra, which won the south direction. Scholars believe that this King Chandragupta was the second who defeated the Shakas rulers, this inscription not only gives historical information, but also makes sense of the Gupta political power, religious tradition and technical proficiency (Anantharaman, n.d.).

There are also various opinions regarding the transfer of Mehrauli pillar. Some scholars believe that it was originally established in Central India (perhaps Ujjain or Vidisha), which

was the capital of Chandragupta II. Later, it was brought to Delhi, possibly in the 10th-11th century by Anangpal, the ruler of the Tomar dynasty. Another inscription supporting this fact has been found near the Red Fort, which mentions the establishment of an 'Iron pillar' by Anangpal (Anantharaman, n.d.).

In the iron pillar of Mehrauli, information about the hill named Vishnu is given in this regard, Dr. DR Bhandarkar has named the place from where the Vyas River comes out of the Himalayas. But the Fleet believes that this column was not brought from outside, but it was established here from the initial time (Bishvas 1996).

During the medieval period, this pillar remained part of the Qutub campus. Later, the British also showed interest in it. In the 19th century, archaeologists such as James Prinsep and Alexander Cunningham tried to read and analyse its inscriptions. The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) also made efforts to conserve it. In the modern period, this pillar is not only a historical heritage, but has become a motivational source of cultural consciousness and scientific curiosity (Anantharaman, n.d.).

This iron pillar is also famous due to its scientific characteristics. Despite being located in an open environment for nearly 1600 years, this pillar is almost free from corrosion. This feature of this remains a matter of study for scientists and metalists even today. Modern science explains it as 'Passivation Layer' or 'Iron Hydrogen Phosphate Hydrate Layer', but how and under which traditions it was built, it is a living example of the advancement of Indian metallurology (Singh, n.d.).

Today when we look at the Mehrauli Iron Pillar, it is not only a metal structure of the past, but it presents an indelible image of Indian knowledge traditions, creativity, and vision. This pillar reminds us that the past of India has not only been religious or cultural, but also from a scientific point of view.

3 STRUCTURE AND COMPOSITION SCIENCE

The iron pillar in Mehrauli is a proof of a surprising achievement in the field of Indian science and technology, which not only reflects the thinking much ahead of its time, but still remains a matter of study and inspiration for modern science. This pillar has been standing in an open environment for years, despite the lack of corrosion, indicates the uniqueness of Indian ancient metallurgy. From a scientific point of view, this pillar is not only a monument, but also a unique laboratory of metallurgy. It is designed from 98% pure iron, which is a unique technical achievement in itself as modern iron production facilities were not available in that era. In the absence of modern techniques, the production of such pure iron and moulding it as a huge column is a proof of the skill of Indian metallologists (Cunningham, N.d.).

Experts believe that this pillar is produced by forge welding technology, in which a huge structure was created by adding many small iron pieces to extremely high temperatures. Maintaining uniformity in this process is a very difficult task, yet the structural unity of the column reflects its excellence (Kumar and, Balasubramanian 1998).

The most amazing feature of this pillar is its rust resistance. Modern scientists have done many research on it and have found that a thin layer - passive layer made above it - protects it from erosion. This layer is mainly a mixed layer made from the presence of iron, phosphorus, oxygen and hydrogen, called the "Misswite Layer" (Balasubramanian, n.d.).

The role of phosphorus in the manufacture of this misswight layer is particularly notable. In modern iron construction, phosphorus is considered an inaccuracy and adopted the process of removing it, while this element was present naturally in ancient Indian metallic work, and this is the same by reacting with phosphorus, climate and oxygen, which makes a protector layer, which protects the surface from erosion (Adwait 2021).

4 RISE OF ANCIENT INDIAN METALLURGY

The tradition of metallurgy in India goes to the Vedas. The Rigveda and Yajurveda mentions "Ayes" (iron or metal). From the Vedic period to the Gupta period, metals were detailed in India like copper, bronze, lead, gold, silver and iron. Examples such as Ashoka's pillar, Emperor Samudragupta's postures, and Mehrauli Iron Pillar are clear that Indian metallurgical work was in a very advanced state (Swarup 2008).

Mehrauli Iron Pillar is not only a mechanical structure, but a sign of that knowledge tradition, which had a deep understanding of experience, supervision, and natural balance. This knowledge tradition was not in the form of a written scientific book, but in the form of traditional crafts and technical exercises, generations were preserved from generation to generation. In ancient India, metallurology, chemistry and architecture were extremely developed, the proof of which is an iron pillar (Jain and Mohanan 2023).

This pillar is the result of the consolidated knowledge of traditions like Ayurveda, astronomy, mathematics and metallurgy.

People in India have continued the tradition of metallurgy, the examples of which are found first. The iron pillar of Dhar is of the 11th century.12 Another example of Karnataka (located in Kodachandri) is the iron pillar (Deccam Herald 2013). It does not get much information about its history but historians believe that the method of construction is the same. Another example of the pillar located in Mount Abu is whose top is trishula shaped and length is 12 feet 9 inches (Panchanan 1914). The construction of this pillar was defeated by the Rajput rulers in the rebellion after the death of the ruler of Delhi Alauddin, the Delhi Army was defeated by which this pillar was built to commemorate the victory (Panchanan 1914). This column is also made of similar iron similar to the pillars of Delhi and Dhar.

5 INSPIRATION FOR MODERN SCIENCE

Modern scientific institutions such as IIT Kanpur and the National Metalgical Laboratory (NML), Jamshedpur have done intensive study on this column and attempted to understand its metallic properties. Inspired by its findings, new experiments are also being done in the direction of manufacturing modern war-resistant materials (Balasubramaniam 2009).

This pillar also proves that subtle observation of environmental factors, chemical association of materials and prudent use of local resources have been an integral part of the Indian craft tradition. It is a coordination of science and culture, which can become an inspiration for sustainable development and indigenous innovation in modern times. In the modern era, many scientists on this pillar, especially scientist Dr. R.K. Balasubramaniam researched (Balasubramaniam 2009).

UNESCO recognized it as a World Heritage in 1993 with Qutub Minar. This pillar still remains the subject of study for students and researchers of "Corrosion Science".

6 CONCLUSION

Another feature of Indian knowledge tradition has been that it gives coordination of religion, science and art in it. The iron pillar is a vibrant example of this - it is not only a reward of scientific skills, but has been distinguished as a religious place, as a geographical instruction point and also as architectural beauty. This overall approach shows the prevalence and depth of the Indian knowledge system. Finally, the Mehrauli Iron column is a symbolic pillar of Indian knowledge traditions - where science, culture and memory are united. Its study helps us to understand the pride and pride of our civilization, leading towards self -realization and restoration of Indian contribution to global scientific discourse.

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Hatha Yoga in Indian knowledge system

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ABSTRACT: Hatha Yoga is widely practiced today and has gained global recognition, particularly through events like World Yoga Day. This research focuses on Hatha Yoga within the Indian knowledge system, especially as outlined by the Nath Yogis. In Nath traditions, Lord Shiva is revered as the original Nath, and Guru Gorakshanath is credited with reorganizing and revitalizing Hatha Yoga during the medieval period. The term "Nath" means one who has mastered oneself, signifying control over inner instincts and desires. Hatha Yoga represents the union of Chitta Shakti (mental energy) and Prana Shakti (vital energy). The influence of Tantra is evident in Hatha Yoga texts, with Hathapradipika being the most significant. Many of the practices performed globally during World Yoga Day originate from these texts. As 192 countries celebrated the 10th World Yoga Day on June 21, 2024, it highlights the profound contribution of Nath Yoga Sadhana to holistic human well-being worldwide.

Keywords: Nath Sadhana, Gorakshanath, Hathapradipika, Health Management, Yoga Day

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 *Hatha Yoga: Historical roots, global influence, and the path to well-being*

Yoga is one of the most profound gifts of Indian civilization to humanity [1]. Among its various interpretations, one defining essence of Yoga is Samadhi—the unification of Shakti (dynamic energy) with Shiva (pure consciousness), as noted by Arthur Avalon (2000) [2]. In broader terms, Yoga means "union," reflecting the integration of body, mind, and spirit. Rooted in the soul of the Indian knowledge tradition [3], Yoga has branched into many forms and practices over millennia [4]. The antiquity of this system is well documented through archaeological findings, such as Indus Valley seals depicting figures like Pashupati in meditative poses, showcasing its early presence in human civilization [5].Yoga has evolved as a living tradition, continuously transmitted through the experience of great sages, yogis, saints, and spiritual thinkers [6]. Even in modern times, ashrams in remote corners of India and abroad continue to carry forward ancient yogic disciplines [7]. However, in the medieval era, distortions crept into yogic practices due to misinterpretations found in some Tantric and Hatha texts. It was the Nath Yogis, a sect within the larger Nath Sampradaya, who rejuvenated and preserved the purity of Yoga [8]. They removed selfish deviations, re-established spiritual discipline, and made it accessible to laypeople.During the same historical period, even the Mughal elite began integrating certain Indian traditions, such as vegetarianism, demonstrating cultural

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exchange and mutual influence (Gandotra and Jain 2023). In modern history, this profound tradition received international recognition when Prime Minister Narendra Modi proposed the celebration of International Yoga Day at the United Nations General Assembly in 2014. Supported by 177 countries, this proposal led to the first celebration on 21st June 2015. By 2024, the 10th International Yoga Day was commemorated by 192 out of 195 nations.

2 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

To conduct a historical and textual analysis of Hatha Yoga.
To explore the global influence of Hatha Yoga.
To examine the physical and mental health benefits of Hatha Yoga.

3 METHODOLOGY

This research is based on a textual analytical method, using primary, secondary, and tertiary sources, including scriptures, academic journals, commentaries, and recent studies in the field of Yoga.

4 UNDERSTANDING HATHA YOGA

The term Hatha is composed of "Ha" (life force or prana) and "Tha" (mental energy). Their union forms the essence of Hatha Yoga—balancing the physical and mental energies (Saraswati 1992). This confluence leads to internal harmony, resolution of dualities, and the yogi's stabilisation in his true nature. In the Nath tradition, the path to this balance involves purification practices, dietary regulation, asanas, nadi shodhana, pranayama, and mudras, all aiming to awaken the dormant divine energy within [9].These practices are evident in numerous ancient temples and inscriptions across India. Archaeological surveys confirm depictions of Nath Yogis and Goddesses, reinforcing their role in preserving yogic heritage [10]. At Mahudi Gate (pre-13th C.E.), images of Matsyendranath, Chauranginath, and Gorakshanath with associated deities depict the interconnection of Shaiva, Shakta, and yogic practices (Saastri 1940) [11]. The Panhale caves of the 13th century further affirm this, showcasing Gorakshanath surrounded by 84 Siddhas in a spiritual council (Deshpande 1986) [12].Contemporary digitization efforts, like the National Mission for Manuscripts, supported by AI-based cataloging, aim to protect this spiritual legacy (Jain *et al.* 2025) [13].

5 PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF HATHA YOGA

The Nath Yogis emphasized experiential wisdom over scriptural debate [14]. Their teachings were not argumentative but emerged organically through yogic practice [15]. Their philosophy is embedded in practice—where the yogi directly experiences transformation through discipline rather than textual doctrine [16]. Hatha Yoga integrates body and mind using asanas, breath control (pranayama), and meditation [17]. Asanas promote flexibility, strength, and mental calmness, while pranayama channels life force through controlled breathing [18]. These practices aim at unifying dualities—body and soul, strength and flexibility, power and stillness [19].The heart of Hatha Yoga lies in awakening kundalini shakti, the coiled potential energy at the base of the spine, residing in the Mooladhara chakra. Kundalini is both dormant and active [20]. Dormantly, it reflects

latent consciousness engaged in worldly illusions. When awakened, it rises through the chakras, culminating in union with Shiva at the Brahmarandhra—symbolizing liberation [21]. The Kularnava Tantra and Amanaska Yoga describe this awakening through two modes: Kritika Sadhana (technical) and Sahaja (spontaneous) [22]. The ultimate goal is to transcend duality and merge with the divine.Gorakshanath outlines five stages of Kundalini Shakti in Siddhasiddhantapaddhati: Nijashakti, Parashakti, Aparashakti, Sukshma Shakti, and Kundalini Shakti [23]. The last, when awakened, grants miraculous abilities and a perfected, immortal yogic body (siddha deha) [24]. Normally directed downward for creation, the upward movement of kundalini symbolizes spiritual ascent.Texts like Hatha Pradipika, Shiva Samhita, and Gheranda Samhita provide structured descriptions of these processes. Kundalini is metaphorically described as Kalagni, Ishwari, Arundhati, and Shesha. Its rise through the central channel (Sushumna Nadi), breaking the three granthis (knots)—Brahma, Vishnu, and Rudra—leads to divine realization [25].

6 TRADITIONAL HATHA YOGA TEXTS

The Nath Siddhas greatly enriched the corpus of Hatha Yoga literature [26]. These yogis authored texts that documented yogic experiences in regional and Sanskritic languages to maintain accessibility and authenticity [27]. The system resembled ancient guilds (shrenis), balancing spiritual rigor with adaptability (Maurya *et al.* 2025) [28]. Key texts include: Koulajnananirnaya (859 A.D.), Gorakshatakam (11th C.E.), Amritsiddhi (1160 C.E.);Vasistha Samhita, Siddha-Siddhanta-Paddhati (12th C.E.), Hathapradipika (1297 C.E.),Gorakha-bani, Shiva Samhita, Gherand Samhita, Jogpradipika, Jyotsna Tika (14th–18th C.E.) [29].The Hathapradipika by Swatmarama stands out, with over 200 known manuscripts, including early versions from the 13th century (Swami 2018) [30]. It outlines yogic goals, preparatory practices, the influence of Nath Siddhas, the role of diet, and guidelines for living the yogic life. The emphasis on mudras, pranayama, shatkarma, and Kundalini distinguishes it as a practical manual rather than a philosophical treatise [31].

7 HATHA YOGA IN TANTRIC AND BUDDHIST TRADITIONS

The influence of Nath Yogis extended to Vajrayana and Sahajayana schools of Buddhism [32]. Rahul Sankrityayan's records of 84 Siddhas in Tibetan monasteries mention Nath figures like Matsyendranath and Gorakshanath. Their presence in Tibetan art and ritual testifies to shared spiritual lineages. In the 17th-century Nepalese Matsyendranath temple, both Hindus and Buddhists honor him equally. Tibetan masters like Taranatha are mentioned in Jyotsna Tika of Hatha Pradipika (Swami 2021) [33], and figures like Kabir and Gyaneshwar reflect Nath influence in their poetry and commentaries [34]. This cross-pollination shows how Hatha Yoga not only shaped Hindu spirituality but also deeply influenced regional and sectarian practices [35].

8 PRACTICE AND PHYSIOLOGY OF HATHA YOGA

Hatha Yoga's physiological aspect focuses on energy channeling through Ida, Pingala, and Sushumna nadis [36]. The practice of Bandhas—Moola Bandha, Jalandhara Bandha, and Uddiyana Bandha—regulates the flow of Apana and Prana toward Sushumna, initiating spiritual ascent. The point of confluence, Moolasthan, lies between the anus and the base of the genitals [37]. As energy rises through Agya Chakra to Sahasrara, the yogi attains

liberation. These processes, described extensively in Hatha Pradipika, underscore the yogic journey from bodily discipline to divine union [38].

9 GLOBAL IMPACT OF HATHA YOGA

Hatha Yoga now holds a prominent place in global wellness culture. More than 192 countries, including 44 Islamic nations, participate in International Yoga Day (Ministry 2025). The official Common Yoga Protocol includes over 80% practices rooted in Hatha Yoga [39].

10 SCIENTIFIC STUDIES HAVE CONFIRMED ITS BENEFITS

Physical: Improved flexibility, strength, and metabolic regulation., Mental: Reduced stress, anxiety, and improved cognitive function. Emotional: Enhanced stability and emotional resilience. Spiritual: Greater mindfulness, transcendence, and inner peace (Deepak, Jan–June 2023) [40]. Yoga therapy, derived from Hatha practices, is now widely adopted in hospitals, schools, rehabilitation centers, and corporate wellness programs [41].

11 CONCLUSION

Hatha Yoga is a comprehensive spiritual and physiological discipline that seeks to harmonize the body's energy currents. Through centuries, it has remained a cornerstone of Indian sadhana, revitalized by Nath Yogis, and passed down through texts, rituals, and oral teachings. Central to its philosophy is the awakening of Kundalini Shakti—the latent force capable of transforming human consciousness.Its relevance today is greater than ever, as modern societies seek holistic solutions for physical and mental well-being. Supported by scientific evidence and embraced across cultural boundaries, Hatha Yoga has transcended geography, language, and religion to emerge as a universal path of healing and self-realization. From ancient cave temples to digital manuscripts and international observances, Hatha Yoga continues to illuminate the path toward balance, unity, and liberation.

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Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara: Guardian of traders' paths (with special reference to China)

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ABSTRACT: This study examines the function of Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara in Chinese Buddhist settings, notably the deity's evolution and importance as guardian divinity of merchants through old Asian trading paths. This research shows the way that Avalokiteśvara's kind ethics became integrated into business actions, building structures which uphold ethical commerce by studying sacred writings, symbolic depictions, and past archives. Since the study examines just how this transformation reflected changing cultural plus commercial needs along the Silk Road, it traces the deity's evolution from the male Indian Bodhisattva to the female Chinese Guanyin. This paper contends Avalokiteśvara's mercantile patronage established durable tenets for sympathetic business. These principles remain relevant to contemporary global trade organisations. Textual analysis regarding the Lotus Sutra's Universal Gate Chapter as well as iconographic examination related to Padmapani representations have demonstrated this. Buddhist devotional practitioners shaped symbiotic links that did join spiritual merit with material prosperity because their practices impacted socio-economic structures throughout ancient trade networks in addition to modern ones.

Keywords: Bodhisattva, Avalokitesvara, Guanyin, Padmapani Lokesvara, Amitabha Buddha

1 INTRODUCTION

The intersection between religious devotion as well as commercial enterprise in ancient Asian civilisations shows the way that spiritual values shaped economic practices in a deep way. This study examines precisely just how Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara acts as the patron deity for traders, and it stresses precisely just how the deity transforms and signifies within diverse Chinese Buddhist contexts. How *Avalokiteśvara* protected merchants traveling along Silk Road trade networks is this investigation's research question, also what this transformation implies for comprehending ethical commerce in historical and contemporary contexts?

In this paper, the central thesis argues that *Avalokiteśvara's* mercantile patronage represents a unique synthesis of Buddhist compassionate ethics with practical commercial necessity, creating sustainable frameworks toward ethical trade that transcended cultural boundaries as well as remain relevant for modern global commerce (Britannica 2024). The deity evolved from the male Indian *Bodhisattva* into the female Chinese Guanyin which exemplifies how religious symbols adapt so they serve changing commercial as well as cultural needs while maintaining core ethical principles (Tran 2021).

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This study employs with it a multidisciplinary methodology. It combines textual analysis of canonical Buddhist literature as well as iconographic examination of artistic representations with historical investigation of trade route documentation. Primary sources are the Lotus Sutra's Universal Gate Chapter, Chinese Buddhist texts documenting Guanyin's protective functions, and archaeological evidence from major trading centres along the Silk Road. Old belief systems may shape conversations on moral company actions. The research contributes more toward comprehension of global trade governance (Jain and Chopra 2022).

2 HISTORICAL AND ICONOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW OF *AVALOKITEŚVARA*

Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara has an important role since it represents ideal mercy inside Mahayana Buddhist thinking. Because it encapsulates the deity's fundamental spiritual mission, "*Avalokiteśvara*" translates from the Sanskrit etymology as "the lord who looks upon the world with compassion". Unlike all of the other Buddhist deities, *Avalokiteśvara* uniquely models that theology, for he chooses to delay his own personal enlightenment until all of the sentient beings escape from suffering.

The iconographic development of *Avalokiteśvara* is revealed through advanced symbolic systems that are designed for the purpose of communicating the protective functions of the bodhisattva. Ancient Indian texts do document the thousand-armed and thousand-eyed form. Each appendage has particular saving functions. These functions range from protective gestures in relation to expressions of divine generosity (Wang 2014). "Lord with a Lotus in Hand" literally manifests *Padmapani Lokeśvara* plus a small seated Buddha sits within the bodhisattva's turban crest. This Buddha figure is presumably *Amitabha*, and also it reflects as well the theological concept that *Avalokiteśvara* emanates out from *Amitabha Buddha*.

From cave complexes in Maharashtra archaeological evidence testifies to a relationship. Spiritual devotion with commercial patronage created this relationship. In Ajanta Cave 1, the mural shows *Avalokiteśvara* Padmapani in a typical compassionate posture, while Ellora Cave 7 and Kanheri Cave 90 exhibit detailed representations, and these representations include imagery depicting the eight great perils that face merchants: fire, theft, demons, elephants, lions, snakes, monkeys, and shipwreck (Pattanaik 2024). These artistic programs started in the 6th century CE. *Avalokiteśvara* gets wide recognition among Buddhist sects because they view him as business's main protector.

3 *AVALOKITEŚVARA* AND THE PROTECTION OF TRADERS: TEXTUAL AND CULTURAL ANALYSIS

The theological foundations for *Avalokiteśvara's* patronage over commercial enterprises are established firmly within canonical Buddhist literature, particularly the Mahayana sutras (Yuyama 2007). *Avalokiteśvara* intervenes to ensure safe passage for oceanic dangers, both supernatural entities and natural disasters threaten, explicitly declaring the bodhisattva protects maritime trade as definitive textual evidence from the Lotus Sutra's Universal Gate Chapter.

The sutra states: "If merchants do carry precious treasures and then cross the great sea and then a black wind blows their ship toward the land of rakshasa demons, if among them there is even just one person who calls upon the name of *Avalokiteśvara Bodhisattva*, then *Avalokiteśvara* will deliver all of those merchants from their troubles with the *rakshasa*". This scriptural attestation establishes *Avalokiteśvara's* preeminent role in protecting traders and sailors. Navigating physical with metaphysical dangers is critical for their livelihoods.

Buddhist literature extensively documents various maritime commercial activities as well as the associated challenges that arise. Examples of this are the Jataka collections including *Mahajanaka Jataka, Balhassa Jataka*, and *Suparaka Jataka*. For merchants' commercial ventures, there were multifarious perils that are detailed in these narratives: bandit attacks, wild animal encounters, poisonous vegetation, navigation difficulties, supernatural threats, and also food scarcity. This kind of thorough documentation clarifies that ancient commercial ventures were multidimensional as they needed divine protection (Srivastava 2002).

Commerce with religious devotion historically connected, revealing merchants naturally gravitated toward *Avalokiteśvara's* compassionate intercession when they navigated treacherous commercial pathways (Jain and Skariah 2022). *Sarthavas* historically eased domestic and international trade networks since they were cultural ambassadors that eased cross-cultural understanding and the exchange of ideas, technologies, and artistic traditions (Jain and Mohanan 2025).

4 TRANSFORMATION IN CHINESE CONTEXT: FROM *AVALOKITEŚVARA* TO GUANYIN

The transcultural adventure of *Avalokiteśvara* through Silk Road trade networks depicts the deep connection between commercial exchange with religious diffusion. At the time when the Indian *Bodhisattva* transforms into the Chinese deity Guanyin, this represents an outstanding instance of cross-cultural religious adaptation, which reflects the manner in which religious syncretism is dynamic along trade routes.

Avalokiteśvara's male characteristics were kept in Chinese Buddhist texts in the early transmission period (1st-3rd centuries CE). They followed Indian iconographic conventions hence this maintenance. Gender shifted slowly throughout the Sui (581-618 CE) and Tang (618-907 CE) dynasties. *Avalokiteśvara* had assumed feminine characteristics completely by the Song dynasty's conclusion (960-1279 CE). *Avalokiteśvara* represented the attributes as well as appearance of a Chinese goddess for that time.

This transformation functioned specifically in commerce and in culture within the Chinese trading communities such as described by Tuan (2023). In Chinese religious tradition, female deities particularly were associated with protection when people travelled and undertook maritime ventures. Guanyin's feminine manifestation did resonate quite well with Chinese merchants' real needs for some maternal protection. Wang (2014) indicates that these merchants needed this very protection during quite dangerous commercial adventures. Guanyin temples beside major trade routes, especially in commercial hubs like Chang'an, Luoyang, as well as coastal ports, are documented in Tang dynasty historical records (Ganvir 2012-2013).

The deity's role of protecting merchants from river flooding and mountain bandits plus bureaucratic corruption was indeed stressed in Chinese Buddhist texts, especially in the "Guanyin Sutra" adaptations, in various Chinese commercial contexts. The "Thirty-Three Manifestations of Guanyin" tradition specifically dedicates forms to protect traders of different types such as sea merchants, caravan leaders, and even market vendors. Core ethical principles are maintained as if religious symbols adapt so they can serve changing commercial needs in this localization process.

5 SYMBOLISM OF PADMA AND INDIAN ICONOGRAPHIC LANGUAGE

The lotus symbol emerges as a particularly meaningful and meaningful element within *Avalokiteśvara's* iconographic system because mercantile aspirations deeply resonate with the multidimensional meanings that it symbolizes. The *padma* represents positive energy as well as auspicious beginnings through elegant simplicity. This represents its transformative potential. In business communities, the lotus symbolizes the cultivation of constructive

attitudes. Optimistic viewpoints are also encouraged because they are needed for business gains (Yadav 2012).

During the Buddhist period, the symbol of the lotus became even more meaningful. It gained extra levels of importance. It signified both creative power and perfection together with wisdom, along with spiritual purity at the same time (Srivastava 2015). The *Padmapani Avalokiteśvara* from Ajanta Cave 1 shows the symbolic complexity characterizing this. The sentence presents necessary virtues for. These do include compassion and mercy and peace and purity through that artistic representation.

Included within the iconographic vocabulary of *Avalokiteśvara* are the Purnaghat and the Amrit Kalash as symbolic elements. These elements specifically convey divine blessings to all of humanity. Vessel symbolism includes concepts such as completeness, purity, as well as immortality, gaining particular importance within trading groups since symbols signify prosperity along with favourable outcomes. Just as the kalash holds water, *Avalokiteśvara* represents universal compassion, which inspires the philosophical principle of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam,* envisioning the world as one family in unity.

Abhaya Mudra or *Shantidkar Mudra* does act as a very fundamental gestural element within *Avalokiteśvara's* representations, shown in both the seated and standing forms. This hand gesture communicates of peace, of courage, and of fearlessness as it proves to be especially helpful when commercial practitioners seek after psychological security and experience a spiritual solace. Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain traditions accept the mudra, and this acceptance is beyond sectarian boundaries because it shows practical benefit and universal appeal (Pandey 2001).

6 ETHICAL AND ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS: FROM ANCIENT TRADE ROUTES TO MODERN COMMERCE

The socio-economic ramifications of *Avalokiteśvara's* mercantile patronage extend past conventional religious boundaries for they establish thorough frameworks for ethical commerce along with social responsibility. The bodhisattva's basic merits of compassion, integrity, and generosity were key tenets that changed business habits into shows of religious piety, because moral demands controlled merchant behaviour.

Within this ethical framework, mutual trust and social accountability in sustainable businesses were grounded. Commercial success as well as religious patronage were connected symbiotically. This showed how faith and trade existed supportively in Buddhist societies. Successful traders regularly put portions of gains towards kept monasteries as well as towards built temples. These allocations created enduring institutions with spiritual and educational functions (Gandotra and Jain 2023).

Avalokiteśvara's protective functions do allow for examination of some modern international trade organisations. The World Trade Organization's mandate involves liberalising economies, easing commerce, as well as defending rights. Furthermore, it involves guarding merchants and increasing progress. Also within the mandate is increasing financial access, and inequalities are addressed while this happens, mirroring *Avalokiteśvara's* customary kind intervention in commercial affairs.

The bodhisattva vowed he would postpone any personal enlightenment until everyone is liberated, and this resonates powerfully amid contemporary challenges that commercial communities face as these communities commit to serving continuously and ensuring collective welfare. In navigating the complex global markets, *Avalokiteśvara's* example then provides qualities that remain critically relevant for business practitioners, such as courage and patience and diligence as well as tranquillity.

Guanyin continues to influence modern Chinese business practices in a lasting manner. Family enterprises as well as customary traders often see this. Because they venture for protection and ethically decide as they need guidance (Tuan 2023), merchants in China

today often maintain shrines to Guanyin within their establishments. This consistency indicates the active pertinence of old religious structures. These structures are still relevant in current business situations.

7 CONCLUSION

This study shows that the advanced synthesis of Buddhist compassionate ethics with the practical commercial necessity of traders is represented by the role for *Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara* as a patron deity. Religious symbols are adapting to suit varied business and social needs while retaining core moral concepts; for example, the Indian male Bodhisattva transformed into the Chinese female Guanyin.

According to the research, three things matter: First, canonical Buddhist texts absolutely found, notably *Avalokiteśvara's* protective role over commercial enterprises scripturally within the Lotus Sutra's Universal Gate Chapter. Secondly, the deity's iconographic development has created more advanced symbolic systems for its followers. This included within it the Padmapani manifestation. These systems communicated protection that was especially important to trade groups. Guanyin changes form thus showing religious adaptation's satisfaction of some cultural and commercial needs. Chinese Buddhist settings also keep core ethical structures intact within this transformation.

Ethical business practices are in a meaningful way impacted by this study. The current debates that are all around global trade governance are truly where implications do extend. *Avalokiteśvara* protects all with a deep compassion, offering such a model for one. Today's commercial organisations might follow this model as they strive towards successfully pairing profit goals with social duty. These old structures last so stay relevant showing spiritual values may be found to make reliable bases for moral trade in ever trickier world markets.

Later studies could probe distinct cases regarding recent Chinese firms that revere Guanyin, assess parallel divine patron customs across other Asian commercial societies, as well as check what realistic uses exist for Buddhist moral codes inside present business regulatory systems (Gehlot *et al.* 2023).

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Critically analyzing the studies of William Jones on Indian gods and goddesses

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ABSTRACT: Till the eighteenth century, India had a rich past but no history. The establishment of the Asiatic Society of Bengal gradually paved the way for converting this past into history. Indian culture has always been inspired by religion. Before the studies of William Jones, Indian gods and goddesses were only characters of Indian religion, but the linguistic and historical studies of Jones for the first time accepted Indian gods and goddesses as characters of Indian history instead of creatures roaming in the heaven. In 1785 CE, he presented a paper entitled 'On the Gods of Greece, Italy and India' comparing the Indian, Greek and Italian gods and goddesses. He equated Janus with Ganesha, Minerva with Durga, Diana with Bhavani, Dionysos with Rama, Apollo with Krishna, Hecate with Kali and Ceres with Lakshmi etc. On the basis of linguistic and historical studies of these religious d eities, Jones has discussed the ancient relations among these nations. In this research paper, an attempt has been made to know how the Europeans were trying to understand the Indian religious expressions etc. and what parameters or aspects were used in their studies. In this study, a comparative and historically grounded approach has been used, with a focus on close reading of key texts. The main sources include Sir William Jones's essay On the Gods of Greece, Italy and India, along with traditional Indian scriptures like the Ṛgveda, Aitareya Brāhmaṇa, and Yājñavalkya Smṛti. These texts were examined to better understand how Indian gods and goddesses were portrayed in terms of their religious and philosophical roles. The paper compares Jones's interpretations with these Indian sources to see how he linked Indian deities with figures from Greek and Roman mythology, using language and stories as points of connection. To support this analysis, Relevant secondary sources in English and Hindi have been reviewed.

Keywords: Indian, Greek, Roman, Gods and Goddesses, Linguistic etc.

1 INTRODUCTION

Sir William Jones was born on 28 September 1746 in London. His father was a famous mathematician and his name was also William Jones. Jones's father died when he was only 3 years old, so he was brought up by his mother (Teignmouth 1807; pg. 13). Along with university education, William Jones studied various languages like Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Arabic, Persian, French, Spanish and Portuguese etc.

William Jones completed his post-graduation in 1773 and started his career as a barrister from the next year. Jones remained in England till 1782. On 8 April 1783, William Jones married Anna Maria Shipley, daughter of Dr. Jonathan Shipley and after marriage, Jones

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came to Kolkata with his wife in the month of September. In December 1783, William Jones was appointed a judge in the Supreme Court, Kolkata and he was also awarded the title of Knight (Sir). As a judge, Jones understood that correct decisions cannot be taken without knowing Indian customs, values and laws. Knowledge of Indian land-related inheritances and laws was also required to ensure the availability of necessary raw materials to the industries in Britain. Thus, we see that the curiosity to know the history of India and the needs of administration both got integrated into each other.

Keeping these needs in mind, William Jones started learning Sanskrit and studied Arabic and Persian with the help of Syrian Mirza (Teignmouth 1807; pg. 58). To organize and promote the studies related to Indology, William Jones founded the Asiatic Society of Bengal in January 1784 AD. William Jones remained the lifelong president of this society from 5 February 1784 to 1794 AD. In the 1790s, Jones' health started deteriorating and on 20 April 1794 Jones fell seriously ill. As a result, William Jones died in Kolkata on 27 April 1794 AD.

In 1785 CE, William Jones presented an essay titled "On the Gods of Greece, Italy and India," which was published in Volume I of Asiatic Researches. In this work, he compared the gods and goddesses of India, Greece, and Italy, offering one of the earliest scholarly explorations of their similarities.

In this essay, William Jones writes that it is not necessary that one pagan country has adopted some of its concepts from another pagan country because using imagination, unlimited gods of different shapes and sizes can be imagined. But according to him, there is so much similarity between the Greek, Italian and Indian gods and goddesses that it cannot be coincidental. Therefore, the purpose of his study was to establish a similarity between these ancient religions and their followers and to show that the people of Greece, Italy and India were one before getting separated from each other (Jones 1785; pg. 188).

While doing this study, William Jones has described some of his limitations in which he has accepted that his comparative study may be superficial because he has lived in India for very few days and he does not have any reliable book to recall the Greek myths. He has also accepted that his intention is not to hurt anyone's faith (Jones 1785; pg. 191).

A Table of Comparison According to William Jones

Greek Gods (Roman Equivalent)	Indian Gods
Janus (No direct Greek equivalent)	Ganesh
Zeus (Jupiter)	Indra
Zeus (Jupiter)	Brahma
Dionysos (Bacchus)	Ram
Apollo (Apollo)	Krishna
Zeus (Jove)	Shiva
Demeter (Ceres)	Lakshmi
Hera (Juno)	Parvati
Athena (Minerva)	Durga
Cronus (Saturn)	Satyavrata (Manu)
Ploutos (Plutus)	Kubera
Hades (Pluto)	Sheshanaga
Aphrodite (Venus)	Rambha
Hermes (Mercury)	Narada
Artemis (Diana)	Bhavani
Hecate (Hecate)	Kali
Argus (Argus Panoptes)	Kartikeya
Ganymede (Ganymede)	Garuna

William Jones begins by comparing Indian God Ganesha to Greco-Roman God Janus.

2 JANUS & GANESH

According to Jones, Janus is an old Roman god who is considered the leader of all gods. He has two heads and he is wise and the planner of all systems and in ancient rituals, Janus was offered sacrifices first. Similarly, there is the Hindu God Ganesha. He is the god of wisdom and he is shown with the he ad of an elephant. Janus is the protector of the roads and is remembered at the beginning of all important works. The character of the Indian god Ganesha is same. Ganesha is invoked before all religious rituals and worldly works and he is the leader of the Ganas (Jones 1785; pg. 192–93).

If we review this comparison of Jones, we find that there may be some similarities between Janus and Ganesha, like both are remembered at the beginning of any work, but there is a lot of difference in the form and work of these two gods. Janus is called the leader and father of the gods, while Ganesha is the leader of the Ganas and is considered the son of Lord Shiva. Different stories have been given in Hindu mythology for the origin of Ganesha and remembering him at the beginning of works, due to which Janus and Ganesha do not seem to be the same.

The word "Ganesha" means the lord or master of the ganas. The term "Ganapati" is mentioned for the first time in the Rigveda:

Gaṇānāṁ tvā gaṇapatiṁ havāmahe kaviṁ kavīnām-upamaśravastamam
Jyeṣṭharājaṁ brahmaṇāṁ brahmaṇaspata ā naḥ śṛṇvannūtibhiḥ sīda sādanaṁ.
(Ṛgveda, 2.23.1)

However, here this title is used for Brihaspati, the lord of hymns (Mishra 2008; pg. 179). In the Aitareya Brahmana, Brihaspati is also referred to as Ganapati:

Gaṇānāṁ tvā gaṇapatiṁ havāmahe iti brāhmaṇaspatiḥ. (Aitareya Brāhmaṇa 1.21)

The Yajnavalkya Smriti (1/271) states that Rudra and Brahma appointed Vinayaka as the lord of the ganas and assigned him the task of creating obstacles in human endeavors. Hence, to avoid obstacles, people began worshipping Ganesha before initiating any important task. The Yajnavalkya Smriti also mentions Vinayaka as the son of Ambika, which possibly marks the beginning of various legends related to the origin of Ganesha (Mishra 2008; pg. 181). The Puranas provide a detailed account of many such stories associated with Ganesha.

Apart from Brahmanical traditions, Jainism and Buddhism also acknowledge Ganesha. In Jainism, the compiler of knowledge is called Ganadhara or Ganesha. In the Mahayana sect of Buddhism, Vinayaka holds great significance and is regarded as Vighnaharta (remover of obstacles).

Thus, we see that initially, "Ganapati" was a title for Brihaspati, but over time, it became associated with Vinayaka, who was later established as the deity of obstacles. In Smriti texts, Vinayaka was described as the son of Ambika, and later, he was recognized as the son of Shiva and Parvati. This indicates that the present form of Ganesha has undergone a long historical and cultural evolution.

Cronus (Saturn) & Satyavrata (Manu)

According to Jones, the Roman Saturn can be considered the god of time. Saturn ordered the construction of a ship in which humans, animals, birds and reptiles could be saved from a flood. This plot seems to be an imitation of the story of Noah. Similarly, there is the Indian king Satyavrata, who saved medicinal plants, the Sapta Rishis and other living creatures from the flood (Jones 1785; pg. 194–95).

But the similarity between Saturn and Satyavrata is also superficial. Saturn is a Roman god while Satyavrata is a king in the story of Matsya incarnation of Vishnu.

Demeter (Ceres) & Lakshmi (Shri)

According to Jones, the Roman goddess Ceres can be compared to the Indian goddess Lakshmi because both are associated with prosperity and agriculture. Jones says that both were agricultural countries, so it is natural to imagine a deity for agriculture, but there is no significant reason why both chose a woman for this. It is possible that the Earth Goddess is a

woman, so the goddesses of prosperity and agriculture are also considered women (Jones 1785; pg. 203).

In the Indian context, the word "Shri" is extremely ancient. In Vedic literature, the term "Shri" appears with various meanings, but it is most commonly used as a noun or an abstract adjective denoting beauty (Ṛgveda, 1.179.9), radiance (Ṛgveda, 1.188.6), or prosperity (Ṛgveda, 2.8.3). In the Shri Sukta, an appendix to the fifth Mandala of the Rigveda, there is a detailed description of the form of Lakshmi.

In the 2nd and 3rd centuries BCE, depictions of Gaja-Lakshmi and Padma-Lakshmi were engraved on various coins from the regions of Kaushambi and Ujjaini, among others (Agrawal 1988; pg. 36–40). Similarly, in the Shunga period, Lakshmi was frequently represented in artistic evidence (Agrawal 2007; pg. 223).

By the Gupta period, Lakshmi's depiction became more elaborate. Gupta-era literature, art, and coinage all provide narratives related to Lakshmi.

Thus, we see a gradual evolution of Shri or Lakshmi from the Vedic period to the Gupta period, which clearly indicates that Lakshmi is fundamentally an indigenous Indian goddess.

Zeus (Jupiter) & Indra

Indra is the god of heaven and the king of gods. Similarly, Jupiter is the lord of good souls. Indra's weapon is vajra and Zeus' weapon is thunderbolt (Jones 1785; pg. 204).

We see that the mythological god Indra has evolved from the Vedic Indra who was the most powerful god of his time, but by the time of the Puranic period his importance diminished considerably (Agrawal 1988; pg. 7), whereas the importance of Jupiter remains intact in the Greek pantheon.

Zeus (Jupiter) & Brahma

According to Jones, there is a description of the creation of earth, sea, sky, underworld and gods and goddesses by Roman Zeus (Jupiter). In this sense Zeus is equivalent to the Indian god Brahma (Jones 1785; pg. 209).

Ploutos (Plutus) & Kubera

Jones equates Kubera with Plautus as he says that one of Kubera's names is Paulastya (Jones 1785; pg. 210).

Zeus (Jove) & Shiva

Since Jove killed the Titans and had destructive powers, he is similar to the Indian god Shiva, who also has destructive powers along with his fearsome form. It is also believed that Jupiter had set up his court on a mountain and similarly Shiva also resides on Mount Kailash (Jones 1785; pg. 210–11).

Hades (Pluto) & Sheshanaga

According to Jones, Sheshanaga had thousands of heads, each studded with shining gems, and the body of Sheshanaga was black. Similarly, Pluto is also depicted with a crown, and Pluto's colour and weapons were black (Jones 1785; pg. 212).

Aphrodite (Venus) & Rambha

Venus is the goddess of beauty and Rambha was also extremely beautiful, that is why Jones has considered both of them equal (Jones 1785; pg. 214). But Rambha was a courtesan and not a goddess, whereas Venus has the status of a Roman goddess.

Hera (Juno) & Parvati

Goddess Parvati, born in the mountains, has many qualities of Juno. Both have the same royal nature and general qualities. Just as Kartikeya is present with Parvati, Argus appointed by Juno also appears to be present (Jones 1785; pg. 215).

Athena (Minerva) & Durga

Like Durga, Minerva also represents valour and is depicted with a helmet and a spear. Both are seen protecting the virtuous (Jones 1785; pg. 215). But Minerva is also known for her creative power, she invented fine and useful arts and all these qualities are similar to the Indian goddess Saraswati.

Apollo (Apollo) & Krishna

Like Krishna, Apollo is also handsome and warlike (Jones 1785; pg. 225).

Hermes (Mercury) & Narada

Both are messengers of the gods but Jones has also associated Narada with Narada Smriti (Jones 1785; pg. 227).

Thus, we see that for the first time someone started studying comparative mythology, which increased the importance of mythology as a source of history. This study of William Jones paved the way for the analysis of mythology of different religions and cultures and underlined the relationship between them. This study of William Jones aroused curiosity in Indian culture among the Europeans and efforts to know and understand India in great depth began. Till now India was considered poor and extremely backward, uncivilized and devoid of civilization. Due to these studies of William Jones, Indian civilization and mythology started appearing at par with ancient Greek and Roman civilization. These studies of William Jones paved the way for the studies of various later scholars.

3 DISCUSSION

It is believed that in the beginning, all societies were nature worshippers, and with increasing social complexities, their pantheon of deities evolved. Early Indians were also nature worshippers, and it is believed that initially, Hindus were not idol worshippers. However, various hymns from the Rigveda suggest that Vedic Indians had already begun personifying natural forces.

Several hymns in the Rigveda describe the physical attributes, clothing, and ornaments of different deities, indicating that the concept of embodying deities had already begun in the Vedic pantheon.

For example, one hymn describes Rudra as having strong arms, multiple forms, fierce nature, a tawny complexion, and a shining golden appearance:

Sthira bhiraṅga puruṣo ugro babhrū śukrairbhiḥ pipaśa hiraṇyaiḥ. (Ṛgveda 2.33.9)

Similarly, Varuna is described as wearing golden garments:

Vibhradā pī hiraṇyaṁ Varuṇo vastraniṣiṇaṁ parispaśo niṣedire. (Ṛgveda 1.25.13)

A hymn also mentions Indra and Agni being adorned with ornaments:

Indra Agni śubhatā narāḥ. (Ṛgveda 1.21.2)

During the early centuries of the Common Era, when Indo-Greek rulers came into contact with Northwestern India, their coins featured both Greek and Indian deities. In this process, Indian gods were often depicted in the Greek artistic style, leading to confusion in identifying similar-looking deities from both cultures.

For instance, some copper coins of Indo-Greek ruler Eukratides feature a crowned figure seated on a high throne. Cunningham identified this figure as Zeus, while J.N. Banerjee recognized it as Indra (Agrawal 1988; pg. 9–11).

By the 2nd and 3rd centuries BCE, Indo-Greeks began interpreting Indian gods within the framework of their own deities. A notable example is Megasthenes, who identified Shiva with Dionysus and Krishna with Heracles.

This clearly indicates that the present form of Indian deities has undergone a long evolutionary process influenced by various historical and cultural factors over an extended period.

4 OVERSIMPLIFICATION OF COMPLEX DEITIES

In reviewing this essay written by Jones, we see that Jones has overgeneralized the Indian deities ignoring the complexities of the Indian pantheon. The time of appearance and development of Indian deities has been different. Gods like Indra, Varuna etc. were important in the Vedic period while gods like Vishnu and Shiva were important in the Puranic

period. Therefore, keeping all these gods together at one time and studying them comparatively will not give the right result.

Hinduism has evolved from the Karma Kanda of the Vedic Samhitas to the Gyan Kanda of the Upanishads and then to the Puranic Upasana Kanda. In the Indian pantheon, stories related to the necessity of each God, their powers and their forms are seen in various scriptures. Their development has been gradual from time to time, so the similarity of their developed state is not correct. The development of these Gods is indigenous and local, for example, Shiva appears to have developed from Rudra of the Vedic period. Initially, the worship of Shiva and Rudra was done as separate deities (Agrawal 1970; pg. 10–11). Similarly, the relationship of the Bhagwat sect and the Chaturvyuha tradition etc. with Vishnu and the Dashavatara of Vishnu etc. have developed very complexly and gradually (Jaiswal 1967; pg. 32–33).

5 LINGUISTIC PROBLEMS

William Jones had studied many languages and had a very deep grasp over various languages but at the time of writing this essay, his study of Sanskrit was very limited (Kejriwal 1988; pg. 51). This can be guessed from the fact that he has described Ram as the son of Kush whereas in reality Kush is the son of Ram.

6 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we can say that William Jones' knowledge of India was profound but also incomplete. His studies paved the way for the exploration of Indian culture, but due to the limitations of his time, a critical analysis of his work is necessary. He oversimplified the complexities of the Indian pantheon, ignoring the diverse and intricate nature of Indian deities. The presence and development of Indian gods and goddesses varied across different periods, but Jones generalized them excessively. By critically engaging with Jones' comparative analysis of Indian, Greek, and Roman deities, and contrasting it with insights drawn from Indian scriptural sources, the research underscores the complexities and nuances often overlooked in 18th-century European scholarship. It contributes to a more grounded and culturally informed interpretation of Indian religious expressions, moving beyond the European frameworks that shaped early Indological studies. The findings of this paper not only enrich the discourse on comparative mythology but also open new avenues for future interdisciplinary research in religious studies, linguistics, and historiography.

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An analysis into the consequences of Hindutva historical revisionism on domain of historical memory in India in the 21st century

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ABSTRACT: The phenomenon of Historical Revisionism in India is dominated by the Hindutva school of thought, seeking to renew an interest in historiographical analysis of Indian history centring certain tenets of politico-religious norms. Having been at the forefront of policymaking and shaping the academic and social enquiry into Indian history for over a decade, the Researchers seek to bypass some of the partisan arguments about the merits and foundations of Hindutva and seek to examine the consequences of the widespread model of historical revisionism.

Through the examination of scholarly works considered central to both the field of Hindutva historiography and other preeminent scholars of Indian history, the differences in methodology shall be teased out through a comparative examination. Such highlights the departure from conventional norms in historical research and analysis observed amongst prominent Hindutva historians, and through a subsequent doctrinal study, two major consequences shall be examined.

The first consequence is the disruption caused to the ability to conduct research into history through the erasure of its primary sources, examined by the lens of the underfunding of the Archaeological Society of India. The second consequence is the Oversimplification of history, and the impediments it causes on historical memory.

1 INTRODUCTION

There are numerous processes by which Historical Revisionism occurs within academic domains or beyond, ranging from research, online discussions, or even policy-driven campaigns based upon findings by advisors. Chief amongst them is Historiography, a discipline which often involves a systematic examination of the methods and narratives of written history, be it through challenging the arrangement of archaeological evidences or by recontextualizing existing scholarship. Critiques of works both academic and commercial on grounds of language, the inferences drawn or methodological challenges are commonplace within Social Science disciplines (Hallpike 2017). However, within the "Post Truth" era of the 21st Century, it is more common to observe individuals, corporations and miscellaneous entities usurp academic practices to pursue their own vested outcomes, demonstrating varying standards of rigor in their scepticism of existing narratives. Such a phenomenon is globally observed, with Indian news being replete with examples of such different entities presenting versions of "real historicity" paired with calls-to-action, with deadly or even economically disruptive consequences. (Bose 2025).

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The primary paradigm shift within revisionist trends observable in India during the last decade has been the pursuit to re-centre Indian history around tenets of Hindutva; an abstract, contradictory chimera of political aspirations, prescriptive life and social philosophies, and a desire to direct the modern Indian state on these grounds to attain greater socio-economic cohesion with certain doctrines of Hinduism seemingly being central to such goals (Daniyal 2014). Hindutva historical revisionism is not an outlier its methods or principles, as there are sporadic counterfactual revisionists using similar precepts and methods (Azam 2016). However, it is and has remained the most prominent influence over a decade on nearly every facet of Indian life, and for the purposes of this study, influences tussles involving representation of Indians within their own history.

Therefore, Hindutva historical revisionism remains the focus of this study in acknowledgement of its pre-eminence by political and academic institutions. Herein, the researchers would pre-emptively avoid engaging into appraisals of the politics behind such revisionist narratives, in the interest of brevity. Such also entails avoiding either an endorsement of or condemnation of the wider agenda behind Hindutva for this analysis. This is not to absolve or whitewash legitimate criticisms (Truschke 2020) that can and have been levelled against the predominance of Hindutva revisionist history, but merely in an effort to analyse the effects of encouraging such "saffronized" trends in historical revisionism, observed through a mixture of policymaking and public discourse. Thereafter, two research questions are to be examined, related to the consequences observed by the pursuit of the Hindutva revisionist trends, namely the *Turbulence caused within the Professional Sector of History*, as well as the *Oversimplification of historical narratives* and its consequences thereof.

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1) To examine the outcomes of the "Hindutva model" of Historical Revisionism on the field of Historical and Archaeological Research.
2) To identify the outcomes of "Oversimplification" of historical events by the Hindutva model on the field of Historical research.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research conducted is qualitative, based upon a comparative literature review and analysis of published articles entailing events within the subject matter, seeking to adopt an interdisciplinary lens of historiography and political science.

4 LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review for this study shall encompass two works which representative of Hindutva History, as well as other scholarly works within the same eras examined which do not conform to Hindutva trends, in order to examine methodological distinctions between them published in English.

The first referenced work is the *Historiography in Modern India* (Majumdar 1970) which presents the author's misgivings with the academic consensus in historiography of the Indian Freedom struggle. This work is considered one of the seminal sources of Hindutva historiography as it entails formal challenges to the author's self-identified paradigms of the field. By refuting the centrality of Pacifism, or narratives Hindu-Muslim historic unity from the 12th Century onwards the central thesis of this work remains centred around the need of

researchers engaged in the discipline of history to " *... to report correctly the progress of events, which did not in all cases mark the progress towards liberty ...* ".

The second source for Hindutva historiography referenced is *The Rigvedic People: 'Invaders'?/'Immigrants'? or Indigenous?* (Lal 2015) presents another work central to the narrative refocusing that Hindutva historical revisionists present with regard to the Aryan Migration thesis. Several arguments are advanced in the work seeking to associate the "Rigvedic People" with the people of the Indus Valley Civilization, a follow up to his prior work in 2002 on the purported links establishing a continuous "Hindu" heritage between the Proto-Turkic Aryan progenitors of Hinduism. Such extends a linear "heritage" to all subsequent settled societies from pre-history to medieval history, expressly implying the breakage of such a continuous lineage in the 12th Century by the political turmoil around North India and the establishment of the Delhi Sultanate.

The two works are salient not only in the formal enumeration of Hindutva philosophy, but also reflect the central problems engaging in such forms of scholarship, making the propositions presented therein largely ideologically driven over substantive factual and evidentiary support. In both, there is an express authorial intent on enforcing a set framing of *contrarianism* in the work to their interpretation of the mainstream rather than a seemingly detached and objective scholarly analysis of available information. This mimics the limitations observed in works of Hindutva progenitors like Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, whose writings have often been criticized for holding a reductive form of "Hinduism" as central to the tenet of decisions and events from various phases of history, without corroboration with his self-identified sources or justification of discarding or omitting other evidence (Raghavan 2022). Indeed such is overserved in both works, BB Lal's assertions on the ethnic character of "Aryans" does not correlate to the archaeological evidence he relies on but uses its own postulates of "what if" as sufficient grounds to speculate; whereas Majumdar's prose commits the same erroneous selective exclusion of events and individuals, like over-focusing on disproving Gandhian pacifism without reference to the perpetually political deployment of pacifism as observed from other historical and religious figures, from the Mauryan Emperor Ashoka to primary sources on theology like the *Therigatha* or Vedic-Puranic hymns. Such processes detract from an evidence-based pursuit of analysis as close to objective as achievable within the Social Sciences, being unable to rationalize the author's decisions and inferences past their expressly stated biases.

The first non-Hindutva source examined by the Researchers is *The Past Before Us* (Thapar 2013) which examines the perception by peoples of the past about their own interpretations of "history" in Pre-Modern India. The work challenges Eurocentric methods on examining historical sources through the presence of absence of traditions, arguing about the depth of linguistic and specific scholarly schisms observable in plays, poetry and religious texts in Vedic-Puranic and Buddhist traditions. Rather than making prescriptions about the role of "history", the author refrains from "derivative discourse" through lending credence to the plausibility of different narratives of historical consciousness.

The final source for this literature Review shall be for *A People's History of India vol. 30* (Habib 2018) as a standalone part of a larger series, for it also examines Freedom Struggle seeking to apply the author's Marxist framing of Indian history onto literary sources and historical events. The work seeks to scrutinize the amalgamated movements across regions and sections against the unjust economic and political domination of the Colonial state. The author presents such struggles as related through class struggles, deploying a breakdown of economic conditions drawing people across barriers of language and politics. Nevertheless, the author's framing often transcends his own Marxist framing, examining critically the outsized roles played by figures like Gandhi upon events, treating the freedom movement as a struggle for people selecting their own leadership even when those leaders were bound by their own individual limitations.

The main takeaway from these latter two writings gives a strong impression on the difficulty in making or retaining a monolithic framework or bias when examining Indian

History, primarily due to the millennia-spanning ramifications of a multilingual, multicultural melange of peoples across kingdoms and social hierarchies, each subdivided among themselves based on perceived immutable differences, be it caste, creed, gender or geospatial factors. Be it pre-modern India or the Freedom Movement, there are far too many moving parts and traces through oral histories, written works, plays and other mediums of expression, resulting in the analysis by Thapar and Habib acknowledging the diversity of possibilities in interpreting historical events and its disjointed effects on the Indian historical consciousness. These factors were not merely presented as a desire to demonstrate complexity, but also to highlight the problem of Representation that persists across Indian History and Polity, compounded in turn by the Anglicist-driven British education system which sought to record and document history perceived by Colonial rulers in consonance with their often prejudiced world views. The central efforts by Thapar and Habib are to reach past Lord Macaulay's "singular shelf", enumerating the numerous sources, both recorded and discarded, seeking to apply the framing of and by people of the past wherever possible to lend credence to alternative trends in history without imposing a modern ideological framework themselves to the extent such is possible, with Habib even discarding his Marxist lens to criticize decisions made erroneously under auspices of a "socialist ethos" by figures like Nehru within his writing.

5 ANALYSIS

Keeping this in mind, the desire to frame narratives of History with Hindutva at its centre has exacerbated a decline in rigorous academic research into archaeology and history, primarily through lowering of standards of historical evidence necessary to shape policy and discourse (Devy 2023). Through revision of textbooks to edit information, lending preferential appointments and taxation benefits to works of scholarship and fiction, and the deployment of disinformation campaigns (Truschke 2020), Hindutva revisionists have adopted an array of strategies to engage in their revisionism. Even charitably examining the deployment of such methods as being "their turn" to influence the collective consciousness, there is an unprecedented neglect of the standards of academic enquiry as well as the instrumentalities of conducting such measures. This is primarily oberserved by the researchers examining the economic strangulation of the Archaeological Society of India (Mavad 2025).

This does not absolve ASI itself from its own latent inefficiencies warranting a shakeup of its funding or composition, however, there are many instances wherein the organization has been left rudderless in spite of its collusion in the ruling party's efforts to reframe history and polity on Hindutva metrics (Sabhapandit 2025). The State still deems ASI as the sole proprietor of the Government's understanding for historical evidence through their reports, while continuing to stall projects and underfund excavation and restoration drives (Bukhtiyar 2025), doubly eroding the competence and impartiality of the institution in providing primary source evidence for historical research. Privatization drives are presented as the solution to this funding crunch (Press Trust of India 2023), which adds market volatility and profitability as relevant risks of archaeological preservation, a shift which undermines the very ability for scholarship itself to be conducted regardless of partisan leanings and narratives. Without the funding and willingness to preserve the plethora of historical monuments across the subcontinent, there is a real risk of erasure of history at a scale analogous to the Colonial era, which risks irreversibly harming historical memory and intercommunity disparities in representation being aggravated. The ASI has already shown to have "lost" monuments from its lists (Divya 2023) and being unable to preserve many others of all religious denominations, to say nothing of the pre-history era monuments of the Indus Valley civilization being left to the mercy of sand mining mafias (The Times of India 2023).

These disparities lend to the Oversimplification of history that is commonly observable through public discourse around hagiographies in recent literary and media retellings seeking to "saffronize" historical sources and events. The deliberate reconstruction of the Maratha empire as espousing precepts of Hindutva politics is the most prominent example of such a process, wherein the military, social and political decisions of a Medieval-era military confederacy are retroactively accorded prestige in order to make prescriptive inferences on contemporary politics, often overwriting the Maratha's own recorded history (Deol 2020). While the Maratha-Mughal tug-of-war takes centre stage in the normative clash between "Hinduism" and "Islam" within Hindutva narratives, causing endless social turmoil and damage to existing historical monuments, two other ramifications of this oversimplification are worth highlighting. The first ramification is the perplexing rebranding of the Indian Naval insignia to the Maratha Navy over far more suitable and prominent naval powers, the most prominent being the Chola Thassalocracy under King Rajendra Chola (Bedi 2022). This is accused of echoing alienation of Southern states from the Indian historical mythos, which naturally tends to fester resentment between communities about alienation from participation within recollection of historical memories. The second ramification is the contrasting memory of the Maratha empire and its *bargi* mercenaries between the peoples of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa as against this new, highly fictitious model "Maratha" narrative. From children's parables to records of looted shrines and villages (Mandal 2020), the risks of oversimplification salting potential wounds left by inter-community conflicts within the "same faith".

6 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it becomes clear that historical revisionism in India emerged as a deliberate response to the plurality of people's memories and the oppressive hand of the British Raj in birthing a new Independent socio-political order still attempting to bridge over gaps caused in its turbulent, disparate history. The process of shifting into the India of the present has been shaped by revision lending to renewal, and Hindutva is another chapter of this process. However, rather than project a more holistic, scientific and pluralistic understanding of Hinduism and its syncretic role with both Abrahamic religions of other peoples and with other indigenous and divergent faiths like Buddhism and Jainism; a monolithic, often hostile paradigm of Hinduism is presented as the parable of what India "always was", something unsupported by historical evidence (Prakash 2022). In pursuit of such a vision, the peoples of India are trading away the ability to reconcile with their pluralistic, sometimes contradicting and often conflicting historical sources, losing the chorus of voices, sources and mimetic modern norms from these histories, in pursuit of a vision of dubious historical standing. Such bodes ill for the future prospects of being able to access and channel these past norms and memories in being able to represent communities through scholarship, or to advance the understanding of the present from antiquity. The loss from the collective memory of figures like Ashoka has already been observed in the past (Allen 2012), and the risk of such phenomena happening again compounds with the decline of a more independent, supported diversity of thoughts from academics and professionals occurring concurrently, emphasizing the need to conduct Historical revisionism by metrics beyond a monolithic pursuit of the Hindutva paradigms of scholarship.

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From tragedy to tourism: Understanding dark tourism through bibliometrics

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ABSTRACT: This research conducts a bibliometric analysis of dark tourism between 1993 and 2021. This paper examined 397 documents published in different sources between 1993 to 2021. The investigation employed the Bibliometric R package (R studio) and the database Scopus to find well-known publications, writers, nations, papers, and topics related to the theme. The results indicated an upsurge in citations and publications in dark tourism, with a yearly growth rate of 15.78%. Of the 164 journals, the *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, published by Taylor & Francis, is recognized as the leading publication in its field, featuring 27 published articles. J. J. Lennon emerged as the most prolific contributor. The most-cited author is A. V. Seaton, and the authors' h-index reveals that R. K. Isaac, J. S. Podoshen, A. V. Seaton, and J. Zhang are the most impactful authors.

Regarding total publications, Glasgow Caledonian University was the most productive university, and the UK has the most citations. The NHTV Breda University of Applied Sciences dominates in terms of collaborations, and the USA is the primary collaborator with other countries. The keyword "dark tourism" is the most frequently used.

Keywords: Bibliometric, R-package, R studio, Heritage tourism, Jail tourism, Sites of death, Slavery tourism

1 INTRODUCTION

Dark tourism is a topic of discussion for over 20 years (Sun and Lv 2021). Tourists are increasingly interested in a new niche market: visiting sites of tragedy and horror (J. Lennon 2010). Lennon and Foley (1999) define "dark tourism" as visits to locations associated with death, catastrophe, or tragedy. Such destinations are becoming ubiquitous in the tourism panorama, and interest in dark tourism has steadily increased in recent years. Individuals seek to participate in activities and immerse themselves in history and culture. Moreover, people can provide themselves with time for introspection by visiting historical sites associated with dark tourism. This research performs a bibliometric method, initially coined by Pritchard (1969) as "the mathematical and statistical analysis of bibliographic records," which is a commonly accepted method for quantitatively and statistically assessing scientific literature. The application of bibliometric analysis has received a lot of interest lately (Farooq 2022, 2023; Solanki *et al.* 2023a, 2023b). Bibliometric research techniques are becoming increasingly popular across various disciplines as scholars continue to adopt them more widely.

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2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This research study conducts a bibliometric analysis of dark tourism between 1993 and 2021.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research uses bibliometric analysis to statistically and numerically evaluate the scholarly literature that has been published on the topic of dark tourism. To provide a review of dark tourism, we searched nine keywords from the Scopus database between 1993 and 2021: "dark tourism," "jail tourism," "cemetery tourism," "ghost tourism," "massacre tourism," "sites of death," "slavery tourism," "thanatourism," and "battlefield tourism." We selected 1993 as the beginning of the study period because there was no publication record of the said keywords before 1993 in the Scopus database. The Bibliometrix R package (R studio) analyses this data (Aria and Cuccurullo 2017).

The first search yielded 838 documents with a wide range of scientific output. These publications were published in various fields; this analysis took into account the three subject areas with the highest number of publications in the areas of social sciences (460), business, management, and accounting (432), and arts and humanities (196). This first article-screening process has reduced the data set from 838 to 664 articles published in the field from 1993 to 2021. Next, the search was further refined. We considered only papers published in journals during the second article-screening process (Source type), while novels, book series, and conference proceedings were excluded. This process reduced the data set from 664 to 470 articles published from 1993 to 2021.

Furthermore, we excluded reviews, conference papers, editorials, letters, notes, articles in the press, and erratum, only considering papers included in Scopus under the label "articles." This procedure resulted in a smaller data set from 470 to 410 articles published from 1993 to 2021. We have not included articles written in languages other than English in our study during the final search procedure, following. We retrieved 397 articles from the 410 articles published on the keywords from 1993 to 2021. Hence, this research study used 397 articles for the analysis.

To provide a bibliometric analysis of dark tourism, we searched nine keywords from Scopus between 1993 and 2021, the keywords were combined as follows using boolean operators AND and OR: "TITLE-ABS-KEY (TITLE-ABS-KEY ("dark tourism") OR TITLE-ABS-KEY ("jail tourism") OR TITLE-ABS-KEY ("cemetery tourism") OR TITLE-ABS-KEY ("ghost tourism") OR TITLE-ABS-KEY ("massacre tourism") OR TITLE-ABS-KEY ("sites of death") OR TITLE-ABS-KEY ("slavery tourism") OR TITLE-ABS-KEY ("thanatourism") OR TITLE-ABS-KEY ("battlefield tourism")) AND PUBYEAR > 1990 AND PUBYEAR < 2022 AND (LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "SOCI") OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "BUSI") OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "ARTS")) AND (LIMIT-TO (SRCTYPE , "j")) AND (EXCLUDE (PUBSTAGE , "aip")) AND (EXCLUDE (DOCTYPE , "re") OR EXCLUDE (DOCTYPE , "cp") OR EXCLUDE (DOCTYPE , "ed") OR EXCLUDE (DOCTYPE , "le") OR EXCLUDE (DOCTYPE , "no") OR EXCLUDE (DOCTYPE , "er")) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE , "English"))".

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 *Data set*

This study offers a summary of the bibliometric information for the 397 articles. These publications have been published for an average of 6.69 years, appearing in 164 journals between 1993 and 2021. An average of 22.96 citations were received by each document, with an average of 2.317 citations per document every year. The result displays six hundred

seventeen authors and 1,220 authors' keywords, including 462 multiple-authored and 179 single-authored papers. The collaboration index result of 2.12 indicates extensive collaboration among researchers, which evaluates the degree of author collaboration.

4.2 *Analysis of authors (Top 10)*

Six hundred seventeen authors published 397 articles in 164 journals from 1993 to 2021. Of these 617 authors, J. J. Lennon published the highest number of papers (eight papers) from 1993 to 2021. A. V. Seaton, who has amassed an impressive 919 highest citations. The authors' h-index reveals that R. K. Isaac, J. S. Podoshen, A. V. Seaton, and J. Zhang remained the most impactful authors, with an h-index of 6 (Table 1).

Table 1. Top authors' production over time.

Author	No. of Article	h_index	Total Citation	Author	No. of Article	h_index	Total Citation
SEATON AV	6	6	919	FOLEY M	2	2	369
SHARPLEY R	3	3	492	OREN G	3	3	276
STONE P	1	1	454	KEMPA M	1	1	274
BIRAN A	3	3	391	STRANGE C	1	1	274
LENNON JJ	8	3	390	PORIA Y	3	2	258

4.3 *Author's corresponding country (Top 20)*

Figure 1 illustrates that the UK leads the field with 73 publications, 64 one-country publications, and 9 multiple-country publications. The United States ranked second with 49 research papers, comprising 41 single-country publications and 8 multi-country collaborations.

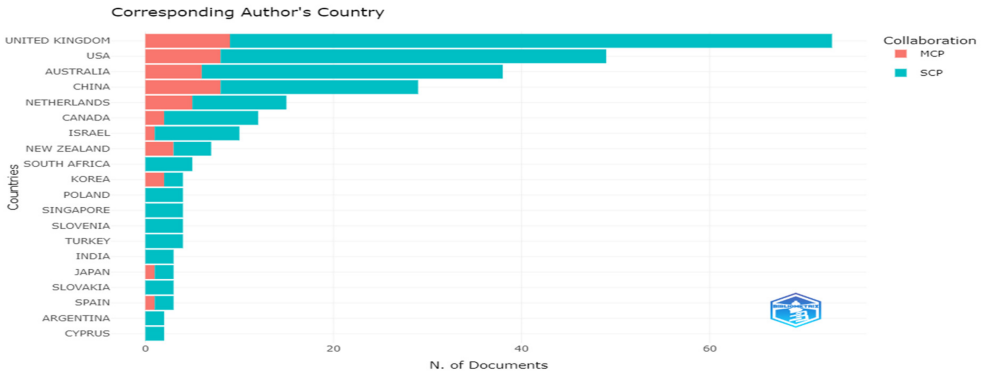


Figure 1. Affiliation country of the primary author.

SCP: Single-Country Publications; MCP: Multiple-Country Publications

4.4 *Countries by scholarly contribution and impact (Top 10)*

The top 10 contributing nations are listed in Table 2, along with the average and total amount of citations for each work published. Forty-two different nations have all produced

Table 2. Country-specific production and citation.

Country	No. of Articles	Total Citations	Average Article Citations	Country	No. of Articles	Total Citations	Average Article Citations
UK	138	1,881	25.77	NETHERLANDS	22	383	25.53
USA	103	1,070	21.84	ISRAEL	18	357	35.70
AUSTRALIA	65	689	18.13	NEW ZEALAND	14	229	32.71
CANADA	39	551	45.92	SOUTH KOREA	8	107	26.75
CHINA	46	476	16.41	THAILAND	5	100	50.00

articles on the specified subject. The UK was the most cited country with 1,881 citations and the most productive country, publishing 138 articles in the category of dark tourism.

4.5 *Institutions with the largest contributions (Top 10)*

Three hundred sixty-six institutes submitted articles on dark tourism studies. Table 3 enumerates the foremost twenty most efficient organizations. Glasgow Caledonian University had eleven publications, the highest among the institutes (Table 3).

Table 3. Institutions with the largest contributions.

Affiliation	Articles	Affiliation	Articles
GLASGOW CALEDONIAN UNIVERSITY	11	UNIVERSITY OF GREENWICH	7
NHTV BREDA UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES	9	UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY	7
UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL LANCASHIRE	8	BEN-GURION UNIVERSITY OF THE NEGEV	6
UNIVERSITY OF GRONINGEN	8	DEAKIN UNIVERSITY	6
LAKEHEAD UNIVERSITY	7	FRANKLIN AND MARSHALL COLLEGE	6

4.6 *Bradford's Law*

Bradford's Law categorizes sources into three distinct groups: the main group, the middle group, and the extensive group. There are 8 sources in the main group, 32 in the middle group, and 124 in the extensive group. Sections that are shaded identify the main source groups. Based on Bradford's Law of Dispersal, the core journals in the field of 'dark tourism' include the *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, *Annals of Tourism Research*, *Current Issues in Tourism*, *Tourism Management*, *Tourism Geographies*, *Tourism Studies*, *International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research*, and the *International Journal of Tourism Cities* (Figure 2).

4.7 *Analysis of journals (Top 10)*

The most relevant journals, the 10 most cited journals, and the most influential academic journals are shown in Table 4. Among the 164 journals, the Journal of Heritage Tourism holds the highest position, boasting 27 published articles.

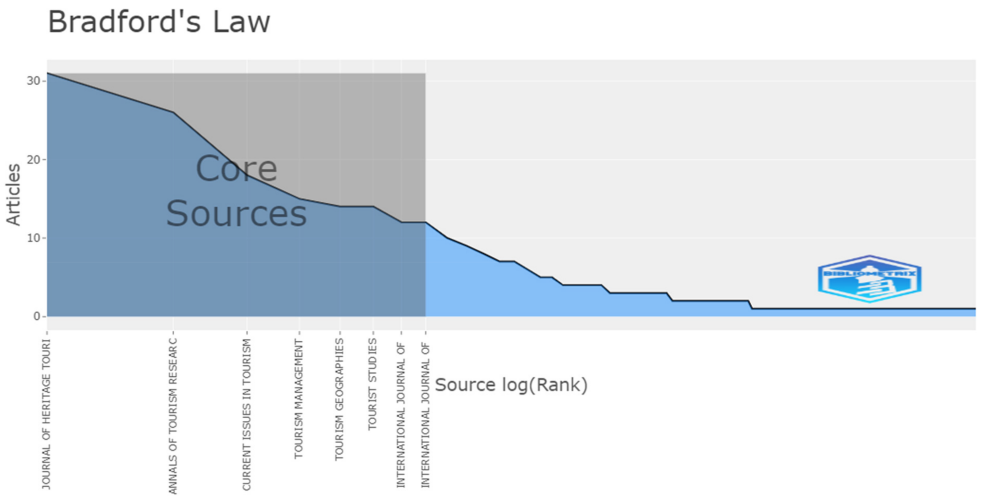


Figure 2. Bradford's Law.

Table 4. Analysis of journals (Top 10).

Journal	No. of Article	Total Citations	h-index
JOURNAL OF HERITAGE TOURISM	27	415	11
ANNALS OF TOURISM RESEARCH	26	2,613	16
CURRENT ISSUES IN TOURISM	18	509	11
TOURISM MANAGEMENT	15	886	11
TOURIST STUDIES	14	429	11
TOURISM GEOGRAPHIES	13	253	9
INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CULTURE, TOURISM, AND HOSPITALITY RESEARCH	12	314	8
WORLDWIDE HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM THEMES	10	63	3
INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF TOURISM CITIES	9	64	5
JOURNAL OF TOURISM AND CULTURAL CHANGE	9	191	7

4.8 *Analysis of keywords*

The findings indicate that a total of 1,220 writers' keywords were reported. Each term had one to two hundred and forty-three instances among these 1,220 occurrences. The output displays the top ten keywords. With almost 240 instances, "dark tourism" is the most popular keyword associated with the research theme (Figure 3).

4.9 *Co-citation analysis*

Stone, Seaton, and Lennon are the most prominent authors in cluster 1, exhibiting the highest levels of betweenness centrality. Biran emerges as the most prominent author in cluster 2, exhibiting the highest levels of betweenness centrality, followed by Cohen and Dunkley. Lastly, in cluster 3, Winter has the highest betweenness centrality measurements (Figure 4).

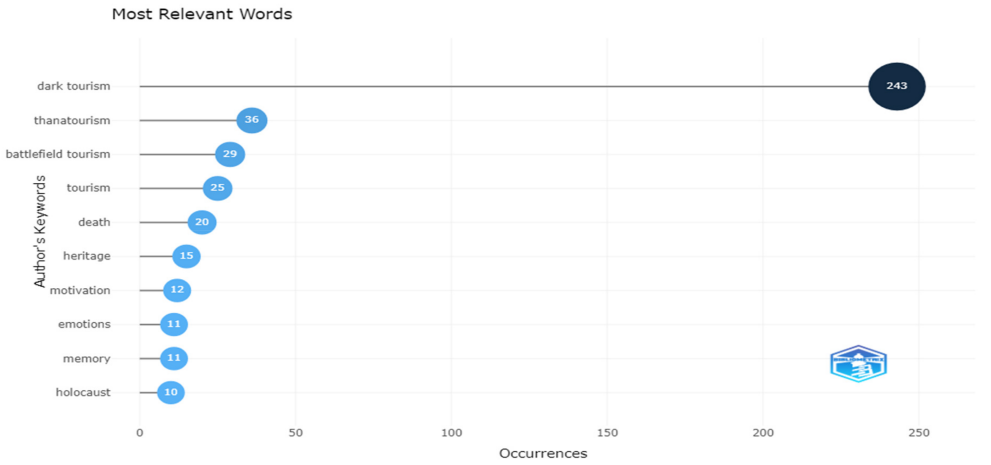


Figure 3. The most relevant words.

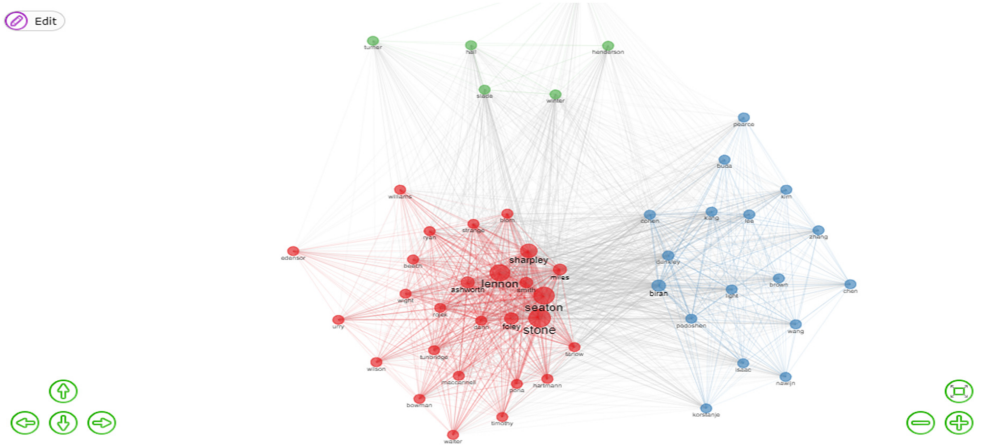


Figure 4. Co-citations analysis.

4.10 *Social structure*

To ascertain how writers, organizations, and nations cooperate on dark tourism research, we conducted a social structure analysis. Nine author clusters are present. The cooperation of R. K. Isaac, G. J. Ashworth, and E. Cakmake is depicted in Cluster 1 (red). The collaboration between J. Zhang, H. Zhang, C. Zheng, and I. Gian is presented in cluster number two (blue). Lastly, cooperation between J. S. Podoshen, S. A. Andrzejewski, V. Venkatesh, and J. Wallin is depicted in the third cluster (light green). Figure 5 provides information about the collaboration between the authors and other clusters.

Four clusters of institutional partnership are depicted in Figure 6. The NHTV Breda University of Applied Sciences dominates cluster 1, collaborating with the University of Groningen and Bethlehem University. In cluster 2, Deakin University collaborates the most with Victoria University. In cluster 3, Franklin & Marshall College collaborates primarily with Concordia University. The University of Ottawa and Winnipeg have the most collaborative efforts in Cluster 4 (Figure 6).

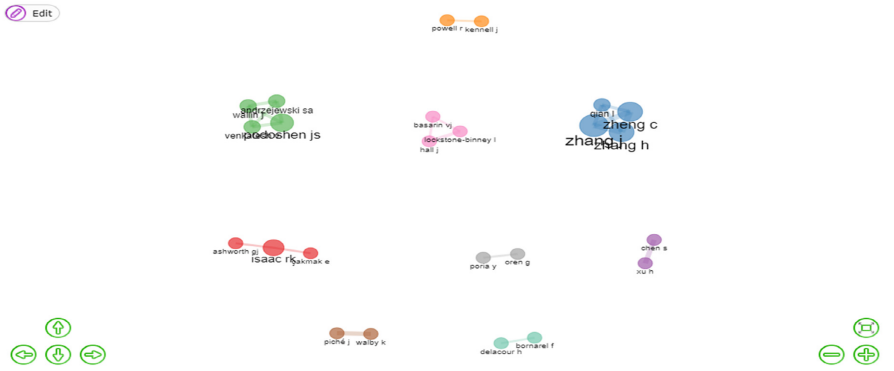


Figure 5. Network of relationships between authors.

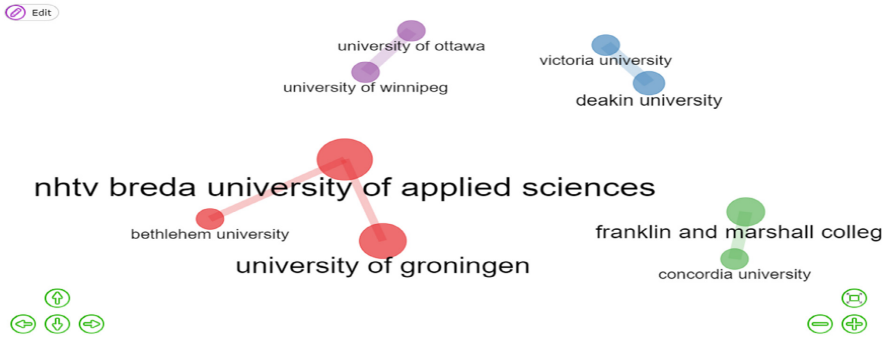


Figure 6. Network of relationships between institutions.

Figure 7 depicts how each nation collaborates globally. The leading partner with foreign countries is the United States of America. Dark tourism cooperation is most common between the USA and China, the UK and the USA, and then the USA and Canada. Moreover, the USA, the UK, and China have the highest betweenness and closeness. Many more countries, such as the USA, the UK, China, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, participated in international collaboration.

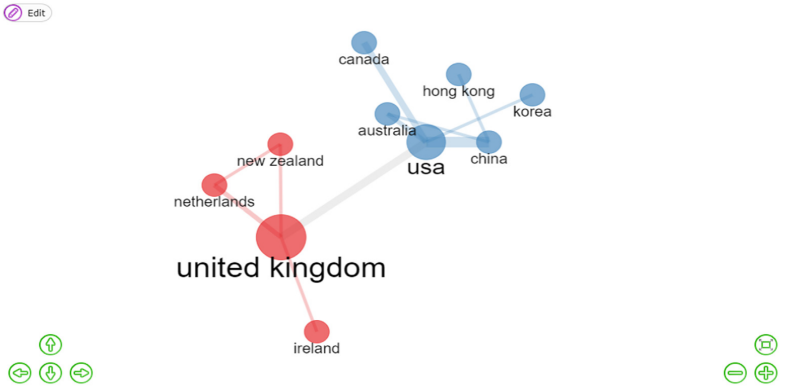


Figure 7. Network of relationships between countries.

5 CONCLUSION

The present study focuses on offering critical insights into dark tourism. By searching crucial papers from the period 1993-2021, one can see that there has been a significant surge in the growth and volume of dark tourism interest. From the findings, it is established that the UK stands top both in publication and citation, followed by USA, Australia, Canada, and China. Further, dark tourism is an interdisciplinary domain. It is concluded that the Journal of Heritage Tourism and Annals of Tourism Research are the most prominent journals disseminating the topic of dark tourism. This bibliometric paper interestingly helps budding researchers in the area of tourism studies to offer their insights based on the findings related to clustering, co-citation patterns, which nourishes the future domain of the topic. From the scholarly works, it is concluded that dark tourism is not only a space of curiosity, but it is a space for learning and unlearning difficult histories. Managers who are responsible for managing these sites should also consider ethical practices, but at the same time satisfy visitors' expectations. The future scope of the study can be to study the effect of dark tourism on local communities, its pros and cons.

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Religious tradition in the lost city of Dwarka

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ABSTRACT: The submerged city of Dwarka holds a central position in the Hindu devotional tradition. This kingdom of Lord Krishna is discussed in many religious texts, such as Mahabharata and the Bhagavata Purana. Contemporary pilgrimage activities and temple sculptures at modern Dwarka indicate the continuity of religious traditions.This study employs associative approach that combines textual analysis, archeological examination of reports and evaluation of available ethnographic studies to investigate the evolution of religious traditions in Dwarka from ancient to modern period. The mythological Dwarka provides material evidence for the presence of an ancient submerged city and has reclaimed its lost status. findings on the sunken city of Dwarka were rectangular and semi circular structures, stone walls, platforms, seals. Near Bet Dwarka 33km long deep 560 meter long wall it similar to Mahabharata were found in underwater coast of Modern Dwarka.This paper argues that until archaeological findings come with strong evidence, Dwarka's religious tradition as a conglomeration of myth, memory and material culture has reinforced the Hindu identities. People have continued to believe in sacred texts and have allowed related devotional practices to sustain their cultural identity and religious continuity.

Keywords: Dwarka, Hindu, Mythology, Underwater archeology, religious tradition

1 INTRODUCTION

The city of Dwarka is located in Gujarat, India. On present times Dwarka is located on the western coast shoreline of Gujarat. Ancient texts such as the Harivamsha Purana and Mahabharata describe the city of Dwarka as a sound city and a grand kingdom. Of all the dominions, Dwarka is of great fame because this is where Lord Krishna spent a great amount of his time. Later, Krishna ruled the city of Dwarka after he relocated from Mathura. Just like in Mathura, Dwarka served as the spiritual heart and controlling point of the kingdom, both politically and spiritually.

Krishna and every other aspect related to him still have the greatest respect among Indian Hindus. The glorious tales revolve around Krishna, and each fragment of where he rests is not just in need of attention but is also a place that revolves around his tales and past times, which at last gives a cosmology-bodied sense where it was saying that the futile shape of the world alongside God's work in existence alongside it. The story of Lord Krishna does hold surprising principles that pave the way to chase after seeking the truth, offer his mercy, but also carry the command of his teachings along the living.

Research carried out on the subject by the National Institute of Oceanology's Marine Archeology Unit places as of most modern studies does illustrate the overall remains of an old structure will serve as the landmarks of what ancient literature says it was a breathtaking city in present modern archaeological searches, such as those carried out by the National Institute of Oceanography's Marine Archeology Unit have unearthed underwater remains that supports the written evidence for an ancient city near the coast, collaborating Dwarka's

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spiritual and historical validity. Dwarka's religious heritage is a compelling confluence of myth, faith, and archaeological curiosity.

How did Lord Krishna's religious traditions influence Dwarka's cultural and spiritual identity in ancient times, and what proof of these traditions is contained within the archaeological remains of the submerged city?

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this research is to explore and analyse the religious traditions associated with the mythical city of Dwarka, paying close attention to their origin, evolution, and cultural significance in Hinduism. The study aims to:-

Trace textual accounts from different ancient sources, such as the Mahabharata, Harivamsha, Bhagavata Purana, and other ancient texts, to understand the theological support of the sacred Dwarka.

This research talks about the continuity of the worship of Krishna and its shaped the religious identity of the city from the ancient period up to date.

To investigate archaeological data from onshore and submerged archaeological sites in order to determine material evidence of sacred buildings, items, and urban sacred planning. To examine ethnographic data from the observing rituals, festival celebrations, and oral traditions in the modern Dwarka, and expressing or reinterpreting ancient religious traditions. To assess religion's continuity and changes in Dwarka over time, that is from ancient cultic to present day pilgrimage and temple-based piety. The town of Dwarka is one of the Char Dham and Sapta puri among modern practices in Hindu pilgrimage. In present times, it is believed that visiting sacred places like Dwarka is important for attaining liberation or Moksha.

2.1 *Religious practice in Ancient India*

It deeply rooted in social, political, and spatial forms, and Dwarka, on textual, archaeological, and cultural evidence, provides a representative instance of how religious life operated in a sacred urban environment. Centrality of Vaishnavism and Krishna worship Krishna is both a god and a divine king, combining political power with religious authority: Some religious practices probably involved- Daily temple worship, Fire rituals conducted by Brahmin priests.

Music and dance festivals, such as Janmashtami, are also held. Temples were the ritual and bureaucratic hubs of ancient cities such as Dwārka. Although the original Dwarka temple of Krishna no longer exists, archaeological remains (pillars, platform bases, sanctum bases) suggest a well-established temple complex that served as a ritual theatre in which the divine was both worshipped and "lived with" through icon veneration (murti puja).

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The method is used in the researching the religious tradition of Dwarka (an historical city in India linked to Lord Krishna), which utilizes a multidisciplinary approach. Researches tend to integrate history, archeology, religious studies, anthropology, and textual analyses in order to comprehend Dwarka's place in Hinduism's religious and cultural spheres. The following is a summary of the research approach one can use when conducting research on the religious tradition of Dwarka:

3.1 *Archeological research*

Excavations: Dwarka is considered to be an old city that is now in current times lies underwater (current-day Dwarka in Gujarat, India). Archaeological digs in and around Dwarka offer significant information regarding the city's historical and cultural practices. Sculptures, artefacts, and older structures take a prominent part in researching the material culture of that period.

Underwater archeology: The underwater remains of Dwarka are important to understand the city's history and how it is related to religion. Methods like excavation, radiocarbon dating, artefact typology, and architectural mapping were employed. Provides physical evidence of religious structures (temples, altars, idols, and ritual equipment). This shows settlement pattern, urban planning, and temple distribution. Illustrates continuity or change in religious architecture and symbols.

3.2 *Ethnographic and field research*

Current Practices: Investigate the manner in which the sacred practices related to Dwarka are performed in the present. This may be entailed in observing rituals, festivals, and temple procedures in Dwarka as well as among upholders in other places.

Interviews and Questionnaires: Interview local priests, scholars, believers, and locals to examine the living traditions, oral accounts, and cultural significance of Dwarka in modern Hinduism.

It sheds light on the ways ancient religious traditions are preserved,transformed, or reinterpreted in the present. It traces the living memory or oral tradition of Krishna and Dwarka. It makes observations regarding on ritual continuity, sacred geography, and cultural symbolism. It gives a sociocultural background to the religious narrative.

3.3 *Textual examination*

Sacred writings: Researchers found the ancient writings like the Mahabharata, Bhagavata Purana, and Skanda Purana which describe the life of lord Krishna and Dwarka city. These writings have both mythological and historical perspectives.

Religious Analyses: Research analyses of these writings by scholars and saints throughout history to understand the emergence of Dwarka's religious significance.

3.4 *Historical investigation*

Chronicles and Documentation: Scrabble into ancient Indian literature, inscriptions, and work of foreign travelers (such as those from Greek, Arab, or European travelers) which speak about Dwarka. These sources can help to position the historical context of the city.

Historiography: examines how Dwarka's spiritual traditions have been recorded and passed down the ages. This could include descriptions of medieval to modern accounts.

3.5 *Comparative religious analysis*

Mythological Parallels: Contrast Dwarka's religious heritage with other places associated with Lord Krishna (such as Mathura and Vrindavan) or other historical religious sites in India to identify parallels and traits.

Regional impact: Study of how Dwarka's religious tradition and mythology impacted the regions of adjacent art and culture.

3.6 *Philosophical and theological enquiry*

Krishna's function in Dwarka: Examines the philosophical debates of lord Krishna's character as a god and a king in Dwarka, particularly from various Hindu schools of thought such as Vedanta, Bhakti and others.

Devotional Movements: This section explores the Bhakti movement that worships Krishna and how it has shaped religious practices in Dwarka and affected local and global forms of devotion.

Through the incorporation of these diverse methodologies, researchers can offer a balanced presentation of Dwarka's religious traditions in terms of both its historical and contemporary aspects. This research will employ a combination of textual study, field research, archaeological findings, and dialogue with the local religious community to guarantee an in-depth and extensive exploration of the submerged city of Dwarka.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 *Scriptural confirmation of Dwarka's Sanctity*

The examination of the early Hindu texts indicates a uniform description of Dwarka as a divine city founded by Lord Krishna after his escape from Mathura. The texts like Mahabharata, Harivamsha and Bhagavata Purana portray Dwarka as a carefully built, fortified and prosperous city created through divine intervention (Vishwakarma, the heavenly architect). Frequent textual allusions lend theological legitimacy to its sacred status and provide a basis for ongoing worship in Hindu tradition.

Key Insight: Dwarka is not just a place but a spiritual ideal of divine kingship and cosmic order, reflecting Krishna's status as both a warrior and dharmic king.

4.2 *Archaeological evidence and Material correlation*

Stone ceramic and anchor stone underwater structures off the coast of current Dwarka by the National Institute of Oceanography Marine Archeology unit support the possibility of an ancient planned settlement. The absolute possibility of an ancient planned settlement. Absolute dating now employs carbon as well as thermoluminescence dating to date some artefacts as far back as 1500BCE.

Interpretation: Archaeological data do not definitively prove the existence of the mythic Dwarka, but they confirm the likelihood of a historical town that led to the religious tradition. These discoveries supplement scriptural records and leave the question open between myth, memory, and materiality.

4.3 *Living tradition and pilgrimage culture*

Fieldwork in the present-day city of Dwarka reveals active devotional practice focused on the Dwarkadhish temple, thought to be constructed over or adjacent to Krishna's initial palace.

Devotees from India and overseas take ritual baths in the holy river (Gomti river), darshan of Lord Krishna, and perform stories through folk dramas.

Priests from the temple and devotees who visit the temple reveal that contemporary devotees do not see Dwarka as a "lost" city but rather as a living continuity of Krishna's presence. Many recount oral histories of the submerged city and miraculous preservation through divine will.

Thematic Observation: Dwarka's religious tradition is experiential and dynamic, grounded in myth and contemporary devotional practices. Mythology is consistently reinterpreted to maintain spiritual applicability to modern life.

4.4 *Myth and history: An interplay*

One of the central themes to emerge from this research is the dialectic between the myth and the material history. While science demands empirical proof, religious traditions embrace symbolic truths. Dwarka case exemplifies how myth and archeology can coexist, one enriching the spiritual imagination and, the other anchoring it in believable reality.

The contrast with other divine cities such as Mathura and Varanasi reveals that submergence myths and divine geography are indeed common themes in Hindu sacred narratives. Dwarka's "lost city" theme supports the Hindu cosmological doctrine of cycles of creation, preservation, and destruction (yugas).

4.5 *Contribution to religious and cultural studies*

This research adds depth to the understanding of how the ways sacred geography, scriptural history, and living traditions influence collective memory and religious identity. Dwarka is more than an ancient relic; it is a mythic symbolic hub of Krishna consciousness, devotees, and kingship of the divine that eclipses historical loss.

5 CONCLUSION

The religious tradition of Dwarka in mythological within sacred literature is a complicated historical reality when analyzed by an associative methodology that synthesizing textual, archeological, and ethnographic analyses. The Mahabharata and Bhagavata Purana provide a theological and narrative foundation for imagining Dwarka as a divine kingdom governed by Krishna, boundary marking its imagination as a holy place within Hindu cosmography. These Yet these texts were not just myth but cultural scripts that shaped the city's ritual and physical landscape.

Archaeological finds, such as-like drowned structural remains, temple foundations, and ritual artifacts, provide key material evidence for the existence of an ancient religiously important settlement. Although direct equivalence with scriptural accounts continues to be controversial, the correspondence of artifacts, urban design, and symbolism with literary themes reinforces an affinity between belief and material culture. This conflation of myth and materiality encourages a re-examination of ancient Indian cities as perhaps having actively built sacred identity through architecture, iconography, and spatial organization.

The ethnographic aspects introduce more complexity, revealing how religious traditions in contemporary Dwarka reassert, reinterpret, and ritualise old myths. Descriptions of present day worship practices, temple ritual, and oral cultural demonstrate how the devine tradition of Krishna's Dwarka lives not only in ruins and inscriptions but also in living tradition and bodily adherence. Such persistence upends the strict historical dualism between "ancient" and "modern" and demonstrates how myth functions as a cultural memory that is malleable, resilient, and adaptive. Overall, Dwarka's religious tradition coalesces as a palimpsest of myth, matter, and memory. The associative method is critical to this unpacking, demonstrating that the reading of ancient religious tradition is not about verifying myth with fact but about reading across modes of knowledge–scriptural, material, and experiential. In so doing we better understand how sacred cities such as Dwarka are fashioned remembered and lived over time.

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Food and Assamese folklore: A study on the folk stories of Lakshminath Bezbarua's *Burhi Aair Sadhu*

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ABSTRACT: Folklore has always been a source of amusement, filled with values, beliefs, instructions for doing certain works, cooking manuals, eating manuals and many social phenomena which verbally transmitted since generations. Folklore across the world varies from region to region and folklore of each region speaks something about their cultures. Folklore of Assam reflects a lot about the Assamese culture. Many Fokora jujona (idioms), Dakor Boson (Sayings of Dak), proverbs, folktales, folk songs reflect food habits of the Assamese people. Food has been a recurring theme that can be observed in the Assamese folkloric traditions. Through the medium of amusing stories, and the depiction of the food and culinary practices of the people, the folktales reflect a glimpse of the Assamese society and culture. It reflects how agriculture has been the main source of livelihood of the Assamese people since time immemorial. Sometimes food has also been used to describe certain situations or habits of people. The paper aims to examine select tales incorporated in the Lakshminath Bezbarua's *Burhi Aair Sadhu* as to how food habits and practices have been represented within these folktales. Further the study aims to explore the references of agriculture within the text, to identify food as narratives and to understand the cultural and moral significance reflected through the medium of food.

Keywords: food, folklore, folktales, Assam, culture

1 INTRODUCTION

Growing up in a village environment listening to folklore from grandparents has been a day-to-day affair. Folklore is believed to keep the human society in discipline and carry on peoples' lives and day to day activities in a smooth manner. Folklore is not limited to any specific aspect of the society, but there is folklore for every sphere of our life and society and has been prevalent since time immemorial. These are a part of our literary heritage. They were composed in history by some people in a community and have been passed on from generations till today. Folklore reflects cultural traits of a society. The ones who composed the folklore did it according to what she or he witnessed around them.

Folk means 'people' lore means 'body of traditional knowledge'. So simply, folklore can be defined as a body of traditional knowledge which can include traditional beliefs and practices followed by people over time. It is unknown who created this body of knowledge, but it is assumed that these were created by some knowledgeable and experienced people in the past because of their practical applicability and relatability in society even after years. It

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is therefore said that folklore is as old as mankind and is composed of all aspects of social behaviour, such as customs and traditions, food habits, rituals, folk beliefs, folk song, folk-tale, folk medicine, folk speech, singing, dancing, dresses religion, worship etc. that has been followed since generations. Folk tales, riddles, dances, costumes, myths and legends and several oral traditional cultures like proverbs, songs, aphorisms. These all are collectively called folklore.

English antiquarian William John Thomas coined the term folklore in 1846. Before that folklore were known as popular antiquities or popular literatures. He proposed that the single term "folklore" to be used to refer to etiquettes, customs, observances, superstitions, songs, and proverbs and other things of the ancient time in English language. Because the word folklore is a combination of folk, which means people, and lore, which means knowledge, he considered it would be more suitable to define them than any other long words, such as popular antiquities. Lithuanian Folklorist Jonas Balys has defined folklore as "Folklore comprises traditional creations of peoples, primitive and civilized. These are achieved by using sounds and words in metric form and prose, and include also folk beliefs or superstitions, customs, and performances, dances and plays" (Leach, 1949, p. 398) Richard A Waterman defines folklore as "that art form, comprising various types of stories, proverbs, sayings, spells, songs, incantations, and other formulas, which employs spoken language as its medium." (Leach, 1949, p. 403)

Folklore is an essential way that cultural knowledge and wisdom is passed down from generation to generation and from peer to peer. (Bronner, 2007, p. 53) One goal of researching folklore is to understand the meaning and purpose behind these. Man cannot make a choice among all the customs in the world until he understands what these conventions are. Folklore includes traditional customs. However, the goal of gathering, categorizing, and evaluating traditions and other types of folklore is not necessary to provide the investigator the option of choosing a different way of life. (Dundas, 1969, pp. 471-472)

In the preface to *Burhi Aair Sadhu* Lakshminath Bezbarua points to the importance of studying folklore. According to him Folklore is essential for understanding the unwritten history of human national existence, as it preserves the customs and traditions of all classes within a nation. According to Prafulladutta Goswami folklore are 'a key to understanding the folk around us'. (Goswami P. G., 1960, p. 1) In *Asomiya Sahityar Ruprekha* Dr Lila Gogoi writes, "Folk literatures are mental reflections of the people. They are the ones that reflect people's emotions, sentiments, and experiences. People's collective emotions are expressed through literature, such as poems, grandmother stories, songs, and so on." He further points out the timeless nature of folklore. There is no time limit, no pressure of conservatism, just like a flowing river, folklore transmit orally through generations. (Gogoi, 1991, p. 1)

Folklore consists of both literary and artistic tradition. Proverbs, idioms, folktales, folk songs, legends, myths, riddles, tongue twisters, greetings, folk sayings, folk costumes, folk medicines, folk dances, folk art and everything that takes into account traditional knowledge can be included under the term folklore. Oral or in written form preservation of folklore are essential to continue the prevalence of these traditions in the society. Digitisation of old texts using AI technologies has shown positive results. (Jain *et al.* 2024) Assam has a rich collection of folklore. Due to the presence of numerous multi-cultural and multilingual, tribal and non-tribal communities co-existing together makes this region of the Indian subcontinent very rich in genres of folklore. These folkloric traditions also serve as a source of oral history showcasing a glimpse of the traditional society and culture.

Food is an important part of human culture. William Graham Sumner coined the word "foodways" in 1906 to describe how food and culture intersect—what food says about the people who produce and eat it, and how culture impacts the dietary choices people make. (Green, 1997) The term also encompasses the process of food production, distribution, preservation, and consumption. In knowing these processes, the role of folklore cannot be ignored or denied. Food is a universal experience and an important subject of the folklore.

Food in Folklore has a significant role in conveying lessons and wisdoms to the folk through food. Our forefathers have used storytelling in the form of folktales, ballads, folksongs to impart culinary knowledge. From time immemorial food is used in literatures as a means to impart cultural values. Food references are found in all cultures around the world. Since folklore are a cultural entity so they have numerous references to all those processes of food production, distribution, consumption and preservation. Agricultural activities and food grains (Maurya *et al.* 2025) are also well represented by the folkloric traditions. They illustrate and transmit an image of the rural society and livelihood that existed to when the folklore belongs to. However, the original time period of the folklore are not known. These just have been in circulation within the society.

Knowingly or unknowingly food enters our lives through the folklore from a very young age. If one grows up with their grandparents then it is likely to be familiar with names of fruits and vegetables, different dishes and culinary delicacies through the narrations of their stories. India's culinary culture has a significant impact on cross-cultural communication and flexibility. (Gandotra and Jain 2023) Folklore also have impact on the preservation on culinary cultures. From the *Jambuphala* in the tale of the Monkey and the Crocodile from Panchatantra to delicious *Pithas* from *Burhi Aair Sadhu* by Laksminath Bezbarua all have formed a significant part of the Indian Folklore genres.

In this article a few of the Lakshminath Bezbaruah's *Burhi Aair Sadhu* have been analysed to see how food and food culture has been represented in them.

2 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objective of the study is

(1) To identify the various representations of food and culinary practices within the select folktales in Lakshminath Bezbarua's *Burhi Aair Sadhu*.
(2) To explore the references of agriculture within the text.
(3) To identify food as narratives.
(4) To understand the cultural and moral significance reflected through the medium of food.

3 METHODOLOGY

The study will use analytical method to analyse few of the tales of Lakshminath Bezbarua's *Burhi Aair Sadhu.* A thematic analysis of the selected tales will be done to identify the recurring themes of Assamese food and food practices and understand its context within the text. While doing this particularly in the matter of translations, original Assamese words will be retained wherever possible to maintain its original meaning and context. Besides, books and articles that have dealt with folklore and folktales will be analysed to have a broader understanding of the folklore and folktales.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 *Meaning and definition of Assamese Folktales*

Sadhukatha in English means folktales or oral tales. Dr. Praphulladatta Goswami has defined *Sadhukathas* as tales recollected and narrated by the merchants who wanders from place to place including myths and fables- "the Assamese word for an oral tale is *sadhukatha,* usually derived from the Sanskrit *Sadhu,* a merchant, and *katha,* a tale, meaning thereby that the *sadhukatha* is a tale told by a wandering merchant". (Goswami P. G., 1960, p. 74)

Sadhukatha has a broad sense and is commonly used to refer to all of the phrases that myths, stories, tales, and their subcategories entail. (Nath, 2011, p. 21) *Sadhukathas* do not have any definite forms, and a good folktale has a good moral lesson in it. (Neog, 1987, p. 30) According to Dr. Leela Gogoi in *Asamiya Sahityar Ruprekha* -"*Sadhukatha* in Assamese language encompasses everything ranging from tales, legends, myths and fables and since these stories ends with a moral lesson, so people began termed them as *sadhukatha*". (Gogoi, 1991, p. 241)

In the preface to *Burhi Aair Sadhu,* Lakshminath Bezbaroa mentions that *Sadhukatha*s are of two types- one which was composed purely for providing moral teachings and another which are fictional, imaginary composed for purely enjoyment. (Goswami J., 2005) Bezbarua further points out, if the term *sadhukatha* is broken down and evaluated, wherein, *sadhu* means a good and wise human being, and *katha* means stories or tales; hence, *sadhukatha* implies tales narrated by a smart and moral person, and so he suggests that *sadhukathas* have a moral dimension. However, as Bezbaroa also remarked, not all *sadhukathas* provide moral lessons; others are simply for pleasure.

Sadhukathas are prevalent across the state of Assam in written and unwritten forms. Our grandparents have been well versed in the art of storytelling. These folktales are not necessarily logical in nature because folktales often narrate things which are imaginary, like animals and birds talking, a human being turning into a plant or an animal after death, a animal giving birth to humans and vice versa, or tales narrating a bottle gourd so big that could accommodate a human. But they contain certain amount of values these inculcates values in children by making them to decide what is right and what is wrong.

Sadhukathas are a source of knowing and experiencing our society. They reflect social life of the people. Folktales reflect the folk life, folk culture and traditions, folk beliefs, their ways of thinking and their values. (Gogoi, 1991, p. 242) While describing social life we can also have a glimpse of the food habits of the people because almost every folktale directly or indirectly talks about food. Some folktales even describe recipes and in such an attractive manner that have the capability to make anyone drool over it and develops the eagerness to have it.

4.2 *An Analysis of the representation of food in the Laksminath Bezbarua's* Burhi Aair Sadhu

The study incorporates a few of the tales from *Burhi Aair Sadhu* by Laksminath Bezbarua to understand how food is represented in it. Grandma's tales or famously known as *Burhi Aair Sadhu* (first published in 1911) by Laksminath Bezbarua was the first volume to have a collection of folk tales in Assamese language. The tales in this volume have represented the Assamese folk life and have been an important part of the Assamese culture. For people belonging to the 90's era these tales from the *Burhi Aair Sadhu* holds an emotional attachment as they echo memories of sitting with their grandparents in the evening and listening to these tales as narrated by them beautifully as if the events in the tales are being happening in front of us or at times the narrations would take one to an imaginary world.

The first tale in the collection *Burhi Aair Sadhu* is *Mekurir Jiyekor Sadhu*, or The Story of the Cat's Daughters. It is a completely fictitious narrative about two children born from a cat and their battle to live in civilization when their mother, the cat, dies. Because the cat goes out in quest of food, her kids were frightened that someone would murder her. So the cat mother once gave them a *tulsi* plant and a bowl of milk, telling them that if the *tulsi* plant droops and withers and the milk changes colour, it means their mother has died or are in danger. Here in this story changing nature of these two commodities – the withering of the *tulsi* plant and the changing colour of the milk are used as indication towards the death or one being in danger. Since the *tulsi* plant is also considered as a mother from whom life originates so the drooping and withering of the *tulsi* plant can be understood as a metaphor for the death of the mother.

The story of two orphaned siblings- the elder sister *Suti Bai* and the younger brother *Tikhor*[1] in *Tikhor Aru Suti Bai* (the story of Tikhor and Suti Bai) reveals the love for *pithas* among the people. Not only humans the story also mentions about a tiger who loved *pitha.* The tiger's eagerness and excitement expressed in the story for eating *pithas* at *Tikhor's* home can be understood as a metaphor used to show the love for the delicacy among everyone. The story mentions the ingredients required for preparing *pitha – boradhanor pithaguri* (flour made of sticky rice), *Gud* (Jaggery) and *Tel* (oil) for frying. During the festival times, different varieties of *pithas* are prepared at Assamese homes. Looking into the ingredients mentioned, the story probably talks about preparing *tel pitha*[2]. The narrative depicts how difficult it is for a poor family to satisfy their desire to make and consume such a delicacy. *Suti Bai's* initial thought when *Tikhor* stated his desire for *pithas* was from where they would acquire all the ingredients- rice flour, jaggery, and oil- because they were quite poor and yet managed to meet their daily food requirements. They didn't have enough money to buy all of the components for an extra delicacy. *Tikhor*, on the other hand, was an extremely clever one, as the name suggests. They would not have had the ingredients for *pithas* if it hadn't been for *Tikhor's* cunning nature.

Similar to *Tikhor and Suti Bai* is the Tale of *Sarabjan* which also expresses the love for *pithas. Phoring* was a poor farmer who lived with his wife who expressed his wish to have *pithas*. Like in case of the thoughts of *Suti Bai*, similar thoughts came to the mind of *Phoring's* wife as well- "Well, where is *Boradhan . . . . to make the cakes with ?* There is not a grain in the house" (Barooah, 1915, p. 97) Phoring using his mind gathered enough *Boradhan* for the *pitha*- phoring went out with his endi shawl with a plan on his mind. On seeing his neighbour having his grains trodden out by his cattle he went and began having a good conversation with the neighbor and waited till the grains are separated from the straw. Suddenly he complained of stomach-ache and started rolling on the separated grains of *Boradhan*. After a while he recovered and returned home, there he shook his endi[3] shawl and found that enough *Boradhan* was collected. She sunned and dried them and pounded them into rice flour. This tale along with expressing the love for *pithas* has also described about the process of separating the grains from stalk– "grains trodden out by cattle . . . . when all the grains were separated from the chaff his neighbour removed them away from the straw" and the processing of the rice to make it suitable for making *pithas* by *Phoring's* wife – "She sunned and dried them and made them into powder" (Barooah, 1915, pp. 98-99)The tale also names a few traditional delicacies like curd, Molasses and *Komal Chawal* (soft rice). (Nath, 2011, p. 60) The inability of both the characters- *Tikhor* and *Phoring* in buying the *Boradhan* in both the tales it can be assumed that the rice variety was unaffordable to the marginalized families like theirs.

The tragic tale of *Tejimala* reveals the protective nature of Mother Nature when required. After being killed by her stepmother in the absence of her father, Mother Nature at every step protected *Tejimala* until her beloved father returned and gave her justice by punishing the evil stepmother. After she was killed by her stepmother she survived in various forms of nature- a vegetable, a fruit, a flower and a bird. First, she was transformed into a gourd plant, then a citrus fruit tree (*joratenga*) bearing bountiful of fruits, then a lotus, a sparrow and finally got justice and she turned into a human. Although such happenings are impossible in real life but can be interpreted as a woman's struggle to survive the evils in a society and her desire to prosper and fight it. (Nath, 2011, p. 55)Apart from other interpretation citrus fruits like *Jora Tenga* (mentioned in the tale), *Robab Tenga* (Pomelo), etc are could be found in Assam and vegetables like different gourds (*lau* in Assamese) has been continued to be found.

Assam is a state which is surrounded by water bodies. So, fish is one of the staple foods of the Assamese people, so is fishing and there are lot of ways to prepare fish. A few of the traditional methods of preparing fish are reflected in the story ***Gangatup*** or The Globe Fish. The tale is about a meeting organized by all the fish in the river to fight against their common enemy, man. A lot of variety of fish assembled for the meeting: *Row, Borali, Sole, Kawoy, Goroi,* and others such as the very *Fool-dorikona, Goroi, Sengeli, Gangatup,*

goroisirika[4] (Bazbarua, 2019, p. 36)etc. Along with these many other varieties of fish are found in the rivers of Assam- *Bahu* (Catla), *Puthi* (barb), *Chitol* (Knife fish), are a few to mention. The tale also mentions indigenous fishing tools and equipments used in fishing- *jal, juluki, pala, pauri, sepa,* and *thuha*[5] (Bazbarua, 2019, p. 36) Also, traditional methods of preparing fish such as boiling, grilling, roasting and frying are mentioned in the tale. (Bazbarua, 2019, p. 36) In the tale the fish characters are humanized to express certain weaknesses possessed by humans like the love for being praised, self-importance and pride and that such habits can be dangerous and can be fatal at times- like in case of the *Gangatup* who can expand itself and on being successful bringing the oldest fish *Gadgadee*[6] to the meeting, a task which everyone failed, beamed with so much pride that he expanded beyond his capacity and ultimately bursts and died. (Nath, 2011, p. 57) One important point that can be noted from this tale is their concern that man is the worst enemy can be considered true as due to the over exploitation of the waters several varieties of fish are today endangered or are extinct today.

The *Burhi Aair Sadhu* in all the tales has mentioned something about the food habits of the people of Assam- be it fruits and vegetables grown in Assam, varieties of fish available in the water bodies of the region, rice varieties, special delicacies like *Pithas,* curries, *Komal chawal* (soft rice), liquid molasses and several indigenous cooking methods. For instance rice varieties like *Boradhan* is mentioned in *Tikhor Aru Suti Bai* and *Sarabjan, Manikimadhuri Joha* Rice in *Bagh Aru Kekura* (the Tiger and the Crab), Joha rice in *Jogdap Rajar Upakhyan* (The Tale of King Jagdap). The tale of *Bagh Aru Kekura* talks about the culture of eating the first meal with newly harvested rice called *Na-Khowa* (*Na* means new and *Khowa* means to eat) which is a kind of feast organized by the families prior to the arrival of Magh Bihu. This tradition of *Na-Khowa* is mostly celebrated in the rural areas today. The tradition of the farmers eating *poita bhaat* and *poora maas* gets mentioned in the Tale of *Tula Aru Teja* (Tula and Teja). *Poita bhaat* is basically rice soaked in water overnight and *poora maas* is fish roasted in firewood. Although this combination of having *poita bhaat and poora maas* was once considered the food of the underprivileged people specially farmers as it has a cooling effect on the body of the farmers after working throughout the day in hot sun and today *poita bhaat* has found its position as one of the authentic Assamese cuisines. Not only combined with *poora maas*, but it is also taken with *aloo pitika* (mashed potato), fish fry, pinch of salt, and a few drops of mustard oil. *Parmanna* or *payasam* can be translated as sweet rice made with rice, sugar and milk finds mention in the same tale.

Thus, on analyzing the tales in the *Burhi Aair Sadhu,* one can find several food items, culture in connection with food being touched upon. These references reflect the traditional lifestyles of the Assamese people – their food habits, the traditional methods of cooking, few food combinations, agricultural practices, paddy cultivations, are a few to mention. Besides the representation of food habits, the stories are portraying personification of non-human beings, instilled with love and care like we find in case of the Cat mother who is shown caring for her human daughters. The stories also depict several sorts of moral values, selfless love along with several instances betrayal, jealousy, revenge etc. In stories like that of the *Silonir Jieyekor Sadhu* (the Kite's Daughter), there are depiction of magic through the rice pot that cooked rice in huge quantity with just single grain of rice and curry with a single leaf of greens. Instances of rebirth have been depicted in the tale of *tejimala* where the main character reborn as numerous characters. So the tales of *Burhi Aair Sadhu* not just touches upon a single aspect, but it has encompassed a wide genre of stories that has gathered the interest of a wide section of the people from younger to the elderly.

5 CONCLUSION

Folklore as a whole is being marginalized as an irrational and outdated way of knowing in this era of scientific and technical growth, when people are increasingly inclined to ponder

and analyse everything with science, reason, and logic. Sticking to things from the past is often seen to take one backward in time and impede the process of going forward. As a result some traditional beliefs have faded from society. Today's generation laughs it off listening to tales like a cat giving birth to a human, or all the fish in the river gathering to figure out how to fight the humans, or a person transforming into various forms of nature. Because, in practical sense, these are impossible and non-sensical, regardless of the moral teachings hidden beneath them.

Folktales incorporated in *Burhi Aair Sadhu* by Lakshminath Bezbarua have depicted food in a broader aspect. Although used as a background element these has wide reflection of the society and culture encompassing dietary habits, and agricultural practices of the people. Food becomes a potent narrative technique closely associates to memory, emotion, identity, and survival from the way traditional Assamese delicacies like *pithas* and *komal chawal* are portrayed as well as the symbolic use of ingredients like *boradhan*, *gud*, and *tulsi*.

Besides, one must understand the essence of the tales and lesson it wants to convey through the medium of food implying that the reference to food is more than just sustenance. Food has been employed as a symbolic context portraying several human experiences and moral values embedded within.

The text of the original stories of the Laksminath Bezbarua's *Burhi Aair Sadhu* is very rarely found to be in a preserved condition. The several of the versions published today in Assamese or in English no longer has the essence as in the original stories. Those stories have been edited and shortened which made the stories to lose its essence. Moreover, today's generations are also not accustomed to it.

In conclusion, it can be said that the food in the folktales has been not just a cultural element but a medium of portraying the society, culture and human experiences. However illogical or outdated it must be, preserving them at any cost are the need of the hour.

NOTES

1. *Tikhor* – Assamese word for cleaver; in the story it is the name of the younger brother who was very cleaver.
2. *Pithas* are basically prepared with rice flour. *Pithas* are of different types. *Tel pitha* is a type of *pitha* prepared using sticky rice flour, jaggery, and oil. A dough is made with the rice flour and jiggery, small portions are carved out of it and fried in oil.
3. A type of silk in Assam.
4. *Row* (Rohu), *Borali*(Wallago Attu), *Sole* (Snakehead), *Kawoy*(climbing perch), *Goroi*(a spotted snakehead), *Fool-dorikona* (a tiny variety of fish)*Sengeli* (a), *Gangatup* (puffer fish, its belly expands on inhaling too much air), *Goroisirika* (young *Goroi*fish).
5. *Jal* is the fishing net; *juluki& Pala* are fishing baskets made with bamboo sticks; *pauri, sepa* and *thuha* are different fish traps. (Nath 2011, 91).
6. A type of fish.

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Terrorism and India-Pakistan relations: An international relations perspective

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ABSTRACT: This paper incorporates the theory of realism and from the lens of security frameworks to understand the state behaviour. This research explores how terrorism has changed India-Pakistan relations from 1989 to 2023. The research used qualitative approach because it referenced secondary sources such as, Governmental reports and other international documents. It analyzes significant terrorist incidences from the beginning of the Kashmir insurgency to the Pulwama-Balakot escalation cycle. It also demonstrates how cross-border terrorism has changed from asymmetric warfare to a critical bilateral factor. When significant attacks trigger diplomatic-military responses, temporal analysis reveals several intensification models. Theoretically, India's increasingly severe responses reflect securitization mechanisms, whereas Pakistan's surrogate strategy balances realist power against India's traditional supremacy. In the midst of geopolitical rivalries and concerns about sovereignty, the UN, FATF, and the other major powers are also engage in dialogues with varying degrees of effectiveness about global participation. Normalization calls for sustained international pressure, credible Pakistani policy changes, and initiatives to boost Indian trust. This contributes to the body of research on how non-state violence transforms interstate relations in the nuclear age.

Keywords: India-Pakistan Relations, Cross-Border Terrorism, International Security, Counterterrorism Strategy, Geopolitical Rivalry

1 INTRODUCTION

Terrorism, which has fundamentally changed their contacts since the late 1980s, India-Pakistan relationship continues to be one of the more intricate rivalries in contemporary international affairs. Cross-border terrorism has changed this nuclearization, going beyond traditional models of interstate warfare to pose hitherto unheard-of difficulties for regional stability and international security governance. (Ganguly 2016). The endurance of this rivalry, coupled with the introduction of non-state actors as tools of statecraft, has fashioned a singular case study for grasping how terrorism alters diplomatic interactions among nuclear-armed nations. Researchers examine how terrorism has shaped India-Pakistan bilateral relations, determining implications this transformation holds for International Relations theory as well as practice. This study seeks to analyse how terrorism's role within India-Pakistan relations evolved from 1989 to 2023 and examine state responses through established IR theoretical frameworks. Furthermore, the study assesses just how effective multilateral counterterrorism mechanisms are and evaluates future prospects for bilateral normalisation. The central research questions

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focus on just how terrorism has transformed diplomatic interactions and security interactions. It is also of importance that one identifies theoretical frameworks which can best explain state behaviour when responding to cross-border terrorism, together with an analysis of international actors‘ influence on the regional counterterrorism dynamics. This investigation contributes greatly towards understanding how non-state violence affects interstate relations in the nuclear age as it offers valuable perceptions for conflict resolution and security studies.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Three main models of international relations serve as the conceptual foundations for understanding India-Pakistan relations with regard to the role of terrorism. States compete for power as they face security issues that are the primary motivators of state behavior, according to classical realists like Morgenthau (1948) and structural realists like Waltz (1979). Terrorism could be interpreted as an uneven conflict in the context of India and Pakistan. In order to challenge a more powerful adversary and get around traditional military disadvantages, the relatively weak state turns to proxy organizations. Mearsheimer's (2001) offensive realism also explains India's increasingly resolute replies. Such actions could be interpreted as prudent, power-aggrandizing behavior intended to maintain territorial superiority. The goal of this behavior is to prevent future attacks. The Copenhagen School's securitization model provides valuable insights into how terrorism evolves from ordinary political issues to existential security threats that demand drastic solutions. India has characterized cross-border terrorism as an existential threat, which justifies military measures like surgical strikes. As a result, regular diplomatic disputes are easily converted into security directives, which require immediate attention. Using this theoretical perspective, political leaders create narratives about security. These diaries demonstrate how politicians legitimize previously illegal government operations. International organizations reduce conflict through mutual benefits and long-term cooperation, according to Keohane's (1984) and Nye's (1990) comprehensive interdependence model, particularly liberal institutionalism. The India-Pakistan scenario, however, highlights significant institutional constraints for situations in which fundamental security interests are thought to be at risk. This illustrates how traditional liberal systems struggle with highly secure security issues. There is a strong basis for this analysis. It is found in existing literature. Pakistan's deliberate use of militant organizations as foreign policy tools is demonstrated by Fair (2014). Current academic endeavors provide additional background by charting the evolution of the Kashmir issue as well as terrorist-related elements. However, the ways that terrorism radically alters bilateral ties over long periods of time are not systematically analyzed in current literature in accordance with international relations theory. One can make a significant contribution to regional studies and get a theoretical understanding of the impact of non-state violence on interstate dynamics by filling this research gap.

3 METHODOLOGY

This study employs such a qualitative research methodology that examines terrorism's impact upon India-Pakistan relations, and combines within it systematic document analysis along with theoretical application. The research draws from multiple data sources including official government statements plus policy documents from both nations as well as United Nations Security Council resolutions plus Financial Action Task Force reports. Academic publications, think tank analyses, and media reports document the key terrorist incidents, coupled with declarations that are from multilateral forums like BRICS, Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, and G20. The analytical framework maps out major terrorist incidents from 1989 through to 2023 in chronological order, analyses realist and securitization frameworks in theoretical terms, assesses state responses and international reactions comparatively, and identifies patterns within

diplomatic and military escalation cycles in a systematic manner. This method allows for a full understanding of how terrorism has changed as a factor in bilateral relations while maintaining theoretical rigor. In addition to maintaining ethical concerns it is necessary to ensure that all sources are appropriately cited since they recognize the need for a balanced analysis and the sensitive nature of the subject when analyzing this contentious bilateral relationship.

4 CHRONOLOGICAL ANALYSIS: TERRORISM'S EVOLUTION IN INDIA-PAKISTAN RELATIONS

The development of terrorism in India-Pakistan relations is seen in various stages that show the slow transition from normal rivalry to an unbalanced bilateral conflict. Bilateral rivalry was fundamentally altered by the Kashmir insurgency. Officially, terrorism began to permeate India-Pakistan relations when the first phase began in 1989. Pakistan provided tactical support to organizations like Hizbul Mujahideen. The alliance shifted from formal military forces competing to countries conducting ad hoc warfare with unofficial actors. Extremist groups could infiltrate to bolster quasi-war situations, as the Kargil conflict in 1999 showed. This incident does set a dangerous precedent for future exchanges. Between 2000 and 2008, the conflict grew more intense, and terrorism emerged as a catalyst for war. Because of India's tremendous military mobilization under Operation Parakram, which showed how terrorist attacks may trigger significant military reactions, the December 13, 2001, Parliament attack pushed both countries dangerously close to full-scale conflict. Despite the intense domestic pressure upon it, India's calculated restraint depicted the complex dynamics of nuclear deterrence in terrorism contexts, yet the 2008 26/11 Mumbai attacks marked a qualitative escalation by targeting international guests as well as civilians.

Increased international pressure on Pakistan via United Nations sanctions as well as Financial Action Task Force grey-listing marked the transformation phase from 2009 to 2016 (FATF 2018). During this said period, India pursued what officials have termed "strategic patience" since it systematically built an international consensus which was against state-sponsored terrorism by way of multilateral forums as well as bilateral diplomatic engagement (Jain and Skariah 2022). From the year 2016 to the year 2023, India's approach to counter-terrorism saw its assertive response phase. It signified a fundamental shift in doctrine. After the 2016 Uri attack and subsequent surgical strikes, India transitioned from calculated restraint to proactive deterrence. This signalled the fact that India was indeed willing to conduct cross-border military operations (Ministry of Defence 2019). The February 2019 Pulwama-Balakot cycle escalated more seriously than after Kargil, with the February 14 Pulwama attack followed by February 26 Balakot airstrikes showing how terrorism could trigger limited war even between nuclear powers. The February 2021 ceasefire agreement along the Line of Control implied de-escalation could happen though basic structural problems stayed unsolved. This time-based analysis shows that three clear patterns have come about. These patterns are easily visible to all. Major terrorist attacks consistently result in escalation cycles. The military and diplomats then respond in proportion. Global actors are indeed playing important roles in de-escalation efforts as international intervention becomes rather prominent. Both of the states have demonstrated some doctrinal evolution, and so they adapted all of their strategies based upon previous experiences and also changing regional dynamics, establishing terrorism as the central determinant within bilateral interactions.

5 THEORETICAL ANALYSIS: STATE BEHAVIOUR AND STRATEGIC RESPONSES

Realist theoretical frameworks offer convincing rationales toward state conduct in the India-Pakistan terrorism nexus. Pakistan's calculated support for terrorist groups represents classic

asymmetric balancing against India's conventional military superiority. Weaker states, as Waltz (1979) had predicted, inevitably do seek alternative means by which to challenge stronger adversaries, given that direct confrontation proves unfeasible. Pakistan's proxy war strategy enables it to impose important costs upon India while maintaining plausible deniability. This does successfully bypass, through non-governmental agents, India's customary superiorities. India's counterterrorism stratagems, notably military ripostes like surgical incursions, certainly engender detailed security quandary dynamics. Pakistan perceives these operations. Pakistan views those actions as possible antecedents to broader military operations. This apprehension heightens defences, and these actions perpetuate the conflict endlessly. The standard security dilemma theory reflects this active cycle. A state's protective actions are consequently viewed as hostile arrangements by its opponent. The stability-instability paradox does present added intricacy using nuclear weapons, as scholars do suggest. Contingent instability is allowed since deliberate stability exists. Pakistan, being confident in its nuclear deterrence, may proceed to support terrorism since it calculates that India cannot escalate beyond responses that are limited without confrontation risks. Securitisation theory illuminates how terrorism transforms out of routine political issues. These alterations give rise to existential security risks. Indian leaders consistently frame cross-border terrorism as existential challenges that require extraordinary responses, with Prime Minister Modi's post-Pulwama statements exemplifying securitisation speech acts that justify that military action is necessary for national survival (Modi 2019). Since Indian public opinion increasingly supports assertive responses to terrorism, it legitimises government securitisation efforts and enables leaders to pursue policies that might otherwise face domestic opposition (Gandotra and Jain 2023). However, once terrorism is securitised, a return to normal diplomatic politics is extremely difficult, as India's doctrine that "terror and talks cannot proceed simultaneously" depicts. Liberal institutional frameworks do not address state-sponsored terrorism well. Despite the United Nations, Financial Action Task Force, and multilateral forums such as BRICS extensively instituting mechanisms, sovereignty worries, great power rivalry and definitional disagreements limit cooperation since they dispute terrorism's exact meaning. Pakistan's defence by China weakens global agreement. However, states resist any external interference within counterterrorism operations. By pinpointing the limitations of liberal institutionalism when core security interests are perceived to be at stake here, this theoretical synthesis shows the explanatory power of realism for understanding state motivations, whilst revealing the perceptions of securitisation theory into policy processes.

6 INTERNATIONAL DIMENSIONS AND MULTILATERAL RESPONSES

Great power involvement within South Asian counterterrorism features competing planned interests that frequently weaken multilateral cooperation. Following 9/11, the United States pressured Pakistan initially on terrorism, and it sought Pakistan's cooperation simultaneously in Afghanistan, which created policy inconsistencies because American priorities shifted between counterterrorism objectives and regional stability concerns (Clinton 2011). China intends to collaborate with Pakistan, featuring systematic diplomatic support at global conferences. Beijing at first blocked the United Nations designation for Masood Azhar, to exemplify how great power competition weakens counterterrorism cooperation in a fundamental way. Russia, through BRICS as well as Shanghai Cooperation Organisation frameworks, lends its support to multilateral counterterrorism initiatives plus maintains relatively balanced relations with both countries. Institutional mechanisms show both the capacity that they have and the limitations found when state-sponsored terrorism receives address. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1373 legally founds counterterrorism cooperation, yet political considerations among the permanent members mean that enforcement still remains highly selective (United Nations Security Council 2001). Listing Jaish-e-

Mohammed leaders ultimately demonstrated institutional capacity, and also revealed that great power politics imposed structural constraints. From the year 2018 to the year 2022, the Financial Action Task Force did successfully pressure Pakistan in a multilateral way, which resulted in a grey-listing. This pressure forced visible policy changes, though questions do persist regarding the genuine commitment and implementation sustainability (FATF 2018). BRICS plus the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation both regularly release declarations to condemn terrorism. However, they lack meaningful enforcement mechanisms, reflecting the persistent gap 'twixt diplomatic rhetoric and concrete action (BRICS 2020). When international actors got involved, they achieved mixed results: they succeeded when they increased pressure on Pakistan as well as designated some terrorist leaders, but they failed when attacks continued and Pakistani counterterrorism policy had limited structural changes. When involved with fundamental great power interests, these constraints show how global governance mechanisms battle state-sponsored terrorism.

7 CONCLUSION AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

This thorough analysis shows that as terrorism fundamentally has transformed India-Pakistan relations it has created unprecedented patterns both of conflict and of cooperation that diverge greatly from customary interstate rivalry models. Examining matters in a chronological manner reveals consistent escalating cycles in which major terrorist attacks systematically trigger proportionate diplomatic and military responses, whilst analysing theoretically depicts how realist power competition dynamics and securitisation processes drive state behaviour in predictable patterns that nonetheless remain dangerous (Maurya *et al.* 2025). The study exposes a number of main conclusions. Bilateral relations are now absolutely central in terrorism, creating structural barriers to normalisation and severely constraining diplomatic options. Both states have systematically adapted their strategies because of previous experiences as well as evolving international responses, which shows learning processes that unfortunately reinforce conflict patterns. Conflicting calculated interests and great power competition consistently limit the effectiveness of multilateral mechanisms. Nuclear deterrence possesses a paradoxical impact for it begets room for terrorism with miscalculated actions (Jain and Chopra 2022). However, it does limit any escalation potential at one and the same time. For the future normalization, there is a need to address three critical factors all at once. Pakistan should enact reliable policy changes as it should undertake sincere action versus terrorist groups working from its land. India requires confidence-building measures that are gradual. These measures enable for terrorism discourse de-securitization. For the sake of sustainable progress, consistent international support does remain important through positive incentives as well as multilateral pressure. The case gives validation to realist theoretical predictions concerning power competition and also highlights securitisation theory's perceptions regarding policy processes. Simultaneously, it reveals that liberal institutionalism fundamentally struggles in addressing state-sponsored terrorism. Should nobody address these structural issues, terrorism will continue defining India-Pakistan relations, along with deeply implying regional stability with global security governance (Jain and Mohanan 2025).

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Democracy of opinions: Analysing the role of narratives in Indian electoral practices

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ABSTRACT: With the first amendment on freedom of speech and expression USA made a considerable progress towards respecting opinion even when it is dangerous. Following the trail a trend followed across nations including India for ensuring freedom of speech and expression both under statutory provisions as well as judicial precedents. The journey from Romesh Thapar (1950) to Kaushal Kishore (2024) is the glaring example of the impact first amendment in the USA had across the globe. In the quest of ensuring freedom of speech and expression multiple theories developed advocating the same. One such theory is preservation of democracy through speech and expression. It is this justificatory theory which is the subject matter of present investigation. During elections various kinds of opinion help in building narratives and these strategized narratives go a long way in deciding the winning on either side. Briefly the survival of democracy is not solely dependent on the political participation but also on the narration aligning with the expectation of the prospective voter. The present paper is an attempt to trace the impact of narratives on Indian elections and its long-term effect and validity specially in the era of digital communication which takes lightning speed to spread the narration from one to another. The work is important considering the impact on actual freedom to think beyond biases often created by strategized narratives.

Keywords: Democracy, Narratives, Freedom of Speech and Expression, Elections

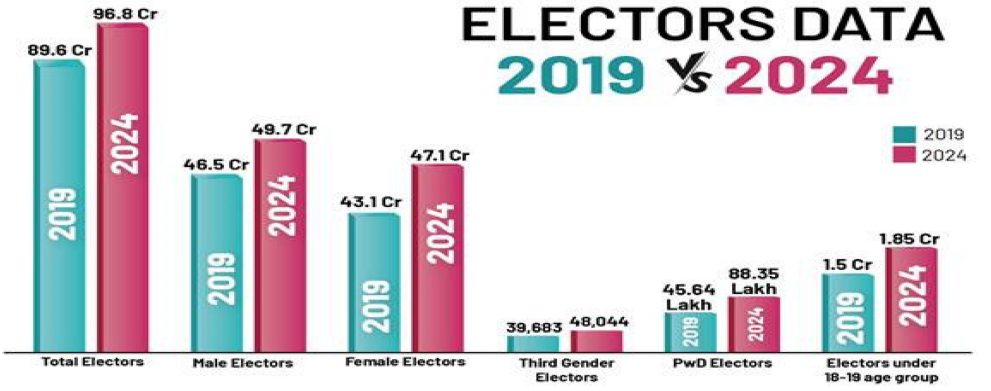
1 INTRODUCTION

Democracy has become a norm of civility for the modern nations. For any successful democracy two preconditions must be fulfilled *firstly*, political freedom and *secondly*, liberty. Political freedom is often understood as freedom from coercion and suppression and discourages presence of any disabling condition which restricts political participation. On the other hand, liberty is perceived as a right to voice one's opinion and beliefs which maintain the diversity in a democracy by giving way to dissenting voices. Both political freedom and liberty are necessary to ensure robust growth of democratic institutions, process, and practices. In this regard more than any other nation India and USA have faced unprecedented challenges. India has remained a curious case in terms of success of democracy with huge heterogeneous population. The size of Indian democracy is over four times than USA which had 174 million registered voters in 2024 US Presidential elections (United States Census Bureau, Census.gov, Press Release Number:

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CB25-TPS.29, April 30, 2025) compared to 96.88 Crore registered voters in India in 2024 general elections (Election Commission of India, https://www.pib.gov.in/PressRelease, 2024). A detail bifurcation of population eligible for voting in India since 2019 to 2024 can be seen from Graph 1 which shows increased number of female voters along with registering a whopping number of very young population (between 18-19 age group) eligible to vote.



Graph 1. Electors data 2019 versus 2024.
Source. Press Information Bureau of India, https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2005189.

It is also interesting to see that despite different country conditions, literacy rates, living standard and stark difference in size both the countries have same age of 18 years for vote and have stark closeness in terms of percentage of participation in election by the registered voters. In 2024 election USA recorded 65.3% voter turnout (United States Census Bureau, Census.gov, Press Release Number: CB25-TPS.29, April 30, 2025) whereas India bettered with 65.79% voter turnout (Election Commission of India, elections24.eci.gov.in). Talking about the challenges India has multiple fronts bleeding right now including dogmatization of population by religious narratives which sometimes lead to violence and other criminal activities, electoral violence, unregulated social media presence, gender disparity, extreme cultural diversity, diversity of religion and language, and lastly climatic conditions etc. Although, with time the gender parity (*Refer* Graph 1.) and education (average 80% in India, Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation 2022-2023) has tremendously improved from 2019 to 2024 yet, incidents of electoral violence are consistent (India Today 2024), diversity is increasing day by day (India: Unity in Cultural Diversity, NCERT, 2018), and fight on language lines has remained consistent too since 1950 (*Protest over Kannada Language*, livemint.com, 2023) and this seems to be irreconcilable (*Fight for supremacy of traditional Language*, Times of India, 2018). Despite all odds India has developed as a successful democracy. One thing which has contributed immensely to protecting the Indian democracy is the power of dissent. From the case of *Romesh Thapar* to *Kaushal Kishore* the Supreme Court of India has developed the jurisprudence of dissent and has emerged as a protector of dissenting voices. The Court has consistently discouraged the efforts of restricting speech beyond the statutory grounds under Article 19(2) of the Constitution. The violative statutory provision has been struck down for having *chilling effect* on the freedom of speech and expression (Shreya Singhal Case 2015). Compared to India USA is another democracy which has faced challenges in sustaining herself due to its unwavering commitment towards individual freedom of thought and expression. In its quest of protecting speech and expression USA has tolerated worst forms of hate speech and hate crimes. In USA opinions have been protected in the name of 'free trade of ideas' and '*test of the truth*' to be 'the acceptance of the thought in the marketplace' (*Abrams*

v. *United States*, 1919). Justice Brandeis in *Whitney* v. *California* (1927) held '*public discussion as a political duty.* In *Brandenburg* v. *Ohio* (1969) even seemingly hate speech, and racist speech was protected under the First Amendment. While both the democracies above can boast of having a tradition of tolerance towards dissent, the question is are they also ready to feed on fabricated, orchestrated and sometimes hate inducing political narratives? In both the countries strategically, planned narratives have helped in forming public opinion. The political strategists are engaged in creating and destroying image through narratives. The question is whether democracies are ready to tolerate narratives to the extent of curtailing free thinking and critical assessment of performance. This paper deals with the issue of impact of narratives and political slogans in a democracy by investigating the process and background of narrative building and its possible impact on public opinion. The significance of this study lies in the fact that currently people are believing the narratives without going into the detail of who has created it and with what object. Liberty of thought in a democracy is indispensable but what if free thinking is outsmarted and enslaved by a narration which is not necessarily true. The first step of moving to a free thought zone is to accept and realise the fact of impact of narration irrespective of its truth and falsity. This paper would historically examine how political narratives and slogans helped governments to win or lose. The paper would serve the following objectives –

(I) It would establish the role of political narratives and slogans in forming public opinion and image building.
(II) It would reflect on the biases media houses often have.
(III) It would question the system of democracy which is said to survive on liberty but fails to ensure true freedom to think by creating strategized narratives.
(IV) It would also establish the dangers of social media which again can have biased and unregulated reach among voters.

For the present research data is mostly collected from official government portals along with secondary data which is duly cited. The data is comparatively analysed between different time periods.

2 DECODING NARRATIVES

2.1 *Political slogans building narratives*

Politics is slogan and narrative friendly. The slogan journey starts with '*Tippecanoe and Tyler Too'* in the USA Presidential Election 1840 (Presidential PR, Syracuse University (2024). William Henry Harrison was referred with the name *Tippecanoe* due to his win in the battle of Tippecanoe where he succeeded over native Shawnee Indians in 1811. On the other hand, Tyler referred to John Tyler a candidate for Vice President from Whig party. The combination of William Henry Harrison and John Tyler was strategically coined in a slogan '*Tippecanoe and Tyler Too*' which helped Harrison's images of war hero as strategized by the Whig party. Harrison became President in 1841 USA elections. In recent times President Barak Obama's slogan 'YES WE CAN' in the background of dipping GDP helped in winning the election when the country's financial sector was looking for bailouts for its survival. The 2016 and 2024 Slogan of 'Make America Great Again' (MAGA) had the same winning effect during the Donald Trump's presidential campaign in the USA. Political slogans reflecting the need of the time has remained popular in India as well. Table 1. below gives a fair idea of effect of slogans on elections by listing different slogans carefully coined in the background of then prevailing conditions in the country and the results of the same in elections. The regional parties in India have also relied on popular slogans in building narratives such as '*Maa, Maati, Manush*' (mother, mother land and people) used in West Bengal in the year 2011 resulting into huge victory for Trinamool Congress government. It is also visible in the Table 1. that the slogans which were mere display of arrogance and inflated

Table 1. Comparative analysis of BJP and congress in Lok Sabha elections and their Slogans.

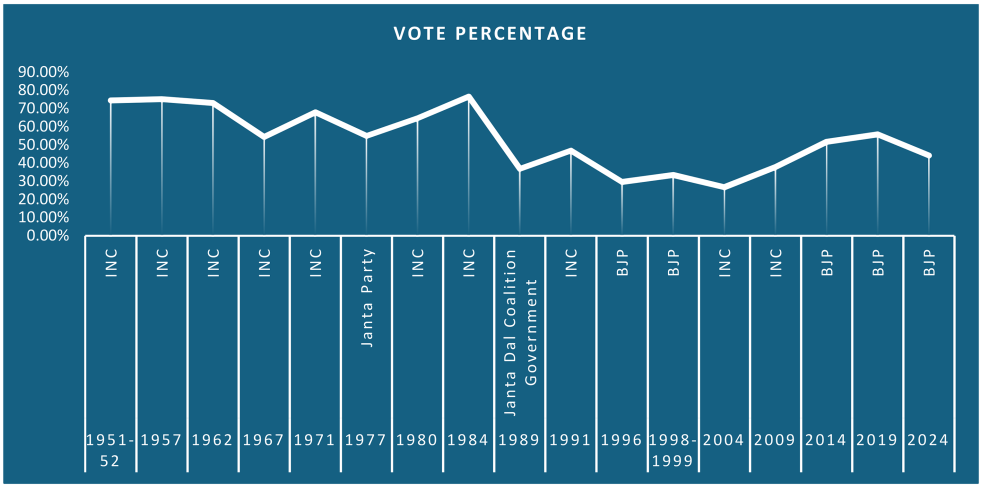
Year	LS	Winning Party	Vote Share	Slogan	Background
1951-1966	1st, 2nd, 3rd	INC	74.48%	NA	Formative years
1967	4th	INC	54.42%	Jai Jawan Jai Kisaan (1965)	Post Indo-China war focus on Army and peasant
1971	5th	INC	67.95%	Garibi Hatao Desh Bachao	Background of lurching economy
1977	6th	JP	54.98%	Indira Hatao Desh Bachao	Post emergency response by opposition
1980	7th	INC	64.76%	Sarkar Wo Chune Jo Chal Sake	Post failure of previous coalition government
1984	8th	INC	76.52%	Jab tak suraj Chaand rahega Indira tera naam rahega	Post assassination of Indira Gandhi
1989	9th	Janta Dal Coalition Govt	36.86%	Raja Nahi Fakir Hain Desh Ki Takdeer hain	Post BOFORCE Scam targeting Rajeev Gandhi
1991	10th	INC	46.83%	Na jaat par, na paat par, sthrirta ki baat par, mohar lagegi haat par	Post unstable government of VP Singh
1996	11th	BJP	29.65%	Sabko Dekha Baari Baari Abki Baari Atal Bihari	Background was magnanimous image of Atal Bihari Vajpayee
1998	12th	BJP	33.39%	Jai Jawan Jai Kisan Jai	Economic and strategic progress of India
1999	13th		33.39%	Vigyan	
2004	14th	INC	26.70%	Congress ka Haath, Aam Aadmi Ke Saath	Pitched against the BJP's 'India Shining'
2009	15th	INC	37.80%	Congress ka hath, Aam Aadmi ke saath Aam aadmi ke badhte kadam, Har kadam par Bharat buland	Extension of the INC's claim to work for common man
2014	16th	BJP	51.74%	Achche Din Aane Wale hain	Used Narendra Modi's reputation for transformation
2019	17th	BJP	55.80%	Abki Baar Modi Sarkaar	Success of Modi Government made this slogan a success.
2024	18th	BJP	44.19%	Abki Baar 400 Paar	Filled with assurance and arrogance but BJP struggled in making Govt

Source - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Indian_general_elections

claims could not attract the masses such as 'India Shining' (*Refer* 10 Slogans that defined political history, 2013, India Today). Below is a tabular and graphical representation of slogans in Indian elections along with their impact on elections.

2.2 *Contemporary events in media building narratives*

Sometimes contemporary political, social, and economic events shape the minds of the voter. For a country like India where issues are not always national. One needs to keep a track of contemporary events to tap the expectations. A news report recently accused the Government of creating a wrong narrative by hosting foreign delegates in Jammu & Kashmir just to portray normalcy post J&K Reorganization Act, 2019 (Kathju Junaid, 2024). But the subsequent elections in the state which were peaceful and saw historic participation then ever contradicted the claim. Not only this while the winning party had formed



Graph 2. Graphical representation of the Vote Share since 1951 – 2024.
*Compiled and derived using secondary data as described in the Table 1.

a coalition with Indian National Congress and bagged 49 seats, the BJP on the other hand alone was also able to get 29 seats and that too in a place which is not its traditional vote bank (J&K Elections Result Highlights 2024, Hindustan Times). So why the wrong narrative this is purely because of the media houses bias. The report by Junaid Kathju is published by South China Morning Post owned and controlled by China based Alibaba group. The portal never cared to put a fair analysis of dying militancy in J&K post abrogation of Article 370 because that would not have suited the China's narrative of India. Similarly, a recent terrorist attack on tourists in Baisaran, Pahalgam Kashmir found media involved in different narratives. Most of the western media hesitated in calling the attack as terrorist attack and tried to portray terrorists as rebels and gunman (*Refer* Pehalgam Terror Attack: Why Western Media loves to call terrorist 'gunmen'). Some used the word rebels (*Refer* NYT Slammed by US Government Panel Over Its Reportage of Kashmir Terror Attack, NDTV (2025) and some said, 'armed group' (Sharma Yashraj, Aljazeera (2025)). The leading newspapers are shying away from calling out the act of terror, a terrorist attack. On the other hand, the leading media in India is focusing on investigation on the lines of religion being the primary concern whereas the primary concerns is our neighbouring country Pakistan. Thus, the contemporary events deeply affect the narration and sometimes create the false narration. The New York Times and Al Jazeera downplayed the terror attack instead of presenting a fair and true analysis.

2.3 *Political campaigns building narratives*

The 2024 elections were a glaring example of narrative creation both in the USA and in India. A narrative was created and spread against the ruling party for being anti-reservation and anti-Constitution. These two narratives played a big role than the persistent problem of unemployment and inflation. In fact, it led to shift in ruling party's narrative. (Krishnana 2024, Frontline). Unfortunately, narrative succeeded over the reality. The Data shows that more than 90 amendments took place till 2014 including the ill-famous mini-Constitution-amendment of 1976 (42nd amendment). Post 2014-2024 more than 10 amendments took place including EWS reservation, abrogation of Article 370 and bringing of the Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019 (CAA) and National Register of Citizens (NRC). Both CAA, NRC and Waqf Amendment Bill was quoted as attack on Muslim minority whereas the truth is

CAA and NRC has nothing to do with Indian Muslims and Waqf Amendment Bill is a historic step towards modernization of Waqf in which the community scholars participated and discussed the changes. With respect to democratic method of passing the resolutions for amendment BJP still faired compared to congress regime which had typically no opposition effective enough till 1977. In fact, the recent waqf Amendment Bill 2025 was concluded after a historic debate of more than 17 hour surpassing the longest debate in Rajya Sabha in 1981 (Waqf Bill Discussion, NDTV, 2025) Similarly, reservation as a policy is completely aligned with the ideological shift of BJP which stood by opposition in not allowing sub classification within quota even after the judgment of State of Punjab v. Devinder Singh (2024, Supreme Court).

Coming to the economic progress, during UPA tenure from 2004-2013 average GDP was 7.8% which was 2.2% higher than the global average compared to NDA rule from 2013 – 2023 which had average GDP 6.9% which was 2.9% higher than the global average. The global trust has reflected in the FDI as well which improved from 1.3% to 1.5% during NDA. The Foreign Exchange Reserve increased during NDA rule to 5,78,449 USD compared to UPA rule 2,92,647 USD but proportionate debt also was higher during NDA regime being 51.25% of the GDP compared to 39.39% during the UPA rule. The expenditure on health dipped but the launch of new health schemes such as PM Health Insurance Scheme (Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojna), Ayushman Bharat, and Jan Aushadhi Kendra, creation of new AIIMS centres across the country compensated. (India Today) The overall social security and inclusive growth increased during the NDA rule as compared to UPA rule which is reflected in the increase in access to electricity and to financial services through the schemes like 'Jan Dhan Yojna'. (Sen Kunal (2024), United Nations University). In fact, the tabular data below shows that for minorities the NDA government contributed more compared to the UPA Government. Thus, on the count of reservation, economic growth and minority the BJP government fared well compared to the Congress, yet the narrative was just opposite and to some extent the narrative succeeded in the 2024 general elections. The data shows double the expenses by the NDA on minority compared to the previous UPA government.

Table 2. Comparative data of minority work during UPA and NDA rule (Anand Kumar 2015) The New Indian Express).

COMPONENT	UPA	NDA
Scholarships	2.94	3.14 crore
Welfare of women under Nai Roshni Scheme	10 Crore	13.48 Crore
Fund towards strengthening Waqf board	Spent 1.91 crore against sanctioned 7 crore (2013-14)	Spent 3.95 Crore against revised sanctioned amount of 4 crores (2014-2015)
Nai Manzil Scheme to modernize Madarsa education	Non-existent during UPA	Launched and executed by NDA Government

3 CONCLUSION

The discussion above clearly shows how narratives affect political allegiance in any country. It is not always work or fulfilling of the promises to the voters which gets the result. Since narration building, image creation plays a crucial role on voters now a days professional strategists and PR teams are hired to plan and execute the election. For future political campaign research, it is necessary to delve into the mechanism of narration building and bring out more free and fair news and policy analysis so that liberty to think in a democracy remains free and not under a siege. It is no more dependent on the free thinking of the individual in a democracy because individual is indirectly charged to think what media, political parties and circumstances around forces him to think. So, when the election season

comes most of the social media, news channels become a host to the ideas which a political party wants to feed to the minds of people. The tool of education and easy access to information can tremendously improve the way a voter thinks but for that researchers must work on developing such policies and mechanisms which will encourage more public debate between the candidates and regulates the false and fabricated reporting during the election campaigns.

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India and BIMSTEC: A foreign policy perspective

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ABSTRACT: The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) was established in 1997. It is a regional organisation that bridges South Asia and Southeast Asia. In recent years, BIMSTEC has become an essential component of India's foreign policy. BIMSTEC gives India a platform to establish regional leadership and foster cooperation among the members of BIMSTEC. By utilising a descriptive and qualitative methodology, this paper will discuss the relations of India with BIMSTEC. The paper aims to understand the challenges in BIMSTEC and the opportunities that the grouping holds for the region. The paper concludes that BIMSTEC gives India the opportunity to boost its presence as well as balance the geopolitical pressures in the region.

1 INTRODUCTION

BIMSTEC was established in 1997 with the signing of the Bangkok Declaration. It is an intergovernmental organisation of seven members around the Bay of Bengal – five from South Asia (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka) and two from Southeast Asia (Myanmar and Thailand). The group brings together a total population of 1.7 billion people – approximately 22% of the global population – with a combined GDP of US $5 trillion It is a relevant organisation, as it serves as a platform for boosting connectivity and cooperation among its members (Ministry of External Affairs 2025; Gajipara and Bhatt 2023).

In 2014, during the 3rd BIMSTEC Summit, that the Permanent Secretariat was established in Dhaka, Bangladesh (Chaudhary 2023). In 2022, during the 5th BIMSTEC Summit in Colombo, Sri Lanka, the BIMSTEC Charter was adopted, which came into force in 2024. This was a significant achievement, as it provided the grouping with a structural strength and legal framework (Sharma 2025). At present, the grouping focuses on seven sectors of cooperation, with each member heading a specific sector.

1.1 *Sectors of cooperation*

Sectors of Cooperation	Country
Agriculture and Food Security	Myanmar
Connectivity	Thailand
Environment and Climate Change	Bhutan

(*continued*)

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Continued

Sectors of Cooperation	Country
People-to-People Contact	Nepal
Science, Technology, and Innovation	Sri Lanka
Security	India
Trade, Investment, and Development	Bangladesh

Source: Sectors of Cooperation, BIMSTEC https://bimstec.org/pages/sectors-of-cooperation

The sectoral division has permitted all the members to equally contribute to the regional growth and development. This also allows the group to address diverse needs simultaneously through well-planned programmes.[1]

BIMSTEC surround the Bay of Bengal, this makes the grouping strategically significant. This is a vital maritime region, as it connects South Asia with Southeast Asia through the Strait of Malacca, and a significant amount of maritime trade passes through this region (Bose and Chaudhury 2024). As BIMSTEC focuses on boosting infrastructure connectivity through land and maritime networks, it facilitates economic growth as well as establishes a mechanism to collectively respond to shared threats. This has the potential to enhance the overall security and promote economic activity in the region. It facilitates multilateral dialogue and augments the bargaining power of the member states on the international stage (Islam 2023; Pattanaik 2018).

In recent years, BIMSTEC has become a vital element of Indian foreign policy. It brings together three main policies, namely – the Act East Policy (AEP), Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR Doctrine) and Neighbourhood First Policy (NFP). Further, BIMSTEC not only aligns with India's foreign policies but also gives India an avenue to counter China and isolate Pakistan (Baruah 2018; Bugaliya 2025; Kumar 2020, 2025).

2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this paper, descriptive and qualitative research methodology will be employed to study the relations of India with BIMSTEC. The study will examine academic articles, official statements, and newspaper coverage on BIMSTEC and India's relations. By analysing these resources, the study aims to strike a balanced foundation for this paper. To achieve its objectives, the paper will discuss two research questions: first, what is the current status of India-BIMSTEC relations? And second, what challenges and opportunities are present for India and BIMSTEC?

3 INDIA AND BIMSTEC

Since 2014, BIMSTEC has emerged as a keystone of India's strategic and regional diplomacy. As the founding member of BIMSTEC, India uses its position to guide collaboration in sectors including connectivity, trade, and security (Kumar 2025; Raju and Chaudhury 2022). India's renewed focus on BIMSTEC is motivated by the strategic interests of countering China's influence in the region, enhancing engagement with its neighbours while isolating Pakistan, and ensuring the development and security of its northeastern states (Kumar 2020).[2]

Previously, SAARC was a platform for the integration of South Asian states, but the group has been stagnant due to India and Pakistan tensions; therefore, BIMSTEC is a suitable grouping for India to integrate with South Asia. Through BIMSTEC, India can

bypass the obstacles created by Pakistan and enable continuous regional cooperation (Bhattacharjee 2023; Bugaliya 2025; Choudhury 2020).

India envisions connecting with Southeast Asia through its northeast region. The northeast part of India a shares border with four members of BIMSTEC – Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar, and Nepal. The geographical and cultural links between northeast India and the members of BIMSTEC gives India a strong foundation for collaboration (Kahmei 2021). Further, as the northeastern region is partly developed, India intends to develop this region through its engagement with the bordering countries. Therefore, BIMSTEC is crucial for India's domestic development.

BIMSTEC's vision for regional cooperation in the Bay of Bengal complements India's SAGAR Doctrine of stability in the Indian Ocean, therefore, allows India to develop a maritime regional order based on shared interests, consensus, and cooperation. (Dahagam 2024; Kumar 2020).

The presence of China has expanded in the region since the launch of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This has further reinforced India to collaborate with its neighbours and propose alternative development initiatives. Therefore, BIMSTEC has become a response to external competition in the neighbourhood of India (Baruah 2018; Nayak 2023).

3.1 *India's initiatives in BIMSTEC*

India has taken both symbolic and substantive steps to foster its engagement with BIMSTEC. India has initiated several projects to foster engagement within the member states. India has continuously hosted high-level diplomatic meetings with BIMSTEC members. In 2016, they were invited by India to the BRICS-BIMSTEC Outreach Summit and Leader's Retreat held in Goa. Later, in 2019, the BIMSTEC members were also invited at the swearing-in service of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. These diplomatic engagements highlighted the preference of India, where BIMSTEC was positioned as a central part of its foreign policy (Kumar 2020).

As India leads the security sector in BIMSTEC, it gives India the opportunity to reinforce itself as the net security provider in the region. In 2018, India hosted the first BIMSTEC military exercise, MILEX-18, highlighting shared efforts to counter-terrorism cooperation in the region (Shivani, 2018). India has also facilitated the BIMSTEC Disaster Management Exercise and the BIMSTEC Centre for Weather and Climate to provide early warning systems for natural disasters (Roy 2023). Radar stations were installed in Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka that facilitate real-time alerts on piracy in the Bay of Bengal (Anwar 2025).

To enhance the energy security of the region, India has taken lead in initiatives such as the BIMSTEC Energy Centre established in Bengaluru and in Noida the Centre for Weather and Climate is established. Such initiatives encourage joint efforts in improving the energy needs and climate adaption in BIMSTEC region (Rahman *et al.* 2024).

As connectivity remains a hurdle for India's strategic vision in BIMSTEC. India has initiated several projects to connect India with BIMSTEC members both physically and digitally. Projects such as the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway and the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project, and inland water transport aim to reduce logistical bottlenecks (Desai 2018). To digitally integrate the region, in 2025, Prime Minister Modi proposed the linking of India's Unified Payment Interface with the BIMSTEC and a digital commerce platform encouraged by Open Network for Digital Commerce to facilitate seamless trade and tourism (Confederation of Indian Industry 2024; Kumar 2025; Roy 2025).

The trade among the BIMSTEC members has grown from US $4.8 billion to US $335.96 billion from 2002 to 2022 (CII Communique 2024). At the BIMSTEC Colombo Summit, India promised US $1 million for institutional development, reflecting its intent to improve the functioning of BIMSTEC (Gupta 2023).

In 2025 Summit, 21-point Action Plan was announced by India to reinvigorate BIMSTEC. India has initiated multiple projects to encourage people-to-people interaction among the BIMSTEC members. The BIMSTEC Athletics Meet was announced in 2025 by India to foster youth engagement. India also provides scholarships to students in BIMSTEC countries at Indian institutions such as Nalanda University and the Forest Research Institute. The BIMSTEC for Organised Development of Human Resource Infrastructure (BODHI) was announced in 2025 to provide training and scholarships for individuals from BIMSTEC countries (Pathak 2025; Ministry of External Affairs 2019).

India's engagement with BIMSTEC aligns with its regional objectives. Integration with members of BIMSTEC allows India to safeguard its geopolitical landscape. The active role of India in BIMSTEC highlights its role as a leader of the Global South, and show its capabilities both as a regional and global leader.

4 CHALLENGES IN BIMSTEC

BIMSTEC faces several challenges, such as institutional limitations, persistent regional issues, geopolitical pressures, and external influences that hamper the effectiveness of the grouping.

BIMSTEC has a weak institutional framework. This undermines the implementation and coordination of BIMSTEC initiatives (Shivamurthy and Bose 2023). BIMSTEC initiatives such as the 2004 BIMSTEC Free Trade Agreement are still under discussion. This highlights the lack of political will and decision-making in BIMSTEC (Baruah 2022). Other projects such as the BIMSTEC Master Plan for Transport are under-implemented due to inadequate coordination and bureaucratic inefficiencies (Bose *et al.* 2024). Delays in such initiatives reduce the trade potential of BIMSTEC (Pattanaik 2018).

The political and economic instability in member states – Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh – hinders regional cooperation. It has caused delays in projects such as the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway, obstructing BIMSTEC's vision for regional connectivity (Xavier and Banerjee 2024).[3] Geopolitical tensions among member states such as Myanmar and Bangladesh also constrain BIMSTEC's goals for the region. India also faces security issues in northeast India – insurgencies, illegal migration, and smuggling – have complicated India's relations with Myanmar and Bangladesh (Baruah 2022).[4]

The growing presence of China in the region challenges India's leadership within BIMSTEC. Such geopolitical pressures force members of BIMSTEC to balance relations with China and India (Kumar 2020). However, these challenges can be mitigated in the long-run through joint efforts of BIMSTEC members.

5 OPPORTUNITIES FOR INDIA AND BIMSTEC

Despite its challenges, BIMSTEC presents several prospects for India and other member states. As a leading member of BIMSTEC, India has the potential to shape the trajectory of the group. While BIMSTEC is not an alternative to SAARC, it gives India an avenue to boost regional integration without any hindrance from Pakistan. BIMSTEC allows India and other members of BIMSTEC to counterbalance China and is an alternative to BRI. It is an avenue for BIMSTEC to collaborate and establish norms based on the needs of the region (Baruah 2018; Bhattacharjee 2023).

By improving connectivity India and BIMSTEC, can foster new trade routes and enhance economic integration. The improved connectivity will benefit the northeast states of India. As the members of BIMSTEC are agricultural-based economies, India can facilitate capacity building and develop valuable supply chains – this can accelerate economic growth in the region (Rahman *et al.* 2024). Even though BIMSTEC has not achieved its trade potential,

the member of BIMSTEC and India can gain access to major and larger markets (Hussain 2025).India must continue to take the lead in energy and climate cooperation. Such initiatives encourage joint efforts in energy security and climate adaption (Rahman *et al.* 2024). Further, the BIMSTEC members are prone to natural disasters efforts to mitigate natural disasters and climate change will directly benefit the citizens of BIMSTEC (Roy 2023). In all, BIMSTEC gives India and its other members a multilayered platform to exercise leadership, supervene national interest and shape regional cooperation rooted in connectivity, security, and shared growth.

6 CONCLUSION

For India, BIMSTEC is a vital platform to assert its regional leadership and promote regional cooperation. The proactive role India has played since 2014 shows the relevance of BIMSTEC in Indian foreign policy. It gives India the opportunity to maintain relations with its neighbours and expand towards the extended neighbourhood. BIMSTEC gives India an opportunity to balance geopolitical pressures from external powers, pursue various tenets of its foreign policy; without any hinderance from countries like Pakistan. Even though there are institutional and regional challenges, the group provides a chance to improve connectivity, and trade, and security. It gives India the opportunity to develop sustainable infrastructure and supply chains that will facilitate regional trade and development. India must take lead and support the development needs of BIMSTEC. Given that BIMSTEC member states have common development needs and strategic interests, the group has the potential to shape the regional order rooted in cooperation and mutual benefit.

NOTES

1. Earlier, BIMSTEC had 14 sectors of cooperation. This caused struggle in delivering substantive outcomes; therefore in 2022, the sectors of cooperation were reduced to 7, with each member heading a particular sector.
2. The aim of NEP is to prioritise economic and security integration with the immediate neighbours of India. Considering that the members of BIMSTEC fall in the immediate neighbourhood of India, it gives India an opportunity to boost its relations with its immediate neighbours and complement the existing bilateral relations. The grouping also strengthens the AEP, which is dedicated to strengthening the relations of India with Southeast Asia. Both Myanmar and Thailand are part of Southeast Asia; hence, BIMSTEC opens a way for India to integrate with Southeast Asia. India also aims to connect with Southeast Asia through its northeast states; therefore, this region becomes an essential part of NEP, AEP, and BIMSTEC. The SAGAR Doctrine aims to enhance maritime security in the Indian Ocean. This coincides with the geographical scope of BIMSTEC, making the group essential for the maritime security of India.
3. The members of BIMSTEC have faced internal political and economic instability for decades. Issues such as political crises and military regimes in Myanmar, Sri Lanka civil war till 2009 and the economic crises of 2022-23. This draws their attention away from their commitments to BIMSTEC; this weakens the political will of the members to invest in regional initiatives.
4. Bilateral issues among BIMSTEC members, include water-sharing, illegal migration and border management, hamper the BIMSTEC initiatives.

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Post-pandemic shift in urban mobility patterns in India: Long-term implications for transport planning and infrastructure investment

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ABSTRACT: The pandemic of COVID-19 paced up an unseen disruption in urban mobility patterns across the country, inspiring both non-permanent and tentatively enduring transformations. This study examines the evolving landscape of urban transportation in India's post COVID-19 era, focusing on how changing work patterns, health considerations, and economic factors have influenced urban mobility. Verifying the insights with the evidences collected from major cities of India, the paper focuses on identifying distinct trends of mobility that evolved during the time of recovery from the effects of the pandemic, and these trends may count as- increased usage of personal transport, enhancing demand of active mobility infrastructure, paced-up transport services' digitalization, more focus on transit-oriented development, and higher emphasis on resilient mobility mechanisms. The analysis of the facts and factors reveal that these shifts hold major implications for future transport planning and strategies of investment in infrastructure development. Major recommendations include flexible policy decisions' implementations for the purpose of accommodating hybrid transportation patterns, active mobility infrastructure should be given priority, smart mobility integration shall be accelerated, adopting inclusive design principle, and transport planning must involve pandemic resilience.

Keywords: Urban Mobility, Post-pandemic Mobility, Mobility Planning, Infrastructural Investment, Sustainable Urban Growth

1 INTRODUCTION

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, India's urban mobility landscape was characterized by rapid motorization, congested roads, and growing reliance on informal and shared modes of transport. Public transport systems such as city buses and metro networks operated at near-full capacity, while auto-rickshaws, cycle rickshaws, and ride-hailing services filled critical mobility gaps. Low-income populations heavily depended on overcrowded, underfunded services. Urban transport planning largely prioritized vehicular traffic over pedestrian infrastructure. Despite infrastructure expansion, accessibility and affordability remained major concerns. The pre COVID-19 scenario, marked by high-density travel and minimal focus on health, safety, starkly contrasts with the significant behavioural and policy shifts observed post COVID-19.

The COVID-19 Pandemic inspired an unseen disruption in the patterns of urban mobility throughout the world with particularly critical impacts noted across the diverse urban

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landscape of India[1]. As the country with second largest population in the world and widely expanding urban landscape, India has recently experienced dramatic shifts in transportation behaviour that keeps on reverberating through its phase of recovery. The implementation of rigorous lock down in March 2020 had a major impact on the mobility of more than 1.3 billion people instigating what researchers have called a natural experiment in mobility change[2].

While elementary changes were seen as non-permanent adjustments evolving evidences suggest that a number of pandemic driven mobility shifts vs. State beyond the immediate problem period possibly representing and during shifting in how cities of India conceptualize and involve with transportation systems[3]. These emerging mobility patterns carry major implications for the planning and investment in transport sector development and strategies particularly as India purse aspiring urbanization and sustainable development goals.

This paper aims at analyzing post-COVID-19 transformations in urban transport landscape across urban centres of India, with particular focus on their future implications for transportation governance, policy frameworks, and investment in infrastructure development. By the examination of the evidences collected from major cities of India including Delhi, Bangalore, Mumbai, Chennai and Hyderabad, etc., the research tries to identify emerging possibilities that can inform the creation of an equitable, more resilient, and future-oriented system of transportation. The outcomes of the study contribute to a more expanded discourse on COVID-19 caused impact while offering relevant directives for policymakers directing the complexities of urban development after COVID-19.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 *Pre-pandemic urban mobility landscape*

In the pre-pandemic era, urban mobility transport mechanisms were featured by distinct patterns of transport given shape by rapid urban development, economic growth, and crucial infrastructural challenges. Research conducted by Agarwal *et al.* (2020) noted the predominance of public mobility means and non-motorized means of transport among lower-income groups, while other segments of the population increasingly relied upon private vehicles[4]. Studies conducted by the Institute of Transportation and Development Policy (ITDP 2019) found major congestion, insufficient public transport infrastructure, and increasing environment related concerns as major determinants of pre-pandemic urban transport in the Country[5].

Tiwari and Jain (2021) documented that despite hefty investment in Metro projects across major cities of the country, first-mile connectivity and last-mile connectivity had still come out being a critical barrier to comprehensive transit adoption[6]. Meanwhile, the introduction and development of ride-hailing services and micro-mobility options had started redesigning urban mobility behaviour, particularly among younger demographics[7].

2.2 *Immediate pandemic impacts on mobility behaviours*

The implementation of pandemic containment measures triggered shocking short-term transformations in the patterns of transport across India. Praharaj and Han (2021) documented a major 80% to 95% decline in public transport ridership in the beginning of lockdown period, alongside notable decrease in overall trip generation[8]. COVID-19 Community Mobility Reports by Google notified a similar massive decline in the trips between home and workplaces, home and retail centres, and public spaces across major cities.

As containment measures emerged, various researches identified distinct adaptation methods among diverse socio-economic groups, with high-income strata more readily shifting to remote work pattern while other population encountered major mobility issues and financial difficulties. According to Sharma and Mahendra (2021) *"informal transport service providers- including*

cycle-rickshaw, auto-rickshaw, and shared vans faced severe disruptions, exacerbating accessibility related challenges for population dependent on public transport.[9]"

2.3 *Urban mobility transitions: Global perspective*

Recent studies highlight persistent mobility inequalities post-2020. In Nairobi, low-income groups continued commuting during lockdowns due to essential job roles[10]. In Madrid, deprived neighbourhoods showed smaller mobility reductions, reflecting limited remote work options[11]. Latin American cities showed similar trends, underscoring structural disparities in urban mobility[12].

Studies from various countries have explored mobility transitions among low-income groups during urban shifts. For instance, Lucas (2012) examined social exclusion and transport inequality in the UK, highlighting access disparities[13]. In South Africa, venter *et al.* (2020) emphasized how informal settlements face compounded mobility constraints [14]. Similarly, research in Brazil by Vasconcellos (2017) showed how inequitable planning affects transit access. These studies underscore the global relevance of transport justice and offer comparative insights for India's context[15].

2.4 *Emerging post-pandemic mobility trends*

As India moved forward towards recovery from the effects of pandemic, many researchers have come out with documenting unwavering shifts in transport related preferences and behaviour. Mehta and Vyas (2023) have observed in their studies that enhanced dependency on personal vehicles among population that use public means of transport earlier, attributed basically to designed work patterns and constant health concerns[16]. Study by Bansal *et al.* (2022) notified growing interest in active transit accessibilities, with walking and cycling rates surpassing pre-pandemic levels in almost all the cities[17].

The National Institute of Urban Affairs (2023) research revealed that increased adoption of digital platforms of transportation, which include integrated applications, online payment facility, and real-time transit info services[18]. Research by Thomas and Krishnan (2022) observed that the new preferences for proximity-based city development, with growing interest in neighbourhood-scale accessibility and decreased distance of trips[19].

In the research of Deshmukh & Patel, it has been noted that the identified shifts have popularized the potential outcomes for transport equity and inclusivity across diverse socio-economic strata of urban population and geographic contexts. This research highlights the possible risk exacerbating the disparities by mobility related trends in post COVID-19 period, if not responded appropriately through policy initiatives and investments in transport sector.

3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

This research aims to identify and analyze the key shifts in urban mobility patterns in major Indian cities post-COVID-19 and assess their implications for future transportation policies.

4 METHODOLOGY

The present study is based on a mixed-method approach that combines quantitative analysis of transport related insights from major cities (Mumbai, Bangalore, Delhi, Chennai and Hyderabad) of India with qualitative assessment of the policy frameworks. The framework of this research includes analysis of transport trends, and policy content through comparison of transport indicators in pre-pandemic, during pandemic, and post COVID-19 periods. The analysis in this research study has been done on the basis of insights collected from various

reports of ministries, and government agencies like Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, National Urban Transportation Survey, Urban Transport Authority of India; and the previous research studies conducted on the related aspects. This comprehensive comparative assessment may help to identify the significant patterns of transport related transformations.

5 MAJOR SHIFTS AND NEW TRENDS IN URBAN MOBILITY PATTERNS

The analysis revealed major mobility shifts that have taken place beyond the immediate pandemic recovery period across the country's major urban centres. These trends include:

5.1 *Increased dependency on personal transport means*

Despite primary expectations of moving back to a mobility pattern that was there in the pre-pandemic period, public transit ridership across the included cities remained 15 per cent to 25 per cent lesser than the same was in 2019 as of December 2024[20]. This decline coincides with enhanced usage of personal vehicles, with personal car registrations rising by 18 per cent between the years 2021 and 2024 as compared to years 2018, 2019 & 2020[21]. The results drawn from various studies suggest that this shift have taken place from constant health concerns, increased work flexibility reducing the cost-benefit ratio of public transport, and revised risk discernment regarding shared transport means.

5.2 *Growing demand for active mobility infrastructure*

The rates of cycling and walking have demonstrated shocking resilience, with active trips manging a 30 to 40 per cent growth over pre-pandemic levels across major cities of the country[22]. This trend adjoins with increasing citizen advocacy for expanded infrastructure for pedestrians and cyclists, reflected in the dispensation under municipal budget demonstrating a growth of average 35 per cent in active mobility investment between years 2019-20 and 2023-24[23].

The continuity of these pattern change suggests an intense attitudinal change relating to non-motorized mobility means, with survey showing that 42 per cent of new cyclists are wiling to continue this mobility practice for an uncertain period[24].

5.3 *Accelerated digitalization of transport services*

The pandemic of COVID-19 catalyzed an instant adoption of digital mobility facilities across the Indian transportation ecosystem. Digital ticketing, which were being experimented in the pre-pandemic period, now process a massive 70 per cent public mobility transactions across most significant cities[25]. Integrated transit applications that combine multiple modes of transit have seen a considerable 215 per cent increase between the years 2020 and 2024[26].

This shift to digitalization reaches beyond transaction mechanisms to include real-time occupancy surveillance, predictive maintenance techniques, and progressive routing programs and applications. It has come out that the COVID-19 compressed what would have been a long-term digital change into a 3 years acceleration. The policymakers have opted to accommodate the transportation technologies which were not expected before 2030s.

5.4 *Renewed interest in transit-oriented development*

The shift towards remote and multi-modal work patterns has extolled the evolving choices for proximity-based urban development. The study of National Urban Transportation

Survey indicated a shift toward neighbourhood accessibility in housing decisions by 58 per cent people (compared to 37 per cent in 2019) in the studied cities. This movement has been observed in case of residential property, with increased demands for housing in multi-use developments and areas with comparatively higher walkability scores[27].

Municipal Master Plans which got approval in the period of 2022 to 2024 demonstrated enhanced emphasis on polycentric development patterns and mobility-oriented development principles. For instance, the comprehensive mobility plan for Bangalore, 2023 explicitly encompasses a "15 minutes city" framework that gives priority to a neighbourhood-scale accessibility over age-old patterns of mobility.

5.5 *Heightened emphasis on resilient transportation systems*

After pandemic transportation plans and policy frameworks explore enhanced attention to system resilience and adaptability. Analysis of policy documents have demonstrated a massive 240 per cent increase in reference to resilience, flexibility and adaptability compared to the transport planning frameworks operating before the COVID-19 era. This notional movement carries along the basic measures, which include the establishment of dedicated resilience department within different agencies working for transport development and the growth of the protocols to respond to disruptions.

Investment patterns in a similar manner, indicate this shift of priority, with increased allotment for component-based infrastructure, multi-modal incorporation hubs, and transport mechanism that prove to be immediately adaptable to the changing patterns of demand and emergency situations. The strike of COVID-19 taught us that the optimization of a single model for making thing things operational can pose a fundamental risk. We need to shift to a pattern which has the capability of flexing and adapting across more than one possible future.

6 IMPLICATIONS FOR TRANSPORT PLANNING AND INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT

The identified transit shifts hold considerable effects for transport governance related instruments and strategy frameworks of infrastructural investments:

6.1 *Need for flexible planning*

Traditional transport planning designs, which conventionally assume relatively rigid mobility patterns and linear progression trajectories, appear increasingly misfit within the post COVID-19 realities. The popularization of hybrid models of working- with 48 per cent office going employees now complying to the variable scheduling model[28] - has inspired a more complicated ephemeral allocation of transport demand that challenges conventional peak-hour planning assumptions.

Such a change gives emphasis on the need of an increasingly adaptive policy design which shows capacity of accommodating multiple transit scenarios and proves to be quickly responsive to new behavioural patterns. Several city authorities have started practicing with scenario-based policy attitudes that inspire constituting infrastructure strategies across several potential future possibilities rather than optimizing for just one assumed outcome.

6.2 *Prioritizing active mobility infrastructure*

The lasting interest in cycling and walking poses both an opportunity and challenge for urban mobility planning. While enhanced active transit comes together with sustainability objective, existing infrastructure proves insufficient in most areas, with only 23 per cent of

prime roads having dedicated cycling accessibility and 37 per cent lacking minimal appropriate pedestrian infrastructure[29].

The after-pandemic scenario introduces a critical platform for strategic investment in intricate active transit matrix that can endure these behavioural transformations. Progressive cities have accommodated quick deployment strategies, which include tactical urbanism intercessions that quickly convert road area into cycling and pedestrian uses while prolonged infrastructure is built.

6.3 *Integrating smart mobility technologies*

The expedited digitalization of transport related services has instigated new requirements for technological infrastructure and governance instruments. There exists an increasing need of capacities for transport authorities for managing data, cybersecurity, and digitalization of services that were never been central to their operating models.

This change not only instigate the necessity of the technological investment but also emphasizes the institutional adaptation, which include workforce development, regulatory instruments for data governance, and new partnership initiatives with technological leaders. A number of cities have setup exclusive transit innovation wings for the purpose of setting up coordination with these efforts and for ensuring that digital transformations fit with broader transport objectives.

6.4 *Focus on inclusive design principles*

The inconsistent effect of pandemic driven mobility shift across different socio-economic groups shows the importance of equity-centred transport planning. Research demonstrates that lower income population has experienced uneven accessibility challenges during the pandemic period and also in the period of recovery, with high reliance upon public transit mechanisms that have faced decreased frequency of services[30].

Addressing these disparities requires deliberate infusion of inclusive model principles into mobility planning process, including aimed investment in transportation dependent population, affordable fare mechanisms, and multimodal incorporation strategies that ensure accessibility across distinct user communities.

6.5 *Integration of pandemic resilience*

The experiences gained from the pandemic infused disruptions has underscored the importance of constructing explicit resilience factors into transport mechanisms. This involves physical structure variables like improved ventilation facilities, contactless interface, and flexible area-based configurations, and operational capacities too including protocols for rapid service adaptation and emergency transit provisions.

Numerous city authorities have created formal resilience frameworks that assesses transport related investments against so many disruption scenarios, including potential public health concerns and emergencies, climatic events, and technology declines. The proposed set of approaches represent an elementary shift from models that drives optimization of efficiency towards mechanisms that balance operational maximization with robust adaptive capacity.

7 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The pandemic of COVID-19 instigated sustainable transformations in India's urban transport, including increased personal vehicle usage, active transport demand, and digitalization. These changes redesign urban spaces, posing both opportunities and challenge. Policy decision makers must constitute strategies that emphasize sustainable trends such as

walkability and regional access, while responding to the concerns like increased dependency on cars and related planning with environmental and liveability goals.

Based on the findings of the research, the following recommendations seems appropriate to be proposed to city transportation authorities and policymakers:

(1) **Implement Flexible Planning:** Creating scenario-based transportation planning attitudes that can cater indefinite transport pattern, particularly relating to the work arrangements and ephemeral distribution of travelling demands.
(2) **Prioritizing Active Mobility Networks:** enhancing investment in major walking and cycling infrastructure to strengthen positive behavioural shifts while addressing safety issues that can sabotage long-term adoption.
(3) **Advance Digital Incorporation with Equity Safeguards:** Continue with technological transformations of transport system while implementing chosen measures for ensuring digital inclusion across different groups of users.
(4) **Adoption of Polycentric Strategies of Development:** Align transport investments with policies guiding land use in order to inspire neighbourhood-scale accessibility and reduce dependence on distant mobility patterns.
(5) **Institutionalizing Resilience Planning:** Accommodate formal policy instruments for assessing and increasing transport mechanisms' resilience across multiple potential disruption scenarios.

These strategies can be helpful for urban spaces in India to navigate the complex scenario of post COVID-19 transportation while improving broader goals of sustainable and equitable urban development. As city areas keep expanding and emerging, transport systems that smartly respond to transport patterns will pay a crucial part in preparing more accessible and resilient urban ecosystems.

7.1 *Future research directions*

Future researches may focus on examining long-term behavioural shifts in modal preferences, evaluate emerging mobility technologies, and assess regional disparities to inform adaptive transport planning and equitable infrastructure investment in post COVID-19 India.

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Decentralisation and local governance

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ABSTRACT: This study explores the connection between decentralisation and local governance by assessing how shifting authority from central to local governments influences public service delivery, democratic participation and administrative efficiency. It categorises decentralisation into political, administrative and fiscal dimensions and applies a qualitative comparative case study of Nigeria and Sweden two countries with contrasting decentralisation models.

Sweden exemplifies a mature and institutionalised decentralised system, marked by strong fiscal autonomy, administrative competence and active local democratic engagement. Its municipalities operate with considerable discretion, supported by stable funding mechanisms and independent revenue sources, fostering accountability and responsive governance.

In contrast, Nigeria demonstrates a more centralised and developing structure. Although the constitution recognises local government autonomy, real power remains concentrated. Reliance on federal allocations, limited fiscal control and political interference significantly impede local governance effectiveness.

The findings indicate that decentralisation's success relies heavily on context. Sweden benefits from institutional coherence and fiscal empowerment while Nigeria's experience reveals the challenges of inadequate autonomy and institutional weakness. The research concludes that decentralisation must be adapted to each country's political, institutional and cultural context to achieve meaningful governance outcomes.

Keywords: Decentralisation, Local Governance, Public Service Delivery, Political commitment

1 INTRODUCTION

Decentralisation has become a key strategy in modern governance, increasingly adopted by both developing and developed nations as a response to the limitations of centralized administrative systems. It involves the systematic transfer of authority, responsibility and resources from central governments to lower levels of government such as states, provinces, municipalities or local councils.[20] Decentralization is based on the idea that local governments know their communities needs better so they can govern more effectively, fairly and with more involvement from the people.[21]

Historically, many nations have operated under highly centralized political and administrative structures facilitating uniform policy enforcement.

There is frequently occurring problem in the delivery of public services particularly in geographically diverse or culturally heterogeneous societies which hinders the system from

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functioning effectively.[12] The inability of central governments to meet grassroots demands coupled with growing public pressure for inclusion and equity, laid the foundation for decentralisation reforms. Decentralisation has been in practice for so many decades across Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America although its forms and outcomes vary widely depending on national context and institutional structures.[25]

Decentralisation is grouped into three intermediate dimensions: political, administrative and fiscal. When the dimensions are effectively implemented it leads to improved public service delivery, stronger local institutions and greater citizen engagement.[8] Although, decentralisation is not an ultimate remedy for governance challenges but its success depends heavily on the design of decentralisation policies, the capacity of local institutions, political will and the presence of accountability mechanisms. In nations where decentralization has been rushed or influenced by political interests, it has often resulted in heightened corruption, elite dominance and fragmented policymaking.[6] Therefore, understanding the local political, economic and institutional context is crucial in determining whether decentralisation will enhance or hinder governance outcomes.

This paper aims to critically analyse the relationship between decentralisation and local governance by exploring how different forms of decentralisation impact the effectiveness of local government systems. Through a comparative case study of Nigeria and Sweden, the research examines the opportunities, challenges and policy implications of decentralised governance. Nigeria represents large developing country with diverse populations and long-standing decentralisation initiatives, albeit with varying levels of success. Sweden, on the other hand, offers insights from a developed country with an established system of local autonomy and public service delivery.

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

From the following research objective, we examine how decentralisation affects the performance and quality of local governance. Decentralisation helps;

(1) Explore the conceptual frameworks of decentralisation and its relevance to local governance
(2) ***To examine different Intermediate dimensions of decentralisation:*** Political, Administrative and Fiscal and explore their interaction in influencing local governance outcomes.[21]
(3) ***To evaluate the practical experiences of decentralisation in selected case study countries*** *such as* Nigeria and Sweden explaining how each country's political structure and institutional capacity have developed its decentralisation process.[8][25]
(4) ***To identify the opportunities and challenges*** associated with implementing decentralisation policies in different governance settings especially in developing countries where institutional weaknesses often pose significant challenges.[16]
(5) ***To provide policy recommendations*** *for* designing and implementing decentralisation frameworks that promote accountable, efficient and inclusive local governance.

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

(1) ***Lidström (2020):*** Lidström analysed the evolving role of Swedish local governments emphasizing the balance between local autonomy and central steering. He found that despite growing national oversight in areas like education and health, Swedish municipalities maintain strong political and fiscal independence. His work underscores how institutional maturity and administrative capacity underpin effective decentralisation in Sweden.[11]

(2) ***Smoke (2020):*** Paul Smoke revisited global decentralisation trends and reiterated that contextual factors especially institutional design, stakeholder alignment and local capacity are critical for successful outcomes. He warned against blueprint decentralisation models advocating instead for locally adapted reforms.[24]
(3) ***Boadway & Eyraud (2020):*** These scholars examined fiscal decentralisation in comparative contexts arguing that predictable intergovernmental transfers and clear revenue assignments are prerequisites for functional decentralised systems. Sweden was cited as a positive example, whereas countries like Nigeria were critiqued for fiscal opacity and over-centralisation.[4]
(4) ***Eneanya & Olojede (2021):*** Focusing on Nigeria, these authors explored the paradox of legal decentralisation without effective autonomy. They noted that while Nigeria's 1999 Constitution formally recognizes local governments, state governments exercise de facto control particularly over financial allocations.[7]
(5) ***Sellers & Lidström (2021):*** In a comparative Nordic study, the authors found that Sweden continues to benefit from multilevel governance arrangements that ensure both central coordination and local independence. The study praised Sweden's institutional trust and robust mechanisms for citizen engagement at the municipal level. [22]
(6) ***Adeyemi & Adebayo (2021):*** These Nigerian scholars assessed fiscal decentralisation in Nigeria pointing at challenges like revenue leakages, weak accountability and political interference. They argued that without reforming Nigeria's Joint Allocation Accounts Committee (JAAC) system, local governments will remain financially dependent and politically vulnerable.[1]
(7) ***Öberg & Ruin (2021):*** These scholars offered a historical-institutional perspective on Swedish local democracy arguing that resilience and continuity are key strengths of the Swedish model. They emphasized that Swedish municipalities enjoy policy discretion due to high levels of institutional trust and legitimacy.[13]
(8) ***Olowu (2022):*** Olowu evaluated Nigeria's repeated attempts at local governance reform. He identified elite capture, poor accountability mechanisms, and a lack of political will as persistent barriers. He argued that successful decentralisation in Nigeria must begin with genuine political commitment to empower local institutions.[17]
(9) ***Karlsson & Danielsson (2022)***: The authors studied Sweden's adoption of e-governance tools and their role in enhancing decentralised service delivery. They concluded that digitalisation has improved transparency, responsiveness and citizen participation in local governance processes.[9]
(10) ***Ogunyemi & Ayoola (2023):*** These researchers examined Nigeria's local governance through the lens of digital readiness. They found that most Nigerian local governments lack the infrastructure and capacity to adopt digital tools for public service delivery limiting the potential of technology to improve governance.[14]

4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research employed a qualitative and descriptive methodology to explore the dynamics of decentralisation and local governance.

a) ***Research Design***

An exploratory-descriptive design was adopted. The exploratory component allowed for the investigation of decentralisation in varied political systems, while the descriptive element helped present existing structures, challenges and impacts of local governance.

b) ***Data Collection***

- The study relied exclusively on secondary data. Academic journals, books, government documents and international organization reports (e.g., UNDP, World Bank) were consulted.

- Online databases:- JSTOR, Google Scholar, and ScienceDirect provided access to credible, peer-reviewed sources.
- Case studies from Nigeria and Sweden enriched the contextual understanding of decentralisation practices.

c) ***Data Analysis***

Data was analysed using content and thematic analysis focusing on patterns like fiscal decentralisation, administrative capacity and citizen participation. This helped link theoretical insights to practical governance outcomes. A comparative approach was also used to highlight variations across countries.

d) ***Research Tools***

Although no statistical software was used, the following tools supported the research:

- Medley/Zotero – for reference management and APA 7th citation.
- Microsoft Word– for data organization and drafting.
- NVivo (Optional) – as a qualitative tool for theme identification.

5 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 *Political decentralisation*

Political decentralization strengthens local democracy by giving power to elected officials, ensuring citizens have a voice in decisions that affect their communities.[21]

The 1999 Constitution of Nigeria establishes a framework for political decentralization granting local governments and councils the authority to govern local affairs through elected officials. However, this system is often compromised by state governors who frequently dissolve elected councils and replace them with temporary committees, thereby weakening democratic accountability.[2] Furthermore, elections at the local level are not conducted properly because of political dominance of the state thereby weakening the legitimacy of local governance structures.[18]

In Sweden, political decentralisation has a long-standing tradition in which every four years Municipal councils (kommuner) are elected and also have more autonomy over public services including; education, healthcare and local development. Their system is characterized by strong citizen participation, transparency and effective institutional checks and balances.[10]

5.2 *Administrative decentralisation*

Administrative decentralisation can be defined as the transfer of planning, management and administrative responsibilities from central government to sub-national units[18]. This dimension is critical for operational autonomy and service delivery.

Nigeria's administrative decentralization is limited, with local governments lacking autonomy and decision-making power. Most public services are controlled by state reducing local governments to implementation roles.[3]Weak staffing, insufficient training and bureaucratic inefficiencies further hinder their ability to drive local development.

Sweden serves as a typical example of a highly functional model of administrative decentralisation. Local governments have a transparent mandate and are authorized to manage key services such as healthcare, education and housing. They employ professional staff and have access to robust administrative systems and digital tools to streamline service delivery.[10] Nonetheless, there is a culture of administrative professionalism, accountability and minimal interference from the central government.

5.3 *Fiscal decentralisation*

Fiscal decentralisation can be defined as the transfer of revenue-raising powers and expenditure responsibilities to local government. It ensures that local authorities have the financial resources to execute their mandates.[21]

In Nigeria, fiscal decentralisation is legally supported by the revenue allocation formula, which grants a share of federally collected revenues to local governments. However, in practice, local governments remain heavily dependent on allocations from the central government. Internally generated revenue is minimal and fiscal transparency is often lacking. [15] Additionally, the role of state governments in controlling local finances further erodes fiscal autonomy limiting the effectiveness of decentralisation.

Sweden again serves as a model, with municipalities having the authority to levy taxes, particularly income taxes. Nearly 70% of municipal revenues come from local taxes enabling them to plan and finance local services effectively.[10] The strong financial base ensures that local governments in Sweden are not only autonomous but also capable of delivering high-quality services.

6 CROSS-CUTTING CHALLENGES

Across the two countries, several cross-cutting challenges to effective decentralisation emerge:

(1) ***Capacity Deficits*** –Nigeria local governments often lack the technical, financial and human resource capacity to manage their responsibilities effectively.[2]
(2) ***Political Interference*** – Despite constitutional provisions, local autonomy is frequently undermined by higher levels of government through budget controls or administrative overrides.
(3) ***Corruption and Accountability*** – Weak oversight mechanisms, lack of transparency and elite capture are common in decentralised systems especially where institutions are fragile.[6]
(4) ***Resource Constraints*** – Fiscal decentralisation is limited in effectiveness where revenue collection powers are minimal and where intergovernmental transfers are irregular or politically manipulated.
(5) ***Uneven Implementation*** – Within-country disparities are evident, with some regions performing better than others due to local leadership, civil society involvement or policy innovation.[8]

7 KEY LESSONS

Several lessons emerge from the comparative analysis:

a) ***Context matters:*** Decentralisation is not a one-size-fits-all solution. Political, economic and institutional contexts have a heavy influence on the outcomes.
b) ***Legal frameworks must be supported by practice:*** Even where decentralisation is constitutionally enshrined, its effectiveness depends on enforcement and political will.
c) ***Critical Capacity building:*** Without investing in human resources, infrastructure and institutional frameworks, decentralisation may fail to deliver expected results.
d) ***Citizen participation enhances accountability:*** Where citizens are actively involved in decision-making such as through participatory budgeting or open councils, decentralisation tends to be more effective.

8 CONCLUSION

Decentralisation has always been an important tool for promoting local governance enhancing service delivery and deepening democratic engagement. As this paper has demonstrated through the comparative analysis of Nigeria and Sweden, the effectiveness of decentralisation is dependent on the political will to enforce reforms, the administrative capacity of local institutions and the fiscal autonomy granted to local governments.

In Nigeria, despite a constitutionally mandated system of local governance, decentralisation remains largely ineffective due to political interference, weak administrative structures and financial dependence on the central government. Sweden by contrast represent a mature, well-functioning decentralised system where local governments enjoy significant autonomy, robust financial independence and institutional trust.

An important note from this research is that decentralisation should not be pursued as a political trend or donor-driven policy but as a carefully crafted governance strategy tailored to national contexts. For an effective decentralisation to take place, it requires enabling legal frameworks, adequate funding, citizen engagement and strong institutions that can uphold accountability and transparency.

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Need for a shift from passive dissent to active dissent: A study of voter apathy in India

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ABSTRACT: This paper discusses the form of dissent in electoral systems, contrasting active dissent, such as the NOTA (None of the Above) vote, with passive dissent, characterized by abstention or withdrawal from the electoral process. Dissent, the cornerstone of democracy, should be expressed in effective ways to sustain a healthy democracy. Active dissent, through tools like NOTA, opens the avenue for citizens to express dissatisfaction with policies, governance, and candidates. NOTA and blank vote express a vivid message to the political system, which shows dissatisfaction but without withdrawing from the elections, thereby upholding the accountability and preserving the social contract that stabilizes the democracy. Passive dissent, nevertheless, carries the risk of being misinterpreted as disinterest, indifference, thereby blurring the line between dissatisfaction with disengagement or disinterest among the voters. This study uses a quantitative survey-based approach to capture voting protest trends across four Indian States- Bihar, Gujarat, Sikkim, and Delhi. The findings reveal that voter fatigue, political distrust, procedural complexity, and logistical barriers significantly influence the voting decision, highlighting the need for electoral reforms to enhance accessibility, voter awareness, and ease of electoral procedures.

Keywords: Dissent, Passive dissent, NOTA, Compulsory voting, Low turnout

1 INTRODUCTION

India, a nation with over 970 million eligible voters, observes elections as a significant democratic exercise, the biggest anywhere in the world. The 2024 election stretched over 44 days from April 19 to June 1, 2024, signifying an extensive voting period. The Voting time has fluctuated over the years, from four months in 1951-1952 to merely four days in 1980. Voting lasted 39 days in 2019, making this 2024 election the second-longest on record. Elections in India face logistical difficulties; almost 15 million election officials and security personnel travel across rivers, deserts, and snow-laden mountains to make available to voters the polling booth within two kilometres, ensuring citizens' right to vote (Economic Times, 2024)[1]. Despite these untiring efforts on the part of the commission, the democratic fabric faces hurdles from growing voter apathy and stagnant voter turnout. The stagnation in voter turnout with increasing distrust in electoral processes over the last three Lower House elections highlights the urgency of addressing the factor causing such a decline in participation (Nath, D., 2025)[2]. Voter apathy and disillusionment, logistical and Socio-economic

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factors, or far-stretched voting fests are identified as causes of decline (Godara, 2024)[3]. Dissent is one of the forms of expression of speech. It manifests in two separate forms- active dissent, like NOTA in India, and passive dissent characterized by unaccounted records of dissatisfaction, causing low turnout. In 2009, the Election Commission of India proposed to introduce a "None of the above" choice, which the government had mostly opposed. The non-governmental organisation People's Union for Civil Liberties filed a public-interest litigation in support of this. Noting that it will boost participation, the Supreme Court of India decided on September 27, 2013[4], that the ability to register a "none of the above" vote in elections should be applicable. The court stated that this "would lead to a systemic change in polls and political parties will be forced to project clean candidates," allowing voters who do not wish to support any of the candidates to exercise their choice in confidence, allowing voters to voice their dissatisfaction. The Election Commission of India subsequently incorporated NOTA into the electoral framework, permitting voters to formally express their discontent without withdrawing from the voting process. Recent data shows a concerning trend as the 2024 election witnessed a dip in NOTA since its inception in 2014. Despite its utility and potential, the data raises concerns about its efficacy as a tool of active dissent, largely due to unsubstantial legal consequences for candidates losing NOTA. This drop highlights growing disillusionment with its efficacy as a protest tool. (PTI,2025)[5]

1.1 *Active dissent*

1.1.1 *Theoretical framework*

As per the definition, generally, dissent means "an unwillingness to cooperate with an established source of authority, which can be social, cultural, or governmental. In political theory, dissent has been studied primarily concerning governmental power, inquiring into how and to what extent dissent should be promoted, tolerated, and controlled by a state." (Readhead, 2014a)[6]. Mill defends dissenting expression as crucial for truth and social growth. (Mill,2002)[7]. The role of dissent is associated with thinking in contrast to the conventions of societal norms through the activity of critical thinking, or in a political sense, questioning authority. As Redhead (2014b)[8] explains, dissent, while giving the brief historical background and relevance of dissent in political theory, is the embodiment of critical thinking that poses challenges to conventions and promotes public reasoning, a procedure significant to recognizing the legitimacy of political institutions. The social contract theory advocates that governance must reflect the collective will to maintain legitimacy (Rousseau,2004)[9]. And NOTA upholds the veracity of democratic vitality via reinforcing the importance of Rousseau's social contract theory, emphasizing the mutual obligations between citizens and the governing authority. He believed that laws should be a reflection of the collective interests of society, rather than serving individual or a faction of society. So, dissent becomes an effective tool of course correction when the governance deviates from reflecting the collective desires of the people.

1.1.2 *Comparative analysis*

"Democracy" is a concept that permeates both social imaginaries and Western political institutions. It is primarily linked to mechanisms of equality and broad participation. Republicanism and liberalism principles since the sixteenth century-which tied political organization to notions of national sovereignty to limited participation, initially limited political participation to a narrow group. While the contemporary notion of democracy has grown increasingly complex with the expansion of suffrage to nearly the entire population. If the idea of expressing dissent is seen in other democracies. Ramos (2009)[10] groups blank votes, null votes, and abstentions into a single category, termed "electoral distancing," and examines this phenomenon in light of the thought of key authors in contemporary political theory. Although these three phenomena may have different underlying motivations, this overarching category is used to generalize non-participatory actions. However, this

generalization must be contextualized within specific empirical scenarios to clarify its explanatory power. Many countries have adopted negative voting in several forms, such as NOTA or Blank Ballot Votes, or Write-in blank votes. In a "write-in vote," voters only write the name of the candidate whose name isn't on the list of candidates on the ballot. (Perney,1993)[11]. Ramos described 'Votos Nulos (Null votes)' as a deliberate form of protest wherein individuals participate in the election process but reject given candidates, allowing voters to express dissatisfaction with available candidates. Countries such as France and Belgium have implemented a "None of the above" (NOTA) option electronically, while Brazil, Greece, Ukraine, Chile, Bangladesh, and parts of the U.S. (such as Nevada) offer it through ballot paper. Moreover, Countries like Finland, Sweden, Colombia, and Spain permit blank votes or "write-in" options as a form of recording neutral or protest voting. Similarly, NOTA in India is a parallel mechanism to null votes expressing dissatisfaction without abstaining or withdrawing from the election process, ensuring a more representative democracy, and acts as a guiding factor for political parties to field better candidates. In a 2013 judgment, A bench led by the then-CJI P Sathasivam stated the goal of negative voting as follows: "Negative voting will lead to a systemic change in polls, and political parties will be forced to project clean candidates. The right to reject a candidate is a fundamental freedom of speech and expression under the Constitution, if the right to vote is a statutory right." 4 The citizen's right to vote is protected by Article 326 of the Indian Constitution, read with sections 62 and 79(d) of the RP Act 1951. The notion of the right 'not to' vote provided in section 79(d) is often misunderstood as omission of voting in contrast to the act of voting. However, the Supreme Court in a 2013 judgment4 ordered ECI to incorporate NOTA to safeguard the right "not to" vote after a writ petition under Article 32 was filed contesting specific Conduct of the Election Rules, 1961 (the "Rules") that violated the idea of a "secret ballot." But the petitioner merely endorsed candidate selection, not the decision to visit polling places.

As per the ECI report, a few voters opt for NOTA, recording its low percentage share since the date of its introduction in 2013. A gradual decrease in NOTA votes has been observed throughout the last three Lok Sabha elections, 'from 1.08 % in 2014 to 0.99 % in 2024' (Election Commission of India, 2025)[12]. Bihar had the largest share (2.07%), followed by Gujarat (1.58%), Dadra and Nagar Haveli, and Daman and Diu (2.06%). Nagaland, on the other hand, had the fewest NOTA votes (0.21%), indicating a greater support or alignment with the state's competing candidates. Political rivalry, the importance of regional parties, voter education, and the general electoral climate in each region could all have an impact on these disparate tendencies among states (PTI, 2025)5. By actively selecting or by utilising NOTA as a tool for protest or dissent, it demonstrates the variety of ways people interact with the political process and express their opinions. However, one may have to face a dead end if the efficacy of NOTA is questioned, as there are no legal consequences, which makes it short of being an effective tool for expressing dissent. Recently, A PIL was filed by Shiv Khera in April 2024 seeking to declare elections "null and void" in cases where the NOTA (None of the above) receives the majority of votes. Therefore, the Supreme Court issued a notice on a plea challenging the practice of declaring the second-highest candidate as the winner when NOTA secures the majority, contending that it undermines the very purpose of recording dissatisfaction. It sought to declare elections "null and void" in cases where the NOTA receives the majority of votes. The pleader stated in its submission, emphasizing the positive effect on the turnout in states like Maharashtra, Haryana, Delhi, and Puducherry," where compulsory re-polling by the State Election Commission on majority to NOTA was introduced.[13]

1.2 *Passive dissent*

Non-participation is a form of passive dissent caused by several factors, as argued, depending on the demography and socio-economic factors. Low turnout is a blatant

example of passive dissent, even if there are several reasons for low turnout. Citizens who refrain from voting may do so due to the candidates, distrust in the political system, voter fatigue from frequent elections, or a prolonged election period. Diwaker (2008)[14], in her empirical research, associated declining voter turnout in Western democracies with "a lack of interest in the democratic process," responsible for the veracity of the election results on the grounds of inefficiency in establishing a representative government. As per Lijphart (1997)[15], "Political equality and political participation are both fundamental democratic ideals". Recently, the Election Commission raised a concern about urban apathy, especially among the youth (PIB, 2024)[16], indicating the rural-urban divide. Geys (2006)[17] observes less social pressure to vote in cities since people there are more independent. Moreover, getting informed about candidates or their policies costs in the cities. Conversely, elections in rural regions are typically more intimate, which may result in higher voter turnout (Blank, 1974)[18].

1.2.1 *Research gap*

There is a lack of a clear distinction between active and passive dissent in the existing literature. Particularly, Indian franchise discourse lacks a detailed analysis that links these two forms of dissent to actual electoral behaviour. Existing literature examines voter turnout in isolation, but no existing study has systematically investigated the behavioural, observational, and legal aspects of voter dissent.

1.2.2 *Research problem*

The central problem this study seeks to address is the increasing disconnect between citizens' dissatisfaction with the electoral process and the ineffectiveness of institutional mechanisms meant to capture that dissatisfaction. Passive dissent-in the form of non-voting driven by apathy, distrust, or administrative challenges- is outrightly criticised as democratic disengagement resulting in low turnout. Yet, the substitute tendered in the form of active dissent by NOTA is legally toothless, making it a symbolic gesture rather than a practical means of protest. The study examines the core contradiction wherein the state urges participation but fails to offer a substantial mode of dissent, thus compounding the disengagement it seeks to reform.

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

(1) To identify social, political, and institutional factors affecting political dissent.
(2) To examine regional differences in electoral engagement, using Bihar, Gujarat, Sikkim, and Delhi as case studies
(3) To evaluate the effectiveness of NOTA as a mechanism to show dissatisfaction or protest and assess alternatives
(4) To suggest a way forward through electoral reforms aimed at reducing disengagement and strengthening voter participation in nation-building.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 *Research design*

This study adopts a quantitative descriptive methodology focusing on understanding voter dissent behaviour exhibited during the general elections premised on a behavioural framework to analyse and assess what roles the factors play in determining the individual's decision to vote, abstain or opt for NOTA, based on their perception, motivations, and political participation.

3.2 *Data collection method*

A Structured survey questionnaire was prepared, which was administered through a hybrid mode, i.e., online forms and in-person, to accommodate changing levels of digital accessibility. The questionnaire comprised sections on- a) Demographics- Age, gender, education, occupation, area type, b) Voting behaviour, c) Views regarding NOTA and its effectiveness, d) Opinion on dissent, compulsory voting, and trust in the political system, e) Open-ended feedback- suggestions for electoral reforms and experience of disenfranchisement.

3.3 *Study population*

The study population was all eligible registered voters (18+) in India. Four States, such as Bihar, Gujarat, Delhi, and Sikkim, were selected based on voters across high-NOTA and high voter turnout and low-turnout areas with diverse urban, semi-urban, and rural backgrounds. The rationale behind selecting these four states is that, as per the election data presented by the ECI, with 2.07%, Bihar had the largest share (percentage) of NOTA votes, followed by Gujarat at 1.58%, with moderate usage of NOTA. Delhi was selected to represent the NCR region, as the NCR region has a substantial percentage of urban apathy as identified by the ECI.5 Sikkim was selected to represent the state with the highest voter turnout.[19]

3.4 *Sampling strategy*

The stratified multistage random sampling was adopted in this study. The first stage includes stratification by state based on voter turnout and NOTA statistics. The second stage applied demographic segmentation, including age, gender, education, and type of individuals within polling zones. To balance the study's interpretive goals with resource limitations, a sample of 100 respondents was chosen. For equal representation, each state had 25 responders. Additionally, attempts were made to ensure that rural, urban, and semi-urban areas were equally represented. This size is sufficient to detect meaningful behavioural trends and patterns in dissent without aiming for statistical generalization.

3.5 *Data analysis techniques*

The data analysis employed descriptive and interpretative analysis to present summaries of the behaviour of voters, political awareness level, trust in the system, and opinions on electoral reforms, including the use of a pie chart and bar graph for visual representation. Behavioural profiling was applied to understand how participants made decisions regarding voting, NOTA or abstaining to vote, while qualitative responses were thematically analysed to understand key motivators such as disillusionment, dissatisfaction, etc. The interpretation of results seeks to place political dissent not only as disengagement but as a conscious form of political expression. The analysis was done using Microsoft Excel and Google Sheets.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 *State-wise electoral dissent and engagement patterns*

The compilation of responses indicates a nuanced picture of electoral engagement and views on dissent among Indian voters in the 2024 general election. A state-wise analysis of voter behaviour patterns unveils significant regional variation on major issues. (Figures 1 and 2). Sikkim recorded the highest voter participation (82.4%), but contradictory showed

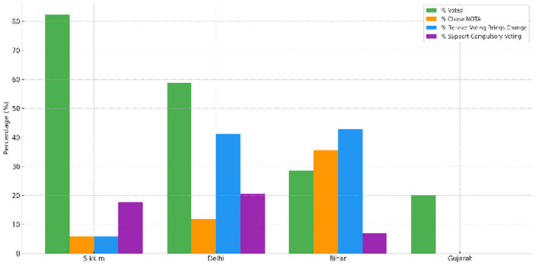


Figure 1. State-wise electoral issues analysis.

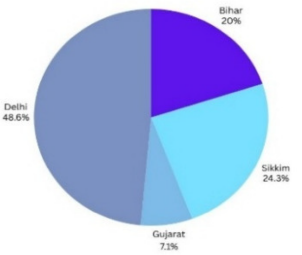


Figure 2. State State-wise distribution of respondents.

the lowest belief (5.9%) that voting can bring change, suggesting that participation is fuelled by civic duty to vote, indicating a culture of voting (participation culture) besides reason lying in a closely knitted community. Delhi showed a moderate turnout (58.8%) and great belief in electoral impact (41.2%), moderate support for compulsory voting (20.6%). Bihar reported high NOTA usage (35.7%), highlighting active dissent, suggesting a lack of trust in candidates fielded by the political parties. Gujarat showed minimal electoral engagement, indicating a gap between participation and trust in the political system. However, scepticism regarding political efficacy remains a common theme. The majority of respondents voted (56.09%), showing civic engagement, while a notable share abstained from voting (43.1%), suggesting myriad reasons like discontent with the system (Figure 3). Among those who voted, the distribution of choice is shown in Figure 4, mostly supporting party candidates with 68.3%, independent candidates with 15%, and 16.7 % selected NOTA, indicating the underlying presence of active dissent. Figure 5 depicts that a significant 69.2% opted for NOTA because they found no suitable candidates. 15.4% indicated that it was a protest vote, while a few percent cited lack of political awareness or peer/media influence. For those who abstained, the varied reasons can be understood through Figure 6, the majority highlighted the major issue to be a lack of trust in political candidates. Logistical challenges and voter fatigue were also cited by the respondents. It reinforces the deep-seated procedural and systemic barriers as significant contributors to passive dissent. Furthermore, it is essential to understand the voting behaviour and beliefs based on region, i.e., Urban, Semi-Urban, Rural (as depicted in Figure 7). Bihar's rural electorate shows deep disillusionment or political alienation, reflected by low participation and high NOTA usage, while its semi-urban voters show complete engagement with mainstream political choices. Delhi's rural and semi-urban voters continue to show engagement in the electoral process, though dissatisfaction manifests through moderate

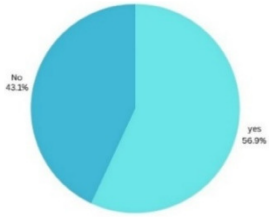


Figure 3. Distribution of respondents based on voting participation in the election.

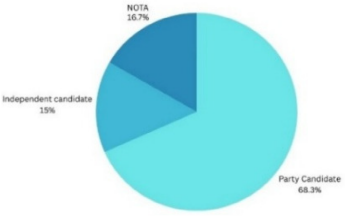


Figure 4. The Voting choice distribution of respondents.

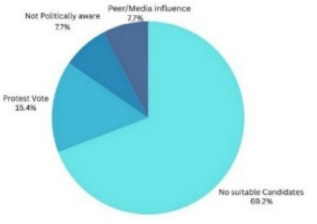


Figure 5. Reasons behind selecting NOTA.

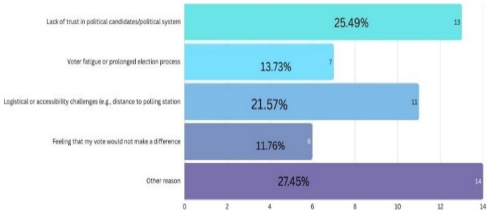


Figure 6. Reasons for abstaining from voting.

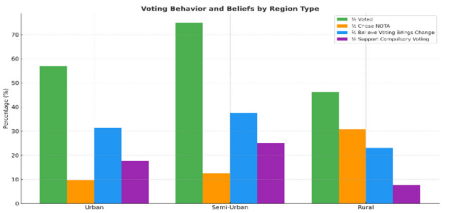


Figure 7. Region wise voting behaviour.

NOTA usage, led by scepticism about the quality of candidates. Despite a strong political presence, Gujarat faces logistical constraints, leading to minimal turnout, indicating systemic barriers to electoral engagement. Sikkim, with its commendably high voter turnout, reflects a participation culture, highlighting that participation does not necessarily equate to confidence in the political system. Across regions, passive dissent, i.e., abstention, led by a lack of trust and fatigue, challenges active dissent, i.e., where NOTA is a symbol of a protest mechanism, although legally ineffective. Thus, the findings underscore the immediate need for electoral reforms to improve accessibility, promote civic education and awareness, and lastly, strengthen institutional mechanisms for meaningful dissent.

Attitude towards political efficacy and Systemic Trust- The responses (Figure 8) to the Likert scale provided critical insight into voters' perceptions of the electoral system, showcasing a dual sentiment within the electorate: electoral engagement alongside crucial scrutiny of political mechanisms. The majority of respondents (65.5%) agreed that voting can bring a change, showcasing faith in democracy, while 20.8% disagreed and 13.9% stayed neutral. However, only 46% of voters believed that NOTA is a valid form of dissent, indicating divided perception on the protest mechanism. When inquired regarding whether not voting is a form of protest, only 19% agreed, suggesting that abstention is not widely taken as a legitimate protest method, which suggests scepticism toward available candidates and also, lack of trust in the tool of active dissent, i.e., NOTA. Meanwhile, merely 35% cited that those administrative challenges affected their participation, while 48.6% expressed dissatisfaction with the current dissent mechanism, showing rooted systemic dissatisfaction as an underlying reason for voter disengagement. Significantly, over 70% strongly endorsed the need for civic education, indicating the need for enhanced voter awareness. This can be viewed in the context of the Election Commission of India's SVEEP strategy, which has been in place for more than ten years and was created to boost participation. Nonetheless, the percentages indicate that the program's chosen approach has to be modified. Additionally, roughly 53% of respondents favoured mandatory voting as a means of increasing voter

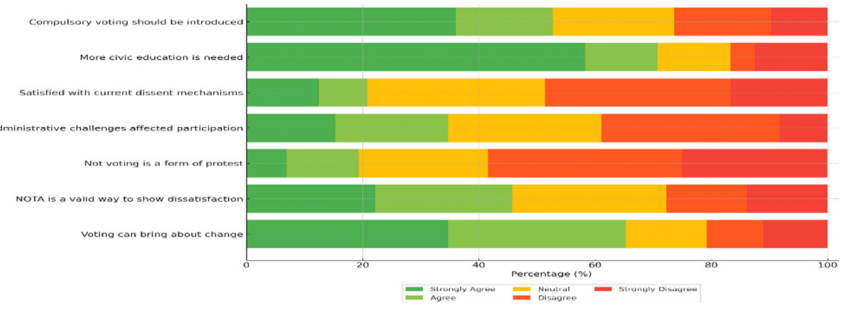


Figure 8. Attitude toward political participation and dissent.

turnout, indicating that more than 50% of respondents support voting as a duty. However, several people pointed to logistical obstacles, voter ID card inaccessibility, and polling booth accessibility as reasons why mandatory voting had not been implemented. Analysing the above pattern in light of existing literature, it is clear that political dissent in India manifests in both passive and active forms. Passive dissent is fuelled by logistical hurdles, distrust, and fatigue, empirically supporting the contention highlighted by Godara (2024) of the causes of low voter turnout. While the cause of active dissent in the form of NOTA is premised on a lack of suitable candidates. It has been a formal tool to record protest; its importance lies between the participation and protest. (Ramos,2009). The thematic analysis of the descriptive questions to the respondents reveals an orchestrated demand for accessibility (45%), Civic education (25%), reforms in NOTA (15%), and transparency (12%). However, 12% highlighted the significance of political dissent as crucial, indicating a lack of conviction in the results of pressing NOTA and, as a result, a lack of desire to vote.

5 CONCLUSION

This study overall highlights that while democratic participation remains substantial, trust in political institutions appears stiff, and dissatisfaction with candidates persists. The study boils down to the following suggestions, along with implementation challenges and policy implications:

5.1 *Civic education*

Voters with better civic education and awareness will understand the value of taking part in the democratic process more, which will increase turnout. SVEEP (Systematic Voters' Education and Electoral Participation) is a flagship programme run by the ECI, established in 2009, for educating voters and boosting voter participation, thereby tackling low turnout and urban apathy. However, the campaign should also incorporate awareness concerning the role of dissent. The focus must be to create a sense of duty to vote, which aligns with the recommendations given by the J.S. Verma Committee on Fundamental Duties.

5.2 *Modernizing the electoral system*

It has become the need of the hour to modernize the electoral system by introducing e-voting or mobile polling stations to enhance accessibility. Australia's laws and policies for increasing voting accessibility and implementing mandatory voting make it a perfect example to follow. First, individuals can vote at any polling place in the state or territory where they now reside. In India and the UK, on the other hand, you have to vote at the precise polling station shown on your ballot. Due to the lack of flexibility, people are often less likely to vote because they think it's a hassle to vote at their local station, the lines at their designated polling location are longer, or their place of employment may be far from the polling place. However, a pilot project implementing e-voting or mobile polling stations at the initial level or in a phased manner in constituencies with high literacy, with a robust verification module to tackle possible fraud, can enhance electoral efficacy.

5.3 *Need for reforms in NOTA*

By invoking legal consequences, NOTA can be strengthened, helping to reduce voter abstention and increase voter turnout. The low NOTA utilisation at the moment indicates voter scepticism regarding its usefulness on the EVMs. So, the changes can be considered, such as if the "none-of-the-above" choice gets more votes than any of the other contenders, no candidate should be proclaimed the winner, and a fresh election should be held.

Additionally, the candidates should be excluded from running for office again. Currently, the NOTA does not have an impact on outcomes as it is treated as invalid. There should be an amendment in section 79(d) of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, and the Conduct of Election Rules,1961, to make NOTA compulsory in all elections, as it is not mandatory in all elections.

5.4 *One Nation, One Vote*

This policy is yet to become a reality; however, this can contribute to reducing systemic challenges and can also counter voter fatigue.

5.5 *Compulsory voting*

After the aforementioned suggestions are well implemented, compulsory voting should be introduced to counter voter apathy and increase voter turnout. In the survey conducted, more than 50% supported the introduction of compulsory voting.

As for future research, there is a need for conducting qualitative research to understand the voter dissatisfaction with more in-depth statistical research at a large scale to fully examine the early NOTA tendencies as well as the underlying causes affecting low turnout in India.

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Interim government in Bangladesh: A way forward

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ABSTRACT: Against the backdrop of political, economic and social crises taking place in 2024, this research paper critically examines why and how the Interim Government emerged in Bangladesh. The study uses secondary data sources to examines the discourse on transitional governance mechanisms to the extent that efforts to restore electoral credibility, rising political polarization, economic vulnerabilities and civic dissatisfaction, has made the discourse necessary. Historical analysis of Bangladesh's caretaker governments and comparative frameworks from transitional democracies such as Nepal and Pakistan highlight both the potential and pitfalls of interim arrangements. The risks are high of normalizing extra constitutionally, but nobody is suggesting that in the absence of a carefully constructed Interim Government that is time bound, is rooted in constitutionalism and the inclusive dialogue, public trust can be restored and electoral integrity safeguarded as well as democracy stabilised. The study highlights civilian oversight and international engagement as a future pathway of democracy but at the same time that does not undercut institutional resilience. The research shows that implementation will be successful only with political consensus, judicial safeguards, and civic vigilance, providing Bangladesh with a unique moment of restoring democracy in the face of internal and external pressures.

Keywords: Interim Government, Political Crisis, Democracy in Bangladesh, Governance Transition, Constitutional Framework etc.

1 INTRODUCTION

Out of a country with a political history defined by military interventions, populist leaderships and democratic experiments, Bangladesh is again at a crossroads. It emerges as a result of demand and discussion of an Interim Government in 2024, in response to entrenched political stalemates, questions about electoral legitimacy and the overall governance crisis that has become evident over the recent years. This paper attempts to analyse the need, difficulties, and possible ways forward for an Interim Government in Bangladesh which has been proposed in different political, civil, and even economic sectors[1].

Bangladesh has historically experienced various governance crises marked by the inability of mainstream political parties to agree on the most fundamental democratic processes that have led to interventions—either judicial, administrative, or military. It is not unprecedented that such a demand calls for a neutral interim administration. The Caretaker Government system (CTG), which was the most notable precedent was in place from 1996 to 2011 until it was heavily criticised and abolished[2]. The constitution offered a neutral, non-partisan oversight of

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elections but also highlighted the weakness in a democratic backsliding when the military backed interim government of 2006 to 2008 over stepped beyond its constitutional mandate[3].

The political, economic, and social quagmire that Bangladesh is plunged into are the causes of the rising demand for a new Interim Government in 2024. Trust between ruling and opposition parties in Bangladesh has been in steady erosion. An environment of election rigging charges, arbitrary arrest of opposition leaders, curtailing of press freedoms and politicisation of state institutions has made free and fair elections nearly impossible without third party intervention[4]. The absence of credible electoral mechanism is of course mere political problem; rather it goes to the heart of democratic legitimacy.

Bangladesh has always been celebrated for its robust growth rates that were driven mainly by its garment industry, remittances, and a burgeoning service sector. The global shocks of the past few years, the COVID-19 pandemic, higher and rising inflation, energy crises and supply chain shock, have brought to the surface vulnerabilities in the system[5]. Also, economic inequality has widened and the rural urban gap widened. Economic disenfranchisement is a feeling that many citizens have and see the government as more leaning towards the interests of the elite business over common welfare, which fuel broader discontent and calls for systemic political correction.

Bangladesh has been going through a major demographic and technological transformation socially. A large part of the population is the youth, and they are becoming ever so vocal about topics like corruption, unemployment, human rights and democratic governance. Even though civic activism is alive, as shown by the Shahbagh protests (2013) and the student-led road safety protests (2018), there are also the limits on the sort of tolerance that the establishment is willing to extend. In such an era of increasing civic awareness, calls for a neutral interim authority are not only calls for procedural tenets but rather for a more just and egalitarian governance model[6]. It is therefore the idea of an Interim Government today that looks like a civilian, constitutionally anchored, and time-bound arrangement deliberately disentangling itself from the model of military dominance[7].

Constitutional challenges also make it difficult to talk. The Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution abolished the Caretaker Government system hence there is no clear legal provision for founding of an Interim Government. Hence, any such movement toward such an arrangement would involve either a significant constitutional reinterpretation or a consensus, outside of the constitution, but popularly sanctioned, arrangements. The debate is being precipitated by this legal ambiguity which carries the urgency of any delay or misstep making governance vacuums deeper, conflicts worsened and destabilizing forces invited.

International dimensions also have a subtle but rather influential role. The importance of free and democratic elections in Bangladesh has been emphasized by global actors such as the United States, the European Union and the neighbouring India have remained a consistent point[8]. Bangladesh's strategic importance in South Asia (sharing a border with India, China's rising regional clout through infrastructural investments, and the dynamics of regional refugees (especially the Rohingya crisis)), its relevance in international politics makes political stability in the country through democratic processes of critical international interest[9].

Therefore, the controversy surrounding the Interim Government in 2024 cannot be limited to an internal political war, it is a complex blend of the historical experience, political needs, economic grievances, social changes, legal challenges, geopolitical calculations[10]. Therefore, this paper attempts to critically evaluate, whether an Interim Government is required, its possible structure, outcomes that might arise and what means Bangladesh could follow to opt out of this without undermining its democratic aspirations.

2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this present study, the descriptive research design has been adopted and secondary data analysis has been used exclusively. Due to political sensitivity and the dynamic nature of governance context of Bangladesh, field surveys or interviews were considered impractical to

collect primary data. Instead, the research bases insights from already published scholarly articles and government reports, legal documents, news sources, and reports of international organizations monitoring governance trends in Bangladesh.

The study is qualitative and relies on thematic analysis to interpret data and evaluate the necessity, the implications of, and path ways to an Interim Government. It also employs a comparative historical method, comparing former interim arrangements, most especially the 1996–2011 caretaker system, and other governance models in use in other countries in the process of political transition, including Nepal and Pakistan.

Additionally, academic journals, constitutional commentaries, political analyses in the form of think tank reports and reports from organizations such as Freedom House, International Crisis Group and the United Nations were consulted to build a comprehensive understanding of the changing landscape of democracy in Bangladesh.

3 SCOPE OF STUDY

The following dimensions are included under the scope:

- **Temporal Scope:** The period between 2021 and 2024 is the focus with a few historical precedents, post 1991 democratic restoration, being referred to.
- **Scope:** This is a study that exclusively focused on Bangladesh, while comparative references to other South Asian transitions have been incorporated for the purpose of analytical enrichment.
- **Analysis:** The analysis comprises of political instability, electoral credibility, governance vacuums, socio economic grievances, constitutional interests and security dimensions.
- **Political Process:** The role of the judiciary, political parties, civil society, the Election Commission, the military establishment, and other actors at the international level in influencing the political process are considered.

4 RESEARCH QUESTION

The general research questions that guide the study are:

(1) What are the political, economic and social factors that require a discussion on an Interim Government in Bangladesh in 2024?
(2) What are the lessons that could be learned from past experiences of caretaker and interim arrangements and how did past experiences with caretaker arrangements and interim arrangements shape the current discourse?
(3) Establishment of a new Interim Government would have what constitutional, political, and security implications?

5 OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

The objectives of this research are described as follows:

- To analyse critically the causes to the demand for an Interim Government in Bangladesh as per political, economic and social dimensions.
- The general search is to evaluate the need and validity for an Interim Government mechanism based on historical precedents and constitutional troubles.
- It will explore the political, social, economic, and security related consequences of an Interim Government model in Bangladesh.
- To provide a coherent, viable proposal of what an Interim Government should be able to propose to provide credible elections and democratic stability.

6 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The political, economic and social grievances have eroded public trust in the existing governance structures and therefore there is the need for an Interim Government in Bangladesh in 2024[11]. The idea of an Interim Government can be demonstrated crucial in restoring credibility to democracy, however, only if it is designed within constitutional and participatory parameters as a matter of extreme care, based on an analysis of historical patterns, contemporary trends and comparative frameworks[12].

Most of the demand for an Interim Government is based on perceived delegitimization of electoral processes. Claims of rigging, voter suppression, biased rulings by judiciary, and contraction for the space of the opposition politics have mounted over consecutive electoral cycles[13]. The mistrust left in the wake of the 2018 general elections, widely criticized by international observers for being an instance of a lack of transparency, is in part due to the fact that the incumbent administration cannot oversee free and fair elections on its own[14]. Any electoral process without a credible transitional mechanism will be deemed illegitimate, and the political polarization will be furthered and there will be significant civil unrest.

The side of political instability has been economically far reaching. Despite once touting Bangladesh's economic miracle (for its steady growth in textile and remittance sectors), complications of high inflationary pressures, devaluation of the currency, energy shortages, and growing foreign debt are taking their toll on the country[15]. The governance deficit comes intrinsically tied with investor confidence; if Bangladesh does not address it, not only will economic stagnation become a reality, but so will the rollback of hard-earned development gains. If an Interim Government could be established and accepted by the political spectrum, there would be the stability needed to reassure at home and abroad during a critical electoral transition[16].

Just as alarming are the social consequences of the impasse as it currently stands. Amongst youth, there is increasingly rising unemployment, the deterioration of public services and the curtailment of civic freedoms have come together to create an environment rooted in rampant dissatisfaction[17]. Student led and civil society group movements are a call to structural reforms instead of mere electoral rituals. An Interim Government, therefore, can also act as a springboard to electoral management as well as to open up dialogue on broader social and political reforms that would answer to the aspirations of a changing demographic landscape[18].

But there are risks and too many irrecoverable consequences that come with the establishment of an Interim Government. From a political point of view, there is a risk of creating a precedent of extra-constitutional arrangements becoming institutionalised, thus weakening the long-term democratic strength[19]. In addition, an Interim Government can also be manipulated by vested interests, as the 2006–08 caretaker regime did and, unfortunately, repeated the mistake of extending its tenure under military influence and political engineering. The problem is that an interim arrangement, which has to be time bound, transparently constituted, and broadly acceptable to all main stakeholders, is a challenge[20].

Security dimensions of the governance vacuum are also equally important. During past crises, politics has been militarised and security forces have been used to subdue dissent in Bangladesh. Consequently, an Interim Government must therefore make sure of civilian control over security agencies and steer clear of militarised approaches to law and order[21]. If this does not happen, public alienation can become even further and it can lead to the rise of insurgent movements, especially among marginalised communities and radicalised youth groups. This is the age of regional volatility; conflict in bordering Myanmar, refugee crises and transnational security threats: Bangladesh cannot afford internal destabilization[22].

It allows a comparison of useful insight. The imperfect trail of Nepal's handling of interim arrangements in its democratic transition to note, however, that the country's experience with interim arrangements reflects the importance of broad political consensus and inclusive constitutional processes[23]. Pakistan's caretaker governments, while too flawed to offer many lessons, reflect on the dangers of judges encroaching on power and militias dictatorship[24]. The experiences highlight that interim administrations should function under

clearly defined legal framework, be transparent, and they must never creep into the mission. These examples must be taken by Bangladesh to learn from; to design mechanisms which protect the interim body from overextension or politicisation[25].

Any future model of an Interim Government will have to meet a number of key criteria. The establishment of such a first step should occur first through an inclusive political dialogue among all major parties, civil society organisations, and constitutional experts rather than unilaterally by executive or military action[26]. Second, its mandate should strictly be limited to overseeing free and fair elections, without any powers to take on a role of initiating long term policy changes or political reordering[27]. Third, the interim leadership should be formed by people of proved neutrality, integrity and public trust, preferably retired jurists, senior bureaucrats, and respected figures from the civil society[28]. Fourth, it should be essential that there is a Fourth, an independent and empowered Election Commission that should be independent operationally and financially.

A formidable obstacle occurs constitutionally with the lack of a current provision for a caretaker or interim government after the 15th Amendment[29]. Nevertheless, there are ways out: constitutional amendment with sunset clauses, judicially supervised bargain, or even parliamentary bargain resolution given constitutional order. The process can further be legitimized with public support and international monitoring so as to guarantee transparency and ensure that the process is not captured by the elite[30].

Overall, the analysis argues that although an Interim Government is not the solution to all problems, it appears to be increasingly necessary, considering that Bangladesh's political paralysis at present. Risks can be tolerated if the potential benefits — restoring electoral credibility, buying peace between at least two political classes, and avoiding economic and social collapse — are properly weighed for the model[31]. Without innovation and building a transitional mechanism, Bangladesh could be driven into deeper political and economic crises and even threaten domestic peace as well as regional stability. And therefore, bold but cautious action, based on constitutionalism, inclusivity, democratic accountability[32].

7 CONCLUSION

In light of the unfolding of a political crisis in Bangladesh in 2024, critical consideration of mechanisms of governance, which could rehabilitate democratic legitimacy, socio political stability as well as economic confidence is sought. This research rested on careful analysis of causes, consequences and comparative frameworks to demonstrate that although not perfect, an Interim Government has become more and more necessary in view of the acute governance vacuum and deterioration of public trust in electoral processes.

It seems that the state is a fragile one that was formed anew and can be proven to lack credibility for elections, without systemic changes. Past arrangements for caretaker were a temporary relief, but they also showed how unchecked military and judicial overreach can be perils. Consequently, any future Interim Government must be based on strict constitutionalism, time bound mandates and a very broad political consensus in order to avoid historical errors.

Secondly, the comparative analysis of Nepal and Pakistan is further strengthened by highlighting that interim solutions need to be transparent, inclusive, and the scope of it limited. Bangladesh needs to innovate constitutionally sanctioned ways to institutionalise transitional governance without breaking the democratic continuity through amendments, judicial interpretations or political pacts.

In essence, the necessity of an Interim Government stems not merely from political expediency but from an existential need to salvage Bangladesh's democratic project. An interim arrangement along inclusive, civilian lines, underpinned by the constitution, can be a way out to peaceful political transitions, regained public trust, and restored international credibility. Success, though, depends on all of the political will of domestic actors, civil society vigilance and the international community watching. This critical juncture needs bold yet cautious steps that will help Bangladesh not off track on democratic consolidation.

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Homegrown terrorism and the crisis of multiculturalism in Britain: Navigating identity, loyalty, and belonging

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ABSTRACT: The experience of homegrown terrorism has brought two major challenges to Britain. The allegiance of Muslims to the Umma, a transnational entity, is often cited as evidence of weakened loyalty to the nation-state. This allegiance becomes especially problematic after terror attacks. What is often overlooked is that British Muslims, like any other group, are not a homogenized community. Their lives are not uniformly guided by the same principles, whether derived from the Quran or not. Both the right wing in Britain and Muslim extremist organizations use fixed identities for majority and minority groups. This combines with criticism of multiculturalism, which is accused of freezing identities and limiting possibilities for change or interaction between these groups. Following terror attacks, there has been increased critique of multiculturalism, a negative perception of Islam and Muslims, and a shift from integration toward community cohesion models. Additionally, racism's basis has shifted from race to religion. Loopholes in anti-racist laws and flaws in the community cohesion agenda have facilitated this transition.

Keywords: Terrorism, Multiculturalism, Cohesion, Discrimination, Identity

1 INTRODUCTION

Contemporary Britain is faced with two strong challenges: first, that British Muslims display dual allegiance, that is to say they are British citizens as well as members of an ubiquitous community, the Umma (the Muslim community of the believer). Second is the way in which it has led to the dissolution of the boundaries between the national and the international. While dealing with terror Britain has been faced with a dilemma. As a liberal democracy, Britain has to protect the rights and liberties of all its citizens; on the other hand, it has to focus on international security and the 'War on Terror'. Britain's experience with homegrown terrorism has further complicated these two roles. Not only does it have to address the constant redefining of what it means to be a citizen or British, it also has to concern itself with the majority-minority stereotypes about each other.

Britain's immigration and security issues become especially complex when some citizens are seen as potential carriers of threats from outside UK borders, creating forced binaries between 'citizen' and 'other.' When Muslims are demonized as backward or anti-modern, they are positioned opposite to what is considered progressive and 'Western.' Both Radical Muslims and Far Right groups rely on such rigid binaries. Some argue multiculturalism also works with frozen identities. The British Right often portrays Muslim demands as purely religious and anti-British, refusing to recognize them as part of a democratic process. The simple dichotomy between Muslims and Europe, combined with the actions of groups like Hizb al-Tahrir, has delegitimized moderate Islam and Muslim groups aligned with the Western political system.

This debate reveals how national and international security concerns mix when British citizens are suspected as external threats. When one part of a citizen's identity conflicts with

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another, making coexistence appear impossible, the challenge for the British state intensifies.[1] Other tensions are evident too, such as the shift toward integration and social cohesion, and the rise of Muslim radicalization, all cited as signs of multiculturalism's retreat. Tony Blair emphasized the need to address these threats on multiple levels.[2]

There has been a shift from neglect of Britishness to its firm affirmation, now promoted as the sole ideal of membership. Like much of Europe, Britain has seen a revival of the Far Right through nationalist rhetoric and media-savvy populism. The British Parliament in 2009 noted an increase in right-wing extremists and populist parties, such as the BNP, who have won notable votes alongside similar parties across Europe.[3]

These right-wing campaigns stem from socio-economic, ideological, and structural contexts. They differ by explicitly dividing society into an "Us" identity, based on religion, region, or ethnicity and a "Them." After 9/11 and 7/7, such divisions intensified between potential terrorists and targets in Britain. While this trend is widespread, there are important exceptions.[4] For example, the BNP's attempt to exploit the murder of Lee Rigby in 2013 was met with massive protests from anti-EDL groups across multiple cities, and strong condemnation from Muslim communities. Rafiq Hayat, president of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Association UK, stated:

"We stand united with the rest of the country in sharing the deep sorrow and pain following the horrific senseless attack... Such acts of violence have no place in Islam and can never be justified."[5]

There is also growing disenchantment with earlier integration models, and a move toward 'community cohesion.' In the 1960s, assimilation was rejected in favour of integration. Roy Jenkins, former UK Home Secretary, described integration as "equal opportunity, coupled with cultural diversity, in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance." Integration promised the right to cultural expression and led to multiculturalism, not from government goodwill, but from minority communities' struggles. Bourne wrote:

"Struggles to wear the turban at work, struggles against non-nationals having to report to the police regularly, struggles for equal pay ... Multiculturalism emerged out of group-based fights for equality and justice."[6]

2 ANXIETY AROUND MULTICULTURALISM

When examining the reasons behind these developments, both domestic causes, like the failure of multiculturalism and rising Islamophobia and foreign policy factors, particularly Iraq and Palestine, are often cited. Many argue addressing these factors could help resolve terrorism. The government's taskforce on *Working Together to Prevent Extremism* emphasized foreign policy's role in terrorism, with academics, journalists, and policymakers contributing to this discussion.[7]

Most conclusions point to multiculturalism's failure or weakening as a cause of increased domestic terrorism. The debate usually splits between those blaming too much multiculturalism and those saying there has been too little. Even critics who deny a direct link agree multiculturalism hasn't been effective positively. Following terrorist attacks, British multiculturalism is often declared dead, blamed on Radical Islam. By 2004, civil society and centre-left groups held seminars and published works like *Beyond Multiculturalism* and *Is Multiculturalism Dead?* discussing how to balance equality, cultural difference, and shared values. New Labour's Foreign Policy Centre produced manuals addressing multiculturalism. Some argue societies must regularly assess if cultural and political structures reflect changing populations. The CMEB praised the government's claim that "every colour is a good colour" and recommended formally declaring Britain multicultural to reduce inequalities tied to minority cultural differences.

In 2001, riots in mainly Muslim northern towns prompted Home Secretary David Blunkett to promote respect for ethnic diversity and launch a community review. The Cantle

report concluded some Muslim communities tended toward self-segregation, a key criticism against multiculturalism. (Cantle 2001) This "parallel lives" concept explained perceived Muslim self-isolation but did not fully capture anti-Muslim sentiment. Post 7/7, the IHRC reported about 200 Islamophobic incidents, including physical attacks and vandalism. One stabbing included attackers shouting "Taliban." (IHRC 2005). Critics argue multiculturalism caused ethnic ghettos, Muslim enclaves, and national fragmentation, prioritizing Muslim ways over British values and encouraging domestic terrorism. The London bombings supposedly ended multiculturalism by exposing how difference-focused policies fostered minority segregation. The backlash after 9/11 and 7/7 followed a decade of disillusionment with multiculturalism, blamed for freezing identities and weakening national cohesion. The 2007 withdrawal of the national curriculum's "common values" and rise of faith schools were seen as increasing isolation. As terror proved homegrown, multiculturalism was faulted for failing to address Muslim alienation and support for violence. The view is it has not fully integrated Muslims into mainstream society.

Two broad perspectives emerge. One maintains that an emphasis on integration represents a retreat from multiculturalism—Rogers Brubaker (2001) describes this shift as moving from "differentialism" to a "new assimilationism," highlighting a shift away from recognizing cultural differences toward a more universal model of citizenship, and Christian Joppke (2004) similarly identifies the rise of centrist "civic integration" policies at the expense of multicultural approaches. In contrast, thinkers like Will Kymlicka and Keith Banting argue that multiculturalism has evolved and adapted by integrating civic integration, forming a blended model that retains its core principles (Kymlicka and Banting 2006). Kymlicka (2001) contends that combining multiculturalism with civic integration is empowering, making the idea of retreat from multiculturalism misleading. Finally, Modood and Meer (2009) reject framing this as a simple dichotomy, asserting that claims of multiculturalism's retreat are exaggerated.

3 WORRY OVER ISLAM AND MUSLIMS

For some, multiculturalism has caused segregation by focusing too much on minority 'difference'; for others, it has failed to address these differences, causing alienation among Muslim communities. Though opposing, both criticisms blame multiculturalism for disorder, and Muslim citizens' relationship with the British state has come under intense scrutiny. This ties into debates about counter-terrorism measures causing loss of rights, especially for Muslims.

The 7/7 attacks were quickly labeled terrorism, with Muslims blamed. The uncritical linking of Muslim identity with terrorism became a major problem. When this association is fixed, the issue deepens. Muslim radicalization was seen as the greatest threat, with all Muslim radicalism equated with terrorism. Questions about multiculturalism were important before terrorist attacks but became urgent afterward. The 2001 northern England riots—spanning towns like Oldham, Burnley, Bradford, and Leeds—reflected deep-rooted segregation, poverty, and limited daily interaction between white and South Asian communities, often interpreted primarily as economic struggles (Christian Science Monitor 2001; Kundnani 2001; LA Times 2001). Following 9/11 and the increasing "turn to Islam," Huntington's Clash of Civilizations thesis gained renewed relevance, reinforcing narratives of a fundamental incompatibility between Western and Muslim civilizations. This posed a challenge to the vision of a multicultural Britain capable of integrating diverse communities (Middle East Eye 2021; New Yorker 2015).

Across Europe, debates on multiculturalism, identity, religion, and secularism reveal anxiety about Islam. This is not just prejudice. The growing Muslim presence amid terror concerns worries Britain. In the West, Islam is not just one identity but challenges what it means to be Briton or European. Immigration is often equated with Islam because most immigrants in Europe are Muslim, reinforcing Muslim "otherness." Cultural, immigrant, racial, religious, and socio-economic marginalization combine, making religion and race key

markers dividing immigrants into assimilable or alien groups. After terror attacks, the British state made security central to its dealings with Muslim citizens, defining certain Islam forms as linked to terrorism and aiming to curb threats from outside borders. Yet, Muslim Britons are citizens entitled to equal rights. Citizenship must ensure no one is treated merely as a security risk. Allen writes, "British Muslims are in a unique situation among Muslims in Europe and [this] will play an important role in the dynamics of representation and future relationship with the state."

Two views emerge. One argues Muslim organizations' involvement in foreign policy and community cohesion show Muslims are not wholesale threats. Toby Archer writes the 'securitization of immigration' poorly explains British Muslims. As citizens, they cannot be strictly defined as threats. Archer sees Muslim Britons as insider citizens. Though the state highlights Muslim "otherness" through transnationalism, Muslims remain British citizens. Securitization claims lack broad acceptance. Muslim participation in democracy suggests no inherent conflict between British citizenship and transnational Muslim identity. Harsh exclusion is untenable.

Archer argues that "the fact that British Muslims are insider (Britain-born) citizens makes the securitization claim less believable," acknowledging discomfort with some Islamic expressions and state policies, yet emphasizing that the perception of Muslims as inherent threats remains marginal and is treated with caution by political figures (Archer, n.d.). However, many Muslims view counter-terrorism legislation as problematic. As the Jack Straw report highlighted, out of 1,471 individuals arrested under terrorism provisions since 9/11, only 340 were ever charged—two-thirds were eventually released without charges (Travis and Hirsch 2009).

The second perspective, articulated by McLoughlin (2005), suggests that new crises deepen a moral panic around those deemed "in but not of the West," viewing transnationalism itself as a threat (McLoughlin 2005). This aligns with Didier Bigo's argument that risk anxiety in England stems from a "fear of losing control over territorial boundaries," framing British Muslims as potential disruptors of societal harmony and security (Bigo 2002). Meanwhile, Huysmans and Buonfino describe this as the "politics of unease," where governance of Muslims occurs through discourses that interweave apprehension and risk—shaping policy responses (Huysmans and Buonfino 2008).

The community cohesion agenda links anxieties over Islamic radicalization, terrorism, extremism, and ethnic separatism to social policies in housing and education. It assumes Britain's culture divides neatly into ethnic and religious groups, ignoring that deprivation, not diversity, is the biggest threat. Poverty and disadvantage, more than ethnicity, undermine cohesion.

4 WHAT IS REALLY HAPPENING?

Multiculturalism's nerve to preserve 'difference'—criticized for focusing so much on difference that British commonality fades—is blamed for justifying otherization. If multiculturalism cannot explain why only British Muslims must constantly "prove" loyalty despite long residence, its policies are offensive. If centuries-old racism rebrands itself as fighting terror and security, multiculturalism fails its basic promise of respect for cultures and ways of life. It is insincere if it cannot protect minority cultures from majority hostility. Critics accuse multiculturalism of encouraging domestic terrorism but offer no concrete policies to support this. Instead, multiculturalism deserves blame for freezing identities of both majority and minority groups—a weakness partly rooted in its achievements. While recognizing individuals' attachment to communities is laudable, multiculturalism errs by equating community membership with inherent loyalty struggles for security.

Many post-terror efforts declared multiculturalism dead, making it fashionable to blame it for Britain's problems and portraying Muslims as anti-British. However, other accounts offer different views. Overemphasis on multicultural weaknesses obscures other important developments. Blaming multiculturalism for accommodating radical Islamist tendencies is blaming it for goals it never set. Multiculturalism is one model of accommodating difference; Islamic radicalism is a more violent method of asserting difference. Reducing radicalism to terrorism misreads a variety of developments. Focusing solely on multicultural failings or majority–minority debates diverts attention from more pressing concerns, such as British Muslim youth's disillusionment with state foreign policy on Iraq, Afghanistan, and Palestine (Abbas 2017; Casey 2016). The socio-economic background of the 7/7 bombers was deliberately obscured. Abbas, Modood, and Bourne argue that Muslim-majority areas are characterized by poverty, under-resourced education systems, and limited job opportunities (Abbas 2005; Bourne 2008; Modood 2002). These same locales—many the sites of the 2001 riots—were established as industrial hubs in the 1950s, relying heavily on Asian labor. As traditional industries declined without replacement, local employment prospects diminished sharply (Bourne 2008; Modood 2002).

Rather than recognizing harsh economic conditions and racial discrimination, minorities are blamed for isolation. The neglected question is why one community and every member must bear the brunt of a terror-stricken world? Why does every member receive the terrorist label, and how does this image embed in public memory? Despite racial equality proclamations, British Muslim citizens face suspicion, marginalization, and hostility from government and society. Unemployment and marginalization reflect socio-economic failures, resolvable by social and economic policies. Using cultural, racial, or religious explanations only justifies state apathy. This is not to deny cultural or religious importance, but they are not primarily responsible for joblessness or social exclusion. When multiculturalism shifts from social policy to state-security issues (attitudes toward Arabs and Muslims post-9/11), when groups disrespecting human rights are homogenized, when threats are exaggerated, when one citizen group is negatively framed, and when true multiculturalism disappears, multiculturalism gets blamed.

Another challenge for the British state is managing forced bifurcations — the binary distinctions fostered by post-9/11 "War on Terror" rhetoric, which frames issues in stark terms of good versus evil. Werbner refers to this as "fabulation"(Werbner 2006). Bruce B. Lawrence (2000) notes that during the 1990s, Euro-American journalists promoted the message "Islam is one, and Islam is dangerous", producing homogenizing and alarmist discourse.[8] Hizb al-Tahrir frames the West as a monolithic aggressor against Islam, often citing Iraq and emphasizes the incompatibility between Islamic life and Western democracy, sometimes dismissing democratic participation as inferior to allegiance to the global Muslim Umma (Hizb al-Tahrir, n.d.). Akhtar writes:

" ... More important than Western occupation of Muslim land was the failure of the US and UK to listen to democratic protest, allowing capital to be made of the futility of trying to work within the Western system."[9]

How multicultural discourse incorporates religion, especially Islam, impacts how the state includes Muslim citizens. After 9/11, Islam was 'politicised' and Muslims 'securitized.' This conflicts with secular European views that see religion's decline as progress. The shift from color racism exemplifies this. 'Colour-racism' declined in the 1980s. 'Black' split into blacks and Asians, and 'Asian' lost political salience as South Asian communities, especially Muslims, prioritized religion over national origins. Political crises involving Muslims: Rushdie affair, Gulf War, faith school controversies, 9/11, Afghanistan and Iraq wars, 7/7 bombing, strengthened this belief. For younger generations, 'Asian' remains only a hybrid British-Asian identity; 'Muslim' emerged as the main communal category.

The delinking of Islam and ethnicity nuanced Britain's religious discourse. Race gave way to religion as the main political fault line. Religion and race remain key markers dividing

immigrants into assimilable or alien. The growing presence of Islam does not necessarily indicate a religious revival. Abbas argues what appears as a 'return to religion' is a complex phenomenon providing individuals constrained by circumstances with alternative ideology, belonging, and political mobilization. The rise in psychological allegiance in Britain is a reaction to ongoing attacks on Muslim identity and citizenship rights, not increased religious practice.

NOTES

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Balancing privacy and practicality in the age of technology: A comparative analysis of the EU general data protection regulation and India's digital personal data protection act

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ABSTRACT: This paper explores a comprehensive comparison between the "European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)" and India's "Digital Personal Data Protection Act (DPDPA)". The relativescrutiny examines the two legal structures based on their historical context, scope, applicability, relevant stakeholders, individual's personal data classification, legal provisions for cross-border data transfers, breach reporting, data processing, children's rights, and associated fines. The analysis reveals the GDPR's detailed instructions compared to the DPDPA's nascent framework. The study concludes with the potential implications and suggestions for future legislation.

1 INTRODUCTION

In the digital age, the creation of privacy and data protection regulations has grown more crucial. The internet's and digital technologies' explosive growth has brought attention to the critical "need for strong regulatory frameworks to safeguard privacy and personal information. China's Personal Information Protection Law, India's Digital Personal Data Protection Act, (DPDPA) and the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) are significant legislative responses to these challenges, each reflecting different socio-economic, cultural and legal contexts".

2 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Understanding the evolution of data protection laws requires a grasp of both the historical context in which they were developed and the intent behind these legislative measures. The exponential growth of digital technology over the last two decades has significantly transformed the approach personal information is composed, stored, and processed, and potential threat it poses to society, amplifying The necessity of complete data protection laws that are robust, dynamic, and sensitive to changing technological landscapes.

Data protection legislation globally has typically been motivated by two main factors: a desire to safeguard the rights of folks in relation access their private information and the necessity of controlling data flow in the digital economy. In the modern world, personal data has grown to be a very important resource, propelling digital economies and facilitating developments in fields like machine learning and artificial intelligence. Therefore, protecting

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people's right to privacy and upholding public confidence in digital technologies depend heavily on the safe management and moral application of personal data.

2.1 *Historical context of GDPR and DPDPA*

The EU passed the historic GDPR to safeguard its citizens' "right to privacy". "The 1995 Data Protection Directive [1] was superseded by it on May 25, 2018". "Transparency, purpose limitation, data minimization, accuracy, storage limitation, integrity, and confidentiality are among the fundamental tenets of" "GDPR". Its extraterritorial applicability, which means businesses "outside the EU that handle the data of EU residents" must also comply, gives it a worldwide impact". [2]

To the contrary, the "DPDPAct is India's attempt" at a comprehensive data protection framework. Initiated by the "Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY)," the Act's first plan was released forintended stakeholder input in, 2022 [3] and it was subsequently withdrawn. A new draft was released in 2023 which was subsequently passed by the parliament in 2024. This legislation comes as the latest in a series of draft proposals since 2018, aiming to address "Privacy and data protection in the particular situation of the nation". The DPDPA, though inspired by GDPR in some aspects, is rooted in India's specific socio-cultural and legal landscape. It was necessitated by the famous Puttaswamy judgement wherein the apex court recognised "privacy as a fundamental right". "As a result", Justice Srikrishna committee was formed which presented first draft of the act. The current act draws its substance from the recommendations of the committee.

2.2 *Purpose of the study*

The rationale of this study is to provide a "detailed comparative analysis between GDPR and DPDPA". "With privacy and data security" becoming central to the digital age, understanding these legislations' similarities, differences, strengths, and weaknesses becomes crucial. By examining their historical context, scope, applicability, concerned parties, Our goals include the categorization "of personal data, the legal foundation for data processing, children's rights, breach reporting, cross-border data transfers", and fines. to offer insights into two distinct approaches to data protection. Furthermore, the study intends to contribute to the global conversation on data privacy, providing stakeholders with a nuanced understanding of the topic and suggesting recommendations for future legislation.

3 "OVERVIEW OF THE GDPR"

The "European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)" is a pioneering legal framework that revolutionizes data privacy laws across Europe and beyond. Enforced from May 25, 2018, it aims to unify data protection across all member states and uphold citizens' right to data privacy. It imposed criminal liability for noncompliance with the provisions of "GDPR".

3.1 *Development and adoption*

The GDPR is not the EU's first legislative frameworkimplemented to protect personal information. It replaces the 1995 Data Protection Directive [4], an instrument that, though crucial at its time, did not suffice to address the rapidly evolving digital landscape. GDPR was adopted on April 27, 2016, after four years of rigorous negotiation and development, and became fully applicable on May 25, 2018 [5]. Its development involved a robust consultative process, including inputs from "stakeholders such as businesses, civil society organizations, and data protection authorities".

3.2 *Scope and applicability*

The GDPR pertains to all EU member states and any global entity handling people's personal data inside theEU [6]. One of its groundbreaking features is its extraterritoriality; organizations "outside the EU that provide goods or services to EU citizens or keep an eye on their activities must also comply with the GDPR" [7]. The legislation happens regardless of the situation "the processing occurs in the EU or not". Hence, its influence stretches beyond Europe, impacting global businesses and "setting a high standard for data protection laws worldwide".

3.3 *Key provisions*

The GDPR is anchored in several key provisions. It mandates transparency about data collection and processing, including clear communication to individuals about the purpose of collecting their data [8]. The regulation emphasizes data minimization, which states that businesses should only gather the information required for a certain purpose and keep it only as long as required.GDPR also introduces a 'right to be forgotten', allowing under certain conditions, anyone can "ask for their personal information to be removed from" an organization's records.

In case organizations "must notify the appropriate supervisory authority of a data breach within 72 hours" and to the affected individuals without undue delay [9]. Additionally, the GDPR empowers individuals with data portability rights, allowing them to obtain their personal information in a format that is widely used and send it to another company. Strict fines for non-compliance, which can reach "€20 million or 4% of an organization's worldwide yearly revenue from the previous fiscal year, whichever is larger", highlight the seriousness with which the EU views data protection.

4 OVERVIEW OF THE DPDP ACT

"The Digital Personal Data Protection Act", 2023 "DPDP Act", is a significant move by India will develop a thorough framework for data protection. The Act is India's most recent attempt to strike a compromise between the necessity for data use in the digital economy and the preservation of individual privacy rights.

4.1 *Development and adoption*

The DPDP Act is a successor of the "Personal Data Protection Act", 2019 (PDP Act), This was removed after more than 80 modifications and other recommendations were proposed by the Joint Parliamentary Committee [10]. "On November 18, 2022, India's Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) released the draft" DPDP Act, marking the latest iteration in a series of legislative drafts. The drafting of the Act included inputs from various stakeholders, reflecting an open and consultative process in formulating the data protection norms for India.

4.2 *Scope and applicability*

The "DPDP Act primarily applies to digital personal data" processing inside India's boundaries. It encompasses information collected from the Data Principals (analogous to 'Data Subjects' in GDPR) online and offline data that has been digitized [11]. The Act also has extraterritorial applicability. It applies to processing "digital personal data outside of India if it entails providing products or services to data principals in India" [12]. However, Notably, the Act prohibits several forms of data processing, including offline personal data processing and non-automated personal data processing.data [13].

4.3 *Key provisions*

The DPDP Act borrows several key concepts from the GDPR while incorporating some India-specific aspects. It describes the rights of data principals, such as "the right to data portability, the right to confirmation and access, the right to rectification, and the right to be forgotten". Data fiduciaries (similar to 'Data Controllers' in GDPR) are expected to maintain openness in their data operations and provide data principals explicit notice "regarding the gathering and utilization of their data" [14].

This legislation further establishes the need for data minimization, limitations on storage and purpose. It also introduces the concept of 'explicit consent', with an emphasis on user consent for data collection and processing. In case of a information security infringe, information fiduciaries are required to notify the relevant authority. "The DPDP Act also establishes the establishment of a Data Protection Authority of India", accountable for monitoring and enforcing adherence to the Act's requirements.

5 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The GDPR and DPDP Act, though formulated to address similar goals, exhibit several significant differences and similarities. A comparative analysis provides valuable insights into these distinct legislative approaches and the potential for harmonization in data protection laws worldwide.

5.1 *Material and territorial scope*

Both GDPR and DPDP Act have broad material and territorial scope. However, one of the major differences is the extra territorial jurisdiction. While GDPR is applicable for collection/processing of data of EU residents or if such collection/processing is with reference to EU citizens. However, DPDPA is applicable even in those cases where collection/ "Data processing is related to the provision of goods and services in India. The GDPR covers both automated and non-automated processing of personal data within the EU and by non-EU organizations who provide goods or services to or monitor EU citizens" [15]. The "DPDP Act" apply to the handing out of digital privateinformation by entities inside India and those external if they are related to activities in correlation to offering "goods or services to individuals in India" [16]. However, "the DPDP Act" excludes certain types of data processing, such as non-automated processing and offline data processing or data collected in non-digital form and not digitized, whereas GDPR encompasses all forms of data processing.

5.2 *"Concerned parties: Data subjects and data controllers"*

The main parties under GDPR are 'data subjects' and 'data controllers'. Data subjects are individuals whose personal information is being processed, whereas data controllers are organizations that specify the purposes and methods of data processing.

These persons are referred to as "data principals" and "data fiduciaries" under the DPDP Act. Data fiduciaries are organizations that decide how and why to handle data, whereas data principals are the people whose data is being processed.

5.3 *Classification of personal data*

While "GDPR" classify private information into 'personal' and 'sensitive' categories, DPDPA doesn't talk about classification of personal data into categories.

Under GDPR, sensitive data includes "racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious beliefs, trade union membership, genetic data, biometric data, health data, sex life, or sexual orientation".

5.4 *"Legal basis for data processing"*

"The GDPR defines six legal basis for data processing: consent, contract, legal duty, essential interests, public task, and legitimate interest. [17]. Among these, consent from the data subject is a critical foundation that must be freely provided, informed, explicit, and clear".

The DPDP Act also emphasizes "consent as a primary basis for data processing, which must be free, informed, specific, clear, and capable of being withdrawn". Another important restriction that must be taken into account under the DPDP Act is legitimate usage.

Apart from consent, the DPDP Act also allows processing necessary for providing a service or a contract to the data principal [18], for meeting any duty under any currently enacted legislation [19], for prompt action in cases such as medical emergencies, for employment objectives, as well as for reasonablepurposes as may be specified by regulations [20].

5.5 *Children's rights and data protection*

Both the GDPR and the DPDP Act have special safeguards for protecting children's data. The GDPR sets the consent age at 16, below which parental authorization is necessary for data processing. However, member states have the ability to decrease the age restriction to no less than 13 years.

A person under the age of eighteen is considered a child under the DPDP Act. Data fiduciaries are responsible for making sure that a child's "data is processed in a way that upholds their rights and" benefits them. Before collecting or processing a minor's personal information, data fiduciaries are required by draft regulations to have "verifiable consent" from the minor's legal guardian.

5.6 *Reporting breaches*

GDPR mandates that data controllers report any breach involving personal data to the relevant supervisory authority within 72 hours, if at all possible, and if the breach is likely to compromise the rights and liberties of natural persons. Additionally, if the breach seriously jeopardizes the rights and freedoms of the data subjects, they must be notified as soon as feasible.

Regardless of "risk" or "harm" to the Data Principal, data fiduciaries are obligated by the DPDP Act "to notify the Data Principal and Data Protection Authority of any" breach of personal data.

5.7 *"Cross-border data transfer"*

If "the recipient" nation guarantees a sufficient degree of protection, as judged by the European Commission, "the GDPR permits the transfer of personal data outside the EU". Additional protections may also be used, such as recognized standards of behavior, legally enforceable business policies, or standard data protection contracts.

Unless a nation is on a "negative list" of nations that the Central Government has informed, the "DPDP Act does not" prohibit the cross-border transmission of personal data. However, certain sectoral restrictions, such those set forth by the RBI or SEBI, may restrict or forbid the "cross-border transfer of personal data". Aside from this, the Data Fiduciary must comply with any regulations that the Central Government may establish by general or special order on the availability of such personal data to any foreign state, or to any individual or organization under the authority of any agency of such a state.

6 "PENALTIES FOR NON-COMPLIANCE"

In both the EU's "General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)" and India's "Digital Personal Data Protection Act (DPDP Act)", "there are huge stringent penalties for non-compliance", which reflect the seriousness with which both jurisdictions treat personal data protection.

6.1 *GDPR penalties*

The GDPR has a tiered penalty structure that distinguishes between less severe infringements and more severe infringements. A "punishment of up to €10 million or 2% of the company's global annual revenue from the previous fiscal year, whichever is bigger, might be imposed for less serious violations". "A punishment of up to €20 million or 4% of the company's global annual revenue from the previous fiscal year, whichever is larger, might be imposed for the more serious violations". "While violations of the Data Protection Officer's (DPO) duties are regarded as less serious, violations of the fundamental principles for processing personal data", such as consent requirements, are among the more serious violations.

6.2 *DPDP act penalties*

The DPDP Act also includes a variety of penalties for violations of the provisions of the legislation. For instance, fines for transmitting or handing out individual information in a way that violates the DPDP Act can extend up to ₹50 crores. In case of non-compliance in appointing a Data Processor who provides A fine of up to 250 crores might be imposed for failing to take sufficient security measures to thwart the compromise of individual information.

The "GDPR and DPDP Act both underscore the growing significance of protecting personal data in the current digital era by reflecting a global trend towards harsher fines for data protection infractions".

7 DISCUSSION

This research has provided a comprehensive comparative analysis between the GDPR and the DPDP Act, touching on various aspects including scope, concerned parties, data classification, legal foundation for processing, children's rights, reporting violations, international data transfers, and sanctions.

7.1 *Similarities and differences*

The GDPR and DPDP Act share a common purpose of safeguarding the specific rights of "data" subjects or "principals", enforcing statutory duty on data controllers or fiduciaries, and promoting transparency in data processing [21]. They both identify specific categories of sensitive personal data requiring enhanced protection and set forth mechanisms for reporting data breaches.

But there are some significant distinctions. While the DPDP Act's jurisdiction is broader and covers any data acquired or processed outside of India in connection with any activity.

DPDPA casts obligations on Data Principals and breach/non-compliance of those duties may attract a fine as penalty of Rs 10,000 on the "Data Principals". This concept is absent in GDPR.

The "GDPR differentiates between" a "data" processor and a data controller, whereas theDPDP Act introduces the unique concept of a "data fiduciary". Also, the GDPR provides more explicit protections for children's data, while the DPDP Act's provisions on this

are not as robust. GDPR makes no distinction between Data Controllers whereas DPDPA classifies "Data Fiduciary" and "Significant Data Fiduciary"

7.2 *Practical implications*

The role of "GDPR has emerged" as a global "standard for data protection", and non-EU entities have had to adjust their data practices accordingly to avoid heavy penalties [22]. The DPDP Act, once implemented, may require similar adjustments, particularly from business entities outside India that process Indian residents' data [23].

Further, compliance with either legislation involves significant investment in technology, training, and potentially restructuring business processes. Therefore, businesses must undertake a cost-benefit analysis to assess the viability of compliance measures.

7.3 *Impact on data subjects and businesses*

Both legislation aims to provide the individuals by giving them more authority over their personal information. Businesses are likely to face increased regulatory scrutiny and costs, but these may be offset by the benefits of increased consumer trust.

While the GDPR has been in force for several years and its impacts are becoming apparent, the DPDP Act is still a proposed legislation as of the time of this research. Therefore, its impacts are largely speculative and will be clearer once it is implemented.

8 CONCLUSION

This comparison of the DPDP Act and the GDPR offers important insights into how privacy and data protection laws are changing globally. The DPDPA is unquestionably a significant first step in the development of Indian privacy legislation. It codifies and regulates the gathering and management of digital individual data. This is the age of AI and digital technology where data is one of the most potent weapons in the hands of unworthy, it has a long way to go before it can maintain a steady pace with other contemporary privacy laws. We are yet to see how the DPDPA performs on ground and how the practical roadblocks are handled.

8.1 *Summary of findings*

Both the "GDPR and the DPDP Act aim to protect personal data and regulate its" processing they lay out obligations for the entities that control and process data and provide certain rights to the individuals whose data is being processed.

The "GDPR" and the "DPDP" Act both seek to safeguard delicate information plus control how it is processed [24].They provide up requirements for the entities that manage and process data and give certain rights to the persons whose data is being handled.

There are notable distinctions in the extent of application, as GDPR covers organizations that handle the information of EU populace, in spite of ofwhere they are established, and the DPDP Act focusing on data processed within India or involving Indian residentsDPDP Act's jurisdiction is wider as it applies to any data collected/processed Outside of India in connection with any activity pertaining to the provision of goods and services to Indian principals. The DPDP Act's introduction of the concept of a " data fiduciary" also sets it apart.

The GDPR provides more detailed protections for children's data, whereas the DPDP Act's provisions in this respect are less explicit. The procedures for reporting breaches and the penalties for non-compliance also differ between the two legislations.DPDPA casts certain obligations on Data Principals and non-compliance by Data Principals may attract a fine of up toINR 10,000. This is indeed a forward step as such provisions are lacking in GDPR.

While the rules under DPDP Act await government notification, there are significant gaps in the draft rules which needs to be addressed such as inclusion of personal data which is not in digital form, treating all personal data under same category (no classification of individual data/vulnerable personal data such as financial data, health data etc.), collecting verifiable consent from minor's lawful guardians (considering the fact that in case parents are absence there is no readily available document to show a "legal guardian" in most of the cases), who a significant data fiduciary will be, non-inclusion of assessment bodies providing Computer Based Testing from the definition of educational institution.

8.2 *Recommendations for future*

The comparative analysis of GDPR and DPDP Act provides the following recommendations for future legislations.

(1) Broadening Jurisdiction: Future legislations should consider expanding their territorial scope to cover data processing that impacts their citizens, even when it occurs outside their borders, similar to the GDPR [25]. This provides more comprehensive protection for individuals in the digital age.
(2) Enhancing Child Protection: Recognizing the vulnerability of children online, detailed provisions should be included to protect children's data [26].
(3) Balance Between Individual Rights and Business Interests: While protecting individual rights, legislations should also consider practical challenges faced by businesses, such as cost and feasibility of compliance measures.
(4) There has to be classification of individual information such as private information, sensitive private data as few data points may require higher protection. The non-digital data should also be covered which is currently excluded.
(5) Encouraging Global Consensus: The analysis points out to the need for a global consensus or at least harmonization in privacy laws, so that international businesses can navigate the legal landscape more easily.it would be beneficial to harmonize the provisions with existing international data privacy standards to facilitate seamless compliance keeping in line with the spirit of globalization.
(6) Assessment agencies, certification bodies should be categorised either as "educational activity or a separate category be created for them as they benefit the society by promoting education even though they are profit making organisation. Considering the sheer size of the population there may be organisations like National Testing Agency, private testing organisations which otherwise fall under the "significant data fiduciary" and may attract additional compliance requirements. They should be exempted as they serve the wider and noble purpose of educational activity, though not educational institutions.Within the Fourth Schedule, the explicit inclusion of "Accredited Testing Organizations" as a distinct class of Data Fiduciaries is proposed. These would include organizations involved in standardized academic and professional testing, psychometric diagnostics, and language proficiency assessments, often operatingunder globally accepted ethical and data privacy standards.
(7) The intent of draft Rule 4 in ensuring accountability and neutrality of Consent Managers. However, the absence of provisions concerning minors introduces ambiguity, particularly for testing services which falls under the wider ambit of educational activity. The Rule related to Consent Managers and First Schedule do not deal with responsibility of consent manager while dealing with children, which needs to be clarified. Given the increasing participation of adolescents in career-shaping assessments and admissions testing, it is recommended that the Rules allow children in this age group to register for assessments either directly with a Data Fiduciary or via a Consent Manager, without necessitating prior parental consent at least for children in age group of 13-17 in line with global requirements.

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[13] DPDP Bill, Art 7.

[14] DPDP Bill, Art 10.

[15] GDPR, Art 2, Art 3.

[16] DPDP Bill, Art 5, Art 6.

[17] GDPR, Art 6.

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Assimilation vs. pragmatism: Divergent paths of immigration policy in Spain and France

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ABSTRACT: This paper examines the contrasting approaches to immigration governance in Spain and France, two European nations with shared colonial histories and EU membership yet divergent policy trajectories. While Spain has developed a pragmatic, decentralized model emphasizing labour market needs and regularisation programs, France maintains a centralized, assimilationist framework rooted in republican unity. This paper traces the historical development of immigration policies in both countries, analyzes the influence of political ideologies and party systems, and assesses the impact of EU directives and internal socio-economic factors on policy outcomes. Through comparative policy analysis, the research highlights how institutional structures and national narratives shape migrant integration. The findings underscore that immigration policy is inherently political, reflecting deep-seated notions of citizenship and belonging. The study reveals that Spain's inclusive pragmatism and France's restrictive assimilationism each create distinct categories of inclusion and exclusion, illustrating the broader contest over the boundaries of national identity in contemporary Europe.

Keywords: Spain, France, Migration, Politics, Policy, Integration

1 INTRODUCTION

The early 1970s marked a pivotal shift as Spain transitioned from emigration to immigration, driven by economic growth in the 1980s–90s (Doomernik and Callejo 2016, p. 61). Its immigration debate remains polarized: the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) ties irregular migration to informal labor, while the Popular Party/People's Party (PP) emphasizes security (Davis, n.d.). France's centralized approach, rooted in republicanism, has fluctuated between openness and restriction—exemplified by Sarkozy's presidency (2007–2012), which tightened family reunification and imposed assimilationist language requirements (McKeever 2024, pp. 87–88). Religious attire bans (Schain 2008) and local housing policies (Schmutz and Verdugo 2022) further reflect this ideological divide. This study analyzes how political ideologies—not neutral governance—shape immigration policies in both nations (Cairney 2023), framing access to rights (Sales 2007, pp. 3–4). By contrasting Spain's decentralized pragmatism with France's assimilationist centralization, it reveals how governance structures and narratives dictate inclusion in contemporary Europe.

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- Critically analyse the historical development and evolution of immigration policies in Spain and France.

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- Examine the influence of major political parties on the formulation and amendment of immigration policies in both countries.
- Investigate the role of external factors, particularly European Union directives, as well as internal socio-economic dynamics in shaping immigration policymaking in Spain and France.
- Evaluate the effects of immigration laws on the processes of migrant regularisation and social integration in both countries.
- Interpret the broader socio-political consequences of Spain's and France's policies towards irregular migration and their impact on migrant rights and inclusion.
- Conduct a comparative analysis of Spanish and French immigration policies to understand the different approaches to immigrant integration and their impact on immigrants.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study utilizes a comparative qualitative policy analysis to investigate immigration policies in Spain and France, applying Bacchi's "What's the Problem Represented to Be?" framework as its analytical lens (Bacchi 2009). The research systematically examines how migration issues are framed in key legislation, comparing Spain's labour-market orientation in Organic Law 14/3003 with France's assimilationist language in the 2024 Immigration Law. It highlights ideological distinctions, such as PSOE's rights-based focus versus PP's security-driven amendments to Organic Law 4/2000 (Davis, n.d.; Gortázar 2002). The analysis draws on national laws (1985–2024), EU directives and regional policies such as Catalonia's language programs, triangulated with peer-reviewed evaluations of implementation (Laurence and Vaisse 2006; Zapata-Barrero 2010). Spain's decentralized integration policies (Arango and Finotelli 2009) contrasts with France's centralized civic integration contracts (Emeriau *et al.* 2025). Thematic coding of political discourse from debates and manifestos, including securitization rhetoric (McKeever 2024, p. 97; Davis, n.d.), and analysis of EU transposition documents further inform the study. Limitations such as reliance on public records and regional data gaps are addressed by cross-referencing academic critiques (Amnesty International 2011; Schmutz and Verdugo 2022).

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 *Migration policy of spain*

Spain's emergence as a major immigration destination represents a significant demographic and social transformation that began in the late 20th century. This shift resulted from several interconnected factors that reshaped the country's migration patterns. The diversion effect of stricter immigration controls implemented in Northern European countries during the 1970s redirected migration flows toward Southern Europe, with Spain becoming a primary destination. Spain's strategic geographic position and its cities' connectivity within global networks facilitated entry through legal channels like tourism visas, followed by overstays and transition to irregular employment (Geddes and Scholten 2016, pp. 177-180). Historical colonial relationships initially influenced migration patterns though these connections gradually diversified to include substantial flows from Eastern European countries like Romania and Bulgaria (Ruiz 3003, p. 2-3). The Spanish economic boom created strong demand for low-skilled labor in sectors shunned by native workers, further accelerating immigration while fostering informal employment arrangements.

The legal foundation for modern Spanish immigration policy was established with Organic Law 7/1985, Spain's first comprehensive "Foreigners Law". This legislation emerged primarily in response to European Community's pressures rather than domestic

imperatives, as Spain sought to align with emerging European migration standards (Bruquetas-Callejo *et al.* 2011, p. 301). The law's provisions focused on administrative control mechanisms rather than physical border enforcement, requiring non-EC nationals to navigate a complex dual authorization process involving separate work and residence permits managed by different ministries (Cornelius *et al.* 1994, pp. 345-350). This bureaucratic structure, while intended to regulate migration, paradoxically contributed to irregular employment by creating significant barriers to legal workforce participation.

The turn of the century brought dramatic policy shifts reflecting Spain's evolving political landscape. The Socialist Party (PSOE) introduced Organic Law 4/2000, a progressive framework that extended certain rights to migrants regardless of legal status (Gortázar 2002, p. 8). However, the subsequent electoral victory of the conservative People's Party (PP) led to its modification through Organic Law 8/2000, which reinstated legal status as a prerequisite for most rights while maintaining basic healthcare access for irregular migrants (Gortázar 2002, p. 14). This legislative reversal highlighted the profound ideological divide between Spain's major political parties regarding migration governance.

Critical events during this period significantly influenced policy trajectories. The 2000 El Ejido riots exposed social tensions surrounding Moroccan agricultural workers but elicited limited policy response. In contrast, the 2001 Lorca tragedy, which claimed the lives of twelve Ecuadorian migrant workers, prompted immediate action through a targeted regularization program (Arango and Finotelli 2009, p. 19). This differential response revealed how specific migrant groups received varying levels of political attention and protection.

The early 2000s witnessed further restrictionist measures under PP governance. Organic Law 11/2003 expanded deportation grounds, while Organic Law 14/2003 added the provision of job search visa which simplified the visa requirement, but enhanced state surveillance by granting the Interior Ministry access to municipal registries containing migrants' personal data (Mahía *et al.* 2010, p. 62; Zapata-Barrero and de Witte 2006, p. 8). These developments reflected growing securitization trends while maintaining Spain's distinctive labor market orientation.

Several key themes characterize Spain's immigration policy evolution. The consistent prioritization of labor market needs has produced periodic regularization programs addressing sector-specific shortages. The alternation between PSOE and PP governments has created a legislative pendulum swinging between rights-based and security-focused approaches. Critical events have frequently prompted shifts in migration policy, with responses shaped by migrant group characteristics and political context. In Spain, the ongoing balance between European Union directives and domestic political dynamics has resulted in a pragmatic, decentralized approach that addresses labor market needs but lacks comprehensive integration measures. This stands in contrast to France's centralized, assimilation-oriented model. Such differences highlight how national histories and institutional frameworks produce distinct migration governance paradigms within Europe. Spain's case illustrates that migration policy is shaped by the interplay of external pressures, domestic politics, and economic demands.

4.2 *Migration policy of France*

French immigration policy has historically fluctuated between openness to new arrivals during periods of labour demand and restrictive measures during economic or political crises. In the late nineteenth century, demographic stagnation and military requirements prompted policy changes, notably the 1889 law that enshrined jus soli (birthright citizenship) as a core principle (Schain 2008, pp. 42–43). Throughout the twentieth century, the state increasingly asserted control over migration, instituting bilateral recruitment agreements and tightening documentation requirements during the interwar and postwar years. After World War II, France favoured European migrants over those from North Africa, but decolonization and shifting demographics led to new controls, including the 1974 suspension of

family and labour immigration (Schain 2008, p. 48). From the 1980s onward, policy alternated between regularization programs and restrictive legislation, culminating in the 2006 focus on skilled migration and the 2011 Loi Besson, which reinforced deportation mechanisms (Schain 2008, p. 57).

More recently, France's 2024 immigration reforms have introduced a dual-track approach that balances economic needs with stricter integration demands (KPMG 2024). The changes include specialized permits for non-EU healthcare workers, a three-renewal cap on temporary visas (EY 2024), and a new regularization path requiring three years' residence plus one year's work in high-demand sectors (Northman Sterling 2024). Language requirements now escalate from A2 for residency to B2 for citizenship (France 24, 2024), while upcoming 2025 reforms propose tighter family reunification rules and expanded deportation powers (Euronews 2024), further emphasizing the policy's dual focus on selective migration and security.

French immigration policy reflects dynamic political influences across governance levels. Left-led municipalities often adopt inclusive housing policies that attract immigrant populations (Schmutz and Verdugo 2022), while national reforms frequently respond to electoral pressures. The Sarkozy administration (2007-2012) exemplified this pattern, restricting family migration and favoring skilled workers amid rising anti-immigration sentiment (McKeever 2024). These measures reframed integration as a matter of national identity, particularly targeting Muslim communities.

4.3 *Integration and challenges*

France and Spain both face enduring challenges in integrating immigrants, but their models and outcomes differ. France's centralized, assimilationist approach, grounded in republican values, often leads to the marginalization of minorities. Immigrants, especially those from North and sub-Saharan Africa, experience significantly higher unemployment rates compared to native-born citizens, even across generations, due to labour market discrimination and the devaluation of foreign qualifications (Laurence and Vaisse 2006, p. 31-34). Educational disparities are also persistent, with children of immigrants underperforming because of linguistic barriers, socioeconomic disadvantage, and systemic inequalities within the education system (Laurence and Vaisse 2006, p. 38-39). Housing segregation in suburban estates further isolates immigrant communities, while public discourse frequently politicizes crime and conflates it with immigrant status, reinforcing exclusion (Laurence and Vaisse 2006, p. 35-37).

Spain, in contrast, utilizes a decentralized and pragmatic model shaped by regional identities and shifting political priorities. Discrimination is widespread and institutionalized, manifesting in both overt acts and subtler forms (Amnesty International 2011), and is embedded in legal frameworks such as the Constitution and Civil Code. Regional policies, like Catalonia's emphasis on language immersion, reflect concerns about cultural preservation. Legal distinctions in voting and citizenship rights based on nationality further institutionalize discrimination (Zapata-Barrero 2010, pp. 387-391). Economic crises have heightened anti-immigrant sentiment and fuelled the rise of far-right politics (Jones 2019), though Spain's decentralized system allows for more regional adaptation and flexibility. Despite these differences, both countries struggle with stereotypes and prejudices that impact immigrants' integration in education, employment, and daily life, with France's uniform model often limiting local adaptation, and Spain's flexible approach resulting in inconsistent outcomes.

4.4 *Spain and france: A comparative analysis*

Spain's decentralized, pragmatic approach is marked by institutionalized discrimination in law and practice, regional language policies, unequal rights based on nationality (Zapata-Barrero 2010, pp. 387-391), ethnocentric education system (Balsera 2015), labour market segregationand and bias (Bleahu 2004; Gratton 2007; Hellgren 2016: 7-8; Marcu 2012,

pp. 44-45). While regional flexibility allows adaptation, outcomes are inconsistent and anti-immigrant sentiment has grown, especially during economic crises.

France's centralized, assimilationist integration model leads to persistent unemployment and educational gaps among immigrants and their descendants, driven by labour market discrimination, undervaluation of foreign credentials, and social inequalities. Housing segregation and the politicization of crime further marginalize these communities (Laurence and Vaisse 2006).

The French Republican model of integration, once rooted in strong assimilationist ideals, has become less effective and more diluted over time. While the state undergoes decentralization and adapts to European integration, its social and political culture still clings to the myth of a unified Republican identity. Migrants are expected to assimilate into traditional French values under the principle of universality, yet in practice, France's approach now lies between strict assimilation and cautious multiculturalism. Recent changes have shifted the focus from viewing individuals solely as citizens to acknowledging, albeit timidly, their ethnic, racial, and religious identities (Kaya 2009, p. 74, 76).

Both countries struggle with stereotypes, systemic barriers, racism and rising anti-immigrant sentiment. However, anti-immigrant attitudes in Spain are less visible because cultural norms discourage open expression, active pro-immigrant organizations counter negative views, and many people believe immigrants should have equal rights (Arango 2013: 11). France's uniform model limits local adaptation, while Spain's approach to diversity governance prioritizes flexible, localized solutions tailored to practical needs, steering clear of rigid frameworks like France's assimilationist model or Britain's pluralistic policies in favor of adaptive responses within its regionalized governance structure (Zapata-Barrero 2010: 384).

5 CONCLUSION

Spain and France approach immigration through different frameworks influenced by their unique histories and political cultures. France typically promotes assimilation within a centralized system grounded in republican principles, whereas Spain employs a more adaptable model shaped by regional diversity and practical considerations. Both nations, however, continue to struggle with issues such as discrimination and the socio-economic integration of newcomers. Finally, immigration policy is a deliberate political and administrative mechanism, deciding who is included in society and how national identity is defined.

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A comparative study of SAARC and the EU on regional cooperation for sustainable development

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ABSTRACT: This paper examines how regional organizations can promote sustainable development by analyzing the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and its comparison with the European Union (EU). The EU has really taken the reins alongside enforceable policies like the European Green Deal, while SAARC struggles due to political tensions and weaker institutions. This study looks at both organizations qualitatively—their frameworks, policies, and outcomes correlating to sustainable development. The findings suggest the EU's supranational governance with robust structural funds outperforms SAARC's intergovernmental, consensus-driven model. The paper concludes by proposing some policy measures for SAARC aimed at increasing regional integration and learning from the EU's success.

Keywords: SAARC, Regional Cooperation, Development, EU, Intergovernmental

1 INTRODUCTION

Regional collaboration is important in addressing cross-border challenges in relation to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Some regional groups have successfully incorporated sustainability into their strategic frameworks, while others face political and structural challenges. This research focuses on two important regional organizations: The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the European Union (EU), studying their attempts toward sustainable development. Through their structures, policies, and implementation efforts, the study aims to explain why the EU has succeeded in surpassing SAARC's sustainable development efforts. The EU boasts successive accomplishment of the SDGs in hindsight to the regional commitments by adopting the supranational model. In the context the Commission has rolled out legally binding agreements which include the European Green Deal (2019) and Circular Economy Action Plan (2020) serving SDG targets (European Commission 2021). It exercises policy enforcement through qualified majority voting which further strengthens the institutional competence showcased through strong financial instruments like the Just Transition Fund (Lenschow and Sprungk 2019).

With the adoption of the SAARC Action Plan on SDGs (2017) SAARC displays intent toward development; however, the intergovernmental nature of decision making, political conflicts, and low capacity for implementation cripple advancement efforts (Khan 2020). Their lack of dominant power to enforce policies and limited financial resources through the SAARC Delve.

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2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

(1) To analyze the institutional frameworks of both SAARC and the EU with regard to the advancement of sustainable development.
(2) To examine the policies, funding mechanisms, and enforcement authorities aligned with the predetermined objectives.
(3) To identify any available lessons which could be useful for enhancing SAARC's regional governance drawn from the EU.

The study combines liberal institutionalism, which emphasizes the impact of formal structures on cooperation (Keohane 2020), and multi-level governance, which focuses on diverse levels of government collaboration in policymaking (Hooghe and Marks 2019). The European Union is an example of neofunctionalism spill over: economic relationships give rise to political affiliation (Rosamond 2020); whereas SAARC's slow progress exemplifies realist perspectives of regionalism in politically tense regions (Bajpai 2017).

3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This paper contributes to three major key discussions:

(1) Even though the principal focus has been the EU region, it also offers a comparative perspective on the Global South organization SAARC (Acharya 2016).
(2) Governance of Sustainable Development: Investigates the impact of institutional framework design on the SDG implementation at the domestic (local) level (Biermann *et al.* 2022).
(3) Policy Adoption: In what ways can EU paradigms be applied to completely different scenarios? (Stone 2020).

This research explores primary sources such as treaties and policy documents of SAARC and the EU complements this with secondary sources from both Indian and Western scholars. Dash's work in 2018 and Kardar's publication from 2019 address SAARC's institutional fissures, while Lenschow's contribution in 2020 and Bulmer's 2022 work focus on the EU's environmental governance and policymaking. Following this introduction, The second section elaborates on the methodology and the third section presents a comparative analysis, while the fourth and final section provides concluding remarks alongside policy proposals. The goal of the paper is to use the two models as a case study to highlight the inadequacies of regional cooperation in South Asia and aid the conversation around governance and planning for sustainable development.

4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is qualitatively comparative and seeks to examine the institutional structures, tools and effectiveness of SAARC and the EU in supporting sustainable development. In light of the complex and multi-faceted nature of regional governance, a case study approach is utilized to analyze these two organizations in detail and to better understand their central areas of resemblance and difference (Yin 2018). The case study approach involves document analysis and comparative policy analysis as a way to help explore how structural and political factors may influence sustainable development outcomes. The primary data will be taken from SAARC's Action Plan on Sustainable Development Goals (2017), the SAARC Charter, and the respective reports of the SAARC Development Fund, as well as various EU treaties such as the Lisbon Treaty (2007), and documents such as the European Green Deal (2019). The documentation will offer information on formal obligations, administrative instruments,

and governance. The secondary data used for this study include peer-reviewed articles, books and reports published by organizations like the World Bank, UNESCAP, and European Environment Agency. Dash (2018) provided perspectives on SAARC's institutional shortcomings, while Lenschow (2020) provided academic writing on EU environmental governance that adds significant research dimensions to the policy-oriented analyses.

The study uses thematic analysis to group key policy themes such as climate action, energy cooperation, and funding mechanisms for both organizations. A comparative institutional analysis looks at differences in decision-making—for example, the EU's qualified majority voting versus SAARC's consensus approach. Process tracing is used to uncover links between institutional design and policy results (George and Bennett 2005). For example, the EU's cohesion policy is studied for its role in reducing regional gaps, while SAARC's Energy Cooperation Framework is reviewed for implementation challenges.

There are some limitations. Data on SAARC's SDG progress is less available than for the EU, which has more transparent reporting. The EU's supranational model may not fully apply to other regions. Geopolitical issues, like India-Pakistan tensions in SAARC, are hard to measure but key to understanding policy deadlock. The study uses only publicly available documents and peer-reviewed literature, avoiding ethical concerns since no human subjects are involved. Triangulating sources provides a solid base for comparing SAARC and the EU, while recognizing contextual differences affecting their sustainable development paths. Regional Cooperation in SAARC and Sustainable Development SAARC, founded in 1985, is an important but underperforming example of regional cooperation in South Asia. It includes eight countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. SAARC is based on sovereign equality and consensus decision-making, which helps cooperation but also limits effectiveness (Dash 2018). Although SAARC has made commitments to sustainable development through frameworks like the 2017 SAARC Action Plan on SDGs and the SAARC Environment Programme, results have been uneven due to structural, political, and financial challenges. SAARC's structure is intergovernmental, which means major decisions need unanimous approval.

SAARC's structure is intergovernmental, which means major decisions need unanimous approval. This often results in policy gridlock, particularly on pressing matters like climate change and water management (Khan 2020). Take, for instance, the 2010 SAARC Convention on Cooperation on Environment, which has seen poor implementation. Member countries have struggled to align their policies or establish binding emission targets (Ahmed and Bhatnagar 2021). Unlike the EU, which can enforce rules, SAARC lacks the power to impose sanctions, so many agreements end up being more symbolic than effective.

Financially, SAARC struggles to support sustainable development. The SAARC Development Fund (SDF), started in 2010 with $500 million, is small compared to the EU's multi-trillion-euro budget (SAARC Secretariat 2020). The SDF's three areas—social, economic, and infrastructure—align with the SDGs but funding is slow and uneven due to bureaucracy and political mistrust (Kardar 2019). Renewable energy projects under SAARC's Energy Cooperation Framework have trouble attracting funds, leaving the region dependent on fossil fuels despite big solar and hydropower potential (World Bank 2022).

Still, SAARC has made some progress in niche areas. The SAARC Food Bank and Seed Bank have improved food security, and the Disaster Management Centre has boosted climate disaster preparedness (SAARC 2019). But these efforts tend to be reactive and lack strong monitoring, making it hard to measure long-term impact (Bhattacharya 2021).

Geopolitical tensions, especially between India and Pakistan, also hurt SAARC's potential. Summits have been postponed repeatedly due to disputes, with the 2016 Islamabad Summit canceled, freezing top-level talks for years (Bajpai 2017). This political conflict contrasts with the EU's ability to separate disputes from cooperation, allowing work to continue during crises.

Overall, while SAARC has laid a foundation for cooperation on sustainable development, its intergovernmental structure, limited finances, and political conflicts have prevented it

from making significant progress. Its experience highlights the challenges of regional cooperation in politically divided areas and raises doubts about whether the EU model can be successfully applied in South Asia.

5 REGIONAL COOPERATION IN THE EU AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The EU is a leading example of regional cooperation for sustainable development. Its unique system allows it to implement strong environmental, social, and economic policies. Since its beginning, the EU has made sustainability a key part of its agenda, with important initiatives like the European Green Deal (2019) and the Circular Economy Action Plan (2020), both supporting the UN Sustainable Development Goals (European Commission 2021). Unlike SAARC's consensus approach, the EU's qualified majority voting system enables it to pass binding laws that go beyond national interests and promote joint action on global challenges (Lenschow and Sprungk 2019). The EU's institutions ensure policy coherence and enforcement. The European Commission proposes and enforces laws, while the European Parliament and Council oversee and decide on policies (Bulmer 2022). This multi-level governance lets the EU tackle sustainable development in a balanced way, combining environmental, economic, and social goals. For example, the 2021 EU Climate Law legally requires member states to reach climate neutrality by 2050, with targets like a 55% emissions cut by 2030 (European Commission 2021). This is very different from SAARC's non-binding agreements, showing the EU's power to turn commitments into real action. Financially, the EU supports sustainability through big budgets. The 2021–2027 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) has €1.8 trillion, including the €17.5 billion Just Transition Fund to help regions dependent on fossil fuels (European Parliament 2021). The NextGenerationEU program adds €750 billion, with at least 37% dedicated to climate goals (European Commission 2020). These funds promote solidarity and push member states toward sustainable practices. Compared to SAARC's underfunded Development Fund, the EU's financial system shows how strong fiscal coordination can drive progress. The EU also succeeds by involving many groups—civil society, businesses, and local governments—in policy making and action. The European Climate Pact encourages citizens and organizations to join climate efforts (European Commission 2021). The EU Urban Agenda supports sustainable cities through partnerships between local and regional authorities (Hooghe and Marks 2019). This inclusive approach contrasts with SAARC's top-down, state-focused style that often leaves out non-state actors. Despite its successes, the EU faces challenges in ensuring fair sustainability across all members. Economic and institutional differences cause uneven progress, especially in Central and Eastern Europe (Börzel 2022). Brexit also showed the fragility of EU unity, raising doubts about its future cohesion (Rosamond 2020). Still, the EU's quick adoption of the Green Deal after Brexit shows it can adapt to political and economic shocks. In short, the EU's supranational governance, strong funding, and inclusive policymaking make it a global leader in regional sustainable development. Its experience offers lessons for groups like SAARC, especially in managing political divisions and embedding sustainability. However, the EU's challenges also reveal the difficulty of balancing national sovereignty with joint action—an ongoing issue for regional cooperation.

5.1 *Comparative analysis*

Institutional Capacity, Policy Implementation, Funding, and Political Will Comparing SAARC and the EU shows big differences in how they promote sustainable development, shaped by their institutional strength, policy follow-through, funding, and political commitment. These four areas explain why the EU leads globally in regional sustainability, while SAARC struggles to turn promises into results.

5.2 *Institutional capacity*

The EU's supranational model gives it strong institutions to enforce policies across members. The European Commission and the Court of Justice ensure members follow binding rules, like the 2018 Renewable Energy Directive (Bulmer 2022). SAARC, on the other hand, works through intergovernmental consensus needing unanimous approval, often causing gridlock (Dash 2018). Without a central enforcement body like the EU's Commission, SAARC's agreements remain mostly aspirational (Khan 2020).

5.3 *Policy implementation*

EU laws are binding and backed by enforcement. For example, the European Green Deal requires member states to create national energy and climate plans, with penalties for failing to comply (European Commission 2021). SAARC's agreements, like its Framework Agreement on Energy Cooperation, lack enforcement, leading to fragmented efforts (SAARC Secretariat 2020). The EU uses monitoring tools like Eurostat to track SDGs, while SAARC depends on voluntary reporting, causing data gaps and weak accountability (Ahmed and Bhatnagar 2021).

Funding Mechanisms The EU's well-organized funding is key to its sustainability success. Programs like the Just Transition Fund (€17.5 billion) and Horizon Europe (€95.5 billion) finance climate and innovation projects (European Parliament 2021). SAARC's Development Fund, with only $500 million, is underused due to bureaucracy and political distrust (Kardar 2019). Unlike the EU's grants tied to performance, SAARC's funding lacks incentives, leading to inefficiency (World Bank 2022).

5.4 *Political will*

The EU's shared political vision has kept sustainability efforts strong, even during crises like Brexit (Rosamond 2020). SAARC's progress is often blocked by bilateral tensions, especially between India and Pakistan. The cancellation of SAARC summits since 2016 shows how political rivalries halt cooperation (Bajpai 2017). While the EU can separate conflicts from cooperation (e.g., Poland's rule-of-law issues), SAARC's consensus system magnifies disagreements, leaving key projects like the SAARC Climate Resilience Platform inactive (Bhattacharya 2021). The EU's strong institutions and financial resources, along with its ability to keep sustainability efforts non-political, provide a good example of regional cooperation. On the other hand, SAARC's challenges highlight the difficulties of loose regional ties in politically divided areas. To improve, SAARC really needs to shake things up by reforming its institutions, securing more funding, and figuring out how to tackle geopolitical challenges—lessons that we can clearly learn from the EU's experience.

6 CONCLUSION

This comparison between the SAARC and EU shows how they illustrate the importance of strong institutions, adequate funding and political will in encouraging and implementing regional cooperation to achieve sustainable development. The EU, which framesthe context using a supranational model and is supported by binding legal instruments, substantial funding and a common agenda has established itself as world leaders in sustainability. SAARC took an intergovernmental approach based on voluntary compliance which with limited funding and persistent political animosity can struggle to make meaningful progress. For instance, with respect to institutional capacity, the EUs structural capacity is parsimoniously resourceful with its central enforcement agencies ensuring adherence to many policies, whereas SAARCs institutional capacity can be hamstrung by needing consensus which can cause delays.

From a policy implementation perspective, the EU has binding targets, while SAARC initiates through non-binding declarations, which makes SAARC implementation less consistent. Regarding level of funding, the EU provides conditional funding that encourages compliance to targets; on the other hand, SAARC has an underfunded Development Fund that struggles to have an impact. Lastly, the EU has a significant advantage regarding political will, since it has developed the ability to cooperate despite differences of opinion, whereas SAARC is often stalled by political tensions, especially between India and Pakistan.

6.1 *Policy recommendations for SAARC*

To improve its effectiveness, SAARC could learn from the EU (with adjustments for the South Asian context) in the following ways:

(1) Create a SAARC Secretariat with limited supranational authority, to direct and oversee SDG management, for example allow it to make decisions in technical matters on climate, health etc. without requiring full consensus.
(2) Create an independent monitoring agency similar to the European Environmental Agency to monitor progress on SDGs.
(3) Increase levels of funding for the SAARC Development Fund through working with the private sector and with external donors, for example the World Bank or Asian Development Bank.
(4) Develop performance-based funding that provides priority to projects such as self-sufficient renewable energy.
(5) Address political barriers to action by building "coalitions of the willing" at the sub-regional level (for example, India, Bangladesh, and Nepal working together on hydropower) to circumvent stalemates created by a region-wide geopolitical tensions.
(6) Encourage track-II diplomacy that involves civil society and business groups that build trust.

While South Asia might not take the same route as the EU in terms of deep integration, SAARC has the potential to embrace practical cooperation strategies to tackle its challenges. The pressing issues of climate change and inequality call for innovative regional solutions. This study sheds light on both the opportunities and hurdles that lie ahead. Future research should bridge the gap between theory and practice to ensure that the recommendations are not only feasible but also politically viable.

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Regionalism vs globalism: Competing visions of international order

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ABSTRACT: This paper examines the evolving dynamics between regionalism and globalism as frameworks for structuring the international order. Globalism, with its emphasis on transnational cooperation and institutional governance, has historically underpinned global integration, particularly in the 21st century. However, the rise of regionalism in the form of localized cooperation, cultural affinity, and strategic regional blocs has challenged the dominance of globalist models. Through comparative case studies of the European Union (EU), Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the African Union (AU), alongside global institutions like the United Nations (UN) and World Trade Organization (WTO), this study explores how both paradigms function in practice, their inherent tensions, and potential complementarities. It argues that neither regionalism nor globalism alone can address the complex, multilayered challenges of the 21st century. Instead, a hybrid governance approach termed 'glocalism' may offer a more effective, adaptive, and equitable path forward. The findings highlight the need for integrated, multilevel governance systems capable of fostering cooperation at both global and regional scales.

Keywords: Regionalism, Globalism, International Order, Global Governance, Regional Integration

1 INTRODUCTION

The 21st century has witnessed two cross-cutting global trends at the international level: the trend of globalism, and the trend of regionalism. The two paradigms, formerly considered rival paradigms are now considered to be given a renewed chance to coexist and complement each other amid a world, which is increasingly interconnected and interdependent [1]. To comprehend these origins and their theoretical inspirations, as well as their practical applications, it is essential to understanding the current geopolitical environment. Globalism, informed by liberal and internationalist ideals, envisions a world without boundaries, where states match like their sovereignties in international organizations and across transnational networks. Ever since the end of World War II and the onset of the Cold War, transnational institutions such as the UN, the WTO, and the IMF have helped nations coordinate, provide for mutual security, and integrate economies. These institutions uphold universal standards, lower trade walls and support joint responses to global challenges such as climate change, pandemics and armed strife.

Rather, regionalism entails the establishment and consolidation of forums for interstate collaboration within a demarcated territorial zone. Through economic compacts, defense treaties, or common cultural ties, regionalism is based on mutual historical memories, cultural proximity, and strategic co-dependency. From EU to ASEAN and AU, regional organizations have become effective actors, regularly more flexible and context-responsive than global institutions. Regionalism is less an outright rejection of globalism than a

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response to its perceived deficiencies including the top-down imposition of standards, unequal benefits, and the stifling of local voices [2]. This work is situated in this dynamic context, and raises the question:

Is regionalism opposed to globalism in principle, or can both be reconciled in a consistent and mutually supportive system of global governance?

What are the strengths and limitations of each approach in terms of fostering peace, development, and international stability?

The global hegemony of globalism is being challenged by the COVID-19 pandemic, Brexit, trade wars, and the rise of nationalism [3]. At the same time, regional organizations have shown that they can coordinate effective responses, develop solidarity, and formulate policies that are attuned to the needs of their citizens. A new framework for global governance that reflects the global norms and regional realities will be the key. This paper claims that an alternative hybrid paradigm 'glocalism' points the way towards an alternative. Glocalism is the mixing of global norms with local/regional thinking, providing room for polycentric, flexible governance [4]. Comparing regional and global institutions, this study examines the relative merits and weaknesses of each approach and their compatibility in serving as part of a calculated policy mixture. Through a discussion of the epistemological premises, institutional apparatus, and concrete results related to both regionalism and globalism, the paper adds to the increasingly vocal discussion on how best to govern an interrelated world characterized by the diffusion of power and transboundary challenges.

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To predict the future of the international order in an age of shifting geopolitics.
- To understand whether regionalism and globalism are contradictory or complementary.
- To understand by examining the political, economic, and cultural wake caused by each scenario on global relations.
- To examine historical and recent examples that exemplify the paradigms.
- To characterize and differentiate the theoretical underpinnings of regionalism and globalism.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In line with the qualitative and explanatory character of our study we entirely rely on secondary sources. These sources provide a wide-ranging, rich and analytically developed set of materials with which to scrutinize the theoretical, institutional and practical development of regionalism and globalism. The discourse analysis was mainly driven by policy coherence, judging coherence between institutional objectives and practices. Mechanisms of enforcement, member-state compliance, and the challenges institutions face were also evaluated as factors that are context-based in order to measure how coherent narrative integrity and governance legitimacy are in each case. The secondary data covers a range of types of data, formats and scholarly disciplines, which all contribute to forming the comparative and conceptual analysis that the paper presents.

The type of the data can be classified into the following main types:

3.1 *Literature review in academic and peer-reviewed journals*

Importantly, a significant amount of this data is derived from peer-reviewed scholarly books, which contribute theoretical groundwork, theoretical orientations and case study materials to the field of globalism, regionalism, global governance, and globalization studies [5].

These sources constitute the theoretical foundation of the paper, providing a range of views from International Relations (IR) scholars, Political Scientists, Global Studies Scholars, Economists, and Comparativist Practitioners.

Examples include:

- Baral (2024) on the conceptual intricacy for regionalism and globalism.
- Collins (2025) on the process of regionalism and globalization.
- Hine (2024) on the economics of globalization and regional trade.
- Oloruntoba *et al.* (2023), on the African Continental Free Trade Area and its regional implications.

These works add critical depth to how scholars have understood regionalism and globalism that will further inform the historical context and analytic frame of this project.

3.2 *Policy papers and institutional literature*

The study also draws on official documents, policy documents, and strategy papers of regional and global entities. Such sources are invaluable for grasping the formal ends, institutional structure, strategic preferences, and legal media within which the targeted organizations (EU, ASEAN, AU, UN, WTO) operate.

Examples include:

- Agenda 2063 (2013) African Union The strategic framework for the socio-economic transformation of the continent over the next fifty years.
- EU Treaties (e.g., Maastricht, Lisbon): Offer understanding of EU integration development and its legal framework.
- ASEAN Charter and Declarations: Describe the guiding principles of operation of ASEAN, particularly with regards to non-interference, and consensus-based decision making.
- UN Charters and GA resolutions: Both inform global norms, peacekeeping and multilateralism.
- WTO: Agreements & Ministerial reports: Aid to Assess the disintegration means and the structured disputing power in the period of globalization.

These are not just corporate declarations in the written sense, but documented evolutions and self-conceptions.

3.3 *Databases of statistical and graphical data*

Emphasis is laid on the use of quantitive data and graphic visualization to elaborate certain global and regional developments, esp., in the field of trade, economic cooperation and development.

Sources include:

- WTO trade statistics: Include the export volume data by region (displayed on the trade volume figure they cited) from Statista (Figure 1).
- Statista and World Bank indicators: Shown to illustrate economic imbalances between regions, integration depths, and the economic weight of the various blocs.
- Include human development index (HDI) rankings and development trends by various regions. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) coverage notes.

These sources are useful to represent the empirical analysis and to visualize the relative influence of globalism and regionalism.

3.4 *Archival files and founding charters*

Historical background materials such as founding charters, treaties, summit declarations are used to track the historical development of the chosen institutions. These materials also shed

light on the politics of institutional development in the context of global changes like the Cold War, the rise of post-colonialism and national independence movements, and post-9/11 security concerns.

Examples include:

- Treaty of Rome (1957) and The Maastricht Treaty (1992) -Documents that brought about the EU.
- The Bangkok Declaration (1967): Humiliation of ASEAN.
- Charter of the Organization of African Unity (1963) Charter of the African Union (2000) creates the institutional structure of the AU, as successor to the OAU.

Such literature helps to understand the original motivations and ideologies in the regional formations, as well as the geopolitical pressures were behind it.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The relationship between regionalism and globalism is not binary but deeply intertwined, with each responding to and influencing the other. This section examines how regional and global institutions have evolved in practice, their respective successes and limitations, and the ways in which they interact [6]. It also explores how these interactions contribute to shaping a hybrid governance framework capable of addressing the multilayered challenges of the 21st century.

4.1 *Regionalism: Emergence, functionality, and challenges*

4.1.1 *The European Union (EU): Deep regional integration*

The EU represents a form of 'post-sovereign' regionalism where member states delegate significant authority to centralized bodies. This level of integration is rare and underpinned by a shared European identity, economic interdependence, and a history of cooperation. The EU has achieved notable success in promoting peace, economic growth, environmental regulation, and the free movement of goods, people, services, and capital across member states [7].

However, the EU has also revealed the limits of regional integration. The United Kingdom's decision to leave the EU Brexit reflected widespread dissatisfaction with perceived overreach by Brussels, loss of national sovereignty, and socio-economic inequalities within the bloc [8]. Additionally, internal divisions such as the North-South divide over fiscal policy, and East-West disagreements over democratic values and migration have threatened cohesion. These tensions underscore that while deep regional integration offers significant benefits, it demands high levels of political coherence, public support, and economic solidarity, all of which are not always present.

4.1.2 *ASEAN: Flexible and pragmatic cooperation*

ASEAN's achievements include the creation of the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA), the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), and active participation in the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). despite lacking enforcement power, ASEAN has maintained relative peace in the region, fostered economic cooperation, and served as a diplomatic platform for dialogue [9].

Nevertheless, ASEAN's consensus model has often hindered swift and decisive action, especially in crisis situations like the Rohingya humanitarian crisis in Myanmar or territorial disputes in the South China Sea. The principle of non-interference, while maintaining unity, has also limited the organization's ability to uphold human rights and democratic norms. ASEAN thus illustrates the trade-off between inclusivity and effectiveness in regional governance.

4.1.3 *The African Union (AU): Aspirational regionalism*

The African Union (AU), which succeeded the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 2002, is another significant case of regionalism. With 55 member states, the AU seeks to promote unity, peace, and socio-economic development across the African continent. Its Agenda 2063 outlines ambitious goals for infrastructure, industrialization, integration, and self-reliance [10].

Despite financial and political constraints, the AU has made measurable progress in peacekeeping operations, electoral monitoring, and advocacy for sustainable development. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), operational since 2021, is a landmark initiative aimed at creating a single African market to boost intra-African trade and economic diversification.

Still, the AU faces persistent challenges. Its reliance on external donors undermines autonomy. Political instability, weak state institutions, and inconsistent commitment among member states hinder effective implementation of regional strategies. While the AU symbolizes a powerful aspiration for Pan-Africanism, its success depends on overcoming resource gaps, enhancing institutional capacity, and deepening political will among its members.

4.2 *Globalism: Achievements, disillusionment, and institutional gridlock*

4.2.1 *Global institutions: Instruments of integration*

Globalism has historically been driven by the formation of transnational institutions aimed at managing interdependence, reducing conflict, and promoting development. The UN, WTO, IMF, and World Bank are pillars of this liberal international order [11]. They provide platforms for cooperation, norms-setting, dispute resolution, and financial support.

The UN, for instance, has played a central role in peacekeeping, humanitarian aid, and development through agencies like WHO, UNESCO, and UNDP. The WTO has facilitated multilateral trade negotiations, reduced tariffs, and established mechanisms to adjudicate trade disputes [12]. The IMF and World Bank have supported macroeconomic stability and infrastructure development in emerging economies [13].

4.2.2 *Case study: Global trade flows and regional disparities*

According to WTO data (2015), the majority of global trade is concentrated in Europe and Asia, with exports valued at $6.81 trillion and $5.92 trillion respectively. North America trails behind at $2.49 trillion, while Africa, Latin America, and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) each contribute significantly less. This uneven distribution reflects long-standing disparities in infrastructure, industrial capacity, and access to global markets [14]. The dominance of certain regions in global trade reinforces economic hierarchies and limits the growth potential of underrepresented areas.

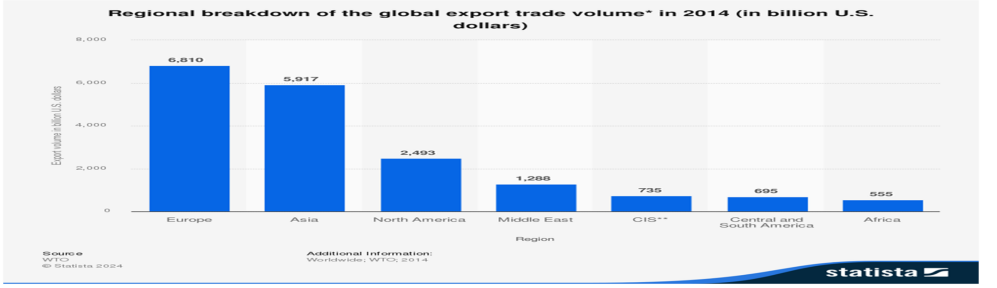


Figure 1. WTO. (November 15, 2015). Regional breakdown of the global export trade volume* in 2014 (in billion U.S. dollars) [Graph]. In *Statista*. Retrieved April 24, 2025, from https://www.statista.com/statistics/268350/value-of-worldwide-export-volume-of-trade-by-region-in-2009/.

Figure 1 shows the geographic concentration of global export trade last year (2014) according to 2015 WTO data. Global exports were dominated by Europe and Asia at 6.810 and 5.917 billion (bn) U.S. dollars, respectively. The third place of place belonged to North America, whose output was well behind at 2.493 trillion U.S. dollars. The Middle East (1,288bn), the CIS (735bn), Central and South America (695bn), and Africa (555bn) had relatively lesser shares. This distribution also represents the dominance of Europe and Asia on the global trade flows, which is a reflection of their economic power and open supply chain in this period.

4.2.3 *The COVID-19 pandemic: A litmus test for global and regional governance*

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the strengths and limitations of both regional and global governance. At the global level, institutions like the World Health Organization (WHO) played an essential role in information dissemination and technical guidance. However, WHO's limited enforcement power and susceptibility to geopolitical pressure especially from powerful member states—hampered its effectiveness [15].

COVAX, the global vaccine-sharing initiative, revealed the deep inequities in access to life-saving vaccines. Wealthier nations engaged in vaccine nationalism, securing large stockpiles, while many lower-income countries faced shortages [16]. This not only undermined the principle of global solidarity but also demonstrated the fragility of global mechanisms in the face of national interests.

On the regional level, responses were more agile. The EU coordinated joint procurement and distribution of vaccines among its members, promoting efficiency and fairness. Similarly, the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) facilitated information-sharing, technical support, and pooled procurement among AU members. These regional responses were closer to the ground, context-sensitive, and often more responsive than global ones. The pandemic thus illustrated that local proximity and regional coordination can complement global frameworks when the latter falter.

5 EMERGING SYNERGIES: THE RISE OF GLOCALISM

Given the respective strengths and weaknesses of regionalism and globalism, scholars and policymakers are increasingly advocating for a 'glocal' approach, a strategic synthesis that combines global norms with regional adaptability. Glocalism recognizes that while many challenges like climate change, pandemics, cybersecurity, financial instability are inherently global, their impacts and solutions are often local or regional [17].

This approach is evident in climate governance. The Paris Agreement provides a global framework, but its implementation relies heavily on national commitments and regional coordination. The EU's Green Deal, for example, aligns with global sustainability goals while being tailored to European capabilities and constraints [18]. Similarly, in the domain of trade, regional agreements like the RCEP and AfCFTA incorporate global trade principles while addressing region-specific needs and asymmetries.

Glocalism also offers a way to mitigate the legitimacy and accountability deficits of global institutions. Regional organizations are often more attuned to local realities and enjoy higher levels of public trust. By embedding global standards in regional mechanisms, glocalism enhances legitimacy while preserving coherence.

Moreover, polycentric governance where multiple centers of authority interact across scales can foster resilience, experimentation, and innovation. Instead of a top-down or bottom-up dichotomy, glocalism encourages feedback loops between global and regional actors, producing more responsive and inclusive governance systems.

The comparative analysis of regionalism and globalism reveals that both paradigms have crucial roles to play in international governance. Regionalism offers context-specific flexibility, cultural alignment, and rapid response capabilities. Globalism brings standardization, economies of scale, and normative leadership. However, neither model is sufficient on its own. The challenges of the 21st century ranging from health and security to digital governance and climate change demand a hybrid approach.

The path forward lies in glocalism, a model that harmonizes global and regional strengths while minimizing their weaknesses. Rather than viewing regionalism and globalism as oppositional, they should be seen as mutually reinforcing components of a complex, multilayered international order. This layered model, if implemented with inclusivity, accountability, and adaptability, holds promise for building a more stable, equitable, and sustainable global future.

6 CONCLUSION

Regionalism and globalism are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they function as interdependent layers within a multilayered governance system. Regional institutions offer adaptability and cultural proximity; global ones bring standardization and scale. Their integration under a glocalism framework can leverage both strengths.

This paper contends that international order will depend on embracing pluralism, supporting multi-level governance, and cultivating regional agency within global frameworks. Only through such inclusive governance can the world navigate pressing challenges such as inequality, climate change, pandemics, and conflict.

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Trade war between US and China: Implications for India

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ABSTRACT: In a globalized world, economic changes in one country results larger impacts on other countries across the globe. The U.S.-China trade war counted as a major economic event have affected the nations involved along with disrupting the markets, global trade, global supply chains for other nation states.

Purpose: This paper investigates the history, reasons of the US-China trade war, analyse their present status, and its positive and negative impacts for India. The paper focuses on the primary objective as to understand how such economic issue among two largest economies affects emerging markets like India.

Methodology/approach: For this paper, we are adopting a qualitative methodology, where we majorly analyse the situation based on secondary data retrieved from academic literature, books, research articles along with retrieving data from primary sources such as newspaper articles, official government websites as this topic involves the current happenings newspapers and government portals served as the primary source.

Findings: This paper in its conclusion provides certain recommendations that could help India deal with the negative impacts in a better way along with strengthening its economy to gain from the opportunities presented. These findings can serve as examples for various other nations how to survive such economic conflicts.

Keywords: Globalisation, Tariffs, Trade war, US-China

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 *Research problem*

The United States and China, two of the world biggest economies, got involved in a series of escalating trade confrontations since 2018. These disputes, popularly termed a "trade war," have manifested through reciprocal tariff increases and non-tariff barriers, severely disrupting global trade patterns (Liang and Ding 2021).

Currently, US and China have again got themselves involved in new escalating trade war due to their rising distrust in trade and war of establishing supremacy in the global trade and global political front.

1.2 *Significance of the study*

The paper focuses primarily as to understand how such economic issues among two largest economies affects emerging markets like India and how can India and other similar economies can deal with these situations in their best possible way.

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1.3 *Research gap*

This paper presents the updates in the trade war till the beginning of April only. A lot is still going among US and China which are not covered in this paper.

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This paper focuses on these research objectives: -

(1) Examine the current trade war situation between US and China.
(2) What positive and negative implications this trade war holds for India?
(3) How can India navigate through these challenges and opportunities posed by the trade war?

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 *Data collection*

Data majorly retrieved from secondary sources like academic literature, books, research articles along with some date also retrieved from primary sources such as newspaper articles, official government websites as this topic involves the current happenings newspapers and government portals served as the primary source.

3.2 *Research methodology*

For this paper, we are adopting a qualitative methodology. The study is basically descriptive and analytical in nature. From the current sources and some previous academic sources for diving into the history of US-China trade war are explored. The interpretation of these facts and data are solely based on the researcher's viewpoint and interpretation. The solutions provided are based on the information fetched from the various sources or the researcher's own thinking.

To begin with this research paper let first acknowledge the concept of a Trade war.

4 CONCEPT OF A TRADE WAR

A trade war is a situation where countries impose punitive trade barriers such as tariffs and quotas on each other in retaliation for perceived unfair economic practices. Unlike trade disputes—typically resolved through institutional mechanisms such as the WTO—trade wars involve broader, often politically motivated, economic retaliation (Liang and Ding 2021, p. 6).

"Trade wars" are international economic conflicts where two states use unusual restrictive measures to affect imports of goods or services from each other to achieve certain economic objectives (Liang and Ding 2021, p. 6).

Trade wars are different from trade disputes as the means of tackling both are different. For tackling trade disputes states usually use normal measures like imposing anti-dumping duties or countervailing duties or other such other measures. The measures taken usually to solve a trade dispute are within the range of international laws, trade policies, etc. But the measures used by states in a trade war are generally of more severe nature. They are generally sort of punitive tariffs, which are solely used with purpose of harming the imports and exports equation with the other country in such a way it creates a negative impact on them and positive impact for the home country (Liang and Ding 2021).

The causes of a trade war are diversified, ranging from economic to political, national to international, and direct to indirect factors. (Liang and Ding 2021, p. 3).

Prima facie reason of a trade war is generally some economic or trade related issue only. But, if we deep dive then will understand that reasons like political structure of countries involved, their geopolitical scenario, technology conflicts or other competitiveness results in such wars. Currently, such is the scenario in the case of US and China.

5 HISTORY OF TRADE WARS BETWEEN BOTH THE COUNTRIES

China's economic growth has boosted significantly since they have joined the World Trade Organisation in 2001. By the year 2017, US and China were each other's largest trading partners. But it changed a lot in the geopolitical scenario as China's economic influence started to increase at a fast pace and along with this US's share in the global production and international trade started declining. China across the globe have established themselves as the world's low-cost manufacturing centre.

Trade dispute among both the countries first initiated in the mid of 2018 by the US under Trump administration when they started to apply certain tariffs on China in the wake of keeping "America First". US was motivated to cut the trade deficit between both countries and apply protectionist policies so that their businesses, industries and customers can be protected. Other issues included intellectual property theft by China and China's industrial policies like "Made in China 2025" (Itakura 2019).

China applied the retaliatory tariffs and after various rounds of imposing tariffs on each other it resulted in affecting the other world economies also as this trade war happened in the wake of globalisation.

After a while both countries settled with mutual agreement providing temporary relief only. After the end of Trump's Presidential rule, the Joe Biden government also did not fully abolish the tariffs but kept them as they were. With Trump coming back again to power the trade tensions again started developing in 2025.

6 CURRENT TRADE WAR SCENARIO BETWEEN US AND CHINA

With coming of Trump back into power the US-China trade war again fuelled up. The US President again imposed tariffs on China and then China imposed retaliatory tariffs. Following table presents the updates in their trade war till beginning of April-

Table 1. Representing timelines in US- China second trade war. (Above details has been retrieved from Times of India newspaper dated 05th April 2025).

S.No.	Date	Action
1.	Feb, 2025	Under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA), US imposed a new 10% tariff on all imports from China. China also imposed similar tariffs on products like- US Coal, LNG, and agricultural machinery.
2.	March, 2025	Here, US again imposed an additional tariff of 10% on all Chinese goods. In retaliatory actions, China imposed up to 15% tariffs on the various farm products from the US. Some of these items include beef, chicken, soybeans and pork. Apart from this China tighten its restrictions on US Companies.
3.	3 April, 2025	Under the light of "Tariff Liberation Day", the US President announced the new rate for tariff on all the Chinese imports. Rate going up to 34%, this again prompted China to deal with the matter with certain new export controls.

(*continued*)

Table 1. Continued

S.No.	Date	Action
4.	4 April, 2025	China filed a lawsuit against US in the World Trade Organisation along with it suspended the import of various items from various US companies. In total it targeted a total of 27 firms to face the trade restrictions, and initiated an anti-monopoly probe into DuPont China Group Co. In another retaliatory move China put more export controls on rare earth minerals.
5.	9 April, 2025	Trump paused his reciprocal tariffs on most nations for 90 days but at the same time hiking levies on Chinese imports to a staggering 145%. In response, China retaliated by raising tariffs to 125% on US goods and along with this including more US companies on its export control list and unreliable entity list.

7 IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA

For an emerging economy like India, this evolving crisis presents both risks and opportunities.

7.1 *Negative implications*

(1) **Dumping Risk:** China and US both can dump surplus goods into Indian local markets at cheap rates via direct or indirect means.
(2) **Loss to local industries:** This dumping can hurt the Indian local industries. It can even result in job loss or reduction of wages. If job loss happens at a large scale, then it can result in disharmony in the social structure.
(3) **Supply Chain Disruption:** India can have certain supply chain disruptions in the areas of electronics, pharmaceuticals and auto parts as India heavily relies on Chinese components. Rising costs or delay in the shipments can result in higher prices for customers or the product will not reach in due time.
(4) **Pressure from US:** The US government is trying to pressurise India to fall for their conditions by imposing certain tariffs on us also. US wants the trade with the various nation states on its own terms.

7.2 *Positive implications*

(1) **Export opportunity:** India can grab the opportunity of making its mark in exporting goods to US in the labour-intensive sector like textiles, toys and games, footwear and others.
(2) **Investment opportunity:** Possibility of relocation of global manufacturing to India.

8 CONCLUSION

The US-China trade war in the wake of globalisation, does not have any clear winners but this trade war has certain implications on the world trade, stock markets and alliances among nations. Both the countries should come together and settle their differences via talk and some high-level meetings. But this seems like a little difficult idea as previously also talks have not provided any permanent solution and since the last trade war in 2018, problems are intact between them with little superficial solutions.

Beijing says that it will not bend before the United States. They in a way have prepared their country in a better way to deal with this by taking lessons from the last time. Increasingly, the Chinese people see the trade war as part of inevitable growing pains and are convinced that the country will emerge more resilient than ever. (*Where Is the Trade War Heading?* 2025 b). Whereas the US President sees that they have an upper hand as China is having a bigger trade surplus with the U.S. and they would not like to forego it. (*Where Is the Trade War Heading?* 2025 b).

The issue arises as both the countries wants to establish their mark in the global economy and wants to create their supremacy. This mindset on the part of both US and China must go as they both have to understand that in a globalised world you cannot hinder the progress and growth of other countries for your benefits. So, rather than working for your own benefit work in a way that proper world order is maintained.

International agencies like World Trade Organisation, United Nations and others also should act in their roles properly. They should not merely be some acting agencies on the part of some Nation States. Rules and regulations should be formulated properly, applied in the same sense and followed to their letter and spirit.

Amid globalisation, this current trade war is not just one between these two countries; it makes America stand-alone against the rest of the world. (*Where Is the Trade War Heading?* 2025 b). The ASEAN countries, BRICS nations and other groups also have started more of regional cooperation among themselves.

For the allies to the United States, the impact of Trump's unilateral tariffs poses even more severe threats. Allies are built on a sense of certainty, and an unpredictable United States prone to sudden policy changes may force its allies to see their U.S. alliances less as an asset and more of a risk (Trump Triggers New Regional Trade Worldwide 2025).

As US and China both are two of the most significant economies globally and contribute a large portion in the global trade this trade war poses significant threats to the global economy, stock markets and the financial stability. This trade war can even result in global recession, rising prices of everyday goods, increasing inflation, job loss for some people whose industries or businesses are affected.

As India is having certain opportunities in its way, they should focus on gaining from these opportunities along the line of balanced Diplomacy so that we maintain our autonomy while negotiating with both the powers. India should take a strong stance and should not fall to the conditions of US and along with focus on their Make in India programme so that in the long run any such trade conflict affects us in the least possible way. Certain strategic recommendations for India are mentioned below-

8.1 *Strategic recommendations for India*

(1) We should enhance our domestic capacity by improving the infrastructure and developing more Special Economic Zones (SEZs) areas.
(2) Trade should be more export oriented. Schemes should be made to promote this.
(3) Workers should be properly trained. Focus should be on their skill development.
(4) Easy loan facility for the business should be available so that more businesses will come forward in export-oriented businesses.
(5) Pragmatic policymaking and strategic foresight are essential to navigate the challenges and capitalizing on potential gains.
(6) Infrastructure development and better transportation facilities should also be our priority.
(7) The Indian government should keep their stance clear they should raise their voice on various forums in case of any form of dumping and unnecessary tariffs if imposed on them.

(8) Red tapism should be reduced to its lowest extent so that fast working procedures can be adopted.
(9) India could utilise its mines for the mining of rare earth minerals as China is the largest exporter of them. We may not be able to supersede them, but we can develop our own reserves and export capacity. India holds 5.9% of the entire world rare earth reserves (The Rare Earth Bottleneck 2025).
(10) India should take a strong message from this that we should speed up our "Make in India" program in different varieties of products.

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Analyzing the role of the United Nations in preventing conflicts in a globalized world

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ABSTRACT: In a world growing more interconnected and in which conflict has transcended national borders, with origins in complex social, political, and economic linkages, the role of the United Nations (UN) has appeared again at the forefront of efforts to prevent conflict. This article examines critically, the changing roles, mechanisms and constraints on the UN in conflict prevention in the era of globalization. Based on qualitative research and case studies, the study examines how the UN adjusts its diplomatic, peacekeeping, and early warning interventions to rise to new threats like cyber conflict, transnational terrorism, and resource-based violence. The work sheds a light on the UN's successes and failures, including the popular successes of peacekeeping interventions in Kosovo and Cambodia and the devastating failure to act in Haiti, Somalia, Rwanda, and Syria. Tracing state sovereignty, international cooperation, and institutional inertia through the prism of multilateralism, the paper suggests that the global peacekeeping moves of the UN remain pivotal but power oppression amongst the largest political players and the lack of enforcement capability has kept the UN from effectively preventing conflict. The results call for institutional reforms, intensified cooperation at regional level, and creative diplomacy in developing the UN conflict-prevention tools required for a globalising world order. In the end, this study is a necessary addition to the global governance debate, providing needed reflections and concrete proposals toward a more agile and effective UN.

Keywords: United Nations, conflict prevention, globalization, peacekeeping, international cooperation, sovereignty, multilateralism, global governance

1 INTRODUCTION

In the twenty-first century, the pace of globalization has altered not just the way that economies and societies function, but the very way in which we view conflict itself. Although states remain the main international actors, the multiple dimensions of contemporary conflicts include non-state actors, transnational networks, extremist ideologies, and technological combat. This has made traditional forms of conflict resolution inadequate and has led to necessitate preventative, more robust forms of resolution. At the centre of this transformation stands the United Nations – the world's preeminent international peacekeeping and conflict resolution institution. Now its role is under vigorous

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scrutiny as pundits weigh whether it is effective at preventing fights before they mushroom into full-on crises. This paper aims to investigate the multi-dimensional role of the United Nations in conflict prevention and to evaluate both its institutional possibilities and political constraints in the contemporary context which is characterised by new dimensions of global interconnectedness (Fajardo 2021).

1.1 *Background of the study*

The UN was established after World War II with the purpose of preventing such conflicts and securing international peace and security. Over the decades, the organization has developed to confront a vast range of such existential threats to humanity, from humanitarian crises to climate change, and sustainable development. But preventing war is one of its most important — and controversial — mandates. In highly globalized political, economic, and social spheres, conflicts are more complex and arise over cross-border issues (such as economic disparity, extreme ideological positions, and environmental pressures). And with digital connectivity and global media, that also means that conflicts are being escalated and disseminated at a faster pace than ever before. Indeed the usual tools of conflict prevention—diplomacy, negotiation, and peacekeeping—are at serious premium in this dewy dawn. The case for a more flexible and cohesive approach to conflict prevention, spearheaded by the UN, is not only timely but compelling (Mings *et al.* 2022).

1.2 *Significance of the study*

This book is important in that it attempts to offer a thorough and critically assessed account of the United Nation's role within the fast-changing international system. The findings provide a practical perspective of the challenges the UN has encountered in implementing its mission to prevent, which are pertinent to current debates relating to the UN's reform. This is not only of pedagogical interest, but also practical relevance for policy-makers, diplomats and international development workers since the way in which the UN works with this area. By shedding light on these tendencies, and by providing strategic advice, it is the aim of this research to enrich the operational relevance of the UN's conflict prevention mechanisms (...) and to contribute to help build a more peaceful and stable global society (Rachmad 2023d).

1.3 *Research objectives*

The main aim of this project is to examine the contribution of the United Nations to conflict prevention in a globalized world. The specific aims are:

(1) To consider the development of the UN's approach to preventive action.
(2) To determine the impact of UN mediation on regional conflicts.
(3) To investigate the impact of globalization on the nature of conflicts and the response mechanism of the UN.
(4) To discover institutional and geopolitical stumbling blocks which are hampering the preventive potential of the UN.
(5) To make recommendations for strengthening the role of the UN in early warning and early response to conflict.

1.4 *Research questions*

Specifically, the study is informed by the central questions:

(1) What changes has globalization brought about, in terms of the United Nations' ability to prevent conflicts?

(2) What are the most serious challenges for the UN in implementing its conflict preventions mandate?
(3) How have UN-led conflict prevention initiatives worked or not worked in certain cases?
(4) How can the UN restructure its institutional configuration in order to better address the new dynamics of conflict?
(5) What are the policy tools and the reforms that can enhance the UN's preventive diplomacy in the 21st century?

1.5 *Structure of the paper*

The structure of this research paper consists of six chapters. Chapter 2 then includes an in-depth literature review, mapping theoretical frameworks, historical context, and main academic discussions on conflict prevention and the role of the UN therein. In Chapter 3, the methodology is described and presented, including qualitative research approach, case study selection and methods for analysis. The analysis is set out in chapter 4 with presented results of the study with regard to UN interventions and their effects. Finally, in Chapter 5, I then provide a detailed discussion of my findings in the context of the wider geopolitical and institutional setting. In the end, Chapter 6 wraps up the research by recapitulating major findings and presenting specific recommendations for the future. These chapters, taken together, seek to offer a comprehensive and critical view of one of the most foremost global governance quandaries of our times (Moore and Pubantz 2022).

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The challenges of conflict prevention in the age of globalization require a strong theoretical underpinning. This chapter critically examines theoretical and empirical knowledge to help explain the role of the United Nations in preventing conflict. It highlights the transition in the UN's preventionist approach, analyses the complex influence of globalization on conflictual dynamics, presents key critiques and disconnects in the scholarly literature which this work seeks to address (Rachmad 2023c).

2.1 *Theoretical framework*

The study lies at the junction between liberal institutionalism and critical peace studies. The concept, therefore, foregrounds the UN and its role as an "international organization [that] organize[s] cooperation, manage[s] relations among sovereign states, and mollify[ies] conflict through codified norms and rules." According to this perspective, institutions are important actors in taming the anarchical character of the international system. In contrast, critical peace theory adds a much-needed lens, challenging the structural inequalities of a global governance order and instead focusing on the importance of addressing root causes of conflict – marginalization, injustice and identity-based grievances. By synthesizing these theoretical perspectives, the current inquiry aims to reconcile the optimistic assumption of institutional capabilities with a critical examination of the systemic and structural constraints which undermine the effectiveness of the UN in the realm of conflict prevention (Orhan 2022).

2.2 *The role of the united nations in conflict prevention—an historical overview*

The universal organization dealing with the vital issue of preventing war and then keeping the peace between nations has been given to the United Nations from its first day. The UN Charter indeed provides that the organization can undertake collective (meaning, counterterrorism) measures in order to prevent a threat to international peace and security (Art.44 UN Charter).

Its content, though, has changed quite radically over time. DURING THE COLD WAR, ideological splits between big powers regularly paralyzed the Security Council and frustrated the choice of preventive action. However, the UN was still an important part of the process of decolonization and served as a diplomatic bridge during otherwise-strained situations. The collapse of the Cold War gave the organization additional license to be more active, broadening its preventive toolbox to include early warning, diplomatic mediation, peacebuilding operations, and special political missions. But the success of those efforts has been mixed. In some cases, the UN prevented escalation, as in West Africa, and in others it was widely criticised for failing to act, like in Rwanda and Bosnia. The evolution of the UN in the prevention of conflict has seen a move from peacekeeping in the rear to the anticipation of the conflict of multiple dimensions (Mochizuki and Vickers 2024).

2.3 *Conflict dynamics and globalization*

International conflict has been transformed by globalization. The quick flows of knowledge, money, people, and ideas around borders engender new types of togetherness that invite cooperation and create friction. On the one hand, globalization has promoted the spread of democratic norms, international legal standards and interdependence that can inhibit war. At the same time, it has opened the way for the proliferation of transnational threats, including terrorism, organized crime, cyberwarfare, and ecological decay, that blur the lines of traditional state-to-state warfare. These dynamics which have made warfare more dynamic, diffuse, and enduring have further obscured the distinction between domestic disorder and threats to international peace and security. For the United Nations, this means that its efforts to prevent conflict need to adjust to threats that do not easily fit into traditional peace and security frames. It is further complicated by the increasing influence of non-state actors as well as the diminishing sovereignty of the states in some regions that has dilated the UN"s engagement mechanisms, additional flexibility and context-specific strategies would be required (Rachmad 2023b).

2.4 *Limitations and criticisms of the literature to date*

Although there is an extensive literature on conflict prevention and the U.N., there remain substantial lacunae and criticisms. A majority of the extant literature, much of which is comprised of case-study or best-practices analysis, does not subject such case-studies to a systematic investigation of the formal and substantial institutional logic that enabled them. The UN has long been criticized by historians for bureaucratic inefficiency and political paralysis, and for its requirement for major power consensus, which may prevent timely preventive action. Thirdly, the Global Republic is a relatively welcoming and receptive world order to the United Nations, with little references in the literature to the fact that globalisation has not only amplified challenges to the UN but provides new tools and opportunities such as digital diplomacy, big data based early warning systems and broader sectoral partnerships. Regional cooperation and civil society involvement in strengthening preventive capabilities are further underemphasized . These weaknesses identify the demand for a more comprehensive and future-oriented analysis looking both at the structural and the operational aspects of UN conflict prevention in a globalizing world. This study hopes to bridge these gaps by raising a comprehensive discussion of where the UN stands in the greater context of global governance and change (Rachmad 2023a).

3 METHODS

This book chapter shows the methodological framework used in testing the thesis of the preventive role of the UN in the prevention of armed conflict in the light of globalisation.

In order to achieve valid and accurate results and to establish credibility of the study, having a clear and consistent methodology is critical. The chapter covers the research design, methods of data collection and analysis, and its limitations and ethical issues that are pertinent to the study.

3.1 *Research design*

The research employs a qualitative explorative design which is suitable for investigation of complex international processes like conflict prevention and institutional performance. Because it is interpretive in nature, the study makes it possible to gain a deeper understanding of the mechanisms, policies and practices of the United Nations as they relate to conflict prevention. It is organised as a series of case studies that demonstrate how the UN's preventative measures have been applied in various geopolitical settings. They were selected to reflect modern conflict patterns and the availability of full documentation. The qualitative design allows us to describe the institutional narratives, the policy frameworks and the intervention results, in order to provide a detailed view of the opportunities and difficulties faced by the UN .

3.2 *Data collection methods*

Data gathering is mainly conducted through secondary sources such as UN official reports, policy briefs, resolutions, and transcripts of Security Council debates. This material provides a direct view of the organization's intention, purpose, and action. In addition, academic publications and reports and books by experts in international relations and peace studies have provided the analysis depth to the study. In addition to these sources, key interviews and public statements of UN officials, diplomats, and regional actors are also considered to incorporate different viewpoints. The triangulation of these sources is used to justify the results and guards against potential bias derived from a sole source of data (Rachmad 2023a).

3.3 *Data analysis approach*

The method of thematic analysis is also utilised to analyse the data. This involves identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns or themes in relation to the collected material, which are relevant to the UN′s preventive strategies and their success. Analysis of responses was thematically coded manually, around common topics as early warning systems, diplomatic engagement, peacebuilding interventions, and challenges of global governance. Special emphasis was placed on cross-case analysis, which helped reveal similarities as well as context-specific variations of the UN's conduct in conflict prevention. The analysis was iterative and reflexive, enabling understandings to evolve as concepts were developed and situated in the larger theoretical landscape as established in the literature (Organization *et al.* 2021).

3.4 *Limitations of the study*

While rigor and comprehensiveness were strived for, several limitations are recognized. The study is limited by its reliance on secondary data, inevitably not always capturing real time developments or decision-making behind the scene. Another limitation of this approach is the lack of primary field research (e.g. interviews or direct observations) that goes without saying capture first-hand experiences or local stakeholders' opposition. Second, the chosen case studies, while indicative, are not necessarily representative of the wide array of the conflicts in which the UN is involved in the world. Interpretive bias is also a potential limitation of qualitative analysis and that was addressed through triangulation and

cross-validation of data sources. Finally, the fast-changing global situation implies that some findings are time-sensitive and will need to be regularly updated, to remain relevant (Montiel *et al.* 2021).

3.5 *Ethical considerations*

Ethical consideration Ethical integrity is a cornerstone to the research. Local reproduction of all cited materials has been made, while reliance on publicly available data in the study was emphasised. Politicised topics have been treated as matters of fact, with understanding of how thing are and how they will look in due time. Research is not speculative, or blame-oriented, it emphasizes institutional analysis and constructive criticism. It has to be mentioned that we have cited all the referred works in the list of references in an effort to be academically transparent to avoid plagiarism. The studyâ€™s approach in this regard is guided by the value of academic integrity and honesty, while at the same time seeking to make a responsible contribution to discussions concerning global peace and security (Zhang *et al.* 2022).

4 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, selected case studies will be discussed in depth of the United Nations' involvement in the prevention of conflict. It assesses successful and unsuccessful interventions, analyzes the interplay between global institutions and national sovereignty, and examines new issues in peace support operations. Quantitative measures, thematic information, and graphical representations are employed to elaborate and exemplify the results.

4.1 *Case examples of UN interventions*

The cases comprising this study involve the UN in Sierra Leone, Syria and East Timor. These were selected to profile a range of levels of conflict intensity, political challenges and intervention outcomes (Usman and Radulescu 2022).

Table 1. Summary of UN conflict prevention interventions (1999–2022).

Country	Year of Intervention	Nature of Conflict	UN Mission (Code)	Outcome Score (0–10)	Duration (Years)
Sierra Leone	1999	Civil War	UNAMSIL	8.7	6
East Timor	1999	Secession/Occupation	UNTAET	9.1	4
Syria	2011	Civil War/Proxy War	UNSMIS (suspended)	2.3	<1

Interpretation:
The bar graph indicates that the UN performed very well in the preventive peacekeeping contexts of East Timor and Sierra Leone for which outcome scores exceeded 8.5. These were missions with strong Security Council mandates, working in coordination with regional organizations and with robust peacebuilding architecture features. In contrast, the Syrian intervention, a muddle of great power competition and non-consensus failure, is a miserable failure, scoring under 3. This also shows that the success of UN operations frequently depends more on international political will and host state cooperation than it does on institutional capacity.

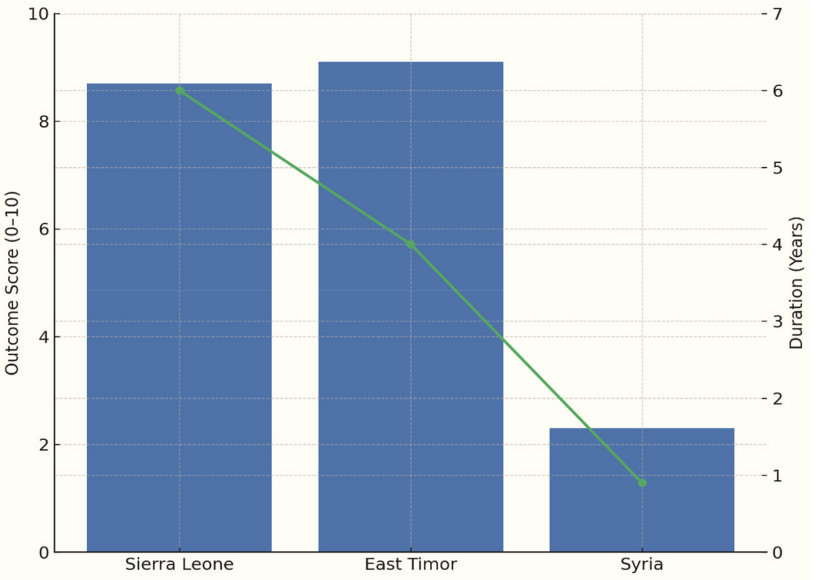


Figure 1. Comparative success of UN interventions.

4.2 *The effectiveness of preventive measures: success and failure in conflict prevention*

In success versus failure comparison we use the Conflict Prevention Efficiency Index (CPEI) which can be formulated as:

$$\text{CPEI} = \frac{S \times P \times R}{T} \tag{1}$$

Where:

- **S** = Sustainability of Peace (0–10)
- **P** = Preventive Timing Score (0–10)
- **R** = Regional Cooperation Score (0–10)
- **T** = Total Years of Conflict (before intervention)

Table 2. Calculated CPEI for selected UN interventions.

Country	S	P	R	T	CPEI Score
Sierra Leone	9	7	8	11	4.58
East Timor	10	9	9	24	3.38
Syria	2	3	1	13	0.46

Interpretation:
This line graph seeks to illustrate the preventive effectiveness of the UN in numbers. Highest was for Sierra Leone despite more prolonged history of conflict, where it was marked by greater sustainability and greater timeliness of intervention. East Timor was also effective, but obtained a lower CPEI as a result of an extended pre-intervention conflict. The Syria

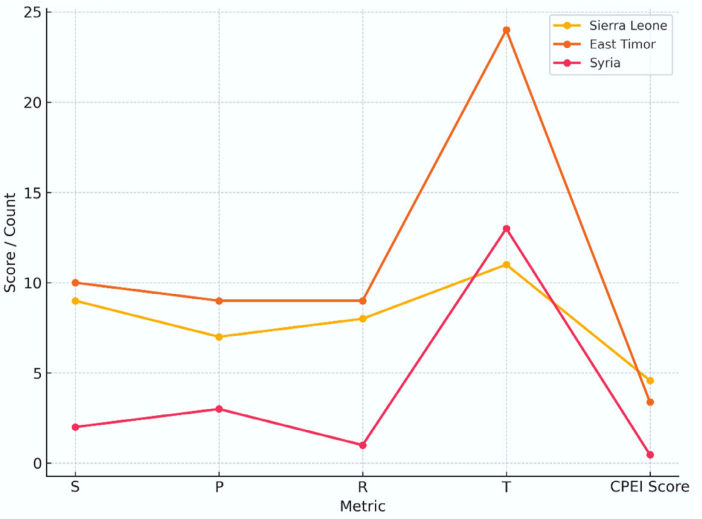


Figure 2. Conflict prevention efficiency index comparison.

example, once more, exposes institutional paralysis, bad timing and incoherence of regional approach, posing the argument that multilateral malfunction has a direct impact on prevention.

5 CONCLUSION & FUTURE WORK

This study highlights the complex and conflict-ridden nature of the UN in conflict prevention in an increasingly globalised and interdependent world. The case study analysis found that successful UN interventions ‘ most notably in Sierra erre Leone and East Timor ’ were characterized by a good “ and timely ” conception of the entry point, strong regional cooperation and a coherent mandate. Failures such as Syria, however, illustrate how deeply-entrenched geopolitical rivalry and the abuse of state sovereignty can cripple multilateral peace-building. Moreover, through quantitative models (e.g., the CPEI), it became apparent that preventive success was an aggregate function not just of operational preparedness, but also of diplomatic unity and the level of strategic commitment over the longer term. Veto power, divergent national interests and competition mean that, despite being created to secure global peace, it remains hobbled and unable to fulfil its potential (Chettri and Sekhar 2022).

Going forward, this research suggests that it is important to further investigate how emerging technologies, climate-related stressors and non-state partnerships may be systematically integrated within UN structures for the proactive management of conflict. Other future research attention might be devoted to exploring the potential of AI-driven predictive modelling for early conflict detection and investigation of the sociopolitical consequences of greater deployment of female peacekeepers, as well as regarding the practical implications of democratizing the veto structure of the Security Council through democratic multilateralism. Furthermore, insights are also required into the influence of global digital connectivity, and disinformation campaigns on local conflict narratives to work against traditional military and diplomatic approaches by elevating the scope of conflict prevention. This type of research could greatly contribute to policy guidelines that ensure UN policies are not only coherent and effective, but also contextually enduring in the ever changing global political world that governs us (Wang *et al.* 2022).

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Food conflict and the limits of global action

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ABSTRACT: The conflict between Russia-Ukraine disrupted the food supply chain at global level, where the first mark was seen in the rise in oil prices, nevertheless, the Russia-Ukraine conflict is not just about oil. Many more commodities of our daily necessity are at risk, particularly wheat, sugar, barley, maize, cereal, and cooking oil. Russia and Ukraine are the largest exporter of wheat. It's almost like a monopoly. However, when the conflict initiated, Russia banned its exports, attacked Ukraine's port and its withdrawal from the Black Sea Grain initiative disturbed food access at globally, as most of the exports of these essential commodities are for low-income countries that rely heavily on these exports and for various food aid programs. However, this situation become worse when other countries, including India, Indonesia and Argentina, also restricted export ban on different commodity. This paper thus analyzes the impact of Export Ban on global food supply chain more specifically to low-income countries by using qualitative analysis of secondary data. This study also identifies the limits of the global multilateral institution, notably the state-centric approach of the international framework over humanitarian obligation..

Keywords: Food security, Global Justice, Russia-Ukraine Conflict and Multilateral Institutions

1 INTRODUCTION

Food is the basic requirement of life, without which the life of any individual cannot persist or at least may not be considered a dignified life. It is important here to note that access to food is not just a basic Human Right but also a essential human need. Here authors would like to quote article 25 of the UDHR of 1948 as well as in article 11 of the International Covenant Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights of 1966 which defines the right to Food as under- "When every person, individually or in cooperation with others, consistently has physical and financial access to adequate food or means of its acquisition" (Committee on Economic 1999). The Russia-Ukraine conflict, initiated in 2022, targeted this access to food by disrupting the global food supply chain for essential commodities. Coming to the effect of the war, this disruption caused an increase in food prices by 12.6% in just one month of the conflict and hunger in low-income countries. As according to World Bank updates, in 2022 about 9.2 percent of world's population faced hunger, in contrast with 2019 it shows addition of 1.3 percent (World Food Program 2023). While Russia's export ban and attacks on Ukraine Ports and supply blockage negatively impact the situation of hunger crisis, leaving the marginalized population to starve. As per FAO report 2024, one out of 11 people in the

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world and one out of every five in Africa faced hunger in 2023 (FAO. 2024). However, the problem becomes worse when other countries also joins in export bans, this underscore the urgent need for the World Trade Policy provisions to mandate humanitarian need over national interest.

This paper aims to analyze the issue of food security due to the Russia-Ukraine conflict and evaluates the limitations of multilateral institutions addressing this situation. This also explores the world trade policies and a contemporary question, how these policies lack global governance provision and humanitarian obligation causing a particular section to suffer, like Africa and Yemen. While existing literature on this issue extensively focuses on global food insecurity due to the Russia-Ukraine Conflict, it largely overlooks its interplay with World Trade Policies and humanitarian obligations enshrined in the Human Rights Declaration, UN Charter, and ICESCR. As these trade policy exceptions permit the states to take defense of a protectionist approach through export restriction, at the expense of global humanitarian needs.

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study aims to analyze-

- The Impact of Russia-Ukraine Conflict on Global Food Security.
- To evaluate the multilateral institutions' effectiveness in dealing with this issue.
- Highlight gaps in policies and propose strategies to ensure the right to food during conflicts.

3 METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach, to assess the impact of Russia-Ukraine conflict on food security and to understand how international trade policies overlook global humanitarian needs. For this secondary data from various international organizations such as the WTO, FAO, United Nation and other legal frameworks, including Trade Agreements, Human Rights Principles, and other international covenants is analyzed.

4 RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 *Impact of Russia-Ukraine conflict*

Wars can be terrible as they cause food crises globally by disturbing the food system. In Russia-Ukraine conflict, the first mark of war can be seen in the climb in oil prices, along with many more commodities of our daily necessities are at risk, particularly wheat, sugar, and cooking oil. It is interesting to note here that Russia is the largest exporter of wheat, making up 18 percent of global exports, and Ukraine is the fifth largest country, making up 7 percent of global sales (A 2023). When all of this added up, it equals 25% of global exports. Likewise, the second vulnerable commodity is cooking oil. Ukraine and Russia account for 75% of its total production (How does Ukraine invasion lead to world food crisis 2022). It's almost like a monopoly. So, the question here is what happens when this supply chain is disrupted? Against this background, an attempt is made here to discuss and examine the impact of conflict between Russia and Ukraine on food security at a global level.

Undoubtedly the Russia-Ukraine situation has created the problem of food against the entire world, especially in underdeveloped countries. However, the situation become more problematic when other countries also participated in export ban from February 2022 to

2024 (below table attached 1.1). The cumulative effects of these actions triggered the hunger crisis. As International Monetary Fund reports that the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine has give birth to hunger in Africa (Aggarwal 2022). This is because Africa is a commodity-dependent economy and relies mainly on China and Russia for financial support, whereas African countries, like Nigeria and Angola, in the short-term benefit from this, but eventually when there is a global recession, they all suffer, as what happened in 1974, 1981, 2001, and 2009. The World Food Program is also alarming for devastation, resulting in 50% of the grain it uses to feed the needy emerging in Ukraine, but it has been forced to rip aid to some African countries. International food prices rose by 12.6 percent from February to March (Sadana 2022). It appears that the World Food Program itself mentions that the crisis has been accelerated due to the war in Ukraine, consequence the food supplies have been reduced and some corrected major concerns to the African countries are re-directed to Ukraine (Program 2022). These countries are already suffering from a shortage of funds and now they are cutting a major portion of the ration from millions of people's diets. Such as in Yemen's case, it has cut 50% of the ration for eight million people who don't have anything and are in extreme need (Yemen Alert 2021). By experiencing such a condition that arises due to war, who decides, who lives, and who dies in such a situation?

Country	Action	articles	Declaration Date	End date
Afghanistan	Ban Export	Wheat	20 May 2022	31 December 2023
Argentina	Tax Export	Soybean products, oil, beans and meal.	19 March 2022	31 December 2023
India	Ban Export	Wheat Grain and Flour, Broken Rice, Semolina, Maida	13 May 2022	31 December 2023
Lebanon	Ban Export	Processed Fruits and Vegetables, Grain Products, Bread, Sugar, Potatoes, Milk, Mineral Water, Meat Products, Oil.	11 March 2022	31 December 2023
Turkey	Ban Export	Cooking Oil, Olive oil, Beans, Lentils and meat	27 February 2022	31 December 2023
Kuwait	Ban Export	Vegetable Oil, Grains and Meat	20 March 2022	31 December 2023

Source: The world bank food security update 2023.

4.2 *Limitations of multilateral institution*

Moving to the way forward concerning this issue, ICESCR, 1966 provides that, the right to food is not merely a paper right, it requires every person to be free from hunger and access it with such sustainability as it is sufficient in both magnitude and excellence to assure the dietary needs of the hungry. Whereas, states defend their part under international law by stating that ICESCR 1966, only obligate them to ensure right to food within their province and jurisdiction, emphasizing the state-centric approach to protecting the human rights as a relationship between individuals and their government and not to accept global implications. We are living in the age of economic globalization, where the policies of one state can impact other states and their citizens, So the question that arises here is why there is no relationship between global actors and states for protection of human rights and why countries are disobliging under international law to unbanned exports for another country if their act affects the right to food at low-income Countries. While General Comment on the Right of Adequate Food, issued by a Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights committee in the year of 1999, explicitly stated the obligation of all states regarding access to food in their province,

with other states at international level (D 2022). There is no specific article in the World Trade Organization agreements or in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade that explicitly mandates or compels countries to unbanned restrictions on export due to the creation of food insecurity in other countries. They, do address the issue of export restrictions and their impact on food security but do not prescribe a universal solution for all situations. Instead, to find the middle ground between the rights of countries to take measures to address food security concerns and non-discrimination and transparency principles in trade.

The relevant provision in the World Trade Organization agreements that relates to export restrictions includes articles XI and XII. This article prohibits the use of quantitative restrictions on exports, except in certain specific circumstances found in Article XX, which allows countries to adopt measures vital to protect life or health of human, animal and plant. This exception can be invoked in cases where a country faces severe food shortage and needs to prioritize the domestic availability of food (WTO, Marrakesh Agreement). While Article XII permits countries to temporarily impose export restrictions to prevent or address a critical shortage of foodstuffs or other essential goods. However, such measures must be applied fairly and must not unjustly discriminate between trading partners. (WTO, Marrakesh Agreement). Also under various aspects of agricultural trade, including export restriction this recognizes the right of countries to implement measures to protect their food security and allows for certain forms of export restriction under certain circumstances (WTO, Agriculture Gateway). It's imperative to note that the World Trade Organization agreements do not mandate countries to lift export restrictions solely because they may cause food insecurity in other countries. However, the agreements do encourage countries to exercise restraint and take into consideration the potential impact of their trade measures on World Trade Organization members, particularly concerning food security concerns. To address the challenges posed by export restrictions during war or emergencies, countries, and international organizations often engage in dialogue and negotiations to find solutions that ensure food security while minimizing disruptions to global trade and supply chains. Humanitarian exemptions and special mechanisms may be established to allow for the flow of food and essential goods to vulnerable regions even during periods of conflict. Overall, managing food security during times of war requires careful consideration of the complex interplay between national interest and global humanitarian concerns, with the aim of finding equitable and sustainable solutions for all parties involved.

The United Nation charter is designed to promote and protect human rights, respect human rights treaties, and allot a particular role for specialized agencies in their realization for example, Article 1(3), 55, 56 of United Nations Charter, emphasizes one of the fundamental purposes of the United Nations, which is to achieve international cooperation in addressing international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian nature (Human Right Office 2011). Similarly, the Rome Declaration on the World Food Summit was adopted in 1996, aimed to combat hunger and malnutrition worldwide. It contains several important commitments (FAO) such as Commitment to Eradicate Hunger, Sustainable Agricultural Development, Cooperation and Partnerships, Right to Food, Trade and Food Security, and Social Safety Nets. All these emphasize the urgency of addressing global food security challenges and call for concerted efforts by the international community to eradicate hunger and improve food access and nutrition for all. However, Russia's actions reveal a contradiction as Russia committed to global food security to provide food aid to 30 countries, added through the 2014 Food Aid Convention and by voluntarily accepting Sustainable Development goals. As per the data, Russia's average annual aid to Africa from 2011-2015 was approximately US$ 30 million (Asmus 2017). However, post-2022, Russia imposed an export ban on critical supplies and by attacking Ukraine port it blocked 32.9 million tons of Grain i.e., 7% of global wheat and half of the world Food Program Supply. This policy of deliberate chokehold on global food shows

Russia's geopolitical strategy over humanitarian obligation and violating the spirit of Human Rights (Press 2022).

4.3 *Action taken by various international actors*

To prevent hunger crisis and food insecurity, various international agencies have responded in an instant manner either through policies or guidelines for their respective members. In this part, we are highlighting their actions. In this regard, Human Rights Watch, an 'International Non-government Organization' recommends the set-up of a global fund for social protection to increase the levels of support to low-income countries, it helps them to establish and maintain social protection platform in the form of legal claim (Human Right Watch 2022). This setup will help the African governments, facing huge debt issues to make sure everyone's needs. In the same line, the Head of the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, World Trade Organization, and World Food Program very recently urged the international community for immediate food supplies, to ensure the poor's needs and for farmers facing higher input prices by avoid restrictive means such as bans on export on food and fertilizers on humanitarian grounds (Human Right Watch 2022). It is very vital to note that, G7 leaders have taken a positive step in forming a Global Alliance for Food Security with the strong cooperation of the Global Crisis Response Group on Food, Energy, and Finance to guarantee that the sanctions do not aim for food and allow for the free flow of agricultural products to other countries including from Russia, it also provided the delivery of humanitarian aid to such countries (Global Affair Canada 2022). In addition increasing agricultural productivity, particularly in the mostly adversary countries, boosts domestic production to $4.5 billion which would help to meet our multidimensional crisis (Global Affair Canada 2022). During the ongoing crisis, the World Bank responded to contribute in various projects such as $300 million in Bolivia to increase the food security and adaptation of climate-smart agricultural practices and $2.3 billion to the food systems resilience program for eastern and South Africa, to increase the resilience of the regional food system (World Bank 2022). Also, the European Union, through the Fund for European Aid for the most deprived nations, accompanies member states to deliver food and/or basic material assistance to those in need (European Par and service 2022). In the same way, the United States Agency for International Development announced $15 million fund to be provided to Nepal to protect vulnerable populations from food crises (U.S Embassy Nepal).

5 CONCLUSION

The study under this paper starts with an indication that Food Security is related to economic, social, and political progress and peace. Improving global and local governance is the only way to defeat this humanitarian crisis as well as to promote socio-political and economic rights. International Organizations and other Financial Institutions enhance their coordination to construct global governance policies that respect humanitarian needs during conflict. To address the situation of disruption, needs a balance approach while protecting domestic need. for this, export restriction should justified the national security and economic stability and such bans, however, should not exceed three months unless exceptional circumstances. The World Food Program and UN agencies to reprogram their budget to support this humanitarian aid. For a larger context, we need to call on international communities and other private international organizations to finance food security and nutrition is ensure that all people, at all time have access to food. In addition to this, technical support needed so that countries can build the capacity to produce food for their own needs and to become a helping hand for ourselves.

To sum up it lets consider this situation of Russia-Ukraine conflict a stark warning, urging immediate reform to prevent present and future crisis.

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India's economic diplomacy against China's belt and road initiative

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ABSTRACT: China's Belt and Road Initiative (2013) has reshaped global development financing and infrastructure connectivity in that it prompted planned responses from major powers. This paper examines India's thorough economic diplomacy as a counter-strategy to China's BRI expansion throughout South Asia and the Indo-Pacific. The research reveals India's multidimensional approach through its expanded Lines of Credit, infrastructure initiatives such as the International North-South Transport Corridor, and also digital partnerships via India Stack as the research uses comparative case studies and quantitative analysis of trade flows plus development financing data (2013-2025). Resource constraints limit India's ability up to BRI's scale. However, the study shows India has achieved prominent successes in digital payments as well as renewable energy cooperation through the International Solar Alliance. India's strategy proves most effective upon offering genuine alternatives rather than opposing Chinese initiatives merely especially by leveraging comparative advantages in democratic governance, information technology, and cultural affinity, which contributes valuable perceptions into geoeconomic rivalry dynamics.

Keywords: Economic Statecraft, Belt and Road Initiative, Indo-Pacific Strategy, Geoeconomic Competition, Development Diplomacy

1 INTRODUCTION

China's Belt and Road Initiative, started by President Xi Jinping back in 2013, represents also the most wide-ranging undertaking of infrastructure and connectivity in present-day history, incorporating over 140 countries within investments exceeding $1 trillion across Asia, Africa, Europe, plus Latin America. The initiative's two components namely the Silk Road Economic Belt plus the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road have transformed patterns in global development financing also challenged international economic structures through institutions like the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and Silk Road Fund (Rolland 2017). At the first instance, India met with the BRI with worries that were somewhat restrained. These worries mirrored China's sway as it grew then in South Asia including even the Indian Ocean area, particularly because some projects passed through disputed lands that also possibly surrounded India such as that China-Pakistan Economic Corridor through a "string of pearls" strategy. New Delhi boycotted that first Belt and Road Forum during 2017 as it rejected BRI's connectivity model since it had concerns regarding

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sovereignty, with the model creating unsustainable debt for partner countries. Economic diplomacy is now India's primary planned rivalry instrument for it offers options to military conflict and uses India's strengths in technology, democratic government, and cultural connection to regional allies. This research addresses how India employs economic diplomacy in a tactical manner so as to counter China's BRI influence right throughout South Asia as well as the Indo-Pacific region (Gandotra and Jain 2023). It examines the way in which middle powers can viably rival great powers by way of the use of specific economic tools despite resource imbalances thus greatly contributing to the economic statecraft literature. This analysis fully examines India's forward-looking economic scheme using trade deals, development funding and infrastructure links instead of current studies concentrating on BRI's effects or India's security reactions. Regarding the comprehension of modern Indo-Pacific strategy featuring great power rivalry, there is deep policy relevance for the research, notably as the United States along with democratic partners pursue aligned reactions to China's foreign economic growth. In this paper, the argument is that India has employed a quite advanced as well as multidimensional economic diplomacy strategy since it offers very credible alternatives with regard to China's BRI via leveraging comparative advantages within digital technology, renewable energy, coupled with democratic governance so as to compete in the context of regional influence, indicating the way that contemporary middle powers are able to compete geoeconomically by means of revolutionary diplomatic strategies which transcend customary security models (Jain and Mohanan 2025).

2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Economic statecraft theory provides such a framework for the comprehension of how states do pursue political aims by using economic instruments that are beyond customary diplomatic and military channels. Baldwin conceptualised economic statecraft as the deliberate manipulation of economic relationships in order that it would influence international actor behaviour, which includes both positive inducements as well as negative sanctions (Baldwin 1985). The distinction that exists between positive statecraft, which does involve trade agreements, investment partnerships, and development assistance, and negative approaches that do include sanctions and economic coercion is important for the purposes of analysing contemporary geoeconomic competition. Economic diplomacy evolved. It was in fact a method for projecting advanced soft power, and it enabled states to build influence by way of economic relationships which benefited both of the parties instead of coercive mechanisms. Geoeconomic competition highlights the increasing relevance of economic instruments in calculated rivalry, with major powers employing commerce, investment, and technological unions for geopolitical advantage while circumventing military clashes. This framework helps us understand how middle-tier states such as India can compete successfully against major powers. India engages in a tactical way and also economically, allowing it to still compete despite resource disparities. The Belt and Road Initiative exemplifies modern economic statecraft, and it involves infrastructure development through investment. The Initiative projects influence across continents in a tactical manner. BRI seeks economic integration through massive infrastructure investments plus connectivity projects to expand political influence then create China-centred regional orders. Delivery mechanisms involve state financing through policy banks, multilateral organisations such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, plus bilateral agreements including debt-for-equity arrangements. Debt diplomacy has emerged as a controversial BRI aspect as critics argue that unsustainable lending practices create dependency relationships enabling Chinese political influence over debtor nations (Chellaney 2017). Aims for regional connection and joining of economies look to form commercial routes and economic pathways. China's

central position for global commerce means these objectives also reduce reliance on Western-dominated institutions. India actively conducted economic diplomacy, moving from an inward-looking economy for participation in global economic governance and regional integration initiatives. Development has historically shifted gradually away from non-alignment principles. These planned partnerships do now leverage economic relationships in order that geopolitical objectives are achievable. The Act East Policy exemplifies this evolution in that it superseded the Look East approach through proactive engagement strategies which stress connectivity, trade, and investment partnerships with Southeast Asian nations. As India counters Chinese influence, neighbourhood connectivity schemes grew in importance as they developed alternative models with democratic governance and sustainable financing. In that it represents revolutionary South-South cooperation mechanisms, the International Solar Alliance positions India as a leader in climate diplomacy as well as eases renewable energy technology transfer. With Digital India initiatives as well as technology partnerships serving as key instruments for building planned relationships throughout contemporary economic diplomacy, India leverages information technology capabilities to offer alternatives to Chinese digital infrastructure in partner countries.

3 METHODOLOGY

This research employs a comparative case study methodology as it examines India's economic diplomacy responses to China's Belt and Road Initiative, making use of the structured, focused comparison approach advocated by George and Bennett (2005) for the analysing of complex international phenomena. For measurement of the effectiveness of India's economic statecraft instruments, the analytical framework assesses policy initiatives qualitatively and analyses trade and investment flows quantitatively. Quantitative analysis, for assessing the material impact of competing economic strategies across target regions, includes bilateral trade statistics. Development financing commitments as well as foreign direct investment patterns are also included in this. The temporal scope spans from 2013, marking China's Belt and Road Initiative launch, to 2025, also capturing the initial responses and evolving policy adaptations as both countries refined their approaches based on early outcomes. This twelve-year timeframe enables analysts to comprehensively analyse policy cycles, those implementing to challenge implementation, also strategists to adjust tactically while providing sufficient data for meaningful trend analysis and impact assessment. For ensuring thorough coverage along with analytical rigor, multiple authoritative sources inform data collection. The Ministry of External Affairs in India issues policy statements, creates development partnership frameworks, and prepares bilateral agreement texts. These formal state papers disclose future designs and detail execution procedures. Quantitative measures for the intensity of economic engagement and its outcomes come from statistics for trade and data for development financing. These are sourced from the Export-Import Bank of India, the Ministry of Commerce, along with partner country statistical agencies. Multilateral organisations such as the Asian Development Bank, World Bank, and OECD report and independently assess how effective development projects are and what regional economic trends contextualise them, thereby relating bilateral initiatives to broader regional dynamics. Geographic criteria pick out instances concentrating on South Asia, Southeast Asia, plus the Indian Ocean region, where India-China compete economically most noticeably and matter tactically for both powers. In order to fully capture the multidimensional nature that defines contemporary economic diplomacy, sectoral analysis also includes infrastructure development, energy cooperation, digital connectivity initiatives, as well as trade relationship evolution. This focused approach does enable us to examine competitive dynamics in some detail while we do maintain analytical coherence across diverse policy domains and geographic contexts.

4 CHINA'S BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE: STRATEGY AND IMPLEMENTATION

China's Belt and Road Initiative represents more of a thorough planned architecture, which is designed in order to reshape global connectivity and integrate economies. It does this by way of two primary components: the Silk Road Economic Belt which focuses upon overland corridors that connect China with Europe via Central Asia as well as the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, which emphasises sea-based trade routes through Southeast Asia, the Indian Ocean, and further afield. The initiative's financial mechanisms do show an unprecedented scale and coordination, with the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank providing multilateral legitimacy and with $100 billion in authorised capital, and with the Silk Road Fund offering $40 billion in dedicated project financing (Summers 2016). The China Development Bank and Export-Import Bank of China are examples of Chinese policy banks, and they do serve as primary funding vehicles for them. They allocate hundreds of billions via soft loans and commercial funding, which aids infrastructure schemes across member nations. Connectivity projects prioritize transportation infrastructure, including railways, highways, and ports in addition to energy infrastructure such as power plants and pipeline networks, because they improve regional economic integration and serve Chinese planned interests. The Digital Silk Road represents a contemporary aspect given its telecommunications infrastructure, submarine cables, satellite networks and e-commerce platforms; it further disseminates Chinese technological sway while Chinese digital systems and standards engender dependence. Certain analysts assert that regional implementation patterns evince BRI tactically prioritises zones near India, thereby fashioning encirclement dynamics. BRI projects all through South Asia present the $62 billion flagship China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, port developments located at Hambantota plus also Colombo within Sri Lanka, together with wide-ranging infrastructure investments within Bangladesh's power generation, transportation, with telecommunications sectors. Rapid railway systems joining China and Thailand, Malaysia, also Singapore represent an aspect of Southeast Asian linkage endeavours. Meaningful harbour initiatives throughout Malaysia, Myanmar, and Indonesia additionally augment Chinese access toward important oceanic bottlenecks. Planned placement within the Indian Ocean entails harbour expenditures and maritime base augmentation aimed at Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Djibouti. This development fabricates such a network regarding maritime infrastructure bearing Chinese influence. Nevertheless, certain situations have evinced anxieties regarding debt sustainability. Sri Lanka conveyed Hambantota Port to China for a term of 99 years. This arrangement arose from debt distress and represents controversial debt-for-equity arrangements that critics characterize as "debt trap diplomacy". Geopolitical consequences from BRI are wide-ranging. They reach further than simple financial increase. Chinese infrastructure investors potentially alleviate dual-use facilities applicable militarily and planners increase encirclement concerns especially toward India. Substantial political influence regarding allied nations originates from China's debt financing and technology conveyance agreements. These agreements as well as financing arrangements render economies dependent also potentially affect governance choices domestically in addition to foreign policy orientations, furthermore they pose a challenge to the existing regional order as well as institutions.

5 INDIA'S ECONOMIC DIPLOMACY RESPONSE STRATEGY

India's alternative development financing strategy has evolved into something very necessary for its economic diplomacy response against China's Belt and Road Initiative because it focuses upon large growth regarding Lines of Credit schemes, which rose from $1.5 billion during 2003 to beyond $30 billion by 2024. Established during 2012, the Development Partnership Administration institutionalised India's development cooperation approach.

It forged specialized systems toward project pinpointing, enactment, and oversight that highlight recipient nation command and ability expansion. India commonly underwrites at diminished rates with interest from 1.75 to 2.5 percent plus extended repayment schedules contrasting markedly with Chinese finance models where interest is greater repayment is briefer and collateral could be needed which potentially results in asset seizures upon default. Grant assistance programs aid bigger infrastructure investments via helping people by means of technical cooperation coupled with capacity building. India tactically designates important local collaborators as exemplifications reveal: India furnished above $8 billion throughout credit extensions toward Bangladesh therefore that it may produce electricity, upgrade train lines, and cultivate harbours explicitly challenging Chinese expenditures. Sri Lanka's relationship includes $1.4 billion through credit lines as well as grants. These allocations and subsidies stress the housing, healthcare, and education spheres, and they furnish substitutes for Chinese infrastructure-intensive expenditures (Jain and Skariah 2022). India strengthens Myanmar via projects developing the border region as it manages political instability plus contestation over Chinese sway. In conjunction with key allies such as Australia, the United Kingdom, and European Union, India tactically integrates economic alliances through Thorough Economic Partnership Treaties. This suggests India has resolved to fortify bonds amid democratic partners since they hold concerns about economic conduct within China. India exited Regional Thorough Economic Partnership discussions during 2019. This mirrored India's determination to decline settlements. Factors ascertained also included domestic manufacturing proficiencies deteriorating, or China gaining disproportionate benefits from aforementioned agreements. India prefers flexible issue-based cooperation mechanisms since these mechanisms address supply chain resilience, clean energy transitions, and digital governance without thorough market access commitments, and this is exemplified through Indo-Pacific Economic Framework participation. Bilateral trade agreement prioritisation focuses upon calculated Indo-Pacific partners, for sure. This focus reflects an emphasis that is on established democratic partnerships for the reason that they have completed agreements along with the UAE and Australia and are negotiating now with the UK and also the EU. As India promotes "trusted partner" networks, supply chain resilience as well as economic security considerations have become increasingly prominent because India reduces Chinese manufacturing and technology dependence as it builds alternative supply chains through Quad partnership initiatives also bilateral cooperation agreements. India shows proactive approaches by way of infrastructure as well as connectivity initiatives. Such initiatives present options other than Chinese-led projects for regional integration. The International North-South Transport Corridor, as it had been developed with Russia, Iran, and Central Asian countries, establishes alternative trade routes that are avoiding Chinese-controlled infrastructure whilst reducing transit times in addition to transport costs for Indian exports destined for Central Asia and Europe. The Chabahar Port project within Iran does represent India's most meaningful connectivity investment now. It gives Afghanistan and Central Asia access and presents alternatives to Gwadar Port, which China developed in Pakistan. Digital infrastructure investments include submarine cable projects, satellite communication networks, and technology partnerships for they promote India's technological abilities along with democratic governance models within partner countries, and these provide alternatives to Chinese digital infrastructure.

6 SECTORAL ANALYSIS OF COMPETITION

India's energy sector diplomacy is an important component for it competes economically with China's Belt and Road Initiative, coupled with leveraging the country's leadership in renewable energy technologies together with climate cooperation frameworks. India's International Solar Alliance, launched in 2015, is a multilateral initiative incorporating 121 nations and procuring over $1 trillion for solar energy investments, establishing India as a

global clean energy leader while providing developing nations options to Chinese renewable energy infrastructure (Dubash *et al.* 2018). India shows its technological capabilities since it has nuclear cooperation agreements alongside Bangladesh, plus Vietnam, and also several African nations, and indeed these agreements form calculated long-term partnerships that rival Chinese nuclear exports. Energy security initiatives include alliances with Mozambique, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka to explore for oil and gas. China seeks influence based in infrastructure in maritime zones, so these initiatives also establish a planned presence there. Such partnerships feature petroleum reserve sharing agreements and joint emergency response mechanisms, and these strengthen partner nations' resilience regarding supply disruptions. Digital as well as technology partnerships represent India's most revolutionary response against Chinese technological expansion, and these partnerships leverage information technology expertise to offer democratic alternatives toward Chinese digital infrastructure. Digital India Stack expands on an international level when it shares India's unified payment interface along with digital identity systems and e-governance platforms with partner countries and thus creates interoperable digital ecosystems which reduce Chinese technology dependence and also promote transparent citizen-centric governance models. Singapore, the UAE, together with France have adopted Indian digital payment technologies that directly rival Chinese fintech solutions (Mahajan and Singla 2017). This shows the outstanding success concerning the UPI payment system's global deployment. 5G technology partnerships of the democratic allies provide alternatives to Huawei infrastructure through collaborations between European companies and also Japanese companies as well, and India's domestic 5G development offers access to reliable telecommunications networks for partner nations. Cybersecurity cooperation frameworks build capacity, share threat intelligence, and defend jointly, strengthening partner nations' digital sovereignty against potential Chinese cyber influence (Jain and Mohanan 2023). Through space technology collaboration, India's growing planned technology capabilities are demonstrated. This collaboration offers to developing countries space-based services with no dependence upon a Chinese satellite system, and it does include earth observation data sharing, satellite services, and joint missions. Via the Sagarmala project, India challenges Chinese maritime expansion because it modernises Indian ports plus creates regional connectivity hubs that compete with Chinese port investments. Calculated partnerships that exist, for the purpose of operations, with ports like those at Chabahar (Iran), Duqm (Oman), and Sabang (Indonesia) allow establishment of a presence within critical maritime chokepoints, offering partner countries alternatives to Chinese development and management of ports. Maritime security co-operation includes initiatives which construct capability, patrols that remain joint and resource-sharing mechanisms. These operations can strengthen territorial marine administration. They also challenge Chinese maritime amplification. Blue economy initiatives advocate for the sustainable employment of ocean resources coupled with marine life conservation because they harmonize economic progression alongside environmental preservation, which diverges from Chinese approaches since they cultivate infrastructure disregarding ecological factors.

7 REGIONAL CASE STUDIES

South Asian competition between India and China's Belt and Road Initiative presents detailed dynamics wherein economic projects function as implements of calculated contention affecting geographic sway. Bangladesh represents this rivalry because China expended $3.6 billion toward the Padma Bridge project. China finalized it in 2022 as the country's paramount infrastructure endeavor, while India upgrades wide-ranging railway schemes totaling over $2 billion prioritizing connectivity also capability enhancement instead of prominent infrastructure. Sri Lanka represents the most pronounced instance of differing methods because China constructed Hambantota Port, engendering a controversial 99-year leasing accord after fiscal exigency, and India invests throughout Colombo Port City plus

the Eastern Container Terminal, stressing collaborative partnerships including infrastructural advancements that safeguard Sri Lankan autonomy. Nepal did join BRI during 2017, coupled with this created tensions for Nepal versus India. India responded through an acceleration of border connectivity projects and cross-border railway initiatives that offer alternatives to Chinese infrastructure while addressing Nepal's concerns regarding Indian economic dominance. President Yameen's tenure saw an intensification of the competition to finance infrastructure in the Maldives, as well as China gave large loans for housing and airport projects. India offered up grant assistance and defence cooperation, also committing itself to the Greater Male Connectivity Project, which shows that it offers support to Maldivian development without the creation of debt dependencies. Southeast Asian engagement depicts India deliberately planning so as to fortify associations via the principal territorial nations. Deep cooperation, exceeding simple competition regarding infrastructure, those structures necessitate. Vietnam plus India have auspiciously charted a fellowship throughout the region since they collaborate upon defence via exercising navies also selling materiel, also since they invest throughout energy when exploring petroleum plus developing green projects, challenging Chinese influence. Indonesia together with India collaborate upon maritime issues through joint naval patrols; they offer port development assistance; they partner concerning investments spanning pharmaceuticals to digital infrastructure; furthermore, they relate multidimensionally for reducing Indonesian dependence on Chinese investment. Singapore and India cooperate regarding fintech via digital payment assimilation and UPI system implementation. These technological liaisons reconcile projected objectives with options for Chinese digital infrastructure. Indian involvement within high-speed rail projects in addition to industrial zone development includes Thailand's Eastern Economic Corridor development, which furnishes options for Chinese-dominated regional connectivity initiatives. India purposefully targets smaller island nations and East African countries, acting against Chinese influence. India employs cultural links, governs in a democratic fashion, also develops sustainably. Partnerships for development in Mauritius and Seychelles emphasise renewable energy, cooperation on maritime security, and programmes for capacity building. These programmes strengthen these nations' planned autonomy while maintaining customary ties toward India. Madagascar, as well as Comoros, engage via agricultural cooperation, offer healthcare assistance, and create educational partnerships, which shows India's commitment to thorough development, more so than infrastructure-focused approaches (Jain and Chopra 2022). East Africa infrastructure and capacity building programmes, including countries like Kenya, Tanzania, and Mozambique, see India give options to Chinese finance through South-South co-operation mechanisms, technical aid, and low-interest loans.

8 CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

India's economic diplomacy possesses key resource limitations which restrict its capacity to rival directly China's Belt and Road Initiative funding power. China's policy banks and sovereign wealth funds do deploy hundreds of billions on an annual basis for infrastructure projects, but India's development financing does remain constrained by its fiscal limitations and also by competing domestic priorities, and total Lines of Credit commitments still represent just a fraction of Chinese overseas investment flows. Complex approval procedures as well as inter-ministerial coordination challenges extend timelines, and this plagues a number of Indian development projects. These challenges reduce India's competitive advantage over China, whose project execution capabilities are streamlined; furthermore, bureaucratic processes also plague these projects, in addition to implementation delays. Indian firms will often lack the capacity as well as willingness for truly substantial international infrastructure investments, so private sector involvement issues do still persist. This differs from Chinese state-owned enterprises since unified funding modalities along with

governmental assistance are there for those organizations. The effectiveness of Indian economic diplomacy is constrained. Geopolitical adversities are present within designated areas. Given that factions endorse China and perceive Indian involvement sceptically, internal politics of allied nations often implicate them because China possesses established connections engendering diplomatic complexities that constrain the nations' readiness to publicly espouse Indian substitutes for BRI ventures. Whilst maintaining scheduled independence with averting alignments that jeopardise relationships with customary partners like Russia, India coordinates economic diplomacy amid wider Western strategies, stipulating that key powers, notably the United States and European Union, must not interfere. Complications regarding regional coordination do surface when India's bilateral economic projects clash against multilateral structures since allied nations are subject to coercion for selection amid regional integration blueprints.

9 OUTCOMES AND IMPACT ASSESSMENT

India's economic diplomacy has achieved measurable results because diversified trade flows coupled with deepened partnerships transpired then bilateral trade volumes increased greatly with key partners including Vietnam, Bangladesh, and UAE following economic agreements and development cooperation initiatives. Outcomes for infrastructure project completion rates are mixed: Bangladesh railway modernisation progressed as Chabahar Port in Iran succeeded, with implementations in Myanmar and Nepal facing delays because of coordination challenges and political instability. Achievements in building institutional capacity include establishing training programmes, technical assistance mechanisms plus knowledge transfer initiatives, and these achievements improved partner countries' administrative capabilities while creating planned long-term relationships that transcend individual project cycles (Sharma and Sharma 2024). These outcomes do indicate that India effectively leverages the economic instruments for the calculated objectives. However, the scale does remain quite limited when we do compare them with Chinese BRI investments. When calculated effectiveness is assessed, it reveals partial success as it reduced BRI influence in South Asia as well as the Indian Ocean because India credibly offers cultural ties, democratic governance models, and sustainable financing alternatives to Chinese development models. The International Solar Alliance and digital payment expansion have developed credible, strengthened alternatives. In vital regions, India's economic diplomacy has prevented complete Chinese dominance. India established itself as a practical alternative as a partner because various nations seek diversified as well as calculated relationships plus India cannot match China's financial resources in any way.

10 CONCLUSION

This analysis shows India's economic diplomacy has been seeing moderate success within its targeted strategies for countering China's Belt and Road Initiative via comparative advantages within democratic governance, technology, and also sustainable development models. Planned outcomes reveal successful diversification of development financing sources of partner countries, and credible alternatives to Chinese infrastructure investments reveal themselves too, particularly in renewable energy, digital technology and capacity building sectors. It depicts the ways in which middle powers are able to employ asymmetric strategies so as to compete with great powers despite any resource constraints. This research contributes greatly to geoeconomic competition literature since it stresses quality over quantity in development partnerships and leverages soft power advantages to build sustainable planned relationships. Theoretical viewpoints show an alignment between calculated objectives and national capabilities is needed for economic statecraft to be effective, and India

succeeds because it focuses on sectors where it has real comparative advantages rather than trying direct competition across all domains. In the event that policymakers recommend adjustments, they stress improved private sector engagement, bureaucratic processes that are streamlined as well as greater coordination with democratic partners in order that they maximise resource efficiency, plus project impact. Future research should investigate whether India's economic diplomacy model can be sustained long-term, compare middle power responses to great power economic expansion, as well as determine whether multilateral approaches are more effective than bilateral approaches in geoeconomic competition. In Indo-Pacific strategy, the broader implications suggest that coordinated responses from a number of democratic partners must be required so as to contain Chinese economic influence. India can act as an important regional anchor by offering alternative development models while it maintains planned autonomy in an increasingly multipolar regional order.

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Analysing the role of energy security in the politics of the gulf states

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ABSTRACT: This paper presents a briefl investigation of the role of energy security crucial in crafting policies and strategies in the Gulf States. Previous analyses involving the region main focus were on internal conflicts and foreign interventions as foreign governments vied for control of oil cum gas supply chains of Gulf state. However, energy security is emerging as a rallying point in determining the focus of policies and political strategies of the Gulf States. Situated at the heart of global energy supply, Gulf nations leverage their vast hydrocarbon resources to shape domestic policies and assert regional and international influence. The study further investigates how energy security concerns influence collaboration, economic diversification efforts, and foreign policy decisions, in view of volatile global energy markets and environmental responsibility.

Ultimately, the paper gives insights into the manner Gulf nations provide equilibrium of security vis-a-vis climate mitigation interests, on the other. The research reveals that energy security engenders innovations which counter difficulties in order to ensure sustainability, competitiveness, and collaboration which position the Gulf region as the global centre of renewable energy supply.

Keywords: Energy security, Sustainability, Diversification, Policies, Transitions

1 INTRODUCTION

Energy security is the singular force driving the world towards a multipolar order. Hence Russias invasion of Ukraine in 2022 could not secure the support of concerned European Union countries. Instead, the EU nations, whose oil and gas imports were historically tied to Russia, turned to the gulf nations to broker bilateral agreements in the pursuit of energy security (Aminjonov 2025). International Energy Agency (IEA 2023), opines that energy security is simply the uninterrupted availability of energy sources at an affordable price. Energy security can be viewed as a struggle for affordable prices for households and businesses, sustainable energy sources that minimize environmental impact and ensure long-term availability for use in different segments of the economy. Energy security implies unencumbered access to a reliable, affordable, and sustainable energy supply to meet the needs of a society, and it involves ensuring that energy sources are available when needed and at prices which are affordable for households and businesses (Aminjonov 2025; Peng *et al.* 2024). As yet, there's no universally recognized definition of energy security but only recognizable components (Kinninmont 2019; Strojny *et al.* 2023). For the purpose of this study, the key components translate to availability, accessibility, environmental acceptability, and affordability which factors provide the basis for examining the role of security with respect to energy in the politics of Gulf nations demand explanations as follows:

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Availability of different forms of energy implies having enough energy resources to meet the ever increasing needs of a whole country- developed, developing or under developed. Therefore, the persistent availability of energy in the various forms and quantities required by the economy and homes must be ensured and secured.

Affordable Products: Apart from energy sources being available in sufficient quantities, the next question that must be answered is whether or not these energy sources continue to be affordable for all categories of consumers. Affordability of energy resources makes it possible for the economy to thrive and achieve growth targets. Energy sources and the affordable supply of same is crucial for every facet of social and economic life of the citizens to ensure constant flow of resources within a country's borders.

Accessible energy resources: Here again, energy security takes into consideration the ease with which Individual citizens access energy resources. And these include both physical access and the ability to generate renewable energy sources. Thus, access to various energy resources positively impacts the socio economic life of the ordinary citizens.

Sustainable energy supply sources: Energy security is increasingly linked to the need for sustainable energy sources that minimize the environmental impact and ensure long-term availability. Furthermore, the study is significant because availability of energy in different forms, in abundant quantities, with reasonable pricing and balanced by climate mitigation efforts will ensure limited vulnerability to short-term or longer periods of supply chain disruptions. Several research papers have investigated and analyzed problems of political and ideological conflicts, energy poverty, etc in the Gulf States (Kim *et al.* 2025; Kinninmont 2019). However, there's a paucity of studies investigating the four major factors which define energy security in the region namely, availability, affordability, accessible energy resources and sustainable energy supply sources in view of economic development goals and net-zero targets.. Therefore, the aim of this study is to analyze the role of energy security in the politics of the Gulf States.

2 GULF NATIONS ENERGY SECURITY STRATEGIES

The regions default interest to reinforce the predominance of fossil fuels in the global energy system was abandoned after the COP26 (Finley, 2019). It dawned on the leaders of the Gulf nations that such a stance wasn't only futile and counterproductive but may also invite global antagonism on the long run. Counterproductive because the region is experiencing global warming at a higher rate than other regions of the world due to higher emission of greenhouse gases from oil and gas extraction and industry. And, they would have had to deal with global antagonism due to climate mitigation challenges.

A dimension of the Gulf nations energy security policy and strategy is the involvement of key state-owned enterprises with the potential to succeed in a lower-carbon economy. Hence, Saudi Arabia's twin hydrocarbon companies rank among the first five upstream establishments worldwide, in terms of low carbon dioxide emission levels. Saudi Aramco and ADNOC are two companies positively positioned to incorporate oil into the ongoing energy transition as a result of the cost advantage. In addition to Saudi Aramco being the first to export blue ammonia to Japan in 2020 and to South Korea in 2022, it has also announced plans to emerged as the major producer and supplier of blue hydrogen by 2025 (Aminjonov 2025).

Similarly, as a demonstration of her commitment to decarburization goals, Qatar budgeted $200 million emissions reduction technologies in 2021. The investment ensured a product with 30% fewer emissions compared to other sources of liquefied natural gas. Again, Qatar has also strategized to build the world's largest blue ammonia plant to produce 1.2 million tons per annum. The implication of the Gulf region second order of energy interests is, therefore, to promote the production and consumption of oil and gas products, resource circularity, and unimpeded hydrogen development. Again, this decarbonization

effort requires government involvement to support carbon capture storage. Pioneering creation of a viable network of CO2 emitters and storage locations is worthwhile. The Gulf States possesses aggressive emission reduction targets. They are not dissuaded by the reality of non availability of a appropriately developed emissions regulation package. However, they have the profile to rapidly implement laws and frameworks, without bottlenecks. Governments in the region are working on providing legal framework needed. It is noteworthy that such government/private collaboration has always proved to be crucial for immense and feasible hydrocarbon projects. The strategy is to engender agreements which promote investment. Gulf countries possess a litany of major operational Carbon Capture Storage (CCS) projects. These genuine efforts boost the value of reserves through sustained competitiveness in almost all the major transition scenarios. Carbon Capture Storage projects, including those announced in Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, may potentially generate further expansion with increasing scope of contributions to the production of low-carbon blue hydrogen leveraging natural gas reserves and making net-zero pledges seem realistic in this region (Aminjonov 2025).

3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

(1) To attempt a definition and provide a concept of energy security as it relates to Gulf States
(2) To analyze how energy security concerns influence the domestic politics and the structure of governance of Gulf States.
(3) To analyze how transitions and climate commitments reflect on the policies and strategic partnerships of Gulf States
(4) To examine the environmental vulnerability of Gulf States critical energy infrastructure to threats and the possible countermeasures.

4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology for analyzing the role of energy security in the politics of Gulf States involves a mixed-methods approach involving qualitative and quantitative analyses. It therefore included discourse analysis of policy documents from archives and several data bases making possible quantitative analysis of energy security data for the Gulf region.

5 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings from our analysis of Gulf States' energy policies, strategies, installed renewable energy and national targets

Contrary to negative forecasts by critics of the energy transition efforts of the Gulf nations (Aminjonov 2025), the results inform that the leaders of the Gulf States have demonstrated their determination to replicate their role as major global suppliers of clean energy which repredents a drive towards sustainable energy supply.{See Table 1]. The findings align with those of Nikbakht, M. *et al.* (2023) and Elfarra *et al.* (2024) that minimization of fossil fuel dependence leads to improved energy security and stability. This is proof that Gulf States are managing energy resources and investing in relevant clean energy infrastructures as a result of sovereign wealth funds activities. [see Table 2] In agreement with findings by Elfarra *et al* 2024, Qatar, UAE and Saudi Arabia have major investments in Carbon Capture Storage [CCS], carbon emissions reduction projects without which a sustainable economic

Table 1. Gulf States installed renewable energy capacity versus national targets.

Country	Renewable energy capacity of the total power supply	Renewable energy target	Renewable energy	c capacity to achieve
Bahrain	0.10%		20% by 2035	19.9%
Kuwait	0.40%		15% by 2030	14.60%
Qatar	0.10%		20% by 2030	19.9%
Oman	0.40%		30% by 2030	29.60%
Saudi Arabia	0.20%		50% by 2050	49.80%
UAE	7.00%		44% by 2050	33%
Iran	-			
Iraq	-			
Kuwait	-			

Source: Concordiam

Table 2. Persian gulf countries petroleum statistics (2006).

Country	Reserves liital liquids Billion bhl	Capacity Total liquids Million bbl/d	Production Total liquids Million bbl/d	Consumption Total liquids Million bbl/d	Net Exports Total liquids Million bbl/d
Saudi Arabia	262.3	12.1	10.7	2.1	8.7
Iran	136.3	4.3	4.1	1.6	2.5
Iraq	115.0	2.0	2.0	0.6	1.4
Qatar	15.2	1.2	1.1	0.1	1.0
UAE	97.8	3.1	2.9	0.4	2.5
Kuwait	101.5	2.8	2.7	0.5	2.2
Bahrain	0.1	0.1	0.05	0.03	0.02
Total	728.0	23.6	23.6	5.3	18.2

Source: EIA short term energy outlook.

foundation will be impossible. As a result, Saudi Arabia's Saudi Aramco is the first to export blue ammonia to two major Asian countries in 2020 and 2022,

Two Gulf nations have achieved large-scale domestic renewable energy projects as the contrasting scenario depicted by Tables 1 and 2 above, show. Abu Dhabi hosted the The International Renewable Energy Agency in October 2024 and Dubai hosted COP28 in the last quarter of 2023. As far back as 2006, the UAE's Masdar Co. budgeted and spent more than $20 billion in 30 countries across the globe for the purpose of the development of 11 gigawatts of solar, wind and waste-to-energy power-generation projects. Clearly, the Gulf countries' practical commitment to the energy and economic diversification targets is unwavering and appear bound for long term global impact. [See Table 1].

Geopolitical risks- including the potential for political, socioeconomic and military interventions and environmental threats are a reality in the Gulf region and beyond. Factors impacting energy supply chains range from greenhouse gas effects to cyber attacks. The recent attack on Saudi oil facilities and resulting disruption of oil supplies (Finley and Medlock III 2019), hurricanes on the Gulf Coast (which disrupted oil and gas production and distribution, as well as the electrical grid), and unprecedented high winds in California, causing widespread power outages (Bamberger, 2007).{See Figure 1] These unpredictable occurrences underscore the need for a comprehensive global, regional and individual national focus on energy security (Finley 2019).

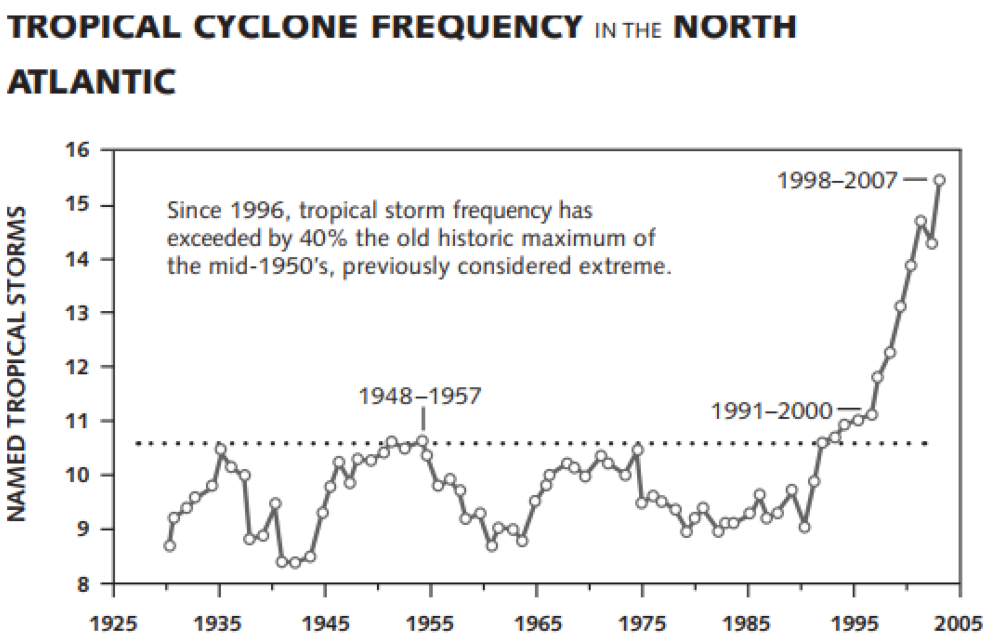


Figure 1. Tropical cyclone frequency in the North Atlantic. Source. AtlanticHurricaneDatabaseRe-analysisProject.

6 CONCLUSION

Regime changes and military intervention have become infrequent in the Gulf region. Hence, cooperation, competitiveness and collaboration spearheaded by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member states are more evident enabling leaders in the region to focus on achieving the desired energy transition target. The research reveals that energy security engenders innovations which counter difficulties in order to ensure sustainability, competitiveness, and collaboration, that has the potential to position the Gulf region as the global center of renewable energy supplies. Potential future research may focus on policy challenges of investment in renewable projects, engendering private/public and foreign partnerships significant to the Gulf region.

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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Understanding the dynamics of the policy approaches of Donald Trump and its impact on India

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ABSTRACT: **Introduction:** Tariffs certainly disturb the economy of every single state directly or indirectly and impact trade dynamics, which will erect trade barriers. The tariff policies will affect the GDP, whose impact will be witnessed by inflation in each sector. The word Trump and Tariff echoes unrest, and geopolitical relations and international trade will affect the American economy. By no means does the redressed of reciprocal tariffs have to be made so that bilateral trade agreements can run parallel and smoothly. The trade war could potentially lead to economic downturns in this era. This is not the era of war. Each nation needs the other nation because they rely on each other. There is a ruckus in the economy of almost every country that is facing tariffs and economic turbulence, which are being escalated.

Purpose: The paper defines pragmatism and the dilemma faced by the countries to which US President Trump has imposed reciprocal tariffs, and descriptive research methodology has been used by the researcher. The study aims to analyze the impact and effect of Donald Trump's tariff policy.

Method: The study used an expert group opinion survey among 250 respondents. The questionnaire has 15 questions.

Results/Outcome: The finding advocates that implementing increased tariffs is not the solution. The result of the study highlights that there is no long-term effect on the Indian share market and economy. The conclusion comes that in interconnected world; imposing tariff is not accepted as it widens unrest in the economy.

Keywords: Tariff Policy, Sustainability Impact, Geo-Politics, Trade Barriers, International Trade

1 INTRODUCTION

MAGA is a political movement that emerged during the 2016 Presidential campaign of its Robust and Bold; above all, it's of dynamic leader, Donald Trump (Brooks 2023). It is defined as "Make America Great Again." The movement was founded on the belief that the U.S. was initially a "great" country. Its prominent objective is to provide economic protection to the country, once again make the U.S. an enormous economic nation, and make the world work again to its advantage (Bussaja 2024).

Every country is facing pragmatism in its tariffs. As the trade war initiated by US President Donald Trump continues to escalate, all eyes are on what will happen. He believes that this will free the US from its reliance on foreign goods after his administration imposes "reciprocal tariffs" to match the duties that other countries charge on American products

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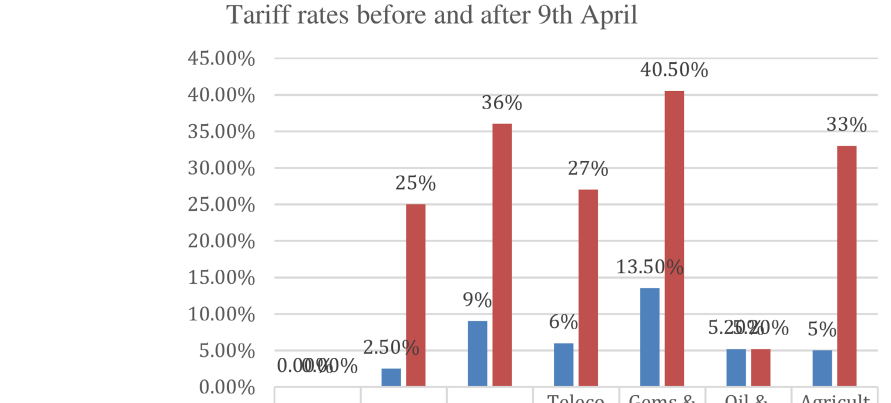
(Giesecke and Waschik 2025). But there is palpable uncertainty over how these levies will be rolled out.

The policy of Trump cannot transform politics, but can lead to impairing relations with many nations. Not too soon, but later his decision to raise taxes may hit his own country from economic and many other perspectives. The current global economic landscape demands transparency in bilateral relations. Everybody was expecting that if Trump got elected in the election, they could easily deal with America, but he changed the perception after deciding with a hard nose. This hard decision of Trump may affect foreign policy and make relations very strained (Safavipour and Jalalirad 2025).

This policy of the US President will convert contemporary world politics into a radical one. Whose aftermath will be witnessed very soon and will be severe. The tariff policies of the US are causing global trade disorder, and due to this, turmoil could be seen in geopolitics. US actions are more political than economic. Variable i representing a country, m_i representing imports of goods from that country, and x_i representing exports of goods to that country, the formula given by the White House is as follows (Giesecke and Waschik 2025):

$$\Delta\tau_i = \frac{x_i - m_i}{\varepsilon \times \varphi \times m_i}$$

Tariffs can be both good and bad, depending on their nature. They can be good if they generate government revenue, increase exports, etc. They can be bad if their prices increase, reducing exports and increasing imports, and leading to a trade war. The US reciprocal tariff will impact India directly or indirectly. Also, India could be affected by Trump's tariffs at the national level, the product level, or through non-tariff barriers, all of which could complicate trade relations between the two nations. The effect would not be in an individual sector but in multiple sectors (Ignatenko *et al.* 2025). India has to face major challenges regarding tariffs imposed by Trump's administration.



	Pharma	Auto	Textile	Telecom	Gems & Jewels	Oil & gas	Agriculture
Tariff before 9th April 2025	0.00%	2.50%	9%	6%	13.50%	5.20%	5%
Tariff after 9th April 2025	0.00%	25%	36%	27%	40.50%	5.20%	33%

Sectors such as steel and aluminum are already feeling the impact of the 25 % tariffs imposed by the US on these metals. $5 billion worth of goods were already affected by Trump's 25 % tariffs on these metals, which have taken effect. Throughout much of its time in office, the NDA government has increased protectionism by erecting higher tariffs and

non-tariff barriers, including a raft of quality control orders. Tariffs have been raised multiple times since 2016, covering more than 500 major item categories, marking a "calibrated departure" from the policy of reducing import duty followed by governments over the previous two decades. The union budget cut basic customs duty on more than two dozen items. The average customs duty has been reduced to 10.66% from 11.66%. Duty cuts on items such as bourbon, high-end cars, and motorcycles are intended primarily for Washington. Considering the economic perspective the researchers have decided to explore the contemporary effect of the political stand of American President.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Atray and KR (2025) have explored the broader implications of the United States' tariff policies on India, particularly following the announcement of reciprocal tariffs by President Donald Trump. Klomp (2025) has focused on the economic impact of U.S. tariffs on steel and aluminum, specifically their effect on the stock performance of American defense firms. Gopalakrishnan *et al.* (2025) has looked into U.S.–India agricultural trade in the context of America's protectionist stance. While overall trade in this sector remains relatively small at $7 billion annually, India's high tariffs continue to be a major barrier. Bukhari *et al.* (2025) has investigated the possible global repercussions of a second Trump presidency and the anticipated "America First 2.0" policy. Pajo (2025) has analyzed the Liberation Day tariff strategy introduced by Trump in 2025, examining how it affects the Philippines in comparison to other nations. Ozili (2025) has provided a detailed breakdown of the rationale behind the U.S.'s retaliatory tariffs, introduced under the label of reciprocal trade policy. These were broadly applied, with higher rates levied against nations considered responsible for the persistent U.S. trade deficit.

Chohan (2025) has examined the economic impact in the second Trump administration. Researcher suggested that often politicians use tariff impositions to show nationalist sentiment for political advantages. Sanyal (2020) has analysed the effect of import tariff of America, on India. Athukorala, P. C. (2020) examined that U.S. safeguard duties on steel and aluminium have taken a toll on India's exports of these products to the United States, but these products account for a tiny share of India's total exports to the United States.

Amiti *et al.* (2019) have studied about the conventional approaches about tariff. The study focused 2018 Trump's administration. Chadha *et al.* (2021) have studied US–China trade war and Indian approach for trade with both the country. Morgan *et al.* (2022) have provided a detailed look at the impact of retaliatory tariffs by US and commodity and estimates the direct export losses associated with the trade conflict.

2 RESEARCH GAP

The researchers have found that there are proactive researchers, who have anticipated different perspectives with different methods. The researchers have found a space to conduct the impact on share market, economy and world order. The researchers thus found that present study could bridge the gap.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 *Objectives*

- To study the impact of recent American policies in India
- To understand the economists' interpretation of the American international strategies

3.2 *Hypothesis*

Ho1. There is no significant difference in the opinion of expert group about the impact of the American tariff on the Indian share market.

Ho2. There is no significant difference in the opinion of expert group about the impact of recent tariffs of America on the world order

Ho3. There is no significant difference in the opinion of expert group about the long-term impact on the economy

4 EXPERT GROUP FORMATION

To understand the American tariff impact on India the researcher has tried to go beyond the established ratios. GDP, export or import is a long-term perspective and currently the impact prediction will be mere a small anticipation. So, the present study is designed as an opinion survey among the economists and thinkers of international relations. The researchers have selected the Post graduate students of economics, Political science and international relation. Their opinion could be predictive of the anticipated impact of the recent changes in American tariff on other countries. Some researchers have also motioned it as expert sampling.

Sample: Non parametric, random sampling, 250 respondents

Scale statistics: 05 point scale, 15 items, Cronbachs' Alpha > 0.600

Variables and Items: Indian share market, the world order, the economy

5 ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Ho1. There is no significant difference in the opinion of expert group about the impact of the American tariff on the Indian share market.

The test statistic obtained was found to be statistically significant at the chosen level of significance ($p < 0.05$), thereby leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. This indicates that the expert group does exhibit a significant divergence in their opinions.

Ho2. There is no significant difference in the opinion of expert group about the impact of recent tariffs of America on the world order

The results of the t-test indicated a statistically significant difference in the opinions of the expert group ($p < 0.05$), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. This suggests that the respondents' views are not homogeneous with respect to the impact of the tariffs.

Ho3. There is no significant difference in the opinion of expert group about the long-term impact on the economy.

The results of the one-sample t-test indicated a statistically significant difference among the opinions of the respondents ($p < 0.05$), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. This signifies that the expert opinions on the long-term impact of American tariff changes on the Indian economy are not homogeneous. However, the descriptive statistics reveal that the majority of respondents tend to believe that these recent changes will not have a significant long-term impact.

6 DISCUSSION

An interconnected world does not have a country that could not impact the surrounding. When it is about to America it's surely difficult to remain unaffected. Tariffs are often the game to control the imports. Common man could interpret import as a loss to the nation but actually trade deficit is not economic loss. This creates interdependent as well as a

competitive market that keeps growing. The present tariff raise can be seen as a way to affect the share market. This is the economics which is beyond the understanding of a common man. When trade is affected it also affect the company's reputation so as their share prices. Short term shot is expected for recent tariffs may be at some point few companies could suffer. But a long term impact on share market is not possible. Share market is not limited to export orient companies, it compromises of several industries. At some point the rank could change but it is for sure stock market will regain its reputation. Tariff on trade is also a way to show the power a nation has. America started losing its fatherly image in front of world. Soon after Russia attacked Ukraine, the industrial limitations of America were exposed. The way America has to leave Ukraine in the war which actually started due to them, the world order has shift to the east. Once in the race, China remained unconsidered and the older rival Russia has shown its dominance. This traffic cannot regain the world order as earlier. America has the might but surely they have lost the place of axis of the world. The economic condition of India surely will be affected for some time. Few economists have predicted 0.5 point slow down in GDP in FY 26. But not only India but most of the nations have tried to make their economy robust. It started back in 2014 when Russia annexed Crimea. The nationalism sentiments grew all over the globe. The MAGA, Make in India, and many similar economic independence moves are result of economic nationalism. It can be said that economists don't believe in the reasonability of the present tariff changes. It just seemed the political stunt on American citizen.

The researchers have a delimitation in the study that the acceptance of the expert group by other scholar. Their opinion may carry the bias of their nationality. To exclude this factor the present study has only considered those students and the economists and thinkers of international relations who don't have any political affiliation. Their political neutral nature is the most watched condition before selecting them in the survey.

The researchers have selected the Post graduate students of economics, Political science and international relation. In a disguised manner the researchers have marked their political inclination about ruling or opposition party in India. All those who are pro or against the ruling government have not been considered as the researchers have focused to collect the response of an economist and political thinker. This way the researcher has tried to overcome the respondents' bias and made the findings generalized. The study also leaves a scope of investigation of real time impact of the USA policies on India, but that will be subject to availability of trade and share market data in future. The present study is surely and anticipation of the changes in tariff and after coming months they will testified.

7 CONCLUSION

In the globalised village, imagination of closed economy is impossible. A car manufacturer in may have steel form India, technology from Japan, Chip from China, workforce from Pakistan and may have market in America. In such situation increasing the tariff may be a representation of gaining American citizens faith. It has to be understood that politics must be kept away from economy. Impulsive decisions may lead to financial loss. Countries soon will find another market or a tax heaven to manufacture. World must see the way Dubai and Switzerland has made business conducive environment. Though Dubai may have earned through their ports but they opened it, Switzerland may put checks through taxes but they did not. Tariffs could be good at a point when sudden cost effective alien products come in the native market but gradually local market should accept that competition and bring excellence to the business.

The researchers have made this study on the expert group opinion survey. The researchers have seen that the present image of India and its economy is very strong in the mind of its people. The present economics and political science experts are no exception. Proactive economy is not a trend that came in practice. It is a global development over the years. What we, learnt as the end

of the cold war is just a history, actually interests of the nations always remained the priority of their policies. Interests always have conflicts with each other; no two nations can complement each other in complete way. They may have only interests that lead them to accept the benefit of others on their cost. The economy has seen this several times. Whether it is 'Make in India', 'Make America Great again', BRIXIT or the recent reciprocal tariff these all shows that nation's interest cannot be exempted from the international relationship.

In conclusion, the study of Donald Trump's policy dynamics and their impact on India reveals that while politically driven and may create short-term disruptions; their influence is likely to diminish over time. The enduring reality remains the global interdependence of economies, which continues to shape trade, investment, and diplomatic relations. Nevertheless, it is important not to overlook the destabilizing effects these abrupt policy shifts can have on both the world economy and the Indian economy. Such disturbances underscore the need for India to maintain strategic flexibility and resilience in the face of evolving international economic and political landscapes. Ultimately, sustained cooperation and integration at the global level will be essential for mitigating risks and promoting stable economic growth.

Annexure

A1 Questions

Strike with straight line, the most likely option. No alternative is right or wrong.

Indian share market

"Recent changes in American tariffs have a significant influence on investor sentiment in the Indian stock market."

SA (Strongly Agree) A (Agree) N (Not sure) D (Disagree) SD (Strongly Disagree)

"Sectors in India that are export-oriented are more vulnerable to tariff-related fluctuations in the U.S. market."

SA (Strongly Agree) A (Agree) N (Not sure) D (Disagree) SD (Strongly Disagree)

"The Indian share market reacts negatively to announcements of U.S. tariff hikes, regardless of the sector involved."

SA (Strongly Agree) A (Agree) N (Not sure) D (Disagree) SD (Strongly Disagree)

"The long-term performance of Indian stocks is likely to be affected by ongoing U.S. protectionist trade policies."

SA (Strongly Agree) A (Agree) N (Not sure) D (Disagree) SD (Strongly Disagree)

"Increased American tariffs on global imports create indirect pressure on Indian multinational companies listed in the share market."

SA (Strongly Agree) A (Agree) N (Not sure) D (Disagree) SD (Strongly Disagree)

The world order

"American tariff hikes signal a shift from multilateralism to economic nationalism in global politics."

SA (Strongly Agree) A (Agree) N (Not sure) D (Disagree) SD (Strongly Disagree)

"India can leverage alliances with other nations to counterbalance the effects of U.S. protectionist policies."

SA (Strongly Agree) A (Agree) N (Not sure) D (Disagree) SD (Strongly Disagree)

"Emerging economies like India are disproportionately affected by the new U.S. trade tariffs."

SA (Strongly Agree) A (Agree) N (Not sure) D (Disagree) SD (Strongly Disagree)

"The American tariff policy will encourage India to explore self-reliance and reduce import dependence."

SA (Strongly Agree) A (Agree) N (Not sure) D (Disagree) SD (Strongly Disagree)

"The tariff changes reflect a broader attempt by the U.S. to realign global power dynamics in its favor."

SA (Strongly Agree) A (Agree) N (Not sure) D (Disagree) SD (Strongly Disagree)

The economy

"In the short term, American tariff hikes will have minimal impact on the Indian Economy"

SA (Strongly Agree) A (Agree) N (Not sure) D (Disagree) SD (Strongly Disagree)

"The current U.S. tariff policy could potentially create new opportunities for India in alternative global markets."

SA (Strongly Agree) A (Agree) N (Not sure) D (Disagree) SD (Strongly Disagree)

"Changes in U.S. trade policy are an important factor influencing India's macroeconomic stability."

SA (Strongly Agree) A (Agree) N (Not sure) D (Disagree) SD (Strongly Disagree)

"India's economic diplomacy needs to be recalibrated in response to the evolving American trade policy."

SA (Strongly Agree) A (Agree) N (Not sure) D (Disagree) SD (Strongly Disagree)

"The impact of American tariffs on India will be more political than economic."

SA (Strongly Agree) A (Agree) N (Not sure) D (Disagree) SD (Strongly Disagree)

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India's diplomatic hedging in the Bangladesh crisis

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ABSTRACT: Following Sheikh Hasina's removal in August 2024, after which Muhammad Yunus's temporary government then arose, India had certain diplomatic difficulties when it handled its key South Asian bilateral connection. This paper examines India's advanced diplomatic hedging strategy in navigating the Bangladesh crisis. It did do this, because it balanced democratic values with planned imperatives, which do include border security, minority protection, and also economic partnerships. The study employed process tracing methods, and it analysed formal statements, policy papers plus diplomatic correspondence. It reveals New Delhi's hedging approach in three dimensions: security, economic, as well as normative. India has been economically consistent plus it has partnered in commerce and development for over $2 billion yearly. India also adjusted democracy promotion so it would not alienate the transitional administration, as well as remained engaged upon border management plus counter-terrorism collaboratively. The research indicates India's hedging tactic, while somewhat effective at protecting key considered interests plus averting total relational failure, highlighted intrinsic conflicts among India's hoped-for democratic leading position plus realistic judgements within regional governance, thus helping diplomatic hedging theory.

Keywords: Diplomatic Hedging, India-Bangladesh Relations, Neighbourhood First Policy, South Asian Geopolitics, Middle Power Diplomacy

1 INTRODUCTION

The dramatic fall of Sheikh Hasina's government in August 2024 indicated the dramatic collapse of South Asian geopolitics, basically altering the prepared situation that India had cultivated carefully for fifteen years. Following such massive student-led protests, Hasina abruptly departed, as her subsequent asylum within India created an immediate diplomatic crisis for New Delhi, which had invested quite heavily within the bilateral partnership under the Awami League's leadership (Kuttig *et al.* 2020). Muhammad Yunus's caretaker government arose, and it altered not just leadership but possibly shifted Bangladesh's foreign policy approach, questioning India's presumptions about local stability while anticipating alliances. The transition's initial month passed, also disturbing increases in community violence towards Hindu minorities occurred. Abid *et al.* (2024) noted that religious communities and places were assaulted over 200 times by attackers. Simultaneously, border

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tensions increased as thousands of Bangladeshi people tried crossing into India. The 4,096-kilometre border was under pressure. Security protocols that are existing were tested as a result of it. Economic disruption did follow swiftly, bilateral trade flows also became quite greatly volatile and the new administration did make a number of Indian infrastructure projects face more uncertain futures (Jain and Skariah 2022). This conundrum confounds scholars of global affairs: how does a growing middling nation like India deal with the strain of advancing democratic ideals alongside protecting key practical concerns when political unrest confronts it in a nearby country? The case does offer up unique theoretical perceptions into behaviour with regard to diplomatic hedging. It examines just how regional powers do manage the competing imperatives in their immediate neighbourhoods furthermore extending way beyond customary great power applications (Kuik 2016). The research contributes in great measure to the growing literature on middle power diplomacy and planned autonomy. This is particularly relevant as India does seek to establish itself as a responsible stakeholder within global governance, whilst it is maintaining realistic neighbourhood relationships. Furthermore, this analysis has deep policy implications for it tests both the resilience and adaptability within India's "Neighbourhood First" doctrine when it confronts democratic transitions perhaps misaligned with calculated Indian preferences. In this paper, India responded throughout the Bangladesh crisis as well as exemplified advanced diplomatic hedging. New Delhi selectively engages itself on security matters, realistically maintains continuity in its economic relations, and promotes calibrated democracy in order to preserve core planned interests as it adapts itself to new political realities. The analysis proceeds via the examination of initial responses, the crisis dynamics, and India's planned stakes within Bangladesh. Assessment of outcomes with constraints as well as hedging strategy implementation proceeds throughout. This framework shows just how middle powers navigate through such a complex intersection of both their interests and values. The framework operates inside of the regional order. This order is a progressively multipolar one.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Diplomatic hedging has emerged as being a key theoretical framework that is useful for understanding just how states navigate complex planned environments without committing themselves exclusively to one great power. Kuik did contribute a great deal because he conceptualised hedging, arguing that it is very much a multidimensional strategy in which states maximise the benefits while they minimise risks from competing powers through economic pragmatism, political defiance in addition to calculated ambiguity. Actors do seek material gains which stem from diverse origins irrespective of any political alignment, denoting economic pragmatism, whilst actors can selectively withstand dominant power pressure, denoting political defiance. Planned ambiguity allows states to skirt around explicit commitments. It does also allow for them to avoid such provocations. These provocations may well constrain all of their options within the future. This framework is valuable for analysts analysing middle power behaviour. These states are able to create independent policies, yet still they lack resources with which to resist great power influence fully (Goh 2005). Hedging differs fundamentally from customary alliance theories of balancing as well as band wagoning because it recognises that states simultaneously engage with multiple powers without exclusively aligning therefore they approach security also economic partnerships by creating portfolios. From Nehru's rigid non-intervention principles then, India's regional strategy greatly has evolved. Conditional engagement with greater assertiveness followed then. This evolution reflects India's capacity as it rises, with India perceiving threats that shift, especially threats that concern Chinese influence across South Asia (Das 2016). As India reconciles being the largest global democracy with security needs appearing realistic, strain grows, connecting democracy's promotion and measured realism. Recent precedents point to this evolving approach. India furnished large monetary assistance throughout

Sri Lanka's 2022 economic downturn notwithstanding anxieties regarding Colombo's authoritarian tendency (Mohan 2006) plus intervened within Nepal's 2015 constitutional emergency, showing a willingness for utilising economic sway for political outcomes. In 2023, India dealt with the Muizzu administration that favours China. India tested its approach through the Maldivian election, favouring calculated alignment along with democratic governance (Jain and Mohanan 2025). Studies of Bangladesh-India relations since Sheikh Hasina became leader emphasise that a deliberate alliance began following 2009 uniquely, radically altering two-way interactions from mistrust to collaboration. Hasina acted with resolve against anti-India insurgent groups inside Bangladesh, scholars note, and this formed the basis for better security cooperation with intelligence sharing and joint counter-terrorism operations (Ganguly and Pardesi 2009). Border management frameworks necessitated institutionalised mechanisms, so they addressed longstanding issues of illegal migration, smuggling, and territorial disputes. India traded more alongside Bangladesh, becoming its second-largest partner also financed development substantially, and economic ties became interdependent as credit lines exceeded $8 billion (Sikdar 2006). At present, this quite thorough cooperation system encounters certain difficulties. Political transition poses all of those challenges. Recalibration with care of those established mechanisms plus expectations is what is required.

3 METHODOLOGY

This research uses a qualitative case study method so as to examine India's diplomatic reaction to the Bangladesh crisis because it uses the intensive analysis method that George and Bennett (2005) suggested for the comprehension of complex political events. The case study design suits this well, as the crisis has a unique character, and tracing causal mechanisms linking India's planned calculations to particular policy outcomes is necessary. Process tracing methodology does enable a systematic examination of the decision-making sequence, also identification of key turning points is allowed because of the logic underlying India's hedging strategy (Beach 2020). The temporal scope does include the period from August in 2024, as that marks when Sheikh Hasina departs. Therefore, immediate crisis responses also evolving calculated adaptations remain captured through to the present day. Due to the timeframe providing sufficient data which is for policy adjustments analysis, analytical focus is maintained upon the phase of bilateral recalibration which is most critical. Data are collected via multiple sources for ensuring thorough and analytical triangulation. Primary sources happen to be official pronouncements originating from the Ministry of External Affairs, diplomatic memos that were released by way of parliamentary processes, as well as policy papers outlining India's considered framework. Secondary sources include systematic analysis into media reports from leading Indian and Bangladeshi publications, parliamentary debates reflecting domestic political considerations, plus expert interviews with former diplomats and regional specialists. This approach comes about from multiple sources. The findings are thereby enabled toward cross-verification. Also provided are perspectives, including both those official and also those unofficial, upon the policy formulation processes. The analytical structure aids the implementation of diplomatic hedging. For this purpose it utilises three distinct dimensions. It engages selectively in border management and it cooperates in counter-terrorism; it maintains trade relationships; it partners in continued development; and it promotes democracy through calibrated efforts. The dependent variables have a focus upon measurable policy outcomes, that include bilateral agreement modifications, plus trade flow variations, and also diplomatic engagement frequency, as well as on planned objectives, such as relationship stability, interest preservation, along with regional influence maintenance. Now, this framework enables assessment in a systematic way. This assessment occurs right across multiple policy domains. This framework is also theoretically coherent with recognised diplomatic hedging literature.

4 INDIA'S STRATEGIC INTERESTS IN BANGLADESH

India's planned interests for Bangladesh shape bilateral engagement priorities and feature multidimensional security imperatives as a key element. Border management represents the most pressing concern for us. This 4,096-kilometre frontier is considered to be among the most porous and also longest international boundaries across the globe. Unauthorised immigration has presented an issue for a long time. Estimates suggest millions of undocumented Bangladeshi citizens live within India, creating demographic stresses also political sensitivities especially in border states such as West Bengal and Assam (Samaddar 2025). Counter-terrorism cooperation acted as a foundation for bilateral security relations because Bangladesh decisively acted against Indian insurgent groups operating within its territory after 2009. In the Hasina era, mechanisms developed in order to share intelligence. These mechanisms enabled coordinated operations as against networks. These operations put security at risk for the two nations. These operations included neutralising United Liberation Front of Assam leadership, alongside other Northeast insurgent organisations. The safe haven problem remains still critical for the internal security of India, as the territory of Bangladesh has for a long time offered shelter for separatist movements that are aimed at the Northeast region of India. Schemes, due to the fact they include transit and linkage, put funds into regional consolidation for tactical reasons. Initiatives like the Chittagong Port usage agreement and projected rail links via Bangladesh enable an alternative route for India to reach its landlocked Northeast states plus lessen reliance on the constricted Siliguri corridor. India does have commercial interests, mirrored through economic stakes inside Bangladesh, as well as a wider regional integration strategy worth billions of dollars on an annual basis. India, subsequent to China (Tieri 1989), happens to be Bangladesh's second-largest trading partner while it maintains an important trade surplus. The total two-way trade has increased greatly. The volume is in the region of $2 billion. Since development partnerships offered credit lines exceeding $8 billion, they financed important infrastructure projects which included power plants, railways, as well as port facilities, so this established India as a major development partner. Energy cooperation is now more necessary since India exports more than 1,100 megawatts of electricity to Bangladesh along with exploring chances to import LNG for satisfying rising energy needs. Indian businesses do make investments in order to protect their interests when they are operating in the textile, pharmaceutical, and telecommunications sectors of Bangladesh. This represents substantial commercial interests which require stable bilateral frameworks as well as predictable regulatory environments. Bangladesh contemplates importance and also considers geopolitics, which highlights India's competition dynamics as a major power while aspiring to regional leadership. China has become increasingly influential in Dhaka through Belt and Road Initiative projects. Infrastructure investments of diverse kinds strengthen this influence. These developments challenge India's usual command over South Asian matters. Bangladesh is something that matters in regional power balances, so it is quite an important part of India's overall strategy. This strategy counters Chinese attempts at encirclement, and Bangladesh plans for remaining autonomous. India's credibility as a regional leader does greatly depend upon its own ability for maintaining productive relationships with immediate neighbours of it, because Bangladesh's alignment surely is a critical test in New Delhi's neighbourhood diplomacy effectiveness and South Asian integration vision.

5 THE CRISIS AND INDIA'S INITIAL RESPONSE

The August 2024 disruption in Bangladesh started at the time when students protested regarding the quota system that was present for state jobs, before it then quickly grew to be a wider anti-government campaign that indeed sought Sheikh Hasina's departure (Maurya *et al.* 2025). The protests transformed into a nationwide uprising from an initial focus on

merit-based employment policies. The security forces' violent crackdown caused hundreds of casualties as well as spurring public opposition against the Awami League government. Following weeks of demonstrations strengthening and marking the end of her fifteen-year tenure, Hasina dramatically departed on August 5, 2024, also creating an immediate power vacuum within Dhaka. An interim government formed by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus showed an important shift from usual political leadership, because it brought technocratic governance and global credibility to the temporary administration. On account of the fact that law and order deteriorated all across the country, immediate security became concerning, as reports indicated communal violence which targeted Hindu minorities and people who attacked Awami League supporters, thus creating humanitarian crises which required urgent international attention. India reacted diplomatically straight away, which showed the complexity of managing such an unheard-of crisis. India had a role to play with its most vital regional partner. The partner was caught up in the crisis. At first, official statements from the Ministry of External Affairs did stress hopes regarding the early restoration of normalcy. These statements expressed concern with respect to the safety of minorities. Explicit support for absolutely any political faction was carefully avoided in this case (Ali 2018). Granting asylum to Sheikh Hasina proved particularly consequential as India positioned itself as directly involved in Bangladesh's internal political dynamics while fulfilling humanitarian obligations toward a long-standing partner. This choice stirred up real debate inside Bangladesh since detractors considered that India meddled in internal matters, as backers regarded that it secured a democratic figure. High-ranking figures reappraised two-sided structures as well as made plans during urgent talks inside South Block for crises, plus these figures pondered over frontier safety problems and possible refugee movements. Coordination mechanisms at many of the ministries were activated. This sought to deal with security effects more promptly. Following these ministries, which were Home Affairs, Defence, and External Affairs, they adhered to crisis management protocols. Early policy adjustments in Dhaka showed India's realistic approach. They recognised some new political realities and did need to work with just whoever held the power in Bangladesh. This was reflected in a way that they shifted away from party-to-party engagement, which had characterised relations with the Awami League, and toward state-to-state diplomatic protocols. Indian officials recalibrated development assistance programmes via reviewing active projects to the value of billions of dollars, as they assessed project viability under the interim government as well as remained committed to completed agreements. India's planned flexibility all through this adjustment period has been revealed since it adapted established frameworks so as to deal with political transitions. Thus, core bilateral interests were preserved, and regional stability was maintained, throughout these transitions.

6 HEDGING STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

India's security hedging strategy since the Bangladesh crisis demonstrated astute selective engagement that was designed to maintain vital security objectives while adapting to new political realities. Notwithstanding altered circumstances within Dhaka, operational coordination was upheld between Border Security Force as well as Border Guard Bangladesh, as established border security cooperation mechanisms operated all through the Hasina era since institutional frameworks did transcend political shifts. India embraced conditional approaches. This prompted a considered adjustment of intelligence-sharing protocols (Jain and Mohanan 2023). Although delicate information exchanges lessened until trust was re-established under the interim government (Hossain 2019), cooperation in counter-terrorism was upheld. Reconciling principles of non-interference with backing minority protection proved particularly difficult when communal actors perpetrated violent actions,

escalating such actions against Hindu communities. India responded in a diplomatic manner by way of official channels and avoided the making of public statements, viewing this as interference inside Bangladesh's internal affairs, which then shows the complexity involved in the protection of co-ethnic populations without any damage to bilateral relations. Worries arose at a political shift about potential safe havens for anti-India groups. As a result of that, cross-border terrorism monitoring was then strengthened. India's fiscal safeguards did maintain very large trading benefits, despite political instability in Bangladesh. Strategies also included the maintaining of existing commercial frameworks together with adapting to new administrative procedures under this interim government. Further, they gave guidance to Indian exporters navigating changed bureaucratic processes. Since the Yunus administration undertook reviews of major infrastructure commitments, the development project status necessitated careful renegotiation, and India needed to be flexible with project timelines while it protected core investment interests worth billions of dollars. Energy cooperation turned vitally sustainable, therefore Bangladesh relies on Indian electricity exports. Both sides acknowledge the shared advantages as ones exceeding political shifts, so they must continue with technical collaboration irrespective of governmental transitions. India faced with a subtle diplomatic challenge. This difficulty arose within standard hedging. India needed to foster democracy carefully without antagonising the temporary administration. Furthermore, it had to maintain upon its democratic credentials. Public messaging stressed the support for democratic processes in addition to peaceful transitions, whilst avoiding endorsement of political outcomes since it carefully balanced values with interests (Mazumdar and Statz 2015). Since private diplomatic communications conveyed detailed concerns, these made it possible for people to engage in frank dialogue in regard to minority rights as well as democratic institutionalisation free from public confrontation. As the political party interactions of prior bilateral frameworks were suspended, cultural and educational exchanges were supported through civil society engagement strategies. Multilateral organisations such as the United Nations and the Commonwealth coordinated international forums enabling collective mechanisms instead of bilateral pressure. This coordination lowered some of the risks that Dhaka would then directly confront others, and issues regarding governance positions remained quite principled.

7 CHALLENGES AND CONSTRAINTS

India's hedging strategy encountered quite substantial domestic pressures because of the way these pressures restricted the diplomatic flexibility that was needed and because they complicated policy implementation indeed. Members of the public did hold certain opinions about minority protection in Bangladesh. This led it to pressure the Modi government to adopt more assertive positions because Hindu nationalist organisations as well as civil society groups demanded stronger intervention to protect co-ethnic populations facing communal violence. Political opposition parties did criticise the government's measured response as being inadequate. They suggested that India should lead regionally in a more decisive manner as it protects both minorities with democratic values in neighbouring countries. Media coverage about atrocities toward Hindu communities was wide-ranging. Public expectations for a firm Indian response were influenced by this reporting, expectations perhaps at odds with diplomatic realism. Graphic images of communal violence grew through social media, and this generated emotional responses. This complicated governmental efforts to engage both diplomatically also in a balanced way with Dhaka's interim administration. Additional constraints arose from Bangladesh's domestic dynamics. Due to each of those constraints, the implementation of India's hedging strategy was a challenging one. Anti-India sentiment, historically a feature of Bangladeshi politics, came back after Hasina sought asylum in India, as political groups remobilised due to perceived Indian

interference in domestic affairs. While the interim government managed these sentiments and maintained necessary bilateral cooperation, legitimacy challenges arose and the government created delicate balancing acts, limiting policy options for both sides. Student movements together with civil society did hope prior pro-India policies could be completely abandoned, because they pressured the Yunus administration so it would show it was independent from New Delhi's influence, so they constrained opportunities for continued cooperation inside sensitive areas. On account of the major powers' competing pressures, India's policy choices were even more restricted by way of international complications aside from regional organisations. The United States and Western powers too pressured India to promote democracy. This formed expectations concerning more strong posts. These hopes could clash with quite practical involvement methods when rights and democratic rule matters got examined. China interacted with the provisional government in an opportunistic fashion and proposed different alliances. These partnerships made Bangladesh depend less upon India together with limiting India's leverage. India coordinated positions along with other member states, as both SAARC and BIMSTEC responded in a regional way. This maintained each of the multilateral commitments, although it did reduce some flexibility in such bilateral approaches. These constraints overlapped, showing the complex situation India's hedging plan was in, so negotiators needed to navigate domestic hopes, bilateral issues, and global demands.

8 OUTCOMES AND ASSESSMENT

India's hedging strategy achieved mixed short-term results when it managed the Bangladesh crisis, as this showed the potential as well as the limitations of diplomatic flexibility as politics transitioned. Institutional collaboration on border management plus trade facilitation continued, and it achieved some success at stabilising relations, also this prevented total bilateral breakdown despite political chaos in Dhaka. India's ability to maintain necessary security cooperation, coupled with adaptation to new political realities, show it managed the crisis effectively. Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri visited Bangladesh during December 2024 and this visit marked successful diplomatic engagement with the interim government (Hossain 2019). However, minority protection, together with the Hasina asylum question in addition to anti-India sentiment among particular political groups, caused tensions which persisted. This did fairly clearly indicate that hedging strategies were able to manage fundamental political differences, however, they could not eliminate them. Development partnerships went through constant recalibration as a result of continuing challenges. Furthermore, there was some uncertainty that did surround the long-term bilateral trajectory under future elected governments. When we do evaluate a planned success, we then reveal complex trade-offs that are intrinsic within India's hedging approach, and these occur between preserving an interest and compromising a value. The strategy successfully maintained core security and economic interests while avoiding complete relationship rupture as well, which demonstrated practical diplomacy can effectively manage crises. India's democratic promotion agenda was in that way weakened nonetheless too. Minority protection advocacy was also thereby curtailed. Regional credibility was affected in uncertain ways because some observers viewed India's careful response as mature diplomacy but others criticised it since it showed insufficient leadership during a democratic crisis (Jain and Chopra 2022). Future neighbourhood crises provide lessons that institutional frameworks exist beyond political changes. It is likewise important to sustain various means of linkage, and balance domestic needs with worldly realism. Within the Bangladesh case, advanced hedging strategies depict how complex transitions can be navigated by middle powers. The intrinsic tensions within modern diplomacy are being emphasised. These are included by interests and values.

9 CONCLUSION

This analysis reveals that India's diplomatic hedging strategy during the Bangladesh crisis did in fact achieve a partial success for the reason that it preserved core planned interests and adapted to political disruption, even though this was at a cost for compromising democratic promotion objectives. Indeed, the three-dimensional hedging approach demonstrated advanced policy coordination since it secured, included economic elements, and set normative dimensions preventing complete bilateral breakdown and maintaining necessary cooperation frameworks. However, the limitations of the strategy became quite clear when the strategy navigated anti-India sentiment in Bangladesh, and when the strategy managed domestic pressures so it could protect minorities more strongly. In theory, diplomatic hedging literature is extended beyond customary great power contexts by this case. It depicts just the way in which middle powers employ hedging strategies in their immediate neighbourhoods since value-interest tensions happen to be particularly acute (Haacke 2019). The discoveries contribute towards the comprehension of how regional powers balance competing imperatives throughout democratic transitions in tactically important neighbouring states. India's regional strategy requires better institutional structures as well as crisis communication tools. Policy implications do also indicate a need for much more distinct rules for the handling of internal strains all throughout regional crises so as to overcome political shifts. Middle power diplomacy means being tactically flexible and accepting intrinsic limits if normative goals get promoted bilaterally. Across many political cycles, analysts must check hedging plans remain viable. One must compare middle powers' responses during crises. Furthermore, scrutiny of whether multilateral methods handle value-interest compromises better than bilateral ones is required. Additionally, we advance theoretical comprehension of the nature of contemporary middle power diplomacy. This is since domestic political factors mould diplomatic hedging conduct in multipolar regional systems, a key area for examination.

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Memory, myth, and manuscripts: Literary trauma and the Indian knowledge system in historical perspective

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ABSTRACT: Trauma theory has developed itself into a lens that is effective for analysing literature which deals with violence, loss, and historical rupture. The paper examines almost all of current Indian fiction through Cathy Caruth's literary approach to trauma—an approach based upon posthumous experience, fractured memory, and the impossibility of narration. India's post-independence history has been plagued by many conflicts as well as insurgencies, especially in Kashmir, Punjab, and Northeast India. Incidents such as the inexcusable military attack on the Golden Temple in 1984 and intense militancy in Kashmir have left truly deep psychological wounds. Decades upon decades of ethnic conflict in Assam, brought on by groups such as ULFA, additionally contributed to these particular wounds. Arupa Patangia Kalita's *The Story of Felanee*, Siddhartha Gigoo's *The Garden of Solitude*, Shahnaz Bashir's *The Half Mother*, Jaspreet Singh's *Helium*, Sarbpreet Singh's *Night of the Restless Spirits*, and Easterine Kire's *Bitter Wormwood* each function as narratives that recount experienced trauma. These pieces silently repeat, represent shattered temporality, and are indispensable to trauma tales. By way of fusing Caruth's philosophy with these works, the study contends that Indian fiction offers a space for resistance, recollection, and healing—in addition to documenting political and personal suffering.

Keywords: Trauma Theory, Cathy Caruth, Indian Fiction, Insurgency, Kashmir, Northeast India, 1984, Memory, Testimony, Resistance

1 INTRODUCTION

The world as well as human life are recreated artistically in literature. Literary works fully represent positive aspects of life and of the world and negative aspects. Literature consistently captures the specific era and the unique circumstances associated with that era. Because of that, literature, in a similar manner, is unable to disentangle itself from all events. These events can disrupt the normal course of existence. People often resort to the activity of writing and that of recording their woes when a disaster strikes at any time (Jain *et al.* 2025).

From the very beginning, atrocities such as war, terrorism, intercommunal violence, natural calamities, and sexual assault have indeed occurred. These very events have always been a part of human existence. Devastating atrocities like the two World Wars, along with the Korean and Vietnam Wars, and the two nuclear bomb explosions occurred within the

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past century. These atrocities might appear to be physical on the surface, yet they frequently cause anguish because they leave a person with a lasting psychological scar.

In 1693, the word "trauma," which means "wound" and comes from the Greek word *titr*⊠*skein*, first appeared. At first, the term "trauma" was used to refer only to bodily harm, but over time, it has come to mean much more. Today, it describes an internal hurt or a wound upon a person's mind.

Trauma studies experienced a novel increase in the aftermath of both World Wars. It is clear that the signs in the soldiers were visible with respect to what was then referred to as "shell shock." They displayed symptoms such as anxiety, fear, restlessness, and nightmares. A further symptom was chronic depression. An important new angle into the study of trauma came from the Holocaust.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

In 2014, Mompi Choudhury published a paper in the "International Journal of English Language, Literature, and Humanities" titled Violence and Marginalisation of Women in Arupa Patangia Kalita's *The Story of Felanee.* The effects of violence against Assamese women during times of crisis are examined. The protagonist, Felanee, and her experiences and losses during the violence are also covered in the article.

Jan Mohmad Pandit's 2018 study Chronicle of Pain: *The Half Mother* Through Resistance Discourse, which was published in the "Research Journal of English Language and Literature," examines the protracted silence of mothers whose sons have been forcibly disappeared. The study examines the anguish, agony, torment, and bewilderment of a Kashmiri mother who merely waits and yearns to be reunited with her kid.

S. Robin Stanly and Dr. R. Vasuhi have examined Easterine Kire's *Bitter Wormwood* from an ecological point of view. In 2019, they released an article in "The Journal for English Language and Literary Studies" titled Annihilation of Nature: A Critical Analysis in Easterine Kire's Bitter Worm Wood. Their study attempts to investigate the causes of Nagaland's natural degradation during the political unrest.

In *Displacement and Citizenship-Histories and Memories of Exclusion* by Lipi Biswas Sen, an essay titled "Between the Borders of Forgetting and Remembering: An Analysis of Bitter Wormwood by Easterine Kire and *Drums for Rancas* by Manuel Scorza" (2020) examines the struggles that communities face as a result of their suppressed memories. The difficulties faced by those residing on the borders of Peru and India are particularly examined in this research.

3 UNDERSTANDING TRAUMA AND ITS PLACE IN LITERATURE

A severe emotional and psychological reaction is what happens when someone experiences extremely harrowing or upsetting incidents, therefore creating trauma (Maurya *et al.* 2024). According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, extreme shock always precipitates a mental illness, and its unfortunate effects persistently linger for a long time. The effects from trauma frequently manifest in due course later on in the form of mental distress, nightmares, or flashbacks, and it is not just experienced all at once.

Trauma is an overpowering event that resurfaces in unpredictable as well as uncontrollable ways, like hallucinations, according to Cathy Caruth's work *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996). That particular traumatic experience is not completely and fully comprehended precisely when it occurs; this very fact indicates, though, its ramifications do indeed manifest in subsequent later years. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Sigmund Freud offers an explanation of trauma. It stays always buried and subsequently bothers the survivor to a greater extent than merely being a wound that heals.

The mind is in fact deeply affected by trauma. It often impairs a person's wellbeing, as well as sense of self, frequently long after physical wounds have healed (Gandotra and Jain 2023). Trauma can result from objective events, such as abuse or war. Even so, it has a deeply personal impact. Adversity can be the cause of different reactions in different people. Certain people get better over time with assistance. However, other people could experience long-term psychological problems (Singh *et al.* 2017).

In *Coping with Trauma* (2005), psychologist Jon Allen writes that trauma has two aspects: the actual incident, and how people react to it. The experience, along with the individual's deep sense of powerlessness and threat, influences a traumatic reaction. Mental anguish, in addition to emotional shock, are always present even though physical harm may or may not be a part of trauma.

In recent years, trauma, to a great extent, has emerged as a major literary theme. Academics such as Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, and Geoffrey Hartman created Trauma Theory for relating how trauma is represented in literature to social and cultural contexts and for examining it.

4 TRAUMA, TESTIMONY, AND NARRATIVE: CARUTH'S LITERARY APPROACH

Unclaimed Experience by Cathy Caruth is a seminal work in literary theory and trauma studies. She is presently a professor of English and Comparative Literature at Cornell University and is regarded as a pioneer of Trauma Theory in literature. According to Caruth, literature and trauma are closely related since it provides insights into trauma that traditional narratives are unable to convey. (Caruth 2016)

Sigmund Freud's in *Moses and Monotheism and Beyond the Pleasure Principle* have an impact on Caruth's viewpoint. She contends that our understanding of trauma is incomplete at the time it happens. Rather, its consequences manifest later as emotional upheaval, nightmares, or flashbacks. Caruth refers to this delay as "belatedness." Trauma, she continues, is a missed experience that is not fully recognised at the time of occurrence and resurfaces later in disturbing ways. Her theory of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), in which the traumatic experience repeatedly resurfaces in the survivor's memory, is based on this delayed reaction. (Freud 2015).

Caruth highlights that because trauma is not fully understood when it occurs, it is difficult to communicate directly. Survivors frequently find it difficult to describe their experiences. Literature becomes a potent instrument in this situation. Literature aids in illustrating the breadth and complexity of trauma through symbolic language, metaphors, and indirect statements. She also talks about the emotional struggle that trauma survivors go through. They bear the agonising weight of surviving in addition to the recollection of the horrific incident. Trauma is "*a double telling*," according to Caruth, involving both the trauma of the violent incident and the pain of continuing to live after it. The act of survival itself turns into a crisis. (Caruth,1995)

5 TRAUMA AND VIOLENCE IN POST-INDEPENDENCE INDIA: A LASTING PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT

India has seen a number of deeply violent incidents since achieving independence in 1947, and these incidents severely disturbed the lives of its citizens. One of the most long and most unsettling confrontations has indeed taken place in Kashmir, and active tensions between both India and Pakistan over the area have thereby resulted in a more persistent insurgency. It is because of the conflict that exists between militant organizations in addition to the

Indian military that common Kashmiris have suffered to a great extent. Repeatedly, the deaths of many innocent bystanders result from several separatist movements and sustained violence.

Another important act of violence was Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's order for Operation Blue Star in June of 1984, a military assault upon the Golden Temple in Amritsar, a Sikh holy place. The operation killed several hundreds of civilians, and a number of people perceived it as an attack on the Sikh community. In reprisal, Gandhi was killed by her Sikh bodyguards at that time. In Delhi alone, close to 3,000 Sikhs were murdered as a result of this during the 1984 anti-Sikh riots. Sikhs' homes, businesses, and other assets were completely demolished.

Ethnic tensions are similar. Sectarian tensions in Northeast India have also been popular for a long time. Insurgency has indeed occurred for many decades in Assam. It has additionally occurred for many decades in Nagaland. Under Angami Zapu Phizo, both the Naga Club and later the Naga National Council were established; this clearly signified the start of Nagaland's extended fight for independence. The United Liberation Front of Asom, or ULFA, was in fact established back in 1979. Its purpose was to strongly advocate for autonomy in Assam. The military conflicts that are caused by these movements have resulted in the suffering of ordinary people most of all. Women experienced acts of severe brutality that included rape and instances of forced childbearing. To ensure their safety, children were placed in orphanages, as well as many people stayed in woodlands or refugee camps.

The 1984 anti-Sikh riots, the violence in Kashmir, and the current deep instability in Northeast India all impacted the populations involved psychologically, and the impacts lasted a long time. Even though outward signs of devastation relatively diminish, psychological and emotional scars pervasively endure. One of the important psychiatric effects is Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). As psychologists have indeed shown, extended exposure to violence and to riots quite frequently results in symptoms of trauma. Many survivors do not talk for years about those experiences due to fear, embarrassment, or the stigma of being perceived as victims (Singh 2020).

6 TRAUMA AND TESTIMONY IN INDIAN WRITING

Indian English literature has increasingly become a powerful medium of testimony to the traumas that have haunted postcolonial India. From Partition to insurgency, riot, and exile, authors deploy fiction, memoir, and oral testimonies to record not only individual suffering but also the political silences surrounding such events. Jain *et al.* (2021) have contended that such narratives do more than merely reflect trauma; they actively reconstruct history from the silenced point of view.

One of the first and longest-lasting literary reactions to Partition trauma is *Chaman Nahal's Azadi* (1975). In the figure of Lala Kashi Ram, the ordinary man swept up in the turmoil of 1947, Nahal tells the disintegration of communal bonds and psychological ruin of displacement. His novel testifies to Partition's unseen emotional and social cost, particularly to those who lack political power.

A more stylistically experimental but thematically parallel version is to be found in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children (1981)*. While a massive popular success on account of its magical realism, the novel is based on the splintered identities and inherited traumas of the generation born at the instant of Partition. Saleem Sinai is an embodiment of violence, a representation of the cognitive disorientation of postcolonial nation-founding.

The brutality of enforced exile is well-documented in histories of the Kashmir war, and most vividly by Rahul Pandita, whose memoir *Our Moon Has Blood Clots* (2013) tells the

story of the 1990s exodus of Kashmiri Pandits. Pandita's own account, being within personal memory, is one of the very first literary accounts of this violence from the displaced group itself.

Siddhartha Gigoo's *The Garden of Solitude* (2011) dramatizes this experience in the form of a drama, recounting the uprooting of Sridar and his family. In Sridar's uprooting and quest for self in refugee camps, Gigoo characterizes trauma as an enduring process shaped by memory, othering, and erasure of cultural home.

Kashmiri writing also includes the majority community's voice. *The Half Mother* (2014) by Shahnaz Bashir is a novel centered on enforced disappearances and maternal grief. Haleema's search for her son is transformed into a symbolic narrative of suspended trauma—where closure remains impossible, and the state is silent. Bashir's work brings to the forefront the emotional toll of violence on noncombatant life, women in this case.

The 1984 Sikh riots also present themselves as a ghostly ground of literary testimony. Jaspreet Singh's *Helium* (2013) follows Raj, a survivor of his Sikh teacher's lynching, whose trauma is trained in guilt and silence. Similarly, Sarbpreet Singh's Night of the Restless Spirits (2020) uses short stories to recount 1984 from different perspectives, e.g., children and witnesses. Both texts document how trauma lingers in the texture of memory and shatters moral certainties.

The Northeast—traditionally marginalized in dominant histories of trauma—has also given rise to writing that bears witness to years of militancy. Arupa Patangia Kalita, in *The Story of Felanee* (2011), narrates the gendered impacts of violence, Felanee's survival engineered by state brutality and ethnic violence. Easterine *Kire's Bitter Wormwood* (2011) offers too a panoramic view of Naga struggles through Mose's nightmare existence. These are testimonial narratives to suppressed histories and emotional trauma transmitted across generations.

Collectively, these pieces of literature form a shared history of trauma. Sharing their collective experience of Partition, forced migration, ethnic cleansing, or state brutality, they build testimonial narratives that challenge the official narratives and require readers' moral involvement. They do not simply report suffering but transform trauma into a site of resistance, claiming the right to remember, tell, and ask questions.

7 CONCLUSION

Trauma theory offers an insightful prism through which to view how traumatic events are portrayed in literature, especially as it has been developed by Cathy Caruth and other influential academics. Caruth's concept of "belatedness," in which trauma is not fully understood at the time but recurs later in fragmented, eerie ways, sheds light on the format and style of many Indian English literary works. Narratives that constantly revisit violent, loss-filled, and exiled situations in an effort to make sense of what was once inexplicable are indicative of the delayed processing of traumatic experiences. Stories written by Indian authors such as Chaman Nahal, Salman Rushdie, Siddhartha Gigoo, Rahul Pandita, and Easterine Kire, among others, mirror the psychic scars left by historical events rather than just retelling them. By giving voice to individuals who have been silenced by communal violence, displacement, genocide, and insurgency, their works demonstrate that the wounds caused by such trauma are permanent and difficult to heal. These literary works serve as repositories of cultural memory, preserving the past while enabling readers to sympathise with and comprehend the suffering of others. In this sense, Indian literature in English becomes an essential medium for resistance and healing as well as for chronicling terrible history. Trauma is not just told through fiction, memoir, and short tales; it is also processed, grieved, and remembered.

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Trauma discourse on Reddit: A linguistic pattern analysis via Voyant tools

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ABSTRACT: This paper analyzes survivors' narratives from the Reddit forum r/sexualassaultsurvivors. We examine the intersection of trauma, language, and technological intervention. This research aims to determine whether specific linguistic patterns exist within trauma narratives. We have utilized (i) Voyant tools to analyze word usage through word clouds and the frequencies of negative and positive words in these narratives. (ii) Labov's method of pattern recognition to identify recurring structural elements and themes. (iii) Trauma studies—Cathy Caruth's notion of how trauma impacts us long after the event has passed, Bessel Van der Kolk's concept of how trauma is stored in our bodies, and Judith Herman's stages of healing and recovery. The motivation behind this research is to understand the nature of trauma narratives so that it becomes easier for people to recognize individuals experiencing trauma and to offer support for the better growth and survival of humanity.

Keywords: Trauma narratives, Reddit, Voyant Tools, Linguistics

1 INTRODUCTION

Trauma in English and German means 'wound,' primarily referring to an injury inflicted on the body. Freud redefined trauma as a wound, not on the body but on the mind (Freud 1920). The wound of the mind is a breach in the experience of the self, time, and the world. The wound in the body is simpler and can be healed. For the mind to heal, the wound must repeatedly reach the conscious mind, either in the form of nightmares or through repetitive actions of the survivors (Caruth 1996; Freud 1920).

"As long as you keep secrets and suppress information, you are fundamentally at war with yourself" (Kolk 2014). The brain attempts to suppress traumatic memories as a coping mechanism to manage the unpleasant experiences of assault stored in memory. The body cannot forget these memories and keeps a record of everything it has endured. The disconnect between what the body experiences and what the mind registers can disrupt the survivor's sense of identity. Thus, years after the incident has passed, survivors continue to suffer. The mind appears to be at war with itself. It may sometimes suppress the memories of these traumatic events for self-preservation, but trauma also resides in our bodies (Kolk 2014). It can manifest in physical sensations like a fast heartbeat or a knot in the stomach, and these sensations can be reflected in the words of fear or shame that survivors choose (Kolk 2014). This perspective about the body contrasts with earlier theories, such as Freud's (1915) concept of repression, which suggested that trauma could be pushed away and

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forgotten (Freud 1915/1957). Instead, survivors report flashbacks—those sudden, intense memories that feel as though they are happening right now—demonstrating that trauma remains very much alive even if the memory is suppressed (Kolk 2014).

Trauma does not simply remain in the past; it can disrupt how we remember things and communicate, making it difficult to convey a clear story. Trauma resurfaces in fragments, almost like broken glass, complicating our ability to explain things clearly (Caruth 1996). In this paper, we analyze online narratives of survivors from Reddit's r/sexualassaultsurvivors to explore the linguistic patterns in trauma narratives. We examine trauma through the language used by the survivors: the pauses, the silences, and the word patterns that frequently appear in such narratives. How do the words and the gaps in these stories reflect the emotional and physical scars of trauma? Moreover, how does technology help survivors turn their pain into stories of strength? This platform offers survivors space to share their stories anonymously, as the identity mask shields them from public shame and victim blame. The fact that people can remain anonymous on Reddit encourages them to share these stories. Survivors express what they cannot say in person, especially regarding abuse within families, which is a profound betrayal. The pauses in their writing and how they approach the pain with words like "did not" or "said" reveal the depth of their wounds and their bravery in typing these things out.

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The motivation behind this research is to understand the nature of trauma narratives so that it becomes easier for people to recognize individuals experiencing trauma and to offer support for the better growth and survival of humanity. This study utilizes our understanding of trauma to closely examine how technology shapes these narratives. It demonstrates how online platforms can transform pain that has been kept quiet into stories that are shared. This research aims to foster a better public understanding of trauma so that people can respond with sensitivity and empathy to those in need.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research has been done using mixed method- Qualitative and Quantitative analysis. We have taken data from 20 survivors' narratives from the Reddit forum r/sexualassaultsurvivors. We have utilized (i) Voyant tools to analyze word usage through word clouds and the frequencies of negative and positive words in these narratives. (ii) Labov's method of pattern recognition to identify recurring structural elements and themes. (iii) Trauma studies—Cathy Caruth's notion of how trauma impacts us long after the event has passed, Bessel Van der Kolk's concept of how trauma is stored in our bodies, and Judith Herman's stages of healing and recovery.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 *Textual analysis of word cloud in trauma narratives*

A word cloud is a way to visualize frequently used words in a text. The larger a word appears, the more often it is used. By examining posts from Reddit's r/sexualassaultsurvivors through a word cloud (as shown in Figure 1), this study aims to understand how survivors discuss trauma in an online space where they can remain anonymous. The visualization of the words emphasizes the sometimes fragmented way trauma is expressed. It offers insights into how technology enables individuals to articulate things they often cannot express offline, all while considering what we know about trauma.

The word cloud includes terms such as "know," "said," "I am," "just," "feel," "did not," "remember," "want," "like," and "thought" (Figure 1). These words illustrate how survivors

are attempting to process and narrate their experiences, often in a manner that feels somewhat scattered. Cathy Caruth (1996) observes that trauma does not conform to tidy, organized narratives because it encompasses elements that "cannot be placed within the schemes of prior knowledge" (p. 153). When we encounter words associated with thinking—"know," "thought," "remember"—they may indicate gaps in memory and the uncertainty that is common when trying to recall traumatic events (Caruth 1996). Linguistic patterns may reveal trauma's lingering impact, echoing memory loss and suppression as shown in survivors' disrupted, fragmented language (Luno *et al.* 2013).

Words that show feelings, like "scared," "hurt," "bad," "love," and "want," convey the powerful emotions that are part of these stories. The word "love" is exciting, suggesting complicated emotional connections, especially when the trauma involves people to whom you were close. Judith Herman (1992) discusses this as a form of intense fear, where survivors struggle to articulate the pain inflicted by those they should have been able to trust (p. 26). Words about relationships, such as "father," "brother," "mom," "parents," "he," and "she," emphasize that much trauma occurs within families, highlighting a profound sense of betrayal. Kai Erikson (1995) explains that this kind of trauma in relationships disrupts our fundamental social connections, causing even deeper emotional harm (p. 185).

Words that mark time—"years," "months," "day," "night," "age"—show how survivors link memories to specific times. This aligns with Bessel van der Kolk's (2014) idea that trauma is stored as fragments of sensory information rather than as coherent narratives (p. 176). Words like "night" and "sleep" might also imply memories held in the body since trauma often manifests physically during vulnerable moments (van der Kolk 2014, p. 180). Terms that specifically relate to trauma—"assaulted," "sexually," "trauma," "wrong," "help"—explicitly name what occurred. Moreover, verbs like "got," "going," "started," "trying," and "wanted" indicate survivors' efforts to regain control and articulate their actions, perhaps because they have felt blamed (Herman 1992).

Hesitant language, which we see in words like "didn't," "don't," "just," and "trying," reflects inner conflict and a need to explain what they experienced. This is something Herman (1992) links to society sometimes not believing survivors (p. 26). The fact that you can be anonymous on Reddit allows survivors to share these vulnerable stories, creating a space for them to process their trauma and build a sense of community. The word cloud not only supports what we know about trauma but also highlights the need for caution and thoughtfulness when using computer tools to analyze this kind of data. Future research should combine what computers can do with careful reading to develop tools that genuinely help survivors while respecting how brave and complex their stories are.

4.2 *Analysis of linguistic features in trauma narrative corpus*

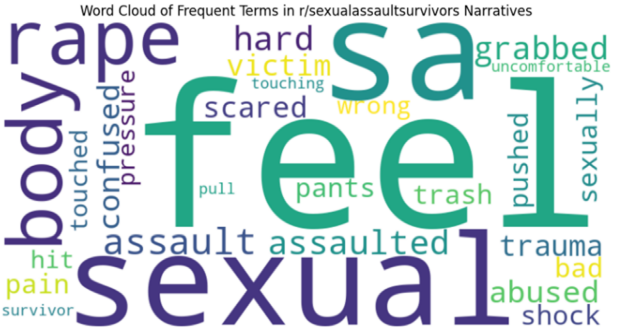


Figure 1. Word cloud generated from Reddit posts in r/sexualassaultsurvivors using Voyant Tools.

The words that are frequently used, like "know" (20 times), "said" (18), "just" (18), "I am" (17), and "like" (15), point to how the person is thinking and feeling. Words such as "know" and "said" might suggest they are struggling with their memories, perhaps not entirely sure about what they remember, and needing to frame or reframe what happened in the past. These choices in language align with Cathy Caruth's (1996) idea that trauma often disrupts the natural flow of a story, leading to expressions characterized by a small amount of uncertainty and repetition. Additionally, using casual words like "just" and "like" helps ground these accounts in the everyday language of conversation, which fits the casual yet deeply personal feel of many Reddit posts. This mirrors Judith Herman's (1992) point that survivors often feel safer telling their stories in environments that resemble informal, supportive chats rather than formal, clinical settings.

The average sentence contains about 21.6 words, indicating that the sentences are often quite complex, sometimes resembling someone thinking out loud. Longer sentences can demonstrate deeper thinking—people tend to use them when explaining things, justifying their thoughts, or trying to make sense of confusing or painful experiences. This type of sentence structure may also reflect the disorganized nature of how trauma memories can resurface, with time, details, and emotions blending in a way that does not feel linear (van der Kolk 2014, p. 176). From the perspective of trauma theory, we can view this collection of writing as a form of shared testimony. The consistent use of "I," often accompanied by words related to thinking and feeling—"know," "said," "feel," "thought"—indicates a recurring effort to reclaim ownership of one's own story. As Caruth (1996) notes, telling your story is both a personal and cultural act: discussing trauma serves as a means to survive and resist, particularly in contexts where individuals have historically been silenced. Herman (1992) agrees that narrating the story can be healing, transformative, and even quite radical in situations where traumatic experiences are denied or minimized. The patterns in this data—sentences with similar structures repeating, language focused on the self, and emotionally charged words—strongly support these ideas.

4.3 *Analysis II*

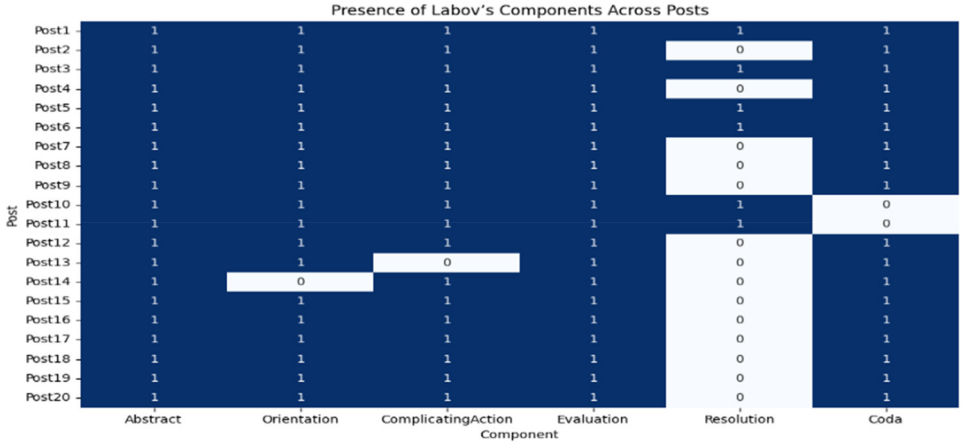


Figure 2. Heatmap: Presence of Labov's components across posts.

The visual data collected from the Reddit posts of trauma survivors aligns with Labov's classical narrative structure. The heatmap, bar chart, and lexical trend graph collectively

demonstrate recurring patterns in survivor storytelling—especially around emotional intensity, narrative structure, and the struggle for Resolution.

This binary heatmap visualizes the presence or absence of Labov's six narrative components—Abstract, Orientation, Complicating Action, Evaluation, Resolution, and Coda—across 20 posts. A clear pattern emerges: the components of Abstract, Orientation, Complicating Action, and Evaluation appear in nearly all posts. This pattern suggests that most survivors begin with a summary, set the scene, describe key events, and then reflect on what those events meant to them. What stands out most is the sparse appearance of the Resolution component—it only appears in 6 out of 20 posts. Trauma narratives frequently lack closure, disrupting Labov's classical six-part structure (Labov 1972). This missing ending is not just a gap—it signifies something real. Trauma does not always conclude neatly. Survivors might still be figuring it out, or perhaps the pain runs too deep to find the right words to close the story. Interestingly, the Coda is present in the majority of the narratives. Even if the trauma remains unresolved, many survivors still attempt to anchor their stories in the present or show how their past continues to shape their current selves.

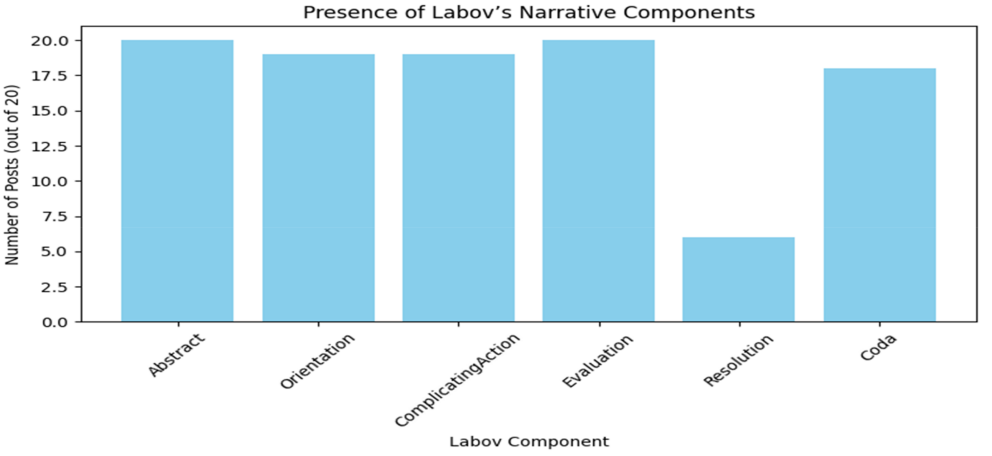


Figure 3. Bar chart: Frequency of each narrative component.

The bar chart quantifies the appearance of each narrative component across all 20 posts and further reinforces the heatmap's findings. Abstract and Evaluation appear in every post (20/20), making them the most consistent features. Survivors always begin with a summary and offer some form of emotional or reflective commentary.

Orientation and Complicating Action follow closely behind (19/20), indicating that survivors frequently provide context and recount events in detail. These components help make sense of what happened and establish a connection with the audience. The Coda appears in 18 posts, highlighting the effort to bring the story into the present, even without a complete resolution.

Resolution is, again, the least frequent component—present in only six narratives. This absence suggests that many trauma narratives remain open-ended, with no clear sense of closure. Survivors focus more on what happened and how it felt (Evaluation and Complicating Action) rather than tying everything up neatly at the end. This pattern closely mirrors what trauma discourse suggests: trauma disrupts time and language, making Resolution difficult or even impossible.

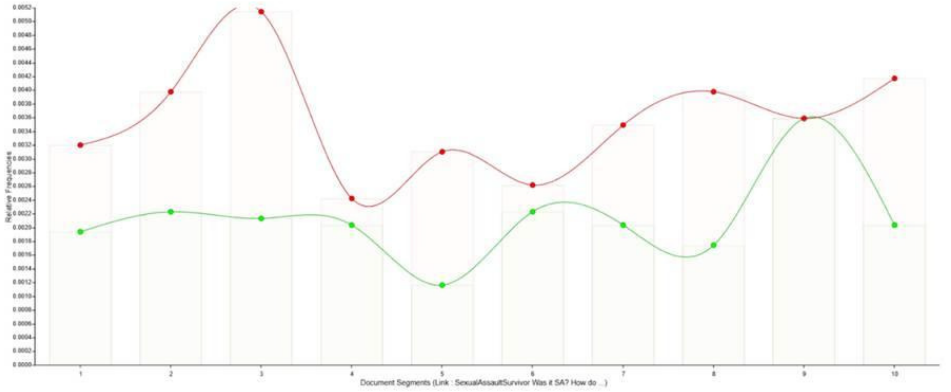


Figure 4. Voyant graph: Lexical trends over document segments.

The Voyant graph shows lexical patterns—likely in Evaluation and Complicating Action—across ten segments of the overall corpus. The red line, which seems to represent emotionally intense or event-driven language, spikes early on, drops in the middle, and rises again toward the end. This line reflects the typical flow of trauma narratives: survivors often begin with detailed recounting (Complicating Action), may falter or grow numb in the middle (emotional overwhelm or fragmentation), and then regain composure in the latter parts, often during Evaluation or Coda. Traumatic memories are often fragmented and disorganized, affecting the coherence of survivor narratives. (Crespo and Fernández-Lansac 2016)

The green line—most likely showing Orientation or Coda—does not fluctuate much. It remains steady throughout the posts, indicating that survivors often return to grounding their stories: setting the scene or tying it back to the present. It serves almost like a narrative anchor they hold on to, even when everything else feels chaotic. The red line dips in the middle, and that shift feels important. It might reflect a moment where words fail—where the weight of the memory becomes too much, or the mind instinctively pulls away. That sudden drop could mirror numbness, emotional shutdown, or a struggle to name what happened. It is something trauma theorists like Caruth and Herman have discussed—that trauma does not just live in the memory but also the silence, in what resists being told. Survivors often hit that wall in the middle of their stories—where language does not feel sufficient.

5 CONCLUSION

Overall, this analysis shows that trauma narratives often partially follow Labov's structure but diverge in meaningful ways—particularly around Resolution. Survivors tend to foreground emotional insight (Evaluation) and vivid recounting (Complicating Action), while closure remains elusive. The Coda's frequent presence suggests that survivors try to make sense of their trauma even without Resolution and assert agency over their stories.The way the language rises and falls across these stories tells us something more profound than just structure—it mirrors the emotional waves survivors ride as they try to put their pain into words. There are moments when the words come easily and others where they stall or disappear, reflecting the struggle to remember or the fear of reliving it. Sometimes, it is not the words survivors manage to say but the ones they cannot. The quiet pauses, the sudden stops—those are the heavy parts. That is where the pain hides, still sharp and alive.

This study of the language used in the r/sexualassaultsurvivors Reddit community shows how important online platforms are for helping people express their trauma. By looking at how often words are used and using a word cloud, this research captures how survivors tell their stories using emotional and sometimes broken-up language. These language patterns reflect how trauma can disrupt the ability to tell a clear story and can damage trust in others, which fits with the main ideas in trauma theory (Caruth 1996; Erikson 1995).The moderate variety of words and the fact that sentences can be pretty long suggest the complex mental work involved in talking about trauma. Survivors often process their memories and emotions as they write, shaping stories that are as much about trying to understand as they share what happened. Despite the heaviness of the topic, the language often feels informal and easy to relate to, which fosters empathy and builds a sense of community online (Herman 1992).

Importantly, staying anonymous online makes it easier for people to share things they might otherwise keep quiet because of shame or fear. In this space, survivors engage in what we can think of as a shared telling of their stories—a process that's both potentially healing and, in a quiet way, a form of resistance (Herman 1992). By bringing together what we know about trauma with computer tools like word clouds, this study demonstrates how looking at the numbers can add to our understanding of these personal narratives. These findings point to the ethical need for approaches to analyzing digital text about trauma that are informed by an understanding of trauma, and they suggest some interesting directions for future work, like looking at the emotions in the text, identifying common themes, and designing tools that truly center the needs of survivors.

Ultimately, this research highlights how online communities can be powerful places for people to find their voice again, feel more in control, and hopefully find some healing. Doing so adds to what we know about trauma and re-imagines online platforms as vital spaces for recovery and resilience.

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Unveiling the unheard voices of Dalit feminist resistance in Sujatha Gidla's *Ants Among Elephants*

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ABSTRACT: The whole Indian society is divided into several caste groups, which creates a hierarchical order by positioning women at the lowest rung of their respective varna; thus, the intersection of gender with caste multiplies women's subjugation by rendering them susceptible to systemic oppression, violence and social exclusion. Dalit women who are considered as the lowest of the low, as their counterparts are at the bottom of the hierarchical order, and they need to follow them in their respective positions, overburdened with multiple suppressions on the axes of caste, class, gender, region and religion. Their oppression is intensified, as they have to endure suppression and domination not only due to Brahmanical patriarchy, but their own community is equally responsible for their sufferings and downtrodden position. When their own gods are marginalised, how can they imagine for their self-emancipation? This makes dalit women more vulnerable not only to physical attack but also to psychological outbreak. Women are considered the backbone of any society. And if we want progress in a real sense, we ought to ensure their empowerment regardless of their caste and class. The present paper is an attempt to unveil the multiple hammers that affect dalit women's identity by taking reference to Sujatha Gidla's narrative *Ants Among Elephants: An Untouchable Family and Making of Modern India*, and tries to articulate for those who are erased from the mainstream, apparently due to their lower strata.

Keywords: Dalit Women, Marginalisation, Oppression, Patriarchy

1 INTRODUCTION

After seventy-eight years of independence from foreign rule, the whole country is celebrating this diamond period as *Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav*. On the contrary, for some populations of the nation, there is no excitement in rejoicing this period with great enthusiasm or fervour, as for them, this freedom does not have any meaning, despite a bit of change in the face of authority as before independence, the country's rule was in the hands of foreigners, but now, native people have access to the authority. I am talking about the 'untouchables', the most susceptible section of the nation, whose subjugation and oppression are the same as it was when the country was fighting for their own constitutional rights. No doubt, our constitution grants numerous rights to this marginalised section of society. However, in a real sense, these rights are largely confined just to paper and have not brought noteworthy changes to their livelihood. Unlike the colonial era, where the oppressor was clearly identifiable as an

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external force, today's forms of oppression stem from within the very society they live in, in the form of caste hierarchies, social exclusion, violence, and systemic discrimination, which is not imposed by foreign rulers, but by fellow citizens. This internalisation of dominance makes the struggle for emancipation far more complex. The idea of achieving justice through collective resistance becomes complicated when the perpetrators are part of one's own nation, culture, and even neighbourhoods. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar rightly said, "The greatest of Sudra of Modern India, Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, taught the lower Hindu castes of their subordination to the upper classes and argued that social democracy was more vital to India than independence from foreign rule" (Ambedkar 1944).

2 OBJECTIVE OF STUDY

- To study how the intersection of multiple identities gives birth to multiple oppressions.
- To explore how caste and gender play a major role in the subjugation of Dalit women.
- To study how dalit women become an agency of change when caught in an adverse situation.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present research is based on the qualitative textual analysis and interpretive framework of the selected text by using dalit feminist approach within the framework of Dalit writings. This research aims to explore the intersection of caste, class and gender oppression, primarily targeting the dalit women's lived experiences in the selected autobiography.

4 METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

The primary data for this research is the dalit feminist autobiographical work *Ants Among Elephants* by Sujatha Gidla. The main reason to choose this text is to shed light on the dalit feminist's perspective on socio-political contexts. Research articles, critical talks and review of literature would be used for providing theoretical insights as secondary sources.

4.1 *Historical and cultural background of casteism and gender discrimination*

According to the ancient Hindu religious text *Manusmriti*, Indian society is divided into four primary *varnas* or castes: the Brahmins, said to have emerged from the mouth of Brahma (the creator), the Kshatriyas from his arms, the Vaishyas from his thighs, and the Shudras from his feet. This symbolic hierarchy not only defines social roles but also justifies differential access to power, knowledge, and dignity. However, those who fall outside this four-fold classification—the so-called "untouchables"—are even further marginalised. Denied a place within the *varna* system, they are labelled as *Avarnas* or *Ati-Shudras*, meaning "outside the varna order" or "beyond even the Shudras." This classification reflects their historical exclusion and stigmatisation, placing them at the very bottom of the socio-religious hierarchy, often stripped of basic human rights and dignity. And one of the most striking paradoxes of the caste system is that, although *dharma* is considered superior to caste in many religious and philosophical traditions, a person can change their *dharma* through choice or life circumstances, but not their caste. Caste remains rigidly hereditary and inescapable, binding individuals to a social status from birth, regardless of their actions, beliefs, or personal transformation. As Kumud Pawade opines: " ... although I try to forget my caste, it is impossible to forget. And then I remember an expression I heard somewhere: what

comes by birth but cannot be cast off by dying is caste" (Pawade 1995). Now, the question is, what then is the condition of women belonging to this already marginalised community? As Dalit women, often described as the "other among others/ lowest of the low", face layered and intersecting forms of oppression, stemming simultaneously from their caste, class, and gender. Their experiences are not only shaped by patriarchal domination but also by caste-based discrimination and economic deprivation, placing them at the most vulnerable margins of Indian society. They have to work as hard as the men of their community. But for men, their work ends by sunset, and when they reach home, they act as the king of their kingdom. And on the contrary, dalit women can't take a breath on their own, as after completing their household chores at night, they need to submit their bodies to their husbands to satisfy their hunger, whether they (dalit women) are willing or not. So, it's better to be born as a man, no matter what community you get (Bama 2012).

To raise a voice against social discrimination, in the 1970s, the *Dalit Panthers Movement* emerged in Maharashtra as a powerful tool to voice against caste oppression, founded by leaders like Namdeo Dhasal, J.V. Pawar, and Raja Dhale; the movement drew inspiration from the *Black Panthers* in the United States. Just as the Black Panthers fought racial discrimination, the Dalit Panthers challenged the deep-rooted caste-based discrimination in India. While these leaders played a crucial role in raising awareness about the marginalisation of Dalits, they often overlooked the specific struggles faced by Dalit women, assuming that such gendered issues should be addressed by feminist movements. Conversely, early Indian feminist movements largely approached Dalit women's issues through the lens of caste alone, without adequately addressing the intersecting realities of caste and gender. As a result, Dalit women occupied a marginal position in both movements, analogous to the exclusion of Black women from mainstream Western feminism, caught at the crossroads of two axes of marginality. Bell Hooks explained this well in her writing, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Centre,* "black women have to face oppression from both white people and black men, whereas white upper- class and middle-class women have the privilege of looking down upon black men, and black men in turn subjugate black women in order to continue this vicious cycle of oppression" (Hook 1984). As Hooks articulated the concept of double oppression faced by Black women, who are marginalised both by race and by gender, Indian scholar Gopal Guru addressed the layered marginalisation of Dalit women in his influential essay *Dalit Women Talk Differently*. Guru highlights how Dalit women experience a unique form of oppression under what he terms as *Brahmanical patriarchy*, a system where caste and gender hierarchies intersect to reinforce their subjugation. Drawing upon these foundational perspectives, this research adopts an intersectional approach inspired by Kimberlé Crenshaw, who introduced the concept of intersectionality to analyse overlapping systems of discrimination in literature and social discourse (Guru 1995).

By integrating Hooks' analysis of race and gender with Guru's insights on caste and patriarchy, Gidla thoughtfully intersects the theme of gender and Dalit women's identity in her narrative, which appeals broadly to class and caste oppression, showing how, in the umbrella march of communism, these factors affect their universalism. She depicts her mother, Majula Bai, as a central character of her narrative who not only represents how Brahmanical patriarchy plays a vital role in their subjugation, but dalit patriarchy also. However, when we drive deep into the narrative, it is very surprising to find that her family was morally influenced by communism and psychologically they were hard-core Ambedkarite activists, but at home they were similar to other common members of the society. Due to this, her mother had to face rigid gender roles, which restrained her access to education and limited her autonomy. Her economic dependence further compounds her marginalisation, exposing how gender and class oppression are deeply intertwined as men's control over women's lives and sexuality since time immemorial. Her mother's father was, although the most wanted maths teacher of the age, but he was also not away from patriarchal concepts he thought that girls are born just to cheat their parents (Gidla 2018) and completely neglected his daughter's wish to choose mathematics in her higher studies and

scattered her dream of becoming a chemist, doctor or engineer. During his maths tuition classes, which he used to give at home, he assured that Manjula would not be allowed to enter the veranda at any cost (2018). And when her classmates got surprised why she had not chosen science subjects, who often believed that she had a better command over these subjects and could be a doctor or engineer, but for her, such options were not available (2018). Despite securing gold medals in Science, Mathematics, and English, as well as silver medals in Social Studies and Telugu, she was denied the autonomy to choose her academic path. In contrast, her brother, Carey, who repeatedly failed in the same subjects, was granted the liberty to study Economics and Mathematics, solely by virtue of his gender. From her field of study to her clothing to cover her feminist body, her marital partner, and her reproductive decisions, each aspect of her life was controlled by the men in her family. No doubt, her achievements were celebrated, but her agency was consistently stripped away. Her choices were not hers to make. "Since she had to sit in classrooms with boys, her family made sure she looked as unattractive as possible. One weekend when Prasanna Rao came to visit, he and his sons and mother – in – law … decided that Manjula ought no longer to wear half saris … her father bought a bolt of coarse white cloth without a spot of colour … Even brahmin widows dressed better than sixteen – year- old Manjula … The decision about Manjula's dress had been made right in front of her, but no one asked her what she thought of it" (2018).

She was under the control of the males of her family, who always strictly controlled her sexuality, not only during her adolescence but even after her marriage, which she willingly accepted as her duty towards them. On one side, her brother Carey slapped her whenever he felt she was involved in something not acceptable to society. Her elder brother, Satyam, however, never practised physical attack but used some other trick to control her sexuality. He used to laugh at those girls who tried to question patriarchy by giving them the title 'bad girls'; as a result, it was fitted into her psyche right from her birth that she should not do anything that might cause disrespect to her family. Even after marriage, her husband, who was eight years older than her, always beat her up without any reason, just to show her masculinity to his mother and relatives. It shows that whether you are educated or working, if someone belongs to the dalit caste as a woman of that community, it doesn't ensure your financial independence. One more crucial thing which Gidla questions in the text is patriarchy's control over women's reproductive rights. During the delivery of her third child, her brother Satyam made a decision of tubectomy without her permission on behalf of her husband.

Gidla, in her narrative, focused not only on these aspects but also on linguistic and regional marginalisation that her mother had to face due to her caste and region when she went to Banaras Hindu University for her degree. Professor Tripath, Head of the Department of History, got furious after looking at her extreme poverty and the appearance of a dalit identity. He gave her fewer marks despite her hard work and better performance in the examination, which affects her assessment. Secondly, her linguistic barrier added to her subjugation during her stay at this institution as "North Indians bullied South Indians and never mingled with them" (2018). Because of her food habits and linguistic barrier, she always felt ashamed on that cosmopolitan campus, and it filled her with an inferiority complex. Here, not only does her gender identity contribute to her marginalisation, but also her dalit class and the region from which she belongs, and the language she speaks, all contribute to her oppression.

Gidla, in her narrative, not only shows her mother's oppression as "double jeopardy" (Rege 2006). She highlighted dalit women's marginalisation due to one more inhuman act, manual scavenging. She criticised this venture as a combination of poverty, lack of education, and the upholding of caste purity and untouchability norms. She writes, "the work is not just filthy; it was designed to remind you every day of your supposed inferiority, of your place in the world" (Gidla 2018). The chains of the caste system forced dalit families, especially women, to this heart-wrecking work across generations as "hereditary division of

labourers" (Ambedkar 1936). Due to such class indifference, "Their position at the intersection of lower class, female gender, and lower caste renders them more susceptible to violence, both within their families and from society at large. In many regions, caste Hindu men view dalit women as objects of sexual exploitation. The prevailing sentiment, 'Access to a dalit man's land comes with access to his Dalit wife,' is a widespread attitude across the country (Dutt 2019).

In a nutshell, Dalit women face multiple forms of marginalisation and subjugation throughout their lives, both from Brahmanical patriarchy and within their own communities. In her narrative, Gidla not only sheds light on the suffering of Dalit women but also ignites a spark of resistance and resilience within them. She makes them aware of their oppression under patriarchy, exposing how societal norms and rigid roles blind them to their subjugation, keeping them chained and suppressing their freedom and individuality. She highlights the silent endurance expected of Dalit women, whose voices are often erased from both feminist and anti-caste discourses. By telling the story of her mother, she reclaims this silenced voice, offering a counter-narrative that challenges both Brahmanical patriarchy and intra-community gender hierarchies. Education, denied to her mother but pursued by Gidla herself, becomes a critical site of resistance and transformation. Through this intergenerational account, she demonstrates how the burden of gendered oppression is often passed down, and breaking that cycle requires both resilience and conscious rebellion. Her work makes a vital contribution to Dalit feminist thought, illustrating that the struggle against caste must also be a struggle against patriarchy.

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Moral development and environmental consciousness among young readers: A descriptive study of Ruskin Bond's children's fiction

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ABSTRACT: With the growth of digital interferences like smartphones, gaming and social media, children tend to deviate from nature and moral values, affecting their creativity, physical health, and emotional attachment with people around them. This paper studies how Ruskin Bond's children's fiction can help moral development and environmental consciousness in young readers where his narratives portray children with deep, affectionate relationships with nature, drawing attention to values like respect, empathy, and care for the environment. Through his storytelling, children will be able to develop an awareness of their surroundings and a sense of responsibility toward nature, which is important in an age of environmental degradation. While many literary scholars have examined Bond's works through the lens of ecocriticism and childhood memories, this paper centres on the possible creation of a generation of environmentally and morally responsible mankind by exploring how Ruskin Bond's children's fiction can function as a literary tool to promote moral development and ecological consciousness. Using a descriptive approach through textual analysis, this study uses Ecocriticism and Moral Development theories to interpret Bond's selected stories, encouraging children to build interest in literature that arouses environmental concerns and moral values in shaping a healthy future.

Keywords: Awareness, children's fiction, environment, morals, nature

1 INTRODUCTION

Ruskin Bond is an Anglo-Indian author, who is one of the leading authors of Indian Writing in English. He plays a prominent role in the field of children's fiction where he writes about the nature-human relationship in most of his short stories. As he spent his childhood in the hill stations of the Himalayan foothills, the surroundings influenced most of his writings. Bond started his career in writing with the publication of his first novel, *The Room on the Roof* in 1956, receiving the most prestigious John Llewllyn Rhys Prize in 1957. He has written 500 short stories, novels and essays. Among them, 69 children's books are included.

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This article discusses the importance of Ruskin Bond's children's fiction to develop moral values and environmental awareness among young readers by analysing selected short stories which include *The Blue Umbrella*, *The Cherry Tree*, *Dust on the Mountain* and "Panther's Moon" from *Panther's Moon and Other Stories*. His contribution to children's literature in India is remarkable for its emphasis on the natural world and human emotions and his stories often portray children in rural or semi-rural areas where they have fascination with trees, animals, and older people to an extent that modern young readers might find them exciting and instructive.

This paper states the importance of literature in shaping a responsible future generation by introducing these values on children. Many literary scholars have studied Ruskin Bond's works in association with the theory of ecocriticism, studying how literature reflects contemporary environmental concerns. Some have examined the relationship between children and nature in his works. "It is said that the present technological world weakens children's relationship with nature in which environmental education becomes an important means to keep children connected to nature" (Nathiya & Rema, 2021). Others have studied on how nature influences childhood experiences in Ruskin Bond's stories. "It is said that Bond's message about the environment through his storytelling techniques uplifts eco-consciousness among readers. Through his writings, Bond subtly conveys his appreciation for life and his ability to find joy and wisdom in nature, which he regards as a spiritual guide" (Kumar, 2023, p.17). Also, Ruskin Bond is deeply influenced by his childhood in Dehradun, which helps him create rich imagery of nature and symbols in his short stories. "Ruskin Bond fabricates nature by utilizing joining legends, experience, dreams and history to uncover human coordinated effort with the non-human world. It additionally makes an endeavour to locate his discerning duty with thought concerning advancing toward cataclysm of the overall condition" (Govindappa, 2020, p. 28). So, the ecological concerns and the clear picture of nature in Bond's selected short stories are also a key area that has been studied.

However, there is limited research on how Bond's children's fiction can act as a medium for moral development and environmental awareness, and this creates a novel area to be explored. This paper argues that Bond's children's fiction presents an influential idea that will act as a pedagogical tool which can help young readers develop compassion, responsibility, and respect toward people and the environment in general.

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- Aims to study how Ruskin Bond's child characters will inspire young readers to love nature and be responsible about it.
- Aims at examining Bond's narrative techniques in the portrayal of human-nature companionship.
- Aims to study how his rural settings encourage ecological values.
- Focuses to investigate how Bond's short stories act as a pedagogical tool to spread awareness among children about their responsibilities toward the environment.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research uses a qualitative method along with a descriptive approach. Four short stories namely *The Blue Umbrella, The Cherry Tree, Dust on the Mountain* and "Panther's Moon' are analysed in order to explore the themes of ecological awareness and values concerning moral ideas. This analysis is supported by existing literatures that have been studied on

Bond's fiction. Also, research works related to Bond's children's fiction through the theories of ecocriticism and moral values are analysed, providing an in-depth study. Cheryll Glotfelty's theory of ecocriticism and moral development theories by Kohlberg and Piaget are applied to enhance the study.

3.1 *Theoretical framework*

3.1.1 *Ecocriticism and children's fiction*

The movement of ecocriticism came into prominence in the late 1970's which then literary works started to indulge the themes of nature and environment, with key concerns about environmental degradation. However, before this movement had started, "Ruskin Bond had started writing about the various types of environmental problems in most of his short stories drawing readers' attention to everything around us" (Fatma, 2013).

According to Cheryll Glotfelty, *Ecocriticism* is defined as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Glotfelty, 1996). As a critical approach, it encourages readers to take into account the narratives that illustrate ecological ideas, human-nature relationship, exploitation and degradation of environmental factors. "It explores how literary texts draw nature, environmental degradation, and human-nature relationships" (Garrard, 2012). So, it can be claimed that most of Ruskin Bond's works are associated with this theory as they portray the interaction and interrelation between nature and humankind, with an alarming message that people should act upon the various degradation of the environment.

Children's fiction is a significant part of children's literature which offers a rich source of ecocritical inquiry. Using imaginative narratives and backgrounds set in nature, these stories create a lingering perception of environmental consciousness in young readers. They often picture children with great affection and love towards animals, trees, rivers, and mountains. Genre such as fables not only entertains but also make young readers have a sense of empathy toward non-humans as they portray animals as sole companions, guides, and moral figures. When studied through the ecocritical lens, children's fiction acts as a strong pedagogical tool which helps children to be aware of the nature around them and that humans are a part of nature itself.

Ruskin Bond's children's short stories have significant associations with the theory of ecocriticism in a way that they portray the interaction between nature and humankind asserting the degradation of the environment. "Several studies talk about the role of children's literature in shaping environmental consciousness" (Gaard, 2009). Stories like *The Cherry Tree* and *Dust on the Mountain* by Bond reflect ecological concerns and the serious impacts caused by deforestation. Bond's narratives foster the passion to read them as his simple narrative techniques and the use of simple words encourage young readers to come closer towards nature. For instance, in *The Cherry Tree*, the character Rakesh's care for the growth of the cherry tree that he planted illustrates ecopedagogy, which is the act of teaching young readers about the patience and responsibility that should be possessed in nurturing any element of nature. In the story, the narrator describes how Rakesh ran his hand along the tree and put his finger to the tip of a leaf and whispered if it was the way what it feels to be God (Bond, 2012). Also, in *Dust on the Mountain* the destruction caused by industrialization is portrayed with a message to reconsider human impact on ecosystems.

3.2 *Moral development theory*

Jean Piaget discusses two stages of moral development which are heteronomous morality and autonomous morality. According to him, "heteronomous morality is of the concept that rules are external and absolute while autonomous morality is based on mutual respect

and justice" (Piaget, 1932). Kohlberg (1981) later works on Piaget's model, in which he introduces six stages of moral development within three levels. Level 1, preconventional morality, includes Stage1: obedience and punishment and Stage 2: self-interest. Level 2, conventional morality includes Stage 3: social approval and Stage 4: adherence to law. Level 3, postconventional morality includes Stage 5: social contract and Stage 6: universal principles

Ruskin Bond's children's fiction illustrates moral dilemmas where characters evolve through these stages. Through these characters, children will be able to incorporate ethical reasoning and moral values. His characters often develop through these stages where they deal with problems that challenge their conscience. Moral development can be observed in characters like Binya in *The Blue Umbrella* and Bisnu in "Panther's Moon". Thus, these characters can make young readers acknowledge the problems of ethical dilemma and moral judgement.

3.3 *Textual analysis*

3.3.1 *The blue umbrella*

One of Bond's most treasured stories, *The Blue Umbrella* introduces Binya, a village girl who desires to possess a beautiful blue umbrella. At first, she was proud and possessive of the beautiful blue umbrella that she had exchanged her leopard's claw pendant for it. Later, she gives it away to Ram Bharosa, the shopkeeper, choosing kindness over ownership. So, in the beginning of the story Binya's preconventional morality is observed from her obsession with the blue umbrella that she enjoys the pleasure and attention it brings. When she donates her umbrella to Ram Bharosa, her postconventional morality is revealed through her commitment to social contract, as she sacrifices her individual interest. Thus, this story is influential in reflecting values like empathy, selflessness, and forgiveness. For young readers, the character of Binya best explains the act of maturity and sacrifice.

3.3.2 *The cherry tree*

In *The Cherry Tree*, a young boy named Rakesh plants and nurtures a cherry seedling and ultimately observes it growing into a small tree. The story revolves around the love and affection that Rakesh shows toward the cherry tree, as he takes on the responsibility to care and adore it as if it is his younger sibling. So, when the cherry tree grows beautiful and healthy, Rakesh experiences a sense of gratification in its growth. This story can educate young readers about the importance of ecological stewardship. Through the simple act of planting and nurturing a cherry seedling, Rakesh undergoes a subtle moral transformation. The story reflects a deep connection between personal growth with the environment which raises an ecological consciousness through critical, reflective, and ethical engagement with nature.

3.3.3 *Dust on the mountain*

Ruskin Bond's *Dust on the Mountain* is set in a Himalayan village. The story pictures the destruction caused by urbanisation. It is influential for its reflection of important issues on environmental degradation. The story narrates the moral development of the character Bisnu. Through his perspectives, one can notice the destruction of natural beauty and traditional livelihood of his village which forces him to migrate to Mussoorie in search of work. There, the polluted and industrialised city life reflects a vivid contrast with the serene beauty and comfort that one finds in the hills. So, the story helps to convey a powerful message to children about the harmful effects on environment.

3.3.4 *"Panther's Moon"*

This story narrates the dispute between fear and empathy. The protagonist Bisnu who is a schoolboy encounters a man-eating panther that has terrified his village. Rather than portraying the animal solely as a potentially dangerous predator, the story empathizes its struggle for survival. The panther is not portrayed as an evil entity but as a natural predator acting on instinct. Through Bisnu's calm and respectful attitude toward the animal, the story reflects the idea that humans must learn to coexist with wildlife instead of destroying it. The panther's death is pictured as an unfortunate result of human-animal conflict which encourages young readers to empathise with animals and be conscious of the ill effects of human's negative interferences in natural habitats.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Throughout the selected short stories, Ruskin Bond builds a moral world rooted in simplicity, kindness and ecological harmony. This study finds that his young protagonists who are sincere and deeply genuine transmit moral and environmental values, particularly to readers of similar age. These characters' experiences encourage readers to identify moral values. His stories impart a lesson to readers to empathize not only with human figures but also with every part of nature.

A notable finding is in the manner in which Bond uses first-person and third-person narration which develops an intimate relationship between the young reader and the child characters. Also, literary tools such as anthropomorphism and symbolism transform natural elements into emotionally impactful characters. Trees are represented as sole companions, and animals are pictured with emotional comforts. All these non-human components of nature function as means to incorporate moral values like empathy and responsibility for the environment among young readers.

This paper also inquires the impact of modernity, materialism, and urbanisation across Ruskin Bond's children's stories. His characters seek meaning and joy of life in rural simplicity and harmony with nature which provide a subtle opposition to the disjointed lives of contemporary urban life. This thematic variation serves as both social commentary and moral inspiration to reconnect with ecological values and the fictional world.

Bond's stories provide a significant pedagogical tool when studied from educational perspectives. His stories can help promote disciplines like Environmental Education and Value Education though the fictional world in a sense that those stories will give a tint of enjoyment and knowledge among children. Educators can use his fiction to conduct discussion sessions related to ethics, sustainability, and responsibility which will make literary study more socially and ecologically responsive. Future researchers can further find out how children in various educational settings such as rural vs. urban settings perceive emotionally and cognitively to Bond's short stories in which small survey with reader response approach can be carried out.

5 CONCLUSION

Ruskin Bond's children's fiction provides a meaningful and useful insight to develop moral and ecological education. His fiction blends ethical dilemmas with an appreciation for nature and they profoundly shape young readers' understanding of various aspects of moral values like kindness, resilience, honesty, and environmental responsibility. This will make them a more conscious citizen of the world. With the exploration of Bond's storytelling, this research fills the gap of literary analysis in educational sectors. This research will strengthen the power of children's literature in shaping values, ethics, and ecological consciousness in young readers.

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E.M. Forster's misleading writings on Hinduism: The curious case of Devi

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ABSTRACT: In this paper an effort is made to show the muddled and obscure views that an eminent author like E.M. Forster held on Hinduism. While constantly drawing incorrect parallels between Hinduism, Greek Mythology and the Christian Theology, he not only confused himself but also his readers outside of India, who saw Hinduism through his lenses. By making an obnoxious comparison between the festivities observed at the birth of Lord Krishna and the Greek ritual of mourning Adonis, he showed his incoherent understanding of both the faiths, that often came out as hilarious to those who were aware of the significance of both the occasions. Since he couldn't understand the native language, he made the blunder of referring to the Hill as Devi, rather than understanding that Devi was the Sanskrit word for Goddess. This paper will examine in series, how Forster compared Hinduism with Christianity and Greek Mythology, what were the possible reasons of calling a hill Devi, and the possible sources from where this confusion emanated.

Keywords: Forster, Devi, Hinduism

1 INTRODUCTION

Edward Morgan Forster stayed in Dewas between 1912-13, and returned again as the Private Secretary to Maharaja Tukojirao III Puar in 1921. Forster's views on Hinduism were not intelligible, and cannot be defined in a distinct manner. There is little doubt about Forster's fascination with the Hindu faith, however, at multiple instances, while talking about Hinduism, he showed an inclination to contradict himself. He exhibited an inherent and visceral tendency of comparing Hinduism with the Greek Mythology and the Christian Theology, and made seamless efforts in drawing parallels between the them. This predisposition can be seen numerous times in his letters to his friends and mother, a compilation of which is in the form of a book, 'The Hill of Devi.' However, this is quite baffling, as Forster had showed a deeper understanding of Hinduism, especially when he had claimed to have read the Vishnu Purana and the Bhagwat Purana. Interestingly, Forster, at the same time, showed both admiration and frustration towards the Hindu faith. As Walt Whitman wrote in celebrated poem, A Song of Myself, "Do I contradict myself? Very well then, I contradict myself, I am large, I contain multitudes" (Whitman 111). One comes to realise the same thing in Forster's context, with his muddled ideas on Hinduism, that probably people do contradict themselves.

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2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

(1) The primary objective of this paper is to understand and highlight the muddled views of E.M. Forster on Hinduism.
(2) Author's clanger of calling a hill 'Devi', instead of knowing that this particular hill was the abode of Goddess Chamunda and that Goddesses are called Devi in Sanskrit.
(3) Bringing to light Forster's inherent visceral tendency of superimposing Greek legends on Hinduism.
(4) Comprehending all the possible reasons as to why did Forster committed this blunder of calling a hill Devi.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

(1) In order to write this paper, firstly, the writings and letters of E.M. Forster are carefully studied.
(2) An objective and systematic analysis was made in order to understand Forster's debacle.
(3) It is brought to light that how Forster's writings in turn confused other Europeans and Americans, who saw India through his lenses.

4 DISCUSSION

Curious case of Devi

According to E.M. Forster, the hill which enshrined the temple of the Goddess was called Devi. This can be seen through various references made to the shrine of the Goddess, where he called the Hill as 'Devi'.

The following passages are taken from his collection of letters, A Hill of Devi:

"It is true that Devi (the sacred mountain that stands above the distracted city like an acropolis)—has at last been divided between them, so that each can get to his own shrine without walking on the other's footpath" (Forster 10). Here it can be clearly seen that Forster referred to the entire hill as Devi.

Another instance from one of his letters: "Here indeed was a very dull India, except for Devi the sacred acropolis with the rakish cap half a mile away" (Forster 38). One can clearly see that he is confuses Devi to be an acropolis, rather than being the goddess whose shrine is located on top of the hill. Probably here he got it all mixed up with the Parthenon, where Parthenon was the name given to a temple which was dedicated to the Goddess Athena that stands on an acropolis.

He continued to write: "Devi (or Devivasini, the Goddess's Residence) Probably gave Dewas its name" (Forster 39). He even made an assumption that Dewas got its for being the residence of Goddess, and this goddess resided on a hill named Devi.

Following references taken from Selected Letters of E.M. Forster:

In a letter addressed to Malcolm Darling in 1941, Forster wrote, "It is odd but two or three days ago I was thinking of the Cave on Devi, I must try and find the cave on Devi" (Forster *et al.* 194-195). Another instance, where it can be clearly seen how Forster called the entire hill, which enshrines the Goddess, Devi.

Woodlanders on Devi

In Woodlanders on Devi, he wrote, "Beyond the garden, on the farther side of the chaussee, rose Devi, a burnt-up bump of a hill. Devi was sacred. and odd to look at, for it was topped by an outcrop of rock, which tilted jauntily, like a messenger boy's cap" (Forster 254). This passage is very important as it is quoted by Gerber and Davis, while writing

Thomas Hardy's biography, who ended up repeating the same mistake of calling the hill Devi.

In 'Thomas Hardy: An Annotated Bibliography of Writings about him,' compiled and edited by Helmut E. Gerber and W. Eugene Davis, there is a very interesting reference of Forster's Woodlanders on Devi. The authors talked about Forster's essay which was written in 1939 and was originally published in the New Statesman and Nation XVII. In the aforementioned essay Forster was seen reading Hardy's The Woodlanders, when he was "living in the semi-derelict palace" in India and one day imagined how the beautiful trees about which he was reading, hung on the slopes of a hill, that was "Devi" (Gerber and Davis 428). This clearly showed how a mistake made by Forster has spread misunderstanding among other authors who, thinking him to be an authority, quoted him in their works.

Reasons for this confusion- There could be multiple reasons for the author's perplexity, some of the possible ones are listed below:

This confusion primarily occurred because Forster tried to superimpose his understanding of Greek mythology and Christian Theology on Hinduism. It is evident from the following instances:

Comparison between Hinduism and Christian Theology:

While talking about the festival of Gokul Ashtami, he described the Mararaja of Dewas, Tukojirao Puar, who, "is dancing all the time, like David before the ark" (Forster 95). He further said, "But what did he feel when he danced like King David before the altar?" (Forster 104). Here he clearly drew parallels with Prophet David, who had danced before God after seeing the Ark of the Covenant.

When talking about the birth of Krishna and how the Lord went on to kill his uncle Kamsa, Forster wrote, "Like Herod, he (Kamsa) then gave orders for all the children in his kingdom to be massacred (Forster 107). A weird analogy between Kamsa and Herod is made, however, the demon Kamsa was Lord Krishna's uncle, who, after learning that Devaki's son would kill him, held, both, Devaki and her husband captive and killed her six new born children, later Krishna the seventh son, killed Kamsa in order to restore Dharma, however, Herod ordered the killing of children, after he learned that the "king of Jews" was born. No doubt, both stories had some similar narratives, yet, they are poles apart in their essence.

Instances of drawing parallels with Greek Mythology:

While describing the festival of Holi, Forster described Dewas to be "Dionysiac" (Forster 49). Moreover, he talked about a custom observed during Holi, where women abuse men. Forster compared it with a 3000 years old obscure Greek ritual (Forster 49).

While talking about Gokul Ashtami, Forster wrote that he "was reminded of the Adonis festival, where the God is born, dies, and is carried to the water, all in a short time" (Forster 101). Forster compared the birth of Krishna with the death of Adonis. Frazer while describing the mourning of Adonis wrote, "At the festival of Adonis, the death of the god was annually mourned, with a bitter wailing, chiefly by women; images of him, dressed to resemble corpses, were carried out as to burial and then thrown into the sea or into springs" (Frazer 630). How can the birth of a God be compared with the death of Adonis? How can mourning and merriment be similar? Forster, in his enthusiasm to find similarities between Hinduism and Greek Mythology, again ended up making a huge blunder.

Another possible reason for this confusion was Forster's lack of understanding of any of the native languages. Since he didn't understand the languages of India, he didn't realise that Devi was the Sanskrit name for Goddess. The following instances illuminate how Forster's lack of understanding of the native languages caused confusion.

Forster at a loss of words

Forster had never shied away from accepting his own inability to understand the native languages of India. This can be seen multiple times in the letters that he wrote. He was also frank enough to point out that he was not fit to be the Maharaja's Private Secretary, as he lacked the skills required to do the job. "These were not the duties which I had expected or

for which I was qualified" (Forster 46). "Ignorant of the language and the administration generally" (Forster 49).

At one place, he wrote, "There seems to be no Indian word for thank you" (Forster 7)., which is absolutely wrong, in Hindi, its *dhanyawaad*, in Urdu, its *Shukriya*, in Marathi also, the word is *dhanyawaad.* (since he was the Private Secretary to a Maratha Ruler).

At another place he wrote that *chaprassi* meant a messenger, which was not entirely correct*, chaprassi* would mean peon, a messenger is called *doot*. In Urdu messenger would be *qasid*. In Marathi a messenger is called *doot* or *sandeshvahak,* and peon is called a *shipai.*

Forster's carelessness: Surely, he read a great deal on Hinduism, still he made this mistake, it clearly shows his casual attitude towards the country where he lived for few years. Following passages elucidate Forster's deep understanding of Hinduism:

Though, at numerous places it can be seen how Forster casually compared Hinduism with Greek Mythology and Christian Theology, however, at several instances, he surprisingly showed great insight about the Hindu faith. In one of his letters, he wrote about making an offering to Goddess Chamunda, "youngest and the most amicable of the seven sisters" (Forster 86)., alluding to the concept of Saptmatrika.

G. K. Das writes, "In conceiving such a god, Hindu imagination has excelled the Greek or the Christian conception of spirituality, he (Forster) found Hindu worship of Krishna spiritually far more meaningful than the technological and political idolatry of the West" (Das 255). He described the birth of Lord Krishna in painstaking details, while constantly referring to the Bhagwat Purana and the Vishnu Purana. In one of his letters, he is seen quoting from the Bhagwat Purana, "Kamsa … now had the unusual honour of seeing him (God) face to face" (Forster 107).

Forster's eventual disillusionment with Hinduism could have been the cause of this debacle. He never bothered to go further deep into understanding the faith, as he later found solace in Islam:

Forster wrote, "Religion approaches to me in every tangible form, as I have been hit on the head by an iron bar belonging to a sacred swing" (Forster 90). He further explained, "and though I am dressed as a Hindu I shall never become one" (Forster 95). In one of his last letters, he mentioned, "I do like Islam, though I have had to come through Hinduism to discover it" (Forster 116). "I have passed abruptly from Hinduism to Islam and the change is a relief" (Forster 145). As the Hindu faith is all encompassing, worships both Nirgun and Sagun, it was hard for a Britisher like Forster, with an anglophile upbringing, to wrap his head around it. It was obvious that he would eventually lean towards an Abrahamic faith for assuaging all his woe.

5 CONCLUSION

It is quite evident from the above-mentioned instances that Forster was clearly referring to the Hill itself as Devi and not as the abode of the Goddess. He mentioned it time and again in the Hill of Devi, his other essays and letters that Devi was a sacred Hill in Dewas, where the temple of the Goddess was built. How misleading his writings were for other authors can be discerned from the writings of Gerber and Davis, who talked about Devi being a sacred Hill in India rather than the Sanskrit word for a Goddess. Time and again he has used the word 'acropolis' while writing about the Hill of Devi, which indicates how hard he tried to superimpose his knowledge of the Ancient Greece on India. Two things can be ascertained for sure, one, as he didn't know any of the native languages, be it Marathi or Hindi, he made this blunder. Secondly, the tendency to superimpose Greek Mythology on the Hindu Mythology was so strong that he was misled in multiple ways. Many a times, this motivated him to make absurd comparisons between the Birth of Krishna and the Greek festival of mourning Adonis.

Forster's Letters and essays became a source of confusion and misunderstanding among other writers, who were not familiar with India or Indian culture. It is still puzzling that someone as educated and well read as Forster made such a huge blunder which continued as a chain of misunderstanding among other American and European authors.

An educated and well-versed author like E. M. Forster could make such a slip up while writing about Indian culture, then little can be expected from other British nationals who came to India or probably saw India through Forster's lenses. Being a Britisher, he was given a preferential status during his stint in India. He continued to boast about his friendship with Indians, but paid little or no attention to their faith and customs. This probably started a series of confusion for those who read and quoted him, for instance, Gerber and Davis. Though, he never shared the imperialistic attitude and vision of Kipling, but he surely benefitted though it and made it obvious that he didn't care much about a country which was, back then, ruled by Britain.

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An exploration of unveiling harsh reality in Nayantara Sahgal's *This Time of Morning*

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ABSTRACT: Nayantara Sahgal is one of the recognized English writers of contemporary India. Her novels have dealt with social, political and feminist issues. In this novel *This Time of Morning* expresses India at the time of early years of independence. Sahgal darley attacks corrupt politicians, businessmen and male chauvinists through her novels. She picturizes the real-life situation of Indian people particularly Indian women and their struggles in the male dominated society. This present paper analyses the characters merits and demerits as per their own originality. It also describes the agony and suffering of women who need liberalism in all the fields, like social, political and cultural liberalism. The real characteristic of male characters is explored apart from all restrictions; the female characters unveil themselves to the society. The traditional rules and regulations that are the barriers to the new generation of modern women are portrayed by the mother characters. Gender discrimination should be eradicated from society and women have to be treated as equal to men in families and their rights should be ensured. It explores the false characters in all fields, like family, politics and business.

Keywords: Agony and suffering of women, Unveiling characters, Corrupted Politician.

1 INTRODUCTION

Nayantara Sahgal is the writer of all time in exploring the originality of characters. Her works attributed to women's empowerment and the domination of men over women. She reveals her characters relating to real incidents in life. This novel depicts people's mindset of the early post-independence period hence, the country flourished with hope for the future. The characters of this novel represent personal to political issues. It also describes the inferior position of women in family and in society. Yet so far there has not been any portrayal of revealing both male and female characters of Nayantara Sahgal's novels. So, this study focuses on bringing out the frustrations and struggles and to expose the reality of the characters and also the degradation of women.

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To describe the role, victimization of women and gender violence among the people.
- To attempt to explain modern women's way of facing the society.

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- To create change in the mindset of dominative society.
- To evaluate the importance of man-woman relationship.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology adopted for presentation and documentation adheres to the 9th edition of the Modern Language Association (MLA) style.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Rashmi is the daughter of Kailas (a humanist) who marries Dalip, their marriage is an arranged marriage by their parents. However, Rashmi's married life is not fruitful and she wants to come out of it through divorce. She hates that tall, well-settled man, Dalip. Her decision to divorce is shocking news to her traditional mother, Mira (to her, a woman has to serve a man). The feeling of slavery obviously comes from her tradition, so she accepts marriage later and understands her position from slavery to freedom. Rashmi is analysed in *Nayantara Sahgal and Doris Lessing: A Feminist Study in comparison* as,

> Rashmi in *This Time of Morning* annoys her mother who does not talk to her when she learns of Rashmi's decision of separation. Rashmi's mother belongs to the generation where women are judged by endurance, submission and devotion to whatever fate provides them in the form of husband and his family (Arora 92).

In this novel, *This Time of Morning* Nita represents family bound society of India, which doesn't allow women to go alone without male support. This is clearly known that when Mrs. Narang says that, "But don't keep Nita put too late. Her father hardly ever allows her to go out to these club dances" (TTM 38). Ironically, Nita loves freedom and individuality, which are hardly given to her. She wants to lead her life with her own choices of education, job and life partner however, these are prohibited.

The parents have to choose the right choice for their princess. They treat her as a royal princess in the house, but they fail to consult the wish of their princess. Nita is affectionate and loveable to her father, that's why she tries to accept the stranger and dance with him. She doesn't like the event, but she accepts for the sake of her father and his party and loves Dr. Narang as a great father, even though he is a doctor, well-settled, has adopted Western cultures, used to go to many parties, wears foreign dresses and imitates Western mannerism and habits, but who is strict with his daughter to follow the traditional Indian culture.

Nita's parents have selected a bridegroom even though he is smart well-settled, rich, he looks like a total stranger to her. She loves Kalyan Sinha (a Politician) because he has given her own wish of freedom, liberty and job. The job is unrefusable by her parents because it is offered by a great politician, Kalyan (Minister). So, she becomes ready to give herself to Kalyan. However, as a traditional Indian woman, she cannot refuse her parents' wish for her marriage. Nita is helpless to choose whether her parents or Kalyan, the education, job have given her confidence but her love for her parents stops her from selecting on her own.

Uma Mitra is the young wife of sincere civil servant Arjun Mitra. She is the daughter of a high-court judge, nineteen years old but he is thirty-three. Long years of age gap between Arjun and Uma spoils their life, he doesn't think her as an equal partner and satisfy her needs. So, she seeks her needs apart from her husband. As a woman, she has her own dreams about her husband, but he never tries to satisfy his wife so, she finds satisfaction somewhere. She has a sexual relationship with Neil Berenson who is an architect in the Peace Institute. So, she is described as a voluptuous wife, but no husband is portrayed like that. He is a sincere worker and a modal to several youngsters. Though he is a sincere, worker and good

colleague, but a failure husband in the house. *The Novels of Nayantara Sahgal* analysed Arjun Mitra as,

> Arjun Mitra's *This Time of Morning* utter indifference to his wife has turned Uma into drunk and adventurist. But the sanest thing, in the circumstances, would either be a separation which even a Hindu marriage, however hard and rigid traditionally, should provide, or an attempt to repair what has been allowed to disintegrate so badly through callous neglect (Asnani 38-39).

To him, she is like an object in the house like table, chair and he has to give her food and shelter to save his family's name. He doesn't take even a single step to understand the feelings of his wife Uma. Arjun has married her to fulfil the wish of his grandfather Sarat Mitra, Marriage needs an appropriate age for women but for men it is not needed. He can marry whatever his age might be; after marriage he has spent his time on books and his work. Women are treated as property of men sometimes; it depends on the father, brother, husband and son.

Kalyan Sinha is known as Minister without Portfolio. Later he has appointed as Advisor on Foreign Affairs. Such a rough man, has grew up with no love and affection. He is a corrupted politician and spoils the lives of several people. Kalyan and Kailas are the controversial people because Kailas is the follower of Gandhian principles and the second one is corrupted for power and money. But he pretends as a good politician, in reality he has wasted many women including Leela (girl from Banaras). Leela has committed suicide when she confirms her pregnancy. The traditional Indian society doesn't teach her to handle her situation, which has options for better life. However, she feels guilty and commits suicide.

Leela doesn't like to meet any elder for help in her critical position of pregnancy. She might feel shame to reveal her pregnancy because of depression, desperation who died. She has not tolerated the full freedom in a new country like America she remains as uncage bird which has made her to lose her life. She might have found other solution for her problem like abortion with the help of a right consultant.

Leela's death is discussed in Exploration of Inner Struggle of Indian Women in Nayantara Sahgal's *This Time of Morning* that,

> The culture and society, in which she was brought up influence her to take fatal step. Leela is unable to balance the conventional values and modern way of living. Finally, she dies. Sahgal questions how far these convention and traditions decree women's growth and freedom (Shankar 82).

She has several ways however the cultural shock, has taught her to be pure when it is missed, she has found herself to be useless. So, she died, if it happens for man means it is not a problem at all because males are allowed to do anything but certain things are always prohibited for women.

Hari Mohan is a rich business man with political support and pretends as good man to the people. Ironically, he is not truthful even to his wife, who has seduced the Nurse, she takes care of his ill wife at his home. He warns her not to reveal the truth thus, "She was hysterical afterwards but he told her that though she had lost her head and behaved foolishly, he would see that she was not punished for it. If, she breathed a word of the incident her nurse's license would be cancelled" (TTM 265). In reality, Hari Mohan and Kalyan Sinha represents the corrupt politician of that time and their misuse of political power for money.

Mira is a traditional wife of Kailas (who represents Gandhian values) however, he doesn't give equality to his wife. She doesn't have her own wish apart from her husband. She performs as a slave to her husband and expects the same from her daughter Rashmi. But Rashmi (modern woman of Sahgal) breaks all rules and restrictions forced on her.

Rakesh is a civil servant represents Government official of that time, who thinks of all the characters and describes Delhi in the post-independence period. He knows the real face of

all, like he is well known with personal and political news of Kalyan Sinha when he has been in Boston. Kalyan has used and misused several Indian and foreign women including Leela, Nita, Celia Rand and the list is endless. However, he pretends to like good politician in front of people. In Reality, the Government remain motionless towards Kalyan and Harimohan like Rakesh.

The mother characters, like Mira and Mrs. Narang resemble old traditional values and their duty is to impose it to their daughters (next generation) without questioning. Nita's parents offer her many suitors but she rejects all. Her mothers say that before marriage she cannot know a man wholeheartedly. She has to marry someone whereas she wants to know him and understand him and hug and kiss him before marriage but her parents are very strict towards bridegroom selection of their daughter. Vijay is the suitor choice of her parents to Nita. He is tall, good looking, well-settled, the engagement between Nita and Vijay is fixed so, she has no reasons to avoid him. However, she feels Vijay as a stranger to her. As a woman, they have to support for the decision of their daughters whereas they teach them to be obedient to the male generation.

Neil Berenson is the architect of the Peace Institute, a European who likes travelling. But really, he makes use of women for his sexual urge, married and father of two children. He is separated from his family, uncaring about them, wants to satisfy himself, using Rashmi, Uma and so on. Men like him see women as sexual objects not as equal human beings on the earth.

The female characters of this novel have educational qualification, job and well-settled-life; however, they have struggled to lead their lives in the male centred society. Generally, Indian women are restricted in the name of culture and tradition. They are always known as silent sufferers, symbol of sacrifice, must obey, respectful, loveable and devoted to the family and husband. Women have to give happiness to them even though she suffered. Women are not identified as individual but related to any other man like father, brother, husband who must satisfy herself within the family. She does not have any wish of her own, has considered as secondary being in the society whereas the western countries have some equal status to women but in India it is impossible. In the modern days, it is pretended that they are allowed to do certain things. The pity of women is described in *Social and Political Concern in the Novels of Nayantara Sahgal* that,

> In Hindu society the ideal woman has been traditionally personified by Sita who is portrayed in the Ramayana. Sita's image as mother is glorified and she is repeatedly referred to as Sita Mata but as a wife she is subjected to the whims of her husband who abandons her only because of the derogatory remarks of a commoner (Sinha B.P.143).

The female characters Leela an Celia are affected by the dominant society. The mistakes of men are not revealed. Women got depression because of wrong decisions and false beliefs. Sahgal explains frustrations of Indian women through her female characters. Rashmi, Leela and Mira are made as victims in the male dominated society.

5 CONCLUSION

Actuality is not accepted by the people, Sahgal has brought to light all the circumstances such as political corruption, inability of the Government, women's inferior position even in choosing life partner, cultural shock for Leela in Boston because the society fails to blame man like Arjun who doesn't understand his wife. In Reality, many actual faces are hidden in the family as well as in the society like Arjun and Kalyan. Women should be given first equality in family and then in society and their education should be compulsory for the betterment of the family and also for the country.

Marriage is the essential word in the life of a human being. In married life not only love and affection is essential but also the respect in mutual terms is necessary for great bonding in relationships. If it exists, there will not be divorce in life, it must be handled with safe and care.

- From birth itself, two genders male and female kids should be treated equally in all aspects.
- Equality should be given to women not as law or written statement but with whole heart. Then only it can be practiced.
- Female education must be compulsory for the growth and independent state of women. They should be financially independent. These suggestions are for the betterment of women in the male dominated society like India.

Sahgal has pictured out the contemporary India through the characters of her novels.

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Unleashing Gaia's wrath: Phantasmagorical reckonings in Claire Buss's *The Gaia Project*

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ABSTRACT: In an era characterised by intensifying environmental crises, the wrath of nature is evident in the form of pandemics, extreme weather events, natural disasters, and biodiversity loss etc. Our planet appears to be demonstrating its agency in both alarming and enlightening manners, often interpreted through literary, scientific, political and even mythical lenses in various forms of artistic expressions. This paper aims to explore these reckonings of the Earth through the critical analysis of the phantasmagorical portrayal of Gaia's wrath in Claire Buss's (2018) hopeful sci-fi dystopian novel *The Gaia Project* – a text within the growing body of twenty-first-century environmental fiction that merges mythic imagination with ecological urgency. By drawing from James Lovelock's Gaia Hypothesis and Lawrence Buell's concept of the environmental text, the study argues that Buss reconfigures Gaia not merely as a symbolic Earth Mother but as an iconoclastic force of resistance. Through the lens of phantasmagoria, the paper examines how Gaia's presence in the novel manifests not merely as a literary device or a straightforward apocalyptic punishment but as a *reckoning* that unfolds in fragmented, spectral, and hallucinatory ways, thus evoking a planetary consciousness that transcends scientific rationalism.

Keywords: Gaia, Gaia hypothesis, Phantasmagoria, Environmental Aesthetics

1 INTRODUCTION

Contemporary literature has increasingly responded to planetary unrest by reimagining the Earth not merely as a passive backdrop but as an active, autonomous force capable of resistance, retaliation, and renewal. Recent novels portray nature as a dynamic agent that shapes narrative trajectories and disrupts anthropocentric worldviews. These works critique unsustainable human practices, advocate for environmental responsibility, and foster a deeper ecological consciousness (Venu and Reddy 2024). Within this evolving literary landscape, the ancient Greek conception of Gaia as " … a goddess, from Greek *Gaia*... personification of *gaia* 'earth' (as opposed to heaven), 'land' (as opposed to sea), 'a land, country, soil' … sometimes used in English poetically or rhetorically for 'Earth personified' or 'the Earth as a planet'" (Harper 2018) has been revitalised as a potent metaphor and narrative construct in eco-fiction and speculative literature.

While Gaia is portrayed as a nurturing maternal deity in mythology, embodying the generative power of the Earth, her transformation into a scientific paradigm emerged through the Gaia hypothesis, proposed by independent British scientist and environmentalist James Ephraim Lovelock, in collaboration with microbiologist Lynn Margulis. In their

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seminal article "The Quest for Gaia", Lovelock and Sidney Epton (1975) assert "it appeared to us that the Earth's biosphere was able to control at least the temperature of the Earth's surface and the composition of the atmosphere... the system seemed to exhibit the behaviour of a single organism, even a living creature" (Lovelock and Epton 1975, pp. 304–305). Lovelock (1988) further expanded this hypothesis into Gaia theory, incorporating broader systemic insights stating: "thoughtful criticisms of this first book led to new and deeper insights into Gaia...as a consequence, this second book is a statement of Gaia theory; the basis of a new and unified view of the Earth and life sciences" (Lovelock 1988, p.10). And since this theory has evolved into what is now known as Earth System Science, a multidisciplinary field that explores the Earth as a complex, interconnected system of biological, atmospheric, geological, and chemical processes. This scientific turn does not diminish her symbolic power; rather, it reinforces it, emphasising the Earth's systemic interconnectedness and the catastrophic consequences of human disruption, as Martin Ogle (2010) rightly remarks:

> The living planet metaphor has engendered both interest and controversy, raising challenging questions for science: in what sense is the Earth alive, how does the Earth work, and how do humans fit into this reality? Metaphor should not intrude unnecessarily into the exactitude of given scientific tests and processes nor should scientists subject metaphor to a rigorous peer-review process: both science and metaphor of the Earth as a living system can enrich and expand each other. (Ogle 2010, p. 276)

Moreover, is Gaia- the Earth herself- retaliating against humanity's exploitative excesses? Such a question reframes the current ecological collapse not merely as a climate crisis but as a metaphysical reckoning, a long-ignored wrath now manifesting through wildfires, floods, pandemics, and destabilised ecosystems. The Earth is no longer merely polluted; it is *angry*, and its wrath manifests through visions, spectral disruptions, and apocalyptic transformations as Franco Viviani (2021), senior scientist and professor at Professor at University of Padua, argues that pandemics like COVID-19 are not random events but ecological responses: "Do you want to stay healthy? Then stop challenging the power of Gaia, the watery one, who, in her ancient wisdom, holds the power of collaboration and stands above the muscular one, blind and arrogant" (Viviani 2021). For him, Gaia is no longer a passive Earth system but a reactive force, capable of restoring balance through corrective disruption.

2 RESEARCH GAP

Though ample research has been done on Lovelock's Gaia in scientific and philosophical contexts, its integration in literature, particularly through affective and phantasmagorical narrative devices, remains underexamined. This research addresses this research gap in ecocritical studies by examining Claire Buss (2018), an emerging English author and winner of the Raven Award for Favourite Fantasy/Sci-Fi novel, *The Gaia Project*. Unlike the predominant climate fiction, this novel presents a rare instance of hopeful dystopia, wherein Gaia emerges from a scientific metaphor into a narrative presence.

3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Given this critical background, the objectives of this study are-

- To examine how the novel *The Gaia Project*, set in a technologically advanced yet ecologically broken future, portrays Gaia as a phantasmagorical presence haunting the remnants of a society that has lost touch with its environment.
- To analyse phantasmagorical imagery in the novel as a narrative mode that blurs the boundaries between dream and reality, vision and nightmare.

- To contribute to the existing body of critical literature by illustrating how the narrative decentralises human agency and foregrounds environmental ethics and planetary responsibility.

4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The concept of phantasmagoria, as employed in literary and visual culture, serves as a critical lens to explore surreal, hallucinatory representations of ecological collapse and the autonomous agency of nature. Etymologically derived from the French *phantasmagorie* (later *fantasmagorie*)- originally referring to a theatrical show employing magic lanterns in darkened spaces to evoke supernatural phenomena- the term combines *fantasme* (phantasm) with the suffix *-agorie*, whose origin remains uncertain. In contemporary usage, phantasmagoria denotes a constantly shifting succession of images, illusions, or imagined scenes, often characterised by bizarre, dreamlike, or fantastical combinations (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Walter Benjamin (1999) - a German philosopher and cultural critic- expanded the notion of phantasmagoria into a critical tool for representing the uncanny, the surreal, and the spectral within modernity in his unfinished work *The Arcades Project.* He used phantasmagoria to describe the dreamlike, illusory spectacle of 19th-century consumer capitalism- how commodities, architecture, and urban experiences create a 'dream world' that masks underlying realities. Later, scholars in critical theory, cultural studies, and literary studies as seen in the works by Goethe, Sin Chaha, and Kyokutei Bakin around 1827 (Nawata 2020) further adapted Benjamin's phantasmagoria to explore how art, literature, and cinema depict the uncanny, the spectral, and the collapse of linear, realist representation-especially in contexts of trauma, capitalism, or environmental collapse. This paper employs a qualitative and multidisciplinary research methodology and literary analysis engaging with Lovelock's insights on Gaia, Buell's concept of the environmental text alongside the aesthetic lens of phantasmagoria by Benjamin to investigate how this novel represents Gaia's wrath in the context of current ecological crises, consequently contributing to the discourse on eco-fiction as a mode of environmental consciousness and critique.

5 PHANTASMAGORICAL VISIONS OF GAIA'S WRATH: AN ANALYTICAL PERSPECTIVE

Buss's novel *The Gaia Project* (2018), a sequel to *The Gaia Effect* (2016), continues the narrative within the same futuristic society of 2215- a world dominated by the ruling 'Corporation', where citizens live under pervasive surveillance and are increasingly alienated from the natural environment, and find solace in the artificial comforts of advanced technology, as initially depicted in the earlier novel. This analytical section focuses on examining how this novel utilises the aesthetic mode of phantasmagoria to represent the wrath of Gaia in the face of environmental degradation. The narrative intricately weaves phantasmagorical elements of the spectral appearances of the Blue Lady and the symbolic presence of bees (as familiars of Gaia), to deepen the novel's theme of ecological consciousness and dramatise the continued influence of Gaia in a world struggling to recover from environmental collapse.

In several pivotal moments of the novel, the characters either dream of or reflect upon the elusive presence of Gaia, notably exemplified by Kira's intense yearning: "She needed to talk to someone about Gaia. She hadn't seen any signs of the goddess for months … the only thing Kira knew for sure was that too many people had seen Gaia for her to only be a figment of imagination" (Buss 2018, p. 9). This longing underscores the emotional and existential need of the characters for connection with Gaia. In phantasmagorical terms, Gaia's appearances are fleeting, hallucinatory, and imbued with symbolic resonance aligning with Benjamin's (1999) concept of phantasmagoria, wherein the boundaries between material reality and dream imagery are blurred: "these creations undergo this 'illumination' not

only in a theoretical manner, by an ideological transposition, but also in the immediacy of their perceptible presence. They are manifest as phantasmagorias" (Benjamin 1999, p. 14).

The persistent appearance of bees throughout the novel functions not merely as an atmospheric detail but as a symbolic extension of Gaia's agency within the narrative. As Giulia Papa *et al.* (2022) highlight, bees are "key bioindicators of environmental pollution and may provide valuable information on the impact of human activities" (Papa *et al.* 2022, p. 16), positioning them as crucial mediators between human and ecological health. Their recurring, almost spectral presence-whether gently bumping against windows in sterile government offices or emerging quietly during moments of political tension, serves as a silent yet potent reminder of the enduring presence of Gaia. This symbolic use of bees aligns closely with Lawrence Buell's assertion that in an environmental text, "the nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history" (Buell 1995, pp. 7–8). In Buss's novel, the bees do not simply decorate the narrative backdrop; they embody Gaia's silent yet active resistance to human exploitation and disconnection, thus granting the nonhuman world narrative agency and ethical weight within the imaginative and moral framework of the narrative.

One of the most pivotal moments in *The Gaia Project* occurs through Kira's phantasmagorical encounter with Gaia, distilling the novel's central tension between destruction and renewal. Suspended in "a warm, dark place, gently floating, but it didn't feel scary. She felt safe and content. The darkness became lighter as a soft golden glow expanded from everywhere at once … She was with Gaia. And she was dreaming" (Buss 2018, p. 137), Kira experiences a profound sense of safety and connection as she floats above the Earth, hand in hand with her 'blue lady'. However, Gaia's body bears a "a deep cut down the side of Gaia's neck, over her shoulder and disappearing down her back. It was black and dull with grey shadows pulsing either side of the gash" (Buss 2018, p. 137), serving as a visceral metaphor for the ecological trauma inflicted by human exploitation. Gaia's sad smile and her fading touch offered just before she disappears sensationalise the warning that planetary destabilisation is not a future threat but an immediate and ongoing process: "Gaia turned to look at her again and her entire face was transformed by a glowing smile as she nodded … Gaia put out a hand and touched Kira's face gently before she started to fade, still smiling. Kira woke slowly, basking in the remnants of her dream, feeling her spirit refreshed" (Buss 2018, p. 137). In this dream-like sequence, Gaia is not simply a mythical deity, but a living metaphor for the fractured systems of Earth. The aesthetic beauty of the vision- the golden light, the floating sensation is thus a narrative strategy that sharpens, rather than softens, the ecological warning. Buss (2018) here transforms phantasmagoria from illusion into illumination.

Moreover, through Kira's realisation that "finding somewhere to live" (Buss 2018, p. 137) is integral to Gaia's healing, the narrative exemplifies a decisive movement from anthropocentric survivalism toward an eco-centric ethic of care, emphasising the intertwined fates of humanity and the Earth. This vision of Gaia as a wounded, fading retaliatory planet finds strong resonance in James Lovelock's influential work *The Revenge of Gaia* (2006), where he contends that only when we envision Earth as a living and sentient organism can we grasp the magnitude of our harm:

> Only when we think of our planetary home as if it were alive can we see, perhaps for the first time, why farming abrades the living tissue of its skin and why pollution is poisonous to it as well as to us … When the Earth was young and strong, it resisted adverse change and the failure of its own temperature regulation; now it may be elderly and less resilient. (Lovelock 2006, pp. 2–3)

The novel deepens this ecocritical narrative strategy in another phantasmagorical moment shared by other characters, including Martha and Dina, in which Gaia reappears not as a nurturing guide but as a spectral harbinger of crisis: "It's not safe. It's not safe. It's not safe. Martha woke up in a cold sweat, the warning ringing in her ears. She tried to remember the

dream but it was fading fast. All she was left with was a vague memory of a blue lady. Gaia had spoken to her, warned her. It's not safe" (Buss 2018, p.130). The repetition of the phrase 'It's not safe' reverberates through their consciousness, reflecting a deeper moral and ecological reckoning. This moment also signals a narrative evolution in Gaia's representation from a benevolent Earth spirit to an oracle of wrath and aligns with the warnings of Lovelock (2006): "Unfortunately, we are a species with schizoid tendencies, and like an old lady who has to share her house with a growing and destructive group of teenagers, Gaia grows angry, and if they do not mend their ways she will evict them" (p. 60). This evolution also resonates with Buell's theory of environmental texts as agents of 'ethical engagement' and decentring of human mastery as Buell (1995) affirms, "The rhetoric of nature's personhood speaks merely to the nominal level; what counts is the underlying ethical orientation implied by the troping" (Buell 1995, p. 217). In this context, Gaia's spectral warning transcends mere personification and operates as a narrative mechanism urging ecological responsibility and self-reflection. It is not Gaia's anthropomorphic form alone that matters, but the moral imperative her apparition conveys within the environmental imagination. Overall, these phantasmagorical manifestations of Gaia- as oracle in dreams, as ecological agent through bees, as visionary force in moments of resistance, and as an absent, wounded presence construct a layered narrative that compels readers to confront the moral implications of environmental degradation and to imagine new paradigms of coexistence.

6 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Gaia in *The Gaia Project* is not merely a mythic or symbolic figure but a vivid, affective, and sensorial presence that permeates the narrative through dreams, visions, and ecological symbols such as bees and the blue lady. Furthermore, this analysis opens up further multidisciplinary inquiry into literature that not only represents Gaia as a mere backdrop or decoration, but it becomes Gaia's voice-medium through which the Earth expresses its wrath and remembers its wounds. Through such symbolic strategies, Buss's (2018) portrayal of Gaia transcends rhetorical gesture, offering not only a sustained ethical engagement with planetary suffering and human complicity but also suggesting that Gaia's wrath is not only mythic but systemic, a response to the cumulative violence inflicted upon Earth's life-support systems as Lovelock (2006) warns: "By massively taking land to feed people and by fouling the air and water we are hampering Gaia's ability to regulate the Earth's climate and chemistry ... we are in danger of extinction. We have in a sense, stumbled into a war with Gaia...All that we can do is to make peace while we are still strong and not a broken rabble" (p. 140).

DECLARATION

We acknowledge the use of OpenAI's ChatGPT (GPT-4 model) to assist with language refinement, conceptual clarification, and the organisation of academic content. However, all ideas, critical analyses, interpretations, and final conclusions are our own and reflect our original scholarly work.

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Locating the influence of physical and psychological spaces in the play *The Iceman Cometh* by Eugene O'Neill

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ABSTRACT: This paper will explore the relationship between physical and psychological spaces dramatized by the great American playwright Eugene O'Neill onstage. It discusses the reproduction of psychological conditions of the characters on stage through the physical environment and setting in the Modern Theatre. A territorial understanding of theorists like Deleuze and Guatari has been employed to study its effect on the psyche of the inhabitants in Harry Hope's Bar. Notably, it situates the play *The Iceman Cometh* within the realm of symbolic spatiality, as the paper discusses various layers of spatial configuration evident in the delusion-stricken lives of the characters, devoid of agency or agility in any form. The play reveals that outcasts and disregarded individuals often retreat into spaces that validate their shared delusion. It further discusses the insight of critics on the dramaturgy of O'Neill, highlighting the recurring themes of disillusionment and immobility in the play *The Iceman Cometh*. An attempt is made to understand how the physical environment is utilized by the dramatist to mediate a performance of human suffering that arises from collective disillusionment.

Keywords: Territory, Space, Psyche, Alcoholics, Drama

1 INTRODUCTION

Space and spatiality can shape the mental and physical world of humans, making it one of the most significant questions prevalent in every discipline today. It is a deeply structured confluence of ideas that can grow in any direction without an agent moulding it. Contemporary studies have explored how concepts of locations and territories are utilized in different fields to develop a new understanding of preexisting art, science, and philosophy. Defining space became a priority in the previous century with its growing significance, along with the need to signify a relationship between physical and psychological structures.

The shifting awareness and breakthrough studies in psychoanalysis categorize the mental or inner space as the psyche's architecture. Philosophers like Deleuze and Guattari, in their book *A Thousand Plateaus*, contend that a physical territory, when perceived by an individual, can transcend into memory and attain the power to rebuild social relations. An individual's presence at a place and their awareness about it play an important role in shaping their identity, memory, and feelings, reflecting their inner experiences. The thinkers have further reorganized the meaning of territory, cognizing that it is always in flux, subject to shifting identity, memory, and power. In the chapter 'Of the Refrain', they have tried to interlink different feelings and emotions- inner worlds with the external world inhabited by an individual, like cities, public spaces, etc. These spaces, recognized by the famous

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philosophers, can be reimagined in the world of Theatre as the scenes depicted by the playwrights resonate with the inner world of the characters in various modern plays.

Theatre indulges in representing the virtual spaces, and this function of theatre takes inspiration from the ancient Greek theatron (a topological place of seeing). Stanley Vincent Longman (1981) has divided the stage into three dimensions i.e., the first realm, which consists of visual construction of the physical setting, the second realm makes the audience visualize spaces beyond the scope of the narrative and the third realm is an interactive space that engages the audience as an active agent, whose perception plays significant role in creation of meaning. It is further concluded that the spectacle happens between the actual and the imagined, the world and the beyond, and activity and inner life. Thus, establishing a strong relationship between the physical and psychological spaces existing in the world of theatre.

Thus, it can be established that a setting encodes various meanings and expressions emoted by the playwright to deliver an intense narrative. The Senate House in Julius Caesar, The Tower of London in Richard III, The Forest of Arden in As You Like It, and The Island in The Tempest, to name a few, are illustrations of fluid spaces used to represent the heightened state of mind of the characters and story by the Bard. O'Neill shows similar tendencies in portraying complex and chaotic emotional states of the characters through the symbolic spaces like the Sea, a Barroom, an Elm Tree, and a jungle on an Island, etc.

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This review aims to identify the spatial negotiations occurring in the narrative of the play *The Iceman Cometh*. It has examined various literature available on the theory of space and O'Neill's theatre to understand the relationship between the psychological and physical settings represented through the assemblage of derelicts, a murderer, a socialist and prostitutes.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The review of various literature, made available through various databases like, Jstor, Semantic Scholar, Springer, Science Direct was further undertaken to study the spatial symbolism that has been employed by the significant American dramatist belonging to the interwar period.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Psyche is also famously called the mind's eye as it demarcates different territories for its safety from the horror of loss and suffering. Gilmore (1984) has emphasized that Harry Hope's Bar externalizes the psychological inertia- a tryst between stasis and cyclical movement. The environment of the Bar represents a space where time is suspended as the characters seem to be trapped between the cycle of delusive purpose and hopelessness.

Eugene O'Neill is known for experimenting with themes and motifs in his drama, and both have been dealt with precision in *The Iceman Cometh*. The horror of memories has led the characters to weave illusions for themselves, and the threat from the outside world constantly reshapes their interior worlds. They have turned into desiring machines who are addicted to intoxication. Even though there is no sign of smog from the sea, the atmosphere of the room appears heavy and blurry as if it is the representation of the drunken states of the inhabitants. The categorical description of the room "The right wall of the back room is a dirty black curtain which separates it from the bar. At the rear, this curtain is drawn back

from the wall so the bartender can get in and out. The back room is crammed with round tables and chairs placed so close together that it is a difficult squeeze to pass between them." (O'Neill 1946), can be contrasted with the vague separation of the psyche. The inhabitants remain in the backroom, emersed knee-deep in drunken drowsiness, not even bothering to shift to their beds.

The occupants of the Harry Hope have thin boundaries but appear to look happy and relaxed in an enclosed "public space". They have localized and colonized the space of the saloon after being threatened and terrorized by the arrival of new and young members of a society that they had discarded in the past. Larry pretends not to know Parritt and denies any social affiliation with him. He tries to hide any kind of sympathy toward Parritt, as the time since he left the coast, Larry has guarded himself against love and empathy for others. What he shares with the people at Harry Hope's is simply familiarity, which he thinks is not enough to break down his walls and render him into a state of chaos.

Eugene O'Neill famously brought out the inner workings of the mind on stage. His stage is an assemblage of psychological refrains like desire, passion, agony, suffering, impulses, etc. The play *The Iceman Cometh* is a poetic expression of the deepest despair coming from the utter guilt of having invested an individual's entire existence in a purposeful cause like Socialism. The rhythm of alienation of the characters can be found reflected in their conversations and dialogues. For instance, Larry's disillusionment with society and its institutions is apparent in his conversation with Parritt when he says, "Nothing could hold doing. If I don't believe in anything else either, especially not the State. I've refused to become a useful member of its society. I've been a philosophical drunken bum, and proud of it." (O'Neill 1946). Larry has abandoned society and its machineries, witnessed in his tonality, to become a part of a purgatorial space amongst the socially discarded individuals who live only to get drunk.

The enclosed space of Harry Hope's bar represents the psyche of its inhabitants; the arrangement of rounded tables at the Bar reminds the spectators of the labyrinthine alleys often found in post-modern cinema. The waiters shown shifting and sliding in the room among the drunkards on the tables, pouring drinks and making conversation at the same time, evoke apprehensive sensations in the characters. The bond of the inmates strictly rests on their need to feel a togetherness in the approaching inevitability of a situation. The early part of the play deals with the illusions, pipe dreams, and spells under which the inhabitants of the bar are deeply submerged. The setting looks like one of the rings of Dante's hell where the characters are ceaselessly dozing, eternally damned to suffer the pangs of addiction. The dramatist plays with politics and philosophy to bring out the drama of life. Moleski and Stroupe, in their article, have highlighted the meaningless existence of the various characters found in O'Neill's drama:

> Yank Smith's quest to belong (The Hairy Ape), Nina Leed's search for happiness (Strange Interlude), and the pipe dreams and illusions of Harry Hope and his friends (The Iceman Cometh) become patterns which give meaning to life, yet it is a meaning O'Neill equates with illusion. Reality has no direct bearing on the meaning an individual is able to create to sustain in the vision of either playwright. (Moleski and Stroupe 1986)

Stephen Black observes that statements spoken in a fit of rage by the inhabitants give important information about reshaping the psychological condition of the characters in *The Iceman Cometh*. According to Black (2006), Parritt is shown to be changed by the realization that he has helped Larry experience and comprehend his shame. This incident can be related to the Oresteian estrangement, the vengeful pursuit of his mother's past, and the solitude, which leads to his madness. He can at least save his mother from disgrace, even though he is unable to remove her from prison, which will release him from his bondage to her. The psychological condition of Parritt can also be navigated by the spectator through the decadent setting of the Barroom.

A very important O'Neill scholar, Brenda Murphy, has studied the psychic condition of the derelicts of Harry Hope's Saloon. She mentions that by bringing the community of Harry Hope's saloon back at the end of *The Iceman Cometh*, O'Neill affirms the human need for the illusion that can save lives. However, O'Neill leaves the characters in a condition of immobility, with Larry, the lone enlightened member, realizing that all they are doing is waiting for death. Anesthetics like alcohol and pipe dreams are the only things that provide relief to the characters. Although a person such as Hickey, who would intensify the agony by taking these items away, is indeed annoying, he is not the root of human suffering, which is inherent in the human experience. As a result, O'Neill's play is less of a tragedy and more of a threnody for humanity.

Peter Egri (1977) observes that the plays by Gorky and O'Neill share a lot of motives. Harry Hope's saloon is similar to Kostiljov's nightclub in that it attracts downtrodden individuals who are constantly fighting, drinking, and daydreaming about their happy past and future. The sad contrast to a drunken celebration is the actors' and Parritt's suicides at the end of both plays. In both *The Iceman Cometh* (Hickey) and *The Lower Depths* (Luka), there is a guest who serves as a catalyst; he is from another planet, stays briefly with the guests, whom he attempts to change, and eventually departs.

The physical and psychological spaces of a community change without a conscious reminder, and the theatrical representations of that society capture the slightest of these dramatic alterations. Harry Hope's is a five-storey tenement Hotel, but the individuals are seen asleep in the barroom instead of their respective beds. "The renting of rooms on the upper floors, under the Raines-Law loopholes, makes the establishment legally a hotel and gives it the privilege of serving liquor in the backroom of the bar after closing hours and on Sundays, provided a meal is served with the booze, thus making a back room legally a hotel restaurant." (O'Neill 1946) This scene comprises of dispossessed people and places. Furthermore, O'Neill deals with the theme of Alcoholism and alcoholics embedded in the setting of the play, recreating phallogocentric bar rooms and salons where drinks are served. *The Iceman Cometh* is a play where he deals with the semiotics and economics related to alcohol. Eugene O'Neill doesn't romanticize alcohol and its habit, but gives a naturalistic portrayal of society and its inhabitants who associate with drinking more than anything. Eugene O'Neill doesn't romanticize alcohol and its habit, but gives a naturalistic portrayal of society and its inhabitants who associate with drinking more than anything.

A symbolic meaning is assigned to physical and psychological spaces in modern times. Spaces employed by the theatre convey a significant relationship that has evolved over a period. Conjoining history and culture, this form of art narrates to its spectators the dynamism of spaces. It has the power to portray meanings woven in spaces that can be otherwise difficult to express through feelings, involving illusions and pipe dreams. O'Neill is known to reconstruct his characters and theatrical spaces, taking inspiration from the Greek Theatron, enhancing the performance, enabling him to display complex emotions and mental conditions with ease. David Aron Murray, in his article, projects,

Larry and Hickey grasp more of the truth about their fellows than the other characters do, but not even they can tell us the whole story. Larry's passive stare at the end of the play is not the calm resignation of the stoic, nor the passive fatalism of the death-seeker; it is the gaze of the artist who recognizes that the truth about character can, finally, only be portrayed dramatically; that its fullness eludes summing up in speeches or dogmas. (Murray 1992)

The space where the story of these derelicts takes place depicts uncertainty, embraced by the inhabitants, but at the same time, the question of 'tomorrow' still lurks behind the curtains that separate the hellhole from the outside world of immense possibilities.

The relationship and connection between members of the Saloon are built out of the habit of drinking together. Thomas B. Gilmore (1984) gives a compelling picture of the alcoholic atmosphere by dissecting every aspect of their behavioral unity amongst individuals who have shunned society to form a closed society of escapists. Nobody can be seen on higher ground, and when a man comes to preach sobriety, he is found out to have committed the

unpardonable sin of killing his wife. A moral corrosion of the external world is highlighted in the play more than once, and a certain linkage is established with the interior self of an individual. O'Neill found out the duality of everything around him, which increased his pain and suffering as he couldn't reconcile them for some peace. Thus, the problems of society are etherized in his plays without any solution, which also becomes the tragedy of identity amongst a new community of people.

Engagement and association create an attachment between souls, forming variegated territorial relations between the characters. Larry, Parritt, and Hickey, his wife, shared a past that could have let them comfort each other in their insecurities, but it became a suffocating aspect instead. The grotesque death of Parritt (suicide) and Hickey's wife (homicide) reminds spectators of the infringement of selfhood by others, as too much mutual love or hatred can become the reason for discord. Killing oneself or others is psychopathy of the soul, unlike alcoholism, as the extremity of its consumption can dismember understanding and reasonability. Eugene O'Neill was saved a couple of times from death, but having a near-death experience emboldened him to give a serious bent to his representative art. Instead of taking it as a hint from God, it hardened his heart with nihilistic philosophy like 'nothing comes out of nothingness' and helped him to convert it into a 'slice of life' drama.

5 CONCLUSION

The description of the inhabitants of the barroom (Harry Hope's Salon) is that of a certain assemblage filled with empty pipe dreams and deferred agency. The modern theatre itself is an assemblage- an interwoven structure of objects, settings, emotions, dialogues, and context that produce physical and psychological spaces that disintegrate frequently. O'Neill has always tried to find a modern equivalent of Grecian tragedy. Ultimately, the ambitious reimagining of physical and psychological spaces occupied by the characters can be identified as a prominent feature in many of O'Neill's plays. This understanding can be concluded from the inhabitants of Harry Hope's Salon and the place where they cohabitate with the inmates. Bars and barrooms are enclosed spaces that derive their importance from the Dionysian act of revelry and merriment, and addiction becomes a categorical byproduct of that tradition. The postmodern condition is exemplified in *The Iceman Cometh* in all its extreme existentiality, which portrays a suffering that is enabled through the spatial belongingness of individuals. Thus, selfhood and existential threats are projected through the anguish and the tragic sadness of the place inhabited by the characters in the play.

DISCLOSURE

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Assessment of Anita Desai's *Cry, the Peacock* and *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*

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ABSTRACT: This review paper examines Anita Desai's both novels which explore mental health issues and emotional isolation in post-colonial India through captivating pictures and reflective storytelling, demonstrate. Desai's talent for capturing female psychology, both volumes that look at the inner life of their female's focusing on disaffect mental turmoil, and identity in a male-dominated society. Desai's portrayal of Maya's psychological collapse caused by an unrequited relationship and other side introducing Sita, a woman juggling the demands of parenthood and self-reliance who finds solace on a secluded island to get away from the grind of family life.

Keywords: Feminism, Psychological Alienation, Isolation, Identity, Mental Turmoil

1 INTRODUCTION

Anita Desai is renowned for exploring the characters, particularly the female characters, and is regarded as one of the most influential writers of Indian-English literature. Mental distress, existential crises, and the limiting constraints of societal responsibility are common themes in her literature. Recognized for her analysis of feelings among people and psychology, Anita Desai is among the most crucial writers of Indian-English literature. Because of her capacity to compose intricate novels that delve completely into the human mind, Anita Desai has become a well-known figure in modern literature. In 1937, she was born in Massoorie, India. Critics have praised Anita Desai for her poignant exploration of topics such as cultural expulsion, the complexities of familial ties, and the search for identity in a rapidly changing world over her more than 50-year career (Shukla 2023).

This study explores the ways in which *Cry, the Peacock*, symbolizes feminine identity and internal disputes from a feminist standpoint (Priyanka 2022). This study looks at Desai's literary technique, characters, and issues to analyze her critique of traditional gender conventions. It reveals the gender discourse in Desai's literature and emphasizes women's struggle for liberation in colonial India by focusing on Maya's journey (Singh 2022).This examination focuses on the question, *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*, highlights the feminist contribution of Desai by showing how the book addresses gender, identity, and agency while offering perspectives on women's lives in a society that is evolving and carrying on the feminist discourse (Chhaya 2022).

1.1 *Feminism*

Feminism is a movement that opposes stereotypes and discrimination while advancing gender equality. Liberal feminism (legal rights), socialist feminism (gender and class), intersectional feminism (overlapping identities), radical feminism (patriarchy), and ecofeminism (tying gender and environmental issues together) are significant subtypes (Priyanka 2022).

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1.2 *Waves of feminism*

Suffrage was the first wave of feminism, rights and equality was the second, individuality and intersectionality were the third and online activism against gender stereotypes and abuse was the fourth. Each wave reflects changing social settings and builds on the innovations of the waves that came before it (Zubair *et al.* 2018).

1.3 *Sex and Gender*

Feminism challenges conventional gender norms and advocates for equality for all genders. It opposes sexism and patriarchy and advocates for equality and inclusion for women, non-binary, and transgender individuals in social, political, and cultural spheres (Ahmmed 2020; Masood *et al.* 2022).

1.4 *Purpose*

The purpose of analyze and assess the core concepts, narrative techniques, and psychological subtleties of Desai's portrayals of her female leads. The assessment aims to show how Desai uses these works to examine women's inner life, emotional isolation, and societal demands in a patriarchal environment (Kumar 2000).

1.5 *Scope*

The themes, storytelling style, and character growth are examined in this review. Highlighting psychological problems, emotional loneliness, and feminist criticism in the post-colonial Indian society through symbolism and imagery (Reza 2020).

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

This review examines Anita Desai's both novels, delve into the disaffection, mental turmoil, and identity crises of their female protagonists.

Table 1. Represents studies focus on Assessment of Anita Desai's *Cry, the Peacock* and *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*

S. No	Author/Title/Year	Findings	Limitations
1.	Chhaya, D. N. (2023). A psychoanalytical study and feminine sensibility in Anita Desai's *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*	It highlights the protagonist Sita's emotional turmoil and alienation, emphasizing her internal conflict between societal expectations and her quest for individuality.	Narrow focus on psychoanalysis and feminine sensibility. Limited discussion of secondary characters and broader sociocultural contexts.
2.	Priyanka, P. (2022). Ecofeminist landscapes in Anita Desai's *Cry, the Peacock* and *Where Shall We Go This Summer.*	It draws parallels between women's oppression and environmental exploitation, showcasing nature as a symbol of both refuge and struggle.	Narrowly focuses on ecofeminism, under exploring psychological and cultural dimensions. It neglects male characters' roles and broader sociopolitical contexts.

(*continued*)

Table 1. Continued

S. No	Author/Title/Year	Findings	Limitations
3.	Tripathi, P. (2022). A feminist perspective in the novels of Anita Desai.	It highlights protagonists resist traditional roles, reflecting themes of alienation, self-discovery.	It offers limited engagement with male characters and broader sociocultural contexts, narrowing the scope of its analysis.
4.	Singh, S. (2022). Feminism in the novels of Anita Desai's *Cry, the Peacock*.	It highlights Desai's exploration of gender inequality, emotional neglect, and the oppressive nature of traditional marriage roles, showcasing her feminist narrative approach.	It also overlooks broader contextual factors, such as cultural or historical influences, reducing the scope of its interpretation.
5.	Ahmmed, M. F. (2020). Female individuality and struggle in a patricentric society: A critical analysis of Anita Desai's *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*	The novel portrays emotional isolation and psychological conflict, reflecting the impact of a patriarchal society on women's mental health.	It does not explore broader socio-economic factors that contribute to gender oppression in the novel. Limited interdisciplinary perspectives from psychology or sociology.
6.	Zubair, H. B., Qureshi, A. H., and Shahani, H. T. (2018). A feminist analysis of Indian social culture and projection of women in Anita Desai's novels *Fire on the Mountain*, *Cry, the Peacock* and *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*	It highlights Desai's portrayal of women's struggles against patriarchal oppression and emotional neglect, reflecting Indian social culture's gender biases. The analysis emphasizes Desai's focus on female autonomy and identity.	It also lacks an in-depth exploration of male characters' roles and their influence on the protagonists.

3 THEMES

The key themes of both the volumes include:

3.1 *Psychological depth and alienation*

Both novels investigate into the psychological isolation of women. *Cry, the Peacock* focuses on Maya's increasing madness due to her emotional alienation, while *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*, explores Sita's dissatisfaction with her life and her escape to an island to avoid the reality of her present (Sathya, Varadharajan 2020).

3.2 *Marital discord*

Both works critically analyze the institution of marriage. Maya feels dissatisfied and abandoned by her husband, Gautama. Similarly, Sita struggles to relate to her husband and children (Jyothi 2023).

3.3 *Patriarchy and gender roles*

The constraints and emotional oppression that her female characters endure in a patriarchal society are highlighted by Desai. Both Sita and Maya perceive that traditional roles and expectations place limitations on them (Ahmmed 2020; Panda 2021).

3.4 *The search for identity and freedom*

The identity of the two primary protagonists is being contested. They attempt to physically (as in Sita's retreat to the island) or intellectually (as in Maya) escape social norms in order to attain personal freedom.

3.5 *Emotional isolation and loneliness*

Women are often lonely in unfair or unfulfilling relationships, and this is emphasized by the characters' emotional detachment from their surroundings and relatives (Vijayalakshmi and Dhanam 2022).

3.6 *Mental health and madness*

The psychological breakdown of her characters is shown by Desai, who highlights the fragile mental state caused by both internal conflict and external factors (Jha and Suri 2024).

4 CHARACTER ANALYSIS

The psychological and emotional complexity of Maya and Sita, the female characters in both novels as well as how their internal turmoil relates to more significant social issues, are the main topics of the character analysis.

4.1 *Maya (*Cry, the Peacock*)*

Sensitive and fragile because Maya feels trapped in a loveless marriage to her emotionally disconnected husband, Gautama. She experiences an existential crisis as a result of feeling increasingly alone after receiving a death prophecy. Her unmet yearning for love and connection ultimately leads to her psychological collapse and despair (Singh 2022).

4.2 *Sita (*Where Shall We Go This Summer?*)*

Middle-aged and frustrated, Sita feels trapped in her home and partner's routine. After feeling overburdened by her family responsibilities, she takes solace on a secluded island. She exhibits a lot of internal suffering, and her trip symbolizes women's struggle for independence, discovering oneself, and emancipation from traditional gender norms .The men who appear in both tales are antagonists to the female protagonists: Gautama in Cry and a Peacock and Raman in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* They stand for reason and norms of society and are practical and mentally cold. The guys stand in for the social framework that limits the women's freedom of expression and desire for independence (Chhaya 2022).

5 NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES

According to "A Review of Desai's use of narrative tropes is essential to appreciating the works' emotional richness and psychological depth.

5.1 *Stream of consciousness*

In both works, Desai gives readers intimate glimpses into the inner lives of Maya and Sita through the use of stream-of-consciousness narration. Visitors can feel their metaphysical

problems, worries, and wants as their psychological volatility is shown through emotional upheaval and shattered ideals (Shrivastwa 2022).

5.2 *Interior monologue*

Desai regularly uses internal dialogue to delve into her characters‘ innermost feelings and unstated fears. This strategy allows users to access Maya and Sita’s innermost thoughts, anxieties, and frustrations—emotions that are frequently hidden in their conversations with others. Through these monologues, the players’ deepest thoughts are revealed, increasing their closeness and vividness of their mental and emotional challenges (Mohammed 2022).

5.3 *Symbolism and imagery*

The psychological impact of Desai’s writings is enhanced by their profusion of symbolism. Maya’s suffering is reflected in Cry’s peacock and death omen. The island in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* represents Sita’s journey toward liberation and recovery (Priyanka 2022).

5.4 *Psychological realism*

Because Desai concentrates on the inner emotions lives of her characters instead of on outside events, psychological realism has a strong influence on her storytelling style. Since the primary focus of the novels is on the characters‘ memories, opinions, and mental disintegration, they are introspective and devoid of action. Desai paints an intriguing psychological portrait of women who struggle with both their personal aspirations and peer pressure by illustrating the intricate nature of their inner lives (Masood *et al*. 2022).

5.5 *Minimalist dialogue*

The lack of language in Desai’s works illustrates the characters’ emotional distance from one another and their incapacity to communicate with others. This sparse writing style highlights the protagonists‘ loneliness because their main problems are internal, unstated, and sometimes misunderstood by others. The lack of verbal communication adds to the feeling of emotional distance and alienation that permeates Maya and Sita’s experiences (Rosati 2022).

6 CULTURAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

According to ”A Review of Anita Desai’s cultural and social context both highlights the broader socioeconomic issues that Desai explores and has a big impact on Maya and Sita, the female characters.

6.1 *Patriarchal society*

This summer, where are we going? And the Peacock, Cry? depict a restrictive society where women are bound by social expectations. The mental struggles of Maya and Sita serve as an example of the more significant obstacles Indian women encounter as a result of strict gender norms and cultural pressure (Panda 2021).

6.2 *Marriage and domesticity*

In both volumes, Desai asserts that getting married enforces gender stereotypes and is restrictive. Maya and Sita, who suffer from emotional incarceration and lack of fulfillment,

represent the detrimental effects of conventional domesticity. Their resistance to societal norms is the cause of their psychological issues and desire to flee (Tripathi 2022).

6.3 *Post-colonial Indian society*

The struggle between traditional and modernization is explored in Desai's post-colonial Indian novels. Women's problems in a culture that is shifting and divided between conventional values and new forms of self-expression are reflected in her characters' struggle between societal conformity and personal distinctiveness.(Devi, Raj 2023).

6.4 *Mental health and social stigma*

Maya and Sita's behavioral challenges serve to emphasize the societal and cultural stigma associated with mental health in Indian society. Their emotional collapses are viewed through the prism of cultural optimism, which typically overlooks or misinterprets mental illness and depression. Desai reveals the disregard for women's mental health and demonstrates how social norms contribute to women's emotional decline (Jha and Suri 2024).

7 CONCLUSION

Consider the mental health issues that women encounter in patriarchal societies. Maya and Sita are used by Desai to examine issues of identity, emotional upheaval, and estrangement. Her work, which is metaphorical and free-flowing, captures their inner anguish and longing for autonomy. Because these works offer profound insights into women, Desai's contributions to Indian literature and feminist thought are indispensable.

Future studies can look at how Desai's later writings portrayed female consciousness and contrast them with those of contemporary Indian women writers. It might also examine the ways in which Desai's themes of identity, loneliness, and resistance continue to inform feminist writing, offering fresh perspectives on the psychological dimensions of womanhood in modern contexts.

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Fear as an aesthetic in Manipuri folklore: A cultural and philosophical exploration of folktales and rituals

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ABSTRACT: The paper deals with the aspects of fear which is used as an attribute of aesthetics within the context of Manipuri folklore. It focuses on the exploration of a well-established idea of western model of aesthetics where aesthetics mainly resembles beauty or things of beauty which is dissected with a new lens of understanding aesthetics using fear as a driving force within the context of Manipuri folklore. Analyzing the tradition of oral narratives mainly folktales and practices of rituals like *Lai Haraoba* (pleasing the gods), a descriptive analysis is employed with more emphasis on qualitative approach to understand the dynamics between fear and the evolution of aesthetics in Manipuri folklore. This paper investigates how fear is evoked, represented and experienced in Manipuri story telling with an in-depth approach on two folktales in particular i.e. *Tapta* and *Lai Khutsangbi* and also the elements of *Lai Haraoba*. A close-knit survey was conducted to understand how the common folks in Manipur perceived fear in accordance with Stephens King's type of fear. The paper hopes to understand the intricate relationship between Fear and aesthetics and also aims to contribute to the broader discourse on aesthetics, folklore, and indigenous knowledge systems, while also highlighting a significant gap in scholarly attention to Northeast Indian cultural expressions.

Keywords: Fear, Aesthetics, Manipuri Folklore

1 INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been a growing academic interest in how cultural expressions shape emotional and philosophical experiences. Within this discourse, Manipuri folklore offers a new lens in exploring how fear functions not only as emotion or a concept of morality, but as a tool for aesthetic experience which is instilled in storytelling, ritual practice and performance. In the folklore of Manipur, fear is a common trope and it often emerges through ambiguity, suggestion, and symbolic language. In the popular Manipuri folktale *Tapta*, a child's imagination is haunted by an invented entity where the identity of the entity is never revealed but is kept as an anchor throughout the whole story serving as both a narrative aesthetic style and ambiguity. Also, in the context of *Lai Khutsangbi*, where a feminine demon, who is a mythical shapeshifter and uses fear and uncertainty to terrorize a whole village without ever revealing the origin or the purpose for which the terror is inflicted. The narrative structure engages listeners in a deeper psychological and spiritual experience which is derived from fear, ambiguity and the unknown. This oral tradition which is passed down from generations has created a cultural identity through a collective memory process.

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The use of the elements of fear in Manipuri folklore is not confined to narrative structure alone. It is very much integrated into the ritual and ceremonial practices especially those performed during cultural ceremonies like *Lai Haraoba* (which can be literally translated to "The pleasing of the gods" or "Happiness of the gods"). *Lai Haraoba* represents the heart of Manipuri culture especially to the Meitei/Meetei people of Manipur (Saroj N. Arambam 1997). The ceremony deals heavily with the belief that Gods (Lais) and people are connected eternally.

Through masks, rhythmic movement, altered vocal tones, and spatial choreography, fear becomes a performative and symbolic language—shaping spiritual experience and reinforcing communal identity (Kersenboom 1995; Schechner 2002). These aesthetic choices reflect deeper indigenous knowledge systems and a sense of collective identity of experience, where fear is not merely a threat but a transformative encounter with the unknown, the sacred, and the metaphysical. Fear in Manipuri culture is not monolithic. Drawing on Stephen King's (1981) typology, fear can be classified into three categories: the *gross-out* (physical horror), *horror* (unnatural or otherworldly terror), and *terror* (psychological, anticipatory dread).

Manipuri folklore leans heavily on the last—terror, the fear of what may happen or what cannot be explained. To understand how these forms of fear are distributed and perceived within a modern Manipuri context, a preliminary Google Form-based survey was conducted using adapted items from the Fear Survey Schedule (FSS-III), a psychometric tool that categorizes fears across physical, social, and symbolic domains (Wolpe and Lang 1964). The survey aimed to classify types of fear most resonant with Manipuri audiences. The results, though exploratory, confirmed a dominant presence of symbolic and anticipatory fears, aligning closely with the folkloric use of ambiguity and transformation. Theoretically, this paper draws from Edmund Burke's concept of the sublime, where fear and beauty intertwine to produce awe (Burke 1757/2008), and Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection, where fear arises from confronting what disturbs identity and order (Kristeva 1982). Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology helps situate fear as a lived, bodily experience (Merleau-Ponty 1962), while Victor Turner's notion of liminality and ritual transformation (Turner 1969), alongside Richard Schechner's performance theory (2002), illuminates the structure of fear within communal enactment. Despite its prevalence in Manipuri cultural expressions, the aesthetic function of fear remains understudied, with existing literature focusing predominantly on the moral, historical, or anthropological elements of folktales (Devi 2011; Sharma 2015). This paper addresses that gap by asking: *How is fear aesthetically constructed in Manipuri folklore? What role does it play in shaping identity, spiritual consciousness, and cultural memory?* It argues that fear, when understood as aesthetic, serves not just to disturb or moralize, but to connect listeners with a deeper, symbolic world beyond rational comprehension.

1.1 *Problem statement*

The perception of fear has always been dealt within a close proximity of a psychological reaction or a common response to an external or internal stimuli. The connection between fear and aesthetics with regards to Manipuri folklore have not been studied and there are many research gaps where an intensive discourse is required. Pre-existing literature in Manipuri folklore often tends to put more emphasis on the historical and mythological aspects and neglects the overall evolution that fear has had on the shaping of aesthetical design primarily in regard with rituals and oral traditions. This paper tackles on the notion where fear is intentionally constructed through narrative ambiguity and is deployed through various means and methods especially in common rituals and also in various folk tales.

1.2 *Aim of the paper*

The main goal of this paper is to explore the concept of fear in Manipuri folklore not only as an emotion but as a constructive tool for aesthetic and beauty. Investigation has been done

with observation of ritualistic performances especially Lai Haraoba where symbolic identity of God and transcendentalism beyond the natural realm which, subjected to the common masses of Manipuri people is a statement of induced fear where in the statement is justified with accordance to the reaction of the common population during said rituals. Furthermore, folktales like Tapta and Lai Khutshangbi have been studied in detail to prove the use of ambiguity in the oral narrative structure of Manipur where Fear acts as a style of narrative beauty in itself.

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the research are as follows:

(1) Examine the relationship between fear and aesthetics in Manipuri Folklore.
(2) To explore the concept of ambiguity as a narrative style in folktales such as Tapta and Lai Khutsnagbi.
(3) To investigate the aesthetic use of fear in ritual performances
(4) To classify and interpret dominant types of fear experienced by contemporary Manipuri audiences using adapted items from the Fear Survey Schedule (FSS-III), supported by data from a Google Form-based survey.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative, interdisciplinary approach grounded in folklore studies and aesthetic philosophy. The research design integrates textual analysis from secondary sources to understand how fear can be used as an aesthetic element. The paper also includes ethnographic observation of rituals and ceremonial aspects of *Lai Haraoba* through documented video recordings available online and textual analysis of books related to *Lai Haraoba*. A survey-based categorization via Google Form was conducted to understand how fear is perceived by the local population. Secondary sources of data were used for the analysis of the folktales *Tapta* and *Lai Khutsangbi*. All secondary data were collected from books, academic articles, local newspapers, translated folktales, and online journals. The primary data consists of responses from the fear perception survey, which was designed to capture local interpretations and emotional responses to folkloric elements of fear. The survey is based on FSS (Fear survey schedule) with questionnaires modified to align with the cultural context and thematic focus of the research.

The analysis and discussions have been done in two parts: Analysis of the Folktales *Tapta* and *Lai Khutsangbi* to understand the elements of fear in oral narratives and analysis of the rituals and ceremony of *Lai Haraoba.*

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As similar research have not been done in the context of fear as an aesthetic in Manipuri folklore the paper mainly focuses on my interpretation of the narrative structure of *Tapta* and *Lai Khutsangbi* and theoretical framework is based on the arguments of weather fear can be a precursor for the evolution of aesthetics in Manipuri folklore.

4.1 *Analysis of folktales Tapta and Lai Khutsangbi.*

To understand the narrative structure of *Tapta* and *Lai Khutsangbi*, various translated versions were examined. As oral tales passed down through generations, the details often differ,

but the central themes remain consistent. In *Tapta*, a mother tries to calm her crying child with frightening stories, all of which fail—until she invents *Tapta*, a mysterious entity. As Wari (2017) notes, the idea comes from the sound of raindrops—*tap, tap, tap*—which the mother uses to warn the child: "That's the sound of *Tapta* coming to get you!" The child, frightened by this unknown entity, finally stops crying. The story's power lies in its ambiguity: neither the mother nor the listener knows what *Tapta* is. Yet according to the story, even a tiger and a thief, both eavesdropping, are terrified, highlighting how fear of the unknown drives the story structure and often becomes the aesthetic of the narrative.

Similarly in the context of *Lai Khutsangbi*, Lai which translates literally to God and *Khutsangbi* meaning Long Hands is a story about a demoness who eats livestocks and babies and is feared among the villagers. The origin of the demoness is unclear. Rubani Yumkhaibam (2017) describes *Lai Khutsangbi* as a terrifying figure associated with cannibalism and a grotesque appearance—tall, with unusually long hands, unkempt hair, and eerie laughter. She is said to abduct children, kill animals, and possess an insatiable hunger for human flesh, posing a constant threat to women and children in the village.

The recurring use of fear in these folktales is not merely thematic but functions as a narrative device that shapes a distinct aesthetic. This aesthetic aligns with Edmund Burke's (1757/1990) concept of the sublime, where terror becomes a source of awe and imaginative engagement, and Julia Kristeva's (1982) theory of abjection, wherein the horrifying and repulsive are central to defining boundaries of the self and the other.

4.2 *Analysis of Lai Haraoba (Pleasing of the gods) ceremony and rituals*

According to Saroj Nalini Parratt (1997), *Lai Haraoba* literally means 'pleasing of the gods,' and the essence of the rituals lies in invoking the Lais (deities) and performing ceremonies that bring them joy and satisfaction. Lai Haraoba can be grouped broadly into four sections (Parratt 1997). They are

(1) The Laibou(birth) cycle consists of a dance sequence depicting creation of life, an invitation to sexual congress.
(2) The Panthoibi cycle, a series of lyrics largely related to fertility
(3) A third cycle, performed beneath a canopy consisting of complex dance portraying the creation of the universe
(4) The last rite, depicting oneness of the universe, consists of dance and lyrics.

Since the overall context is about fear I would be focusing more on the elements of Lai Haraoba also known as Lai Tongba, which can happen at any moment during the four sections and are often referred to as the possession by the gods. Possession can occur in any individual, but it predominantly affects females. The element of fear is a necessary compulsion—used both to portray the transcendental nature of the possessed and to evoke awe and reverence, especially among believers. Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (1962) phenomenology helps situate fear as a lived, embodied experience, emphasizing how the body becomes a medium through which spiritual and emotional realities are encountered. It may be assumed that the Meetei society in Manipur finds solace from individuals who are possessed. Believers who are deprived of happiness both materially and spiritually are in touch with them as they gratify their spiritual wants (Laishram 2016).

Ethnographic observations revealed how fear is not only narrated in folktales but also embodied through dance, lyrics, masks, and spatial staging. Rituals are performed with altered voice, asymmetrical choreography, and symbolic gestures that convey the depiction of Lai (God) or otherworldliness. The spatial layout of performance—often circular or spiraled—enhances disorientation and metaphysical immersion (Kersenboom 1995; Schechner 2002). This performative aesthetics enact Turner's (1969) concept of liminality, where fear becomes a shared, transitional experience that binds the community and disrupts

the mundane. Participants reported a felt "presence" during masked dances, suggesting that performance acts as a ritual technology for channeling fear into spiritual consciousness.

4.3 *Categorization of fear based on the survey result*

A Google Form-based survey using an adapted version of the Fear Survey Schedule-III (FSS-III) was distributed to Manipuri respondents aged 18–35. Among which 17 individuals responded to the survey. The survey is aimed at categorizing the types of fear with folktale themes and ritual performances. Participants rated 52 fear-related items across categories derived from Stephen King's (1981) typology—gross-out, horror, and terror.

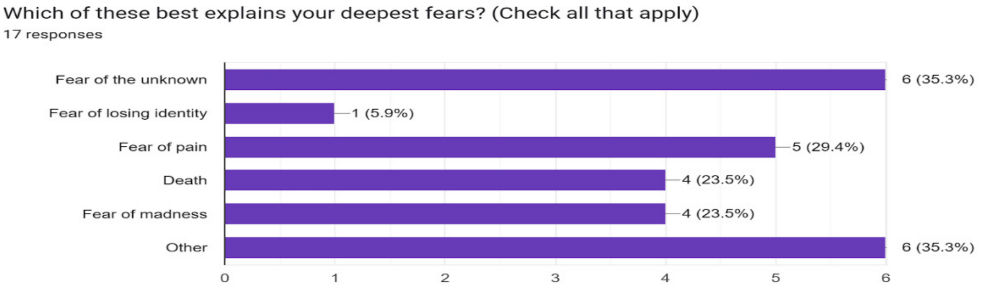


Table representing the subjective perception of fear. (Above) Dominant Fear Categories Identified in Respondents (N = 52)

Fear Type	Frequency (%)	Description
Terror	68%	Anticipatory, psychological fear
Horror	21%	Supernatural or unnatural entities
Gross-Out	11%	Physical disgust (e.g., decay, deformity)

The results revealed terror as the most dominant category, followed by horror and gross-out. This aligns with the folkloric structure of Manipuri narratives, where fear arises not from explicit violence but from ambiguity and anticipation.

These findings support King's (1981) assertion that "terror is the finest emotion," as it engages the imagination before the actual reveal. They also affirm Wolpe and Lang's (1964) original FSS categorization, where symbolic and anticipatory fears were rated more distressing than direct threats.

4.4 *Fear as a cultural and aesthetic construct*

The integration of fear into daily life and ideology was also evident in how respondents discussed their childhood, moral behavior, and religious beliefs. Fear was frequently cited as a moral regulator and as part of aesthetic sensibility—what is considered "beautiful" or "moving" often includes an element of dread, eeriness, or symbolic death. These findings align with Burke's (1757/2008) concept of the sublime, where beauty is enhanced by the presence of overwhelming or terrifying forces.

In this sense, fear is not an anomaly in Manipuri culture—it is foundational. It appears in art, architecture, music, and even in social etiquette. Ritual silence, avoidance of certain spaces, and symbolic behavior (like not naming spirits aloud) suggest a deeply embedded aesthetic ideology that sees fear as a mode of reverence and beauty.

5 CONCLUSION

Although fear is still a universal emotion, the identity developed with fear as an aesthetical art form embedded in the long history of Manipuri folklore is studied in depth in this paper. Furthermore, the study revealed that no previous research has been done linking fear as an aesthetic tool and studied as part of the overall aesthetic appeal in Manipuri folklore. After observing many ritualistic performances and analyzing the folktales we can conclude fear is a dynamic identity of aesthetical morphology in Manipuri folklore. Furthermore, the study revealed that the perception of fear induced from such ritualistic context is collective in nature. The costumes, the movements, the narrative style and the use of ambiguity heavily influences the overall output of aesthetics in Manipuri folklore. The nature of ambiguity is very much stretched out in almost every major narrative history which also opens up a foundational door to further research in the context of fear as a driving force in the adaptation of certain customs and traditions in Manipur. The survey revealed fear as a thematic type pertaining closely to the concept of terror and ambiguity. Fear has become a symbolic style in the overall context and has deeply planted itself in the rise of a unique style of aesthetic in Manipur.

The overall findings revealed the following:

- Terror and ambiguity employed as a tool for narrative structure in Manipuri folktales.
- Folktales such as *Tapta* and *Lai Khutsangbi* rely on ambiguity, silence, and symbolic transformation to provoke a lingering sense of dread.
- Rituals like Lai Haraoba use masks, movement, and spatial aesthetics to perform fear as a spiritual encounter, echoing Turner's (1969) concept of liminality.

The paper aims to contribute in the overall discourse of understanding aesthetics through a new lens in Manipuri folklore where rather than focusing on historical, mythical and theological concepts it tries to bridge the gap between fear and the inevitable changes and a collective identity it has throughout the influence of folklore in Manipuri society.

6 FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Further research could:

- Examine the impact of digital storytelling and horror-based media on the transformation of traditional fear narratives in contemporary Manipuri society.
- Expand the Fear Survey to larger populations and age groups to measure generational shifts in fear perception within folk contexts.

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The forest, the palace, and the sky: A study of emotional cartography in Manipuri folktales

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ABSTRACT: This study focuses on Manipuri folktales to explore the concept of emotional cartography. Emotional cartography is defined as the practice of mapping subjective feelings onto geographical or conceptual spaces. The selected folktales are "The Bird Langmeiton" (Hornbill) and "The Demon Queen." The research focuses on the movement of the characters from one environment to another. These space changes reflect the characters' inner struggles and personal growth. The places can be either full of dangers or hope. Their journey from silent suffering to freedom shows real emotions like pain, strength, and the desire to be free. The study also shows how folktales reflect human experiences, social challenges, and the deep desire for self-growth and independence.

Keywords: Autonomy, Emotional Cartography, Spatial Dynamics

1 INTRODUCTION

People's experiences and situations determine emotions like happiness, sadness, anger, or fear. Emotions help people connect and empathize with others. Emotions are also highly dependent on the physical spaces. The environment, such as school, home, hospital, or park, can create different emotional responses. A classroom may bring confidence to one student while it can create fear in another. These reactions come from experiences, memories, and each space's aura and meaning to different individuals. Therefore, the same space can give different emotions to different people.

Folktales reflect the collective values, beliefs, and traditions of the people who share them. They convey good, evil, resilience, justice, and personal transformation themes. These provide a foundation for understanding individual and collective human experiences. The settings of the folktales are mostly in forests, rivers, mountains, or small villages. Strange incidents generally happen in the forest in most folktales. The characters may get lost and face supernatural situations in the forest. A mountain can be a lonely place or where a character witnesses special events. Rivers can be places of change or cleanse ominous feelings. Some stories take place in houses, huts, or palaces. A small hut can show a simple life, whereas a big palace can show power or sometimes unfair rules. Temples or other holy places also appear in stories. These show respect or fear of the divine. The setting often changes as the story moves on. When the characters grow or learn something, the place around them may change too. The characters' emotional journeys in the folktales highlight the struggles people face in their daily lives. The characters typically undergo significant emotional transitions. This can range from fear, sadness, and oppression to empowerment, joy, and liberation. The emotional landscapes portrayed in folktales evolve in response to the physical and social spaces the characters inhabit. This, further, reflects the internal struggles,

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growth, and eventual resolution that the protagonists experience. Emotional cartography maps people's subjective feelings, moods, or physiological responses onto physical or conceptual spaces. It goes beyond traditional geography by capturing the intangible, personal experience, such as comfort, anxiety, nostalgia, or excitement, on top of a standard map. This study focuses on Manipuri folktales to demonstrate how Emotional Cartography can uncover human psychology, societal dynamics, and universal quests for empowerment. Manipur is one of the states in northeastern India. Manipuri folktales depict the relationship between humans, nature, and supernatural beings. This emphasizes the interconnectedness of all living beings and the environment. The tales are rich in symbolism and reflect the values, ethics, and beliefs of Manipuri society. Manipuri folktales explore the themes of transformation, moral integrity, and the sacredness of the environment. The tales also often feature characters who interact with forests, rivers, and animals in ways that reflect a deep ecological consciousness.

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

(1) To explore the relationship between spatial environments and emotional states in Manipuri folktales
(2) To uncover the psychological meanings embedded in the characters' emotional experiences
(3) To analyze how homes, forests, courtyards, and the sky symbolize oppression, fear, liberation, and empowerment
(4) To study the characters' consciousness and trace their transformation from emotional suppression to self-realization and emotional freedom

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a qualitative analytical approach, using Emotional Cartography as the core framework. "The Bird Langmeiton" (Hornbill) and "The Demon Queen" are the selected Manipuri folktales for this study. There is a detailed textual analysis to identify critical emotional transitions experienced by the protagonists. Emotional Cartography systematically maps the characters' subjective feelings onto their physical spaces.

4 THE BIRD LANGMEITON(HORNBILL)

This folktale is about a kind and hardworking girl named Heiyainu, who loses her mother at a young age. After her father remarries, Heiyainu is left in the care of her cruel stepmother, who mistreats her daily. Despite the harsh treatment, Heiyainu lovingly takes care of her baby stepbrother and helps with all the household chores. One day, after a severe beating by her stepmother, Heiyainu cries out to her deceased mother. Her mother appears as a dove and comforts her in a dream, telling her to join the hornbill, led by the King of Birds. Following her mother's guidance, Heiyainu secretly gathers feathers from the flock of hornbills and sews them into a cloak. One day, she transforms into a bird with the help of a magic ring and flies away with the flock, leaving behind her crying younger brother. Her father later learns the truth about her suffering and is filled with sorrow. When he calls out to her the next day, Heiyainu briefly returns to speak with him in bird form. Though heartbroken, she explains she cannot stay and must live with the birds. In the end, she flies away forever, leaving her father in deep grief.

4.1 *Analysis*

Heiyainu could not find love and care in her home because of the abuse from her stepmother. She was tortured mentally and physically by her stepmother. Home is the starting point of

Heiyainu's journey to free herself from oppression. Generally, home connotes comfort, love, joy, etc. However, in Heiyainu's case, home symbolizes a place of control, fear, and powerlessness. She became emotionally suppressed, and there was no one to help her overcome her sorrow. However, the folktale quickly introduces places where the protagonist can escape from the suffocation of home life. She enjoys bathing in a pond near her home with her friends. The pond offered her relief, and she felt calm and peaceful. Therefore, this space differs significantly from the environment of her home. The pond allows Heiyainu to experience freedom, joy, and companionship. She could not feel such emotions in her home. Therefore, the pond becomes a safe space for Heiyainu. Unfortunately, the stepmother found her bathing in the pond and was angry when she found Heiyainu smiling and enjoying herself with her friends.

With the appearance of the stepmother, the pond transforms from a site of joy to public humiliation and shame. The stepmother's actions of beating her stepdaughter in front of her friends create a sudden emotional shift. The pond becomes a space of vulnerability. She was beaten brutally and verbally abused by her stepmother. This is an important landscape in the emotional map of Heiyainu's life as she was held captive in her home by her stepmother. Her emotional change happens in the courtyard scene when she calls her mother to rescue her. After being beaten by her stepmother, she runs to the courtyard and cries out to her deceased mother. She seeks comfort and connection that she no longer finds in her human relationships. The emotional cartography of the courtyard represents the beginning of Heiyainu's journey into liberation. Therefore, she saw her mother in her dream, and she connected with her mother's spirit. She informed her that she could join the flock of birds and be freed from her sufferings. Therefore, the courtyard becomes a sacred space for Heiyainu. She was able to transcend the boundaries between life, death, human, and spirit. The courtyard represents the protagonist's space to release grief. She became emotionally strong to liberate herself from the violent treatment of her stepmother. This shows transitions from a site of emotional repression to one of emotional transcendence.

The following day, after Heiyainu saw her mother in the dream, the hornbills began dropping feathers in the courtyard and the field. This offers comfort and strength to continue fighting against the stepmother.

Therefore, she became hopeful, and she began to gather the feathers to prepare for her transformation into a bird. It can be said that the gathering of the feathers represents her lost strength and confidence in her attempt to be freed. She is filled with anticipation and hope. The act of stitching feathers represents Heiyainu's growing sense of courage. The act of stitching each feather onto her body shows that she has gained the courage to leave the toxic environment of her home. She is no longer a victim of her stepmother's cruelty, but someone who actively focuses on liberation. The field, in this context, represents a space of self-determination. It is a place where Heiyainu can imagine a life beyond the confinement of her stepmother. The emotional cartography of the field shows it as a place of emotional empowerment. Finally, she can be positive about her life, and she has transformed into a strong person. The tale then moves on to the sky. The sky becomes the space of emotional liberation for Heiyainu. The sky, unlike the other spaces, represents freedom and transcendence. It is the beginning of Heiyainu's emotional journey, where she transcends the earthly confines of her life. She enters a space of boundless possibility. She achieves emotional liberation by joining the birds. Unfortunately, she must sacrifice her bond with her father and brother, whom she loves dearly. The home, later, becomes a lonely and sad space for her brother and father with her departure. Therefore, the analysis has shown that the same space can create different feelings and emotions in different people.

5 THE DEMON QUEEN

In this folktale, a king who, after losing his queen, unknowingly marries a demoness disguised as a beautiful woman. She pretends to love the king's two young sons but secretly

plans to eat them. One day, she takes the princes to her mother's house in the forest, who is also a demoness and leaves them there with the intention that her mother will eat them. However, the clever princes overhear their plan and win the old demons' trust by treating her kindly. They ask her to show them the magic forest, where she reveals powerful plants such as the one that causes floods, one that summons leeches and can start a fire. The younger prince secretly collects a leaf from each. Later, the old demoness chases them when they escape, but the princes use the magic leaves to stop her. Finally, she is burned to ashes. When the princes return to the palace and tell their father everything, the demon queen tries to attack them in her proper form, but the king's soldiers kill her. The king then decides never to marry again and lives happily with his sons.

5.1 *Analysis*

In this tale, there is a connection between the emotions of the characters and the physical spaces they occupy. The tale starts in the palace, moves into the forest, and ends with the destruction of the demon in the palace. The tale begins with the description of the king's pain in losing his queen and leaving their young princes. Therefore, the palace was a place of loss and emptiness. However, it soon shifted into a place of happiness and love for the king with his marriage to a beautiful damsel he met in the forest. However, the king was unaware that his new queen was a demon in disguise as a human. This reflects that the palace represents a place of deceit and emotional instability. The palace becomes a site of manipulation and emotional repression. The new queen pretends to have affection for the princes. However, her instincts and desires differ significantly. She wants to devour them. Therefore, the palace becomes a dangerous and frightening place for the princes. The differences in outward appearances and inner realities are reflected in the emotional cartography. The demon queen is in a space where she is in control because she has succeeded in gaining the king's trust. The king also feels hopeful in the presence of her new queen. In the case of these scenarios, the palace represents different emotions according to different characters.

The queen was not able to harm the princes because of the protection given by the king. So, she comes up with an evil plan to send them far away from the palace. Therefore, the queen persuades the king to allow the princes to visit her mother who resides in the forest. This demonstrates that the emotional tension changes from the secret dangers in the palace to the open threat in the forest. The forest can be considered a mysterious place. The emotions expressed in the forest can vary depending on the individual. It can be a blissful place or a scary space. In this tale, the demons' plan to devour the princes takes place in the forest. She wanted to fulfill her objective with the help of her mother. She believes that she will successfully fulfill her wish to kill the princes. Therefore, the environment changes from suppressed fear to danger as the princes travel from the palace to the forest.

The princes must rely on each other to survive in the forest since they are far away from their father's protection. The demon queen's mother did not hide her intentions of eating the princes. She expressed her desires to the princes as soon as they arrived. She makes it clear that she intends to devour the princes. The old demon views the forest as a place of power where she can act without worrying about consequences. She knew that there would be no one to protect the two young princes in the forest. She was confident that she would win against them. However, the princes observed the demon's mother closely and acted wisely. They pretended to be helpless and gained her trust. When she mentioned the magic leaves, they let her teach them about the strength of such leaves. Later, she took the princes to the deeper area of the forest to eat them. However, as they traveled, the princes gathered the magic leaves and used them against the demon. Therefore, empowerment replaces fear in the forest's emotional cartography. The forest is transformed by the princes from a dangerous area into a place of strategy and survival. They feel scared but they defeat the demon. Since the princes must outrun the demon to survive, the forest turns into a place of fear and pursuit. However, they manage to survive the dangerous situation. This folktale's emotional

cartography illustrates the power reversal in which the princes take advantage of their surroundings. The princes triumphantly make their way back to the palace. The emotional cartography of the palace is changed, turning it into a place of revelation and truth. The palace turns into a place of justice as the princes narrate their journey. The king finally realized the danger and acted quickly. The queen's identity as a demon was eventually exposed. The demon committed a violent act during her last assault on the princes, and she was promptly put to death. As a result, tension gives way to resolution in the palace's emotional landscape. In a flash, the guards cut the demon into pieces. The kingdom is at peace again as a result. The king chooses to live contentedly with his sons and refrains from getting married again at the end of the folktale. The palace, where the story's emotional journey began, turns into a haven of stability and contentment.

6 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study shows that folktales' representations of spatial-emotional experiences mirror psychological trends and emotional challenges that people face daily. Toxic relationships can make a home feel confined, but a natural environment can provide peace, time for introspection, or the strength to pursue change. Many people suffer from psychological confinement and emotional repression because of oppressive environments, family dynamics, or social pressures. In addition to preventing someone from freely expressing themselves, a controlling environment at work or home can cause anxiety, low self-esteem, and mental stress. However, settings that provide emotional safety and independence, like therapeutic settings, encouraging friendships, or creative spaces, may help people find their inner strength, recover from trauma, and progress toward self-empowerment. Many modern experiences are like the path from oppression to emotional self-awareness and autonomy. Furthermore, the emotional shifts observed in the examination of the chosen folktales are comparable to the process of emotional resistance or recovery that occurs when people contest the constraints placed upon them. This could entail reclaiming cultural or personal identity in the face of marginalization, establishing boundaries in a toxic family, recovering from grief, or ending an abusive relationship.

7 CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that emotional cartography is a useful method for demonstrating the relationship between emotions and physical spaces. The analysis of the selected Manipuri folktales reveals that the home, forest, and the sky influence the emotional states of the characters. These spaces represent freedom, empowerment, fear, and oppression. The study also concludes that the emotional journeys of the characters reflect actual experiences. The characters move from emotional suppression to self-awareness and personal growth.

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Themes of mental trauma, isolation and abandonment in Chitra Banerjee's *The Palace of Illusions*

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ABSTRACT: This paper explores the theme of mental trauma in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novel *The Palace of Illusions*, a feminist reimagining of the Indian epic *Mahabharata* from the perspective of Draupadi, here renamed Panchaali. Unlike traditional portrayals that emphasize her mythic or political significance, Divakaruni foregrounds Panchaali's emotional and psychological struggles. Drawing from trauma theory and feminist psychoanalysis, this study examines how Panchaali's identity is fragmented through systemic oppression, public humiliation, coerced relationships, and survivor's guilt.

Her trauma is shown to be cumulative and embedded in social structures that silence women, normalize suffering, and deny moral agency. The paper further compares Panchaali's experience to those of other literary and mythological women—such as Sita, Helen of Troy, Medea, and Sethe—highlighting how narratives of female pain are consistently politicized, aestheticized, or erased across traditions.

Ultimately, *The Palace of Illusions* functions as both a literary healing and an act of feminist resistance. Panchaali's voice becomes a vehicle through which silenced pain is made visible, dignified, and narratively restored. Her story reminds us that mythic heroines, like modern survivors, deserve not just justice—but understanding.

1 INTRODUCTION

In the canon of Indian mythology, Draupadi is both revered and reviled—celebrated as a fiery queen and condemned for triggering a catastrophic war. Traditional interpretations of the *Mahabharata* often reduce her to a symbol: of female strength, sacrifice, and dishonor. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* reclaims this complex figure by giving her a first-person narrative voice and psychological depth. The novel becomes a meditation on mental trauma, showing how violence, betrayal, and grief accumulate within the psyche of a woman rendered both central and voiceless in patriarchal mythology.

Modern trauma theory helps articulate what Panchaali endures across her life. Judith Herman defines trauma as "an affliction of the powerless," emphasizing its capacity to "shatter the victim's sense of self, trust, and safety" (Herman 33). Panchaali's trauma is rooted not in a singular event, but in a series of betrayals and silences that begin in her childhood and culminate in her public disrobing in the court of Hastinapur.

This paper analyzes Panchaali's mental trauma through eight key lenses: identity formation, public humiliation, guilt and grief, the quest for revenge, literary parallels, and modern social relevance. It places her journey within the framework of complex trauma and argues that *The Palace of Illusions* functions both as feminist re-visioning and as a vital contribution

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to trauma literature. By listening to Panchaali's voice, we bear witness to the silent catastrophes so often endured—and ignored—by women throughout history.

2 TRAUMA AND IDENTITY FORMATION

In *The Palace of Illusions*, Divakaruni presents Panchaali not as a static mythic icon but as a woman caught in the process of self-construction and self-destruction. From the moment of her birth, Panchaali is denied agency over her identity. She is born not of a mother but from fire—summoned by King Drupad to avenge his insult. Her existence, therefore, is symbolic before it is personal: she is a daughter of vengeance, not of affection. This absence of maternal bonding and early objectification introduces the first layer of psychological trauma. As Judith Herman explains, trauma often begins in childhood, especially when "attachment is disrupted and the child's value is measured by usefulness rather than love" (Herman 59). Panchaali is desired for what she represents, not for who she is.

Throughout the novel, Panchaali's identity is fragmented by social roles she does not choose. She is a daughter, a political bride, a queen, a pawn, and eventually, a widow. Most destabilizing is her forced polyandrous marriage to the five Pandava brothers. She does not marry for love, nor with agency; instead, she is distributed like property—her body and time divided among five men according to a rota. This coerced arrangement not only silences her desires but fractures her sense of self. As Laura Brown argues in her feminist analysis of trauma, "When the self is defined by others and repeatedly split to serve social order, internal fragmentation becomes a survival strategy" (Brown 106). Panchaali survives by adapting to these roles, but never without internal dissonance.

Divakaruni's use of the first-person narrative allows us access to Panchaali's inner life, and what we see is not confidence but contradiction. She questions her choices, yearns for forbidden love (with Karna), resents her duties, and feels guilty for desiring individuality. Her voice is full of self-reproach and uncertainty. She reflects: "I was not the woman I had imagined myself to be. I was not wise. I was not just" (Divakaruni 247).

Symbolism also plays a crucial role in shaping Panchaali's identity and trauma. *The Palace of Illusions*—her grand, magical home—is a metaphor for the fragile self she builds amid chaos. Itis both dream and trap, security and spectacle. The palace dazzles, confuses, and eventually incites Duryodhana's envy, leading to her greatest violation. In psychoanalytic terms, the palace can be viewed as the ego's idealized self-image—grand yet vulnerable. When the palace is destroyed, so too is Panchaali's illusion of control.

Her relationships offer no safe haven. Though she shares complex bonds with her husbands, none fully see or understand her. Even her beloved Arjun fails her emotionally, marrying Subhadra without informing Panchaali.

Nevertheless, Panchaali is not merely passive. She seeks knowledge, questions the gods, argues with sages, and demands respect. Her relationship with Krishna offers emotional refuge and a sense of divine validation. In trauma recovery, Herman notes, "Survivors need to reconstruct the sense of being seen and known" (Herman 213). Krishna, as a spiritual witness, offers Panchaali this recognition.

Thus, Panchaali's trauma is not simply a response to individual acts of violence; it is embedded in the very architecture of her identity.

3 THE TRAUMA OF PUBLIC HUMILIATION

The most defining—and devastating—moment of Panchaali's life occurs in the Kaurava court during the infamous dice game. She is wagered by her husbands, dragged by the hair into the royal hall, and nearly disrobed before a jeering assembly of kings, elders, and sages. In Divakaruni's retelling, this event is no longer just a turning point in the *Mahabharata*—it

is the psychological crucible of Panchaali's trauma. Rendered in vivid, first-person prose, the scene lays bare the shame, helplessness, and existential fragmentation that define public humiliation as a form of psychic violence.

What makes the humiliation even more harrowing is its ritualistic setting. The court is a sacred space, and its participants include revered figures such as Bhishma, Drona, and Vidura. Their inaction reifies Panchaali's disposability. She is not treated as a queen, wife, or individual, but as a tool in a power struggle between men. Cathy Caruth emphasizes that trauma often resists full comprehension because it "overwhelms the mind's ability to process" (Caruth 4). Panchaali's narration of the disrobing is marked by dissociation: "I was two women—one trembling and ashamed, the other cold and furious, daring them to continue" (Divakaruni 154). This duality illustrates a classic trauma response—splitting or disidentification, where the mind protects itself by distancing from the body.

Divakaruni's choice to render this scene in Panchaali's voice is radical. In Vyasa's *Mahabharata*, the incident is witnessed from multiple male perspectives and framed as a political insult to the Pandavas. In *The Palace of Illusions*, it is emotional devastation. Panchaali is not merely a trigger for war; she is a human being enduring the collapse of self in front of an unfeeling crowd.

Her shame is not hers alone; it is forced upon her.

The scene also exposes the double standards of gendered dharma. While the male warriors debate the legality of staking a wife in a gamble, no one considers Panchaali's consent, or her pain. When she demands an answer—"Whom did Yudhishthir lose first, himself or me?" (Divakaruni 153)—she asserts her moral and intellectual agency. This moment of resistance is powerful, yet tragic. It shows her grasping for logic in a space where only power is respected.

Even Krishna's intervention—when her sari miraculously extends endlessly—is spiritual rather than systemic. Her dignity is preserved, but her trauma is not healed. She later reflects, "I had been saved, but not redeemed" (Divakaruni 156). The event continues to haunt her, shaping her quest for revenge, her grief for her children, and her perception of justice.

In trauma studies, such events are often referred to as "central traumas"—moments so profound they fragment the narrative of the self and must be revisited repeatedly to make sense of them (Herman 69). For Panchaali, the court becomes a psychic wound that never fully closes. Its legacy is war, death, and a life lived with a fury that never cools

4 GUILT, GRIEF, AND REVENGE

In the aftermath of her public humiliation, Panchaali's psychological suffering deepens—not only through her trauma, but through the long shadow of guilt and grief that follows. Panchaali's feelings of culpability are complex. After the war is fought and countless lives are lost, including the deaths of her five sons, she begins to doubt whether justice was truly achieved. "Was it my fault?" she asks herself. "Had my hatred summoned the war, the deaths, the fires that wouldn't stop burning?" (Divakaruni 271). Her emotional response reflects the gendered burden placed on women, especially in patriarchal systems: they are often expected to bear not just their pain but the emotional and moral burden of others' suffering. Judith Herman notes that "in societies that do not offer justice to women, their suffering becomes internalized as shame or guilt" (Herman 102).

This guilt is not only self-imposed—it is socially reinforced. Panchaali is subtly reminded, even by allies, that her anger triggered the downfall of families. Her curse against the Kauravas becomes emblematic of female vengeance, while the systemic failures that allowed her humiliation are quickly forgotten.

Grief, too, becomes a defining feature of her emotional landscape. The death of her sons is not treated as a central tragedy in the epic; it is overshadowed by the larger narrative of war. Her mourning is solitary—another echo of trauma theory, which emphasizes that unresolved grief often occurs when communal acknowledgment is denied (Herman 61).

Revenge, for Panchaali, is not a simple emotion but a survival mechanism. After her trauma is dismissed, her body desecrated, and her family destroyed, she clings to vengeance as the only path to restore moral order. In demanding the war, she exerts agency in a world where her dignity was denied. Laura Brown suggests that for many traumatized women, "rage is not just a reaction—it is the last assertion of personhood in the face of erasure" (Brown 113). Panchaali's anger, though pathologized by others, becomes her moral compass.

Yet, the revenge she demands ultimately leaves her empty. Even with victory, she experiences no peace. The price of retribution is too high. Her closing reflections reveal a spiritual exhaustion: "What had I won? A kingdom of ashes. A silence too deep to break" (Divakaruni 281). This disillusionment marks the beginning of emotional insight. She realizes that revenge cannot restore the life she lost; it only intensifies the void left by trauma.

Through Panchaali's voice, Divakaruni grants legitimacy to the complex moral terrain of trauma, illuminating how victims are often forced to become both judges and mourners of their own pain. Comparative Analysis with Other Women in Literature

Panchaali's trauma narrative, as depicted in *The Palace of Illusions*, does not exist in isolation. It belongs to a long lineage of literary and mythological women whose suffering has been dramatized, politicized, and often misinterpreted. These women—from Sita of the Ramayana to Medea of Greek tragedy, from Helen of Troy to Toni Morrison's Sethe—share a common fate: their personal pain is overshadowed by public narratives. A comparative lens reveals that Panchaali's experience is part of a broader cultural phenomenon in which female trauma is ritualized but rarely understood.

In the Greco-Roman tradition, Helen of Troy offers a similar contrast. She, too, is blamed for war, reduced to her beauty, and robbed of her voice. While Helen is often portrayed as a seductress or a victim, rarely is her psychological state explored. Panchaali, by contrast, offers readers an internal monologue filled with doubt, longing, and regret. Divakaruni's revision enables the reader to see Helen's mythic twin in Panchaali—both beautiful women blamed for wars started by men. As Panchaali reflects, "They blamed me, but forgot the hands that had pushed the dice" (Divakaruni 259).

In Euripides' tragedy, Medea enacts a different response to trauma—one of violent revenge. Betrayed by Jason, she murders their children, becoming a symbol of destructive maternal rage.Another rich comparison is Sethe, the protagonist of Toni Morrison's Beloved, who also lives with haunting guilt after making an unthinkable choice—to kill her infant daughter rather than allow her to be enslaved. Sethe's grief and trauma shape every moment of her life, and the ghost of her daughter becomes a metaphor for unresolved history. Like Panchaali, Sethe is both condemned and sanctified, her voice oscillating between guilt and defiance.

These comparative figures—Sita, Helen, Medea, and Sethe—highlight the recurring pattern of female trauma in literature: women who are used, discarded, blamed, or silenced, yet who find moments of narrative clarity and resistance. Divakaruni's Panchaali is both archetype and individual, both mythic and modern.

5 MODERN PARALLELS: GENDERED TRAUMA TODAY

Though rooted in ancient mythology, Panchaali's trauma in *The Palace of Illusions* resonates powerfully with contemporary experiences of gendered violence and emotional marginalization. One of the clearest contemporary parallels is honor-based violence, a practice still prevalent in many parts of South Asia, the Middle East, and immigrant communities globally. In such cases, women are punished—often violently or fatally—for actions perceived to have dishonored their families or communities.

Like Panchaali, these women are reduced to emblems of honor, denied subjectivity, and blamed for the violence inflicted upon them. Their bodies, like hers, become battlefields upon which male egos and community pride are negotiated.

According to a UN Women report, online abuse "silences women by threatening their dignity, safety, and voice, often with little to no legal recourse" (UN Women 13). Panchaali's silencing in the court of Hastinapur is thus a chilling precursor to the digital silencing many women endure today.

Equally striking is the parallel to institutional betrayal—when systems meant to protect instead retraumatize. Panchaali is not betrayed by her enemies alone; her husbands, elders, and the court all fail her. This echoes the experience of women today who report sexual assault only to face disbelief, victim-blaming, or delayed justice. Psychologist Jennifer Freyd terms this betrayal trauma and notes that it often causes more long-lasting harm than the initial abuse itself (Freyd 95). In both the epic and modern world, the trauma is doubled: first through the violation, and again through neglect.

By aligning Panchaali's mythic trauma with contemporary forms of gendered suffering, Divakaruni blurs the boundaries between past and present. In doing so, she reveals a timeless truth: that patriarchal violence evolves, but its emotional consequences remain tragically familiar.

6 CONCLUSION

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* is more than a feminist retelling of the *Mahabharata*—it is a nuanced psychological portrait of a woman caught in the crossfire of history, patriarchy, and emotional devastation. Through Panchaali's voice, the novel presents a rare and intimate portrayal of mental trauma: from fragmented identity and emotional betrayal to survivor's guilt and unfulfilled justice. Rather than rendering Panchaali as a passive symbol of myth, Divakaruni reclaims her as an active narrator of her own suffering, her own rage, and—most importantly—her own story.

By analyzing the novel through trauma theory and feminist literary criticism, this paper has shown that Panchaali's trauma is not confined to isolated moments of violence. It is systemic, cumulative, and internalized. It is shaped by her symbolic birth, coerced marriage, public humiliation, and emotional abandonment. Her struggle is as much about external recognition as it is about internal reconciliation.

Comparisons with other literary women—Sita, Helen, Medea, Sethe—further reveal the universality of gendered trauma. Modern parallels with honor-based violence, cyber harassment, and institutional betrayal confirm that the wounds of Draupadi's world continue to echo in ours.

In the end, *The Palace of Illusions* is a narrative of resistance. It reclaims the female voice in myth, reframes pain as insight, and refuses to let silence win. Panchaali emerges not as a victim or a goddess, but as a woman: flawed, fierce, and forever speaking.

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Invisible wounds, visible scars: The mental and familial breakdown in Shanta Gokhale's play, *Avinash*

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ABSTRACT: The play, *Avinash*, by Shanta Gokhale is interpreted as a reflection of the society and its ignorance towards pressing issues like mental illness. This research paper indulges into the symbolism of the play and tries to look for meanings within the family's contrasting viewpoints on mental illness. This paper establishes that the play tries to present the dark side of 'family' which is generally considered a signifier of stability, care and concern. It shows how the silences, denials, and repressions occurring within the family harm the individual well-being as well as the integrity of the family. This study positions *Avinash* as a significant work by a woman playwright that confronts the personal and social consequences of untreated mental illness.

Keywords: Women playwrights, Modern Indian Drama, mental illness, family, society

1 INTRODUCTION

India has a long flourishing dramatic tradition since the ancient times. The history of Indian Drama can be traced back to the classical Sanskrit period with the works of great dramatists like Asvaghosa, Bhasa, Kalidasa, Shudraka and Bhavabhuti to mention a few. *Natyashatra,* a treatise on Sanskrit dramaturgy composed by Bharata Muni have also contributed to the discourse on Indian dramatic traditions since long. With the decline of Sanskrit drama around the tenth century, the dramatic culture found its place in various Indian languages embedded in regional forms. Most Indian languages saw the rise of drama writing before Independence and their tradition kept evolving after Independence to the present with the changes in political and cultural nature of society and also with the influence of theatrical forms from outside India.

It is interesting to note that in the context of modern or post-independence theatre in India, if playwrights like Vijay Tendulkar, Mohan Rakesh and Girish Karnad were shaping the modern Indian drama, women writers were also asserting their presence. But when we look at the history of theatre in India, women playwrights are not considered important in the shaping of modern Indian drama, despite their significant contributions. They still need different discourses to voice their role and contributions. Many women writers were involved with theatre before Independence but very few women were writing plays. Hirabai Pednekar, Kashibai Phaske, Sonabai Kerkar and Malti Bedekar, Swarnakumari Devi are examples of

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women playwrights from that period. However, their names are rarely discussed in the mainstream theatre discourses.

Women playwrights come forward after independence mainly during the period of seventies and eighties with the rise of feminist movement. Playwrights like Tripurari Sharma, Anuradha Kapur, Usha Gangul, A. Mangai and Shushma Deshpande have done significant contribution to Indian Theatre during the 1990s. Among such significant women voices is Shanta Gokhale. She is a Marathi playwright, translator, and critic whose works offer engagements with various themes.

It can be said that some of the plays written by female playwrights are equally important in their theme and treatment, still they are not received largely. One such play is *Avinash* by Shanta Gokhale. The play is originally written in Marathi with the title *Avinash-Ek Dhyas*, later it was translated into English with the title *Avinash* by the same playwright. Many plays around the theme of trauma of women are written by women playwrights. For instance, *Lights Out* and *Harvest* by Manjula Padmanabhan, but there is rarely any play in Indian Drama on male trauma written by female playwrights, and this fact makes this play more worthy of discussion and analysis. The play *Avinash* was written and first performed in 1988 under the direction of Satyadev Dubey. Later it was performed in Hindi in 1990, based on its Hindi translation done by Sudha Shesh, the wife of the renowned Hindi playwright Shankar Shesh. The play seems to be well received during the period it was written. But not much research on this play has been done till date. Looking at the theme and its treatment of a very relevant social issue, the play is unique and deserves a place in the history of modern Indian theatre. While scholarly researches on Indian drama have frequently focused trauma related to feminine issues, *Avinash* offers a unique opportunity to examine male vulnerability through a feminist lens.

The play, set within a middle-class home, reflects a man's mental distress and his family's response to his situation. It raises pertinent questions about the neglect of mental health irrespective of the gender, and the social stigma around mental health and illness. The play is a rich text to explore how individual suffering intersects with collective failure.

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This research attempts to interpret *Avinash* as an observation of the social dynamics around the theme of trauma suffered by men. It examines how the play represents the middle-class Indian society's perspective on mental illness and the treatment thereof. The symbolic and narrative techniques used in the play address the disintegration of the *self* and the *other.* It aims to show how a man's mental collapse moulds his family's emotional structure. It considers the gendered dynamics accompanied by a silence and submission of the female characters, especially the protagonist's wife. The research tries to establish the play as a representation of society's failure to accept men's vulnerability.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Through textual analysis, this research attempts to interpret the behaviour of characters by identifying symbols in the narrative structure. Feminist approach is also taken into consideration to understand the burdens, silence and suppression in middle class households.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The family of Avinash includes his wife Vasudha, Father Tatya, mother Durga, and two younger brothers Prakash and Vikram. Among other characters Avinash's childhood friend Kiran and a neighbour of Avinash's family named Lokhande.

Avinash is set in a typical middle-class family of Mumbai. It centers on the psychological decline of its young protagonist Avinash who never comes on the stage. He is introduced through the conversations of family members, friends and neighbors. On different instances, dialogues of play reveal perspective of different characters around Avinash and mental illness. Thus, Avinash is present in spite of his absence throughout the play. The setup of the play is a small house. It conveys the compromised environment of the people in the house. Avinash's room is set off the stage behind the partition, invisible to the audience. It is a metaphor for the negligible acceptance of 'mental illness' in Indian middle-class households. Avinash's room is so cornered that he remains hidden from anyone who visits the family. The stigma around mental illnesses is quite evident in the fact that Avinash's father is worried about him screaming when Aviansh's friend Kiran would be visiting. It seems so habitual of them to hide Avinash that Vikram even says once, "We're old hands at pretending everything hunky-dory" (Gokhale 2004, p. 96).

Tatya and Durga's conversation conveys that Avinash was suffering from something for six years but in the last eight months he has been better. Eight months ago, he was married to Vasudha against her wish, leaving her with no other choice than to devote her life in taking care of him. Vasudha is shown with minor disability in her leg and because of that she limps while walking. Her marriage to healthy man became difficult and she was married off to Avinash as a compromise from both ends. And since the marriage she submitted herself to take care of Avinash. Vasudha says towards the end of play, "you handed him over to me and grew blind and deaf, waiting for a miracle to happen" (Gokhale 2004, p. 118). This reflects the social expectations on Vasudha to take care of her ailing husband single handedly. However, mother Durga some kindness or pity for Vasudha, father Tatya has preconceived notion derived from patriarchy and considers it Vasudha's duty to take care of her husband and doing so is not a punishment.

In scene one, during conversation with Kiran, Durga says Avinash is "ill with joy" (Gokhale 2004, p. 97), an unusually made-up phrase to cover Avinash's absence. But Kiran's response, "Ill? He wouldn't know how to be" (Gokhale 2004, p. 97) points out towards Aviansh having been a healthy child so something later caused him to reach this state. We get to know that first Avinash quits job because of his boss, then began to isolate himself, which was followed by alcohol consumption. This shows that his illness developed gradually. We can also infer the family's lack of attention and preventive action.

A discussion between Prakash, Kiran and Tatya shows that Tatya is unable to understand Avinash's temperament and judges him through his own standards. In one instance, Durga wants Prakash to convince Tatya through the psychology book he was reading, Prakash expresses that he can't talk to him as he starts shouting. Prakash has developed a deep-rooted fear of his father since childhood. He does not acknowledge the changing values of society, implying that since childhood there was a barrier between father and sons, which might have pushed Avinash into his current misery. Durga as a mother is more understanding, she is more concerned for Avinash's betterment, but she is also unable to understand what went wrong and when. Throughout the play Durga tries to calm Tatya's anger against his sons. Tatya has been responsible men of house since an early age of 15, frustrated with the situation that at his old age too he is bearing financial responsibilities of three sons. He is frustrated as he is tired of bearing responsibilities.

Tatya is not willing to understand Avinash's mental illness. Prakash says that Avinash is not insane but ill. Tatya has a refusing attitude and says, "Ill? Eats like an ox, drinks like a fish and he's supposed to be ill!" (Gokhale 2004, p. 106). Tatya's insulting attitude regarding Avinash eating properly indicates his attitude towards not only his son but towards any mentally ill or disabled person as in another instance he talks about Vasudha's minor disability as a larger issue. They are seen as a burden. This reflects a similarity to the attitude towards unmarried girls in any middle-class Indian family. This mentality is reflected in this play itself from the parents of Vasudha. This also shows the inability of women to fight patriarchal values.

Prakash is shown knowledgeable, sensitive towards Avinash and to Vasudha too. Prakash in many instances tries to convince Tatya. In one such instance Tatya expresses his inability to spend more money on Avinash's treatment and there was no betterment. he is now left with last saving. Tatya is determined to spend it to evade the evil eye, reflecting the superstitions of the general people of India around mental illnesses. Prakash wanted the savings for Avinash's treatment but Vikram wanted it for his business setup.

On the day of condolence, Tatya has this weird realization that Avinash was different but he is still not ready to accept that Avinash was mentally ill. He still considers it madness. When Prakash says to Kiran that Avinash was dealing with a kind of despair and it led him to drink, Tatya taunts, "What was he despairing about? Work till your bones ache and then there's no time for despair" (Gokhale 2004, p. 125). This reiterates the generation gap and the changing dynamics in an evolving society. Prakash embraces the changing value system, yet he realizes his helplessness and indulgence in this tragic loss, "we'd got too used to hiding dada from the world. We thought the problem would go away if we didn't talk about it" (Gokhale 2004, p. 126).

Tatya always tried to hide him at any cost and it led to Avinash's death. After Avinash's disappearance, Prakash tries to call the police but Tatya doesn't allow him, and they don't call the police until three days have passed. Later he is found dead on an island. After Avinash's death, Vikram emerges with a new approach to life. He seems terrified of his unemployment and its impact. He says, "Too much family can also drive you crazy. You don't get a job. You hit the bottle. You despair. Disappear" (Gokhale 2004, p. 127). It reflects urban middle class society where securing a job is an important part of life. The repercussions of being unemployed is shown to be life-threatening.

After Avinash dies, the play's focus shifts to Vasudha. It presents the typical question of where is the real home for a woman, maternal or in-laws'? Vasudha emerges with her own voice, starting a new life the way she wants. She was clear in her thoughts and revealed many things which she willingly or unwillingly did. She reveals that she allowed Avinash to drink every night so that they can sleep, until the day she snatched the bottle from his hands and threw it perhaps seeing that Avinash had stopped drinking. The bottle is a symbol of misery which she threw away.

She also revealed about her pregnancy first to Avinash and then to family. Her pregnancy was the clue that led to his disappearance. Avinash was not ready for a child; it was an early incident for him because he was dealing with his mental illness and it was not very long that he started to get better. Vasudha understands his situation and tries to make him understand that it will be fine. While Vasudha felt strong with this event because she could deal with it, Avinash collapsed under the societal pressure. It was a responsibility which made Vasudha to live again and for Avinash it got so heavy that he chose to die altogether. The reason for his falling in the sea while sleepwalking seems insignificant. It seems the load of responsibility of being a father sank him. Vasudha has been silent until Avinash disappeared, but when she speaks, her quiet resilience contrasts with Avinash's silence. The protagonism has shifted to Vasudha. This turn depicts a beautiful feminist touch deliberated by the author.

5 CONCLUSION

Although *Avinash* derives its title from one of the characters' names, he is never seen in action but he dominates the play. In other words, Avinash's character is a metaphor. He signifies the theme of mental illness and its impact. Every character in his family responds differently to his illness, reflecting various perspectives generally present in the society. The diverse reactions of family members to Avinash's condition underline the complex nature of family dynamics, revealing a spectrum that ranges from his father's denial to his wife's submission. His mother and Prakash are concerned about him, while Vikram is frustrated. His family has developed its own mechanism to deal with the situation, but they are unable

to accomplish it. They ignore and try to mask the issue to a point where it disappears altogether from their view. Avinash's death does not mean a resolution of mental illness, rather it shows it's *indestructible* impact on others. The play reflects the multi-faceted repercussions of Avinash's mental health challenges on his family, highlighting issues of responsibility, care, and emotional fallout. Towards the end of the play, Vikram has developed an attitude of not prioritizing family. His motivation to work abroad is money rather than interest, family's well-being, or an upliftment of living standard. In other words, he is wounded and does not realize that he may well be a carrier of what he is determined to avoid: despair. The play mirrors contemporary challenges around mental health discourse within Indian society, urging a societal shift towards empathy and understanding.

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Literature in harmony with nature: *Kalidasa*'s environmental consciousness in his *Meghadutam* and *Abhijnanashakuntalam*

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ABSTRACT: According to Indian philosophy, the human body is composed of the five fundamental elements—Earth (*Prithvi*), Water (*Apas*), Fire (*Agni*), Air (*Vayu*), and Aether (*Akasha*)—collectively known as *Panchtattva*, signifying a deep-rooted connection between human life and nature, which is venerated as *Maa*, or Mother Earth. From the sacred rituals involving fire and water at birth and death to the symbolic immersion of ashes in the Ganges, nature remains central to the Indian way of life. This reverence extends into mythology, where nature takes on divine roles—protector, saviour, guide—and is reflected in characters like *Sita, Karna, Hanuman,* and *Shakuntala*, who are portrayed as the real children of nature. Contemporary Indian authors such as Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Arundhati Roy, Amitav Ghosh, and Keki N. Daruwalla also echo nature's grandeur in their works. This paper explores ecological consciousness in *Kalidas*a's much celebrated works *Meghadutam* and *AbhijnanShakuntalam*, where his lyrical and dramatic genius renders nature as an active spiritual presence. *Kalidas*a's poetic vision infuses natural elements with symbolic meaning—*Akasha* as a bridge between love and the cosmos, *Surya* as life-giver, *Chandra* as peace producer, *Megha* as a messenger of longing, and *Parvata* as a symbol of endurance—transforming them into living metaphors that reflect emotional and philosophical depth. By analysing these texts through an ecological lens, this paper reveals how *Kalidas*a harmonizes natural imagery, human sentiment, and aesthetic beauty, affirming the inseparable bond between literature and the natural world.

Keywords: Mythology, Ecocriticism, Nature, Literature, Harmony

1 INTRODUCTION

From the Palaeolithic era forward, human beings have sustained an intense natural link through various dimensions of their existence. The natural environment formed both the way for early humans' existence and the capability to understand reality through their close harmony with nature. Since ages, all the five natural elements, and multiple objects and creatures such as trees, flowers, leaves, birds, mountains, and clouds, have been the sources of inspiration which, time-to-time, enabled man to add essential meanings to his existence. Besides this, there is a range of some consistent principles and traditions in the earliest Indian literary tradition that have taught man the benefits of environmental conservation. Vedic literature presents nature as a living, divine and spiritual force closely associated to human life. The first and the oldest Indian literature; the *Rigveda* underscores the role of nature in maintaining physical and spiritual well-being of earthly creatures. That is why it instructs,

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"Do not cut trees because they remove pollution"[1]. Even the Atharvaveda (as noted by Satendra 41), has references which emphasize upon water conservation alongside pollution issues. Through their "natural sweeper" function, trees remove carbon dioxide while releasing oxygen into the air, providing environmental value (Kulshrestha 32). The teachings of Vedas and, down the line, other similar powerful literary texts taught the great poets and writers of India to respect, praise worship nature through its sustainable use following ecological ethics.

This paper examines *Meghadutam* and *AbhijnanShakuntalam* by *Kalidas*a as ecocritical texts with the help of the about two-decade old emerging literary theory of ecocriticism which has attracted academic attention of the researchers and the scholars. The two parts of the word "ecocriticism" conjoin the term "eco", which signifies the universe and earth, with "criticism", which means literary analysis. It works as an academic discipline linking literary studies and cultural research to decode natural environment representation in literary works. It underlines that all living things and the earth have inherent value independent of human interest. Upon introducing ecocriticism in the literary field, William Rueckert used his 1978 article *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism* to create the term. In 1996, academia also acknowledged this school of thought as a critical theory. Thus, ecocriticism implies nature's study by uniting diverse cultural, geographical, and social perspectives. Ecocriticism has also played an important role in achieving unity between literature and environmental studies in various discipline like history, philosophy, sociology, etc. through its interdisciplinary approach, which extends traditional literary analysis fields.

The history of environmental consciousness has been seamlessly travelled a long way from Vedic composition to modern literary adaptations made at every corner of the earth – crossing all boundaries from east to west and vice versa. In fact, the power of nature and the vivacity of environment have been the powerful creative source to the literary writers outside the Indian subcontinent for centuries together. Lawrence Buell identifies the early nature-centred literary movement and rightly termed it as "first-wave ecocriticism" through analysis of the Romantic poetry of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, and Keats. Among all romantic poets, William Wordsworth distinguished himself as the highest priest and worshipper of nature in all its manifestations. He proclaimed the same through his famous poem *Tintern Abbey* when he writes "Nature is never failing friend … nurse, guide and guardian of mankind" (Rengasamy, ed. 45). Similarly, through his work *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,* S.T. Coleridge emphasizes upon ecological ethics by using the symbolic albatross figure which serves to warn against harming nature and natural creatures. The whole British Romantic period provides an ideal foundation for ecocritical examination as Buell (3), and Garrard consider animal studies as vital to the field (144). As part of its examination, this theoretical framework explores how different cultures interpret natural environments alongside natural culture dynamics. From a monocultural perspective, one can examine nature as a centralised phenomenon, but the theory induces humans to understand nature as a multicultural, multi-faceted, interconnected system across global scales (Karala and Kathlen xxii).

Sanskrit and world literature distinguish *Kalidas*a as an incomparable master who holds a respected position among poets and writers across ages. The scholars, including Humboldt, recognised his poetic mastery because of his lyrical elegance combined with his imaginative depth (Dave 65). Among the literary works of *Kalidas*a, *Meghadutam* and *AbhijnanShakuntalam* represent supremacy over all other works of their genre as these unites love and natural elements with exceptional elegance. He is incomparable genius who exhibits profound environmental consciousness in these two most celebrated and widely accepted works. His understanding and bond with nature is so deep, sacred and flawless that the poets and literary artists of proceeding generations must have learnt from him the sense of reverence to nature with completely spiritual devotion. These "literary works possess the capacity to heighten public awareness regarding the intricate relationships between humanity and the environment, encompassing various manifestations of nature and diverse life forms, without necessarily prescribing solutions for perceived ecological transgressions." (Dhar, 2020).

2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A few great pieces of literature blended with ecology create scholarly interest among researchers for great artistic exhibition of the relationship between literature and the natural environment, particularly on the vast canvas of ecocriticism. Scholars such as Cheryll Glotfelty and Lawrence Buell declare ecocriticism a tool to understand literary texts that reflect, shape, and challenge human-nature relationships. The classical Indian literature represents a rich yet underexplored repository in this field, particularly the works of *Kalidas*a which blends his ecological concerns with literary imaginations.

In Indian philosophical and literary tradition, nature has been always an uncontroversial object of worship and a source of divine inspiration. *Prakriti* (Vol. V), set by Kapil Vatsyayan, published in 1995, explores the concept of primal elements (sky, air, water, fire, earth) determined by culture and civilisation. Nature is not a matter of intellect, but it is also a question of life. This is manifested in the primal myths and rituals. In the fifth volume, man in nature is a coming together of cultures and disciplines. This book shares new insights into the phenomenon of nature. Taking examples from the work of *Kalidas*, scholars like Kapila Vatsyayan and V. Raghavan have pointed out his exceptional ability to synthesize emotion, environment, and expression in classical Sanskrit literature to bring together natural philosophy and aesthetics.

Furthermore, a few studies by Harold Coward and Wendy Doniger compare Eastern and Western literary traditions. Such studies suggest deeply rooted anthropocentrism in the classical Indian texts – the quality which explicitly exhibit more ecocentric and spiritual view of nature the Western texts often lack. They consider *Kalidas*a's writings having an approach, portraying nature not a mere backdrop but as a moral and emotional force as well.

Ruskin Bond, a prolific writer from the west celebrated for his stories set in the picturesque Himalayan region, captures the mountains' essence in writings like *The Blue Umbrella* and *The Room on the Roof*. His narratives vividly depict the natural beauty while highlighting the region's ecological fragility. The impact of *Kalidas*a's style of writing can be seen easily on Mr. Bond when he portrays the mountains, rivers, and flora emphasizing the delicate balance between human life and nature.

Upamanyu Chatterjee's *English, August* is set in the Gangetic plains and provides a satirical look at modern urban life. The protagonist in the text deals with various bureaucratic and cultural challenges, while the story also touches on environmental changes in the region. The shift in agricultural practices and the impact on the river's health are used as a metaphor for the broader ecological changes happening in the area. In the novel *The Village by the Sea* by Anita Desai takes readers to the coastal areas of India, which depict the hardships faced by a fishing community, and emphasises the environmental impact of industrialisation and the overuse of marine resources. The coastal setting serves as a microcosm, illustrating broader ecological issues associated with economic development.

3 METHODOLOGY

This research paper employs a qualitative approach to critically analyse and explore the representation of nature and environmental elements in *Kalidas*a's *Meghadutam* and *AbhijnanShakuntalam* through the theoretical framework of ecocriticism. Rather than treating nature merely as a device of poetic representation, the research problematizes the depiction of the natural society as an ideological force that reinforces anthropocentric, cultural, and social power structures that are inherent in classical Sanskrit literature. The critical analysis involves close reading and textual analysis of selected writings which highlight natural imagery, interaction between humans and the natural world. The research also focused on thematic concerns such as the portrayal of natural phenomena, animals, and

landscapes with implicit environmental ethics. By using qualitative methodology to give force to the arguments, a fair try is being made to write a paper with high order research. A sincere effort will also be made to study *Kalidas*a's work from the point of view of his environmental consciousness with emotional resonance. The method of thematic analysis and incorporation of relevant material contribute to the overall study objectives. Hence, to organise the various themes and to create all unities in this paper, the analytical and critical approaches have been employed.

4 MEGHADUTAM AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSCIOUSNESS

*Kalidas*a's *Meghadūta* is a long Sanskrit poem of 115 stanzas[2] which has been divided into two parts—*Purva-megha* and *Uttara-megha*. This poem and narrates the poignant tale of a *Yaksha* who, exiled for neglecting his duties, sends a heartfelt message to his beloved through a passing cloud. The first part, *Purva-megha,* deals with the cloud's journey across India's landscapes, rivers, and cities, while the second part, *Uttara-megha,* delves into the emotional weight of the message and the promise of reunion. *Kalidas*a uses rich imagery, similes, and metaphors to animate the natural world, turning the cloud into a symbol of hope and emotional connection. More than a travelogue, the poem is a moving reflection on love, separation, and the human spirit, made even more profound by its cultural and historical layers.

5 INFUSING LIFE INTO THE DEAD

It is said that literature has the power to infuse life into the dead. A poet is a creator and the poem is life thread for those who read it. The most fascinating task for a poet is show non-living beings in nature behaving like human beings. The great masters of Indian classical period like Valmik, Vedvyas, Bharvi, *Kalidas* and many more had the ability to transform passive backdrop of nature into active agents. They are not just poets but recipients of the blessing of being incomparable masters of ultimate knowledge that the goddess Saraswati (the goddess of wisdom) herself bestowed upon them. The *Meghadutam* of *Kalidas* is the product of such wisdom where an exiled *Yaksha* entrusts the clouds to carry his message to his beloved wife. Clouds inspire *Yaksha* and create a sense of wonder and evoke deep emotional responses across the natural world. Their arrival stirs a universal awakening—desires bloom, awareness sharpens, and both living and non-living beings appear to respond to their presence. The *Yaksha* decides to request clouds to deliver his message-

"प्रत्यासन्ने नमसि दयिताजीवितालम्बनाथ जीभूतेन स्वकुशलमयीं हारयिष्यन्प्रवृत्तिम् ।

स प्रत्ययैः कुटजकुसुमैः कल्पिता य तस्मै प्रीतः प्रीतिप्रमुखवचनं स्वागतं व्याजहार ॥"

> As the month of Saavan (month of rain) approached, he sought to sustain his beloved's spirit by sending a message of reassurance through the clouds. To express his affection, he offered her newly blossomed jasmine flowers and greeted her with tender, loving words. (*Meghadutam* Stanza-IV)

Though clouds are often seen as lifeless, they hold a mysterious allure that captivates all of creation. Those who have truly observed the beauty of the rainy season and immersed themselves in its joy know that the vitality of the monsoon is not just poetic fantasy—it is a real and profound transformation. From the ripening of jamuns, to birds soaring through dark skies, to the majestic movement of rivers like the *Gambhira*, the season breathes life into everything it touches. Although there is no comparison between the cloud—a mere blend of

smoke, water, sunlight, and wind—and those subtle messages that only the keenest of beings can truly convey, yet, in his deep yearning, the *Yaksha*, driven by emotion, chose to pray to the cloud itself, disregarding its inert nature. Such is the condition of those consumed by longing—they become helpless, equally vulnerable before the sentient and the insentient, reaching out even to that which cannot respond, simply in hope and desperation.

"धूमज्योतिःसलिलमस्तां संनिपातः क्व मेधः संदेशार्थाः व पटुकरणैः प्राणिभिः प्रापणीयाः ।

इत्यौत्सुक्यादपरिगणयन्गुह्य कस्तं ययाचे कामार्ता हि प्रकृतिकृपणाच्चेतना चेतनेषु ॥

> what possible connection there can be between a cloud which consists of smoke, light, water and wind and messages which can be carried by creatures endowed with sound organs of sense? Unmindful of this through eagerness, the *Yaksha* requested the cloud; for love-smitten persons are naturally incapable of distinguishing between animate and inanimate things[3]."

In *Meghadutam,* nature has been depicted so beautifully that a sensitive soul, moved by such beauty, becomes a seeker of meaning, reading the ever-changing forms of clouds as nature's own text. For such a person, *Kalidas*a's *Meghadutam* is not a closed narrative but an eternal dialogue—one that nature continues to expand and interpret year after year, composing new commentaries with each monsoon.

6 THE CLOUD AS A SENTIENT BEING

*Kalidas*a breathes life into the cloud by endowing it with sentience, turning it into a thoughtful messenger capable of carrying the *Yaksha's* longing across great distances to his beloved. *Kalidasa's* art of personification not only breathes life and endow sentience into the non-living objects of nature but also reflects a worldview in which natural elements are seen as possessing their own agency and intrinsic value, highlighting the deep interconnection between humans and the natural world. The *Yaksha* meticulously instructs the cloud about specific routes and notable landmarks which emphasizes his emotional urgency as well as reveals his exceptional observational skills and his profound reverence for the diverse Indian landscape.

"मार्ग तावच्छृणु कथयतस्त्वप्रमाणानुरूपं संदेश मे तदनु जल्द! श्रीष्यसि श्रोत्रपेयम्।

खिन्नः खिन्नः शिखरिषु पदं न्यस्य गन्तासि यत्र क्षीणः क्षीणः परिलघु पयः स्रोतसां चोपभुज्य ॥

> O Cloud! Listen to me who describes the path fit to be pursued by thee, along which thou wilt travel resting on mountains, when thou art much exhausted; thou wilt next hear my message expressed in agreeable words" (*Kalidas*a's *Meghaduta,* Stanza-XIII edited by K B Pathak, 1916)

7 ENVIRONMENT AND EMOTIONAL RESONANCE

The art of personification by *Kalidas* has not only enables him to create a world around him but also provides him opportunity to share his emotions with them by considering them sentient like living beings. His manner of address, giving instructions, posing questions and style of comparison clearly show how emotional all his descriptions and interaction with nature are. For instance, while addressing, he calls the cloud as messenger (*Meghadutam Stanza-V*), brother, friend (**द्रुतमपि सखे!** *Meghadutam, Stanza-XXII*) and worshipper, river as beloved, lightening as spouse (**चिरविलसनाविन्नविद्युत्कलत्रः** *Meghadutam, Stanza-XXXVIII)* and mountain as friend (**प्रियसखममु**, *Meghadutam Stanza-XII*). *Kalidas* gives the description of this journey not only to portray geographical richness but to explicate

the internal turmoil of *Yaksha* between two extremes of love and separation. The path of the cloud which he describes with full emotional intensity illustrates *Kalidas*a's profound ecological and sensible understanding complementing with his ability to personify all aspects of nature through poetic imagination. As noted by A.K. Warder, *Meghaduta* is "a fusion of love poetry and landscape description where the physical route becomes an emotional one[4]". Thus, nature perceived by *Kalidas* in *Meghadutam* is not confined merely to scenic beauty, it shows his deeply symbolic sense, emotionally responsive attitude, and uniquely, passionately communicable story of love and loss.

8 THE *YAKSHA* AND NATURE

All great poems are marred with dissociation of sensibility and objective correlatives as depiction of personality seems to be indecent unless it has similitude with some universal factors. *Kalidas* is a flawless master of impersonality and objectivity. To express his deep respect for nature and profound understanding of the environment, he establishes *Yaksha*'s two-fold connection with nature – intimate and spiritually resonant. To *Kalidas*, nature is almighty that can have solution even to the gravest problems. Instead of turning his *Yaksha* to living beings or the Gods, he entrusts on the elements of nature choosing a cloud as his messenger. *Yaksha*'s direct address to the cloud "O cloud, thou art made up of water and fire, of wind and ether" in stanza-ii as he sees it over Ramgiri mountain shows his intimacy with nature. Further, when *Yaksha* instructs the cloud with richly detailed guidance about forests, rivers, mountains, Mahakal temple, worship, dance of lord Shiva, mount Kailash, Alkapuri and other sacred cities. It suggests that besides geographical familiarity *Yaksha* has a reverent spiritual connection to nature and its piety. In fact, *Kalidas*a's poetry "sees the world as alive, responsive, and emotionally engaged with the human" (Ramanujan, *Poems of Love and War*, 1985).

9 ABHIJNANA*SHAKUNTALA*M: A POETIC ECOLOGY OF LOVE AND LANDSCAPE

Abhijnanasakuntalam stands as a remarkable testament to *Kalidas*a's deep love, empathy, and profound awareness of the natural world. In this play, the forest's natural beauty, along with its spiritual and restorative qualities, serves as a catalyst for personal transformation and broader social and political change. It affirms the triumph of love and justice. In his work, *Kalidas*a uses nature not merely as a setting but as an active, personified presence that highlights the deep and harmonious connection between humanity and the environment.

*Kalidas*a's adaptation and modification of *Shakuntala*'s story from the Mahabharata is a vibrant tale filled with the themes of love, reconciliation and betrayal, portraying an acute sensitivity to the moods, rhythms and moral presence of nature. Throughout the play, natural force is not inert décor but a responsive and conscious entity, which is capable of moral alignment with joy and sorrow with human behaviour. The contemporary perspective of *Kalidas*a's *Abhijnanasakuntalam* portrays it as a romantic drama in which beauty, love, and fate are centred on the lap of nature. But when we dive deep into its layers, we are shocked by the idea that cautions about what is lost when human ignores nature and its signals. The play is not just the romantic story of King *Dushyant*a and *Shakuntala*, but it can be treated as a touchstone critic about a civilizational rupture, a sense when truth, memory and emotions are abandoned in the extreme pursuit of power and rationality. Under such circumstances, Nature, which the poet positioned as a conscious witness of all this loss, bears in silence the wounds caused by true love and dedication. Despite this unpleasant experience, *Kalidas*a's invites his readers and audiences to

immerse themselves in the splendour of nature, packed with mango trees, jasmine blossoms, birds, wild deer, and babbling brooks. Ecology, love and landscape can be seen sitting hand-in-hand when the spring and the summer seasons are inscribed as the season of love in the prologue, and the story itself. With his incomparable attention to detail, *Kalidas*a conveys to his audience the sentiment of the desert, bringing out the lush beauty of the forest and the cycle of seasons in a sensuous and enchanting manner.

In *AbhijnanaShakuntalam*, *Kalidasa* successfully blends the themes of love and nature with a sort of poetic ecology where the landscape seems to breathe and behave like human beings providing opportunity to the playwright to shapes the emotional and spiritual journeys of the characters. The hermitage in the forest, where *Shakuntala* is raised, symbolizes purity, serenity, and a deep symbiosis between human life and the natural world. Nature plays a significant role in creating and nurturing the bond between *Shakuntala* and King *Dushyant*a. It takes the help of beautiful landscapes to witness echoing their emotions—both in physical union in love and painful separation thereafter. In fact, nature and its spirituality contribute a lot in teaching man the importance of due respect to its creatures who are cultured and dedicated to pious sentiments. That is why, "ancient Indian literature, especially the works of *Kalidas*a, reveals a worldview where nature and culture are inseparable, forming a unified cosmos" (Harini Nagendra, *Nature in the City*, 2016). *Kalidas*a is sensible enough to understand the role of nature in human life. That's why he personifies various elements of nature—trees, birds, rivers—infuses emotions in them and shows his ecological consciousness rooted in deep respect for nature.

क्षौमं केनचिदिन्दुपाण्डु तरुणा माङ्गल्यमाविष्कृतं

निष्ठ्यूतश्चरणोपभोगसुलभो लाक्षारसः केनचित् ।

अन्येभ्यो वनदेवताकरतलैरापर्वभागोत्थितै-

र्दत्तान्याभरणानि तत्किसलयोद्भेदप्रतिद्वन्द्विभिः ॥ ७॥

One tree bore fruit, a silken marriage dress

That shamed the moon in its while loveliness;

Another gave us lac-dye for the feet;

From others, fairy hands extended, sweet

Like flowering twigs, as far as to the wrist,

And gave us gems, to adorn her as we list. (*Kalidas*a's Abhijnan-*Shakuntala*m, 4-7, Sharadranjan Ray, 1908, pp. 401-402)

Hardly does the other work in literature have examples of interconnection of love and the environment. *AbhijnanaShakuntalam* is really a unique tale of romantic love and lyrical rhythmic celebration of the pious relationship between humans and the lively nature.

10 THE HERMITAGE AND HARMONY

The hermitage culture in ancient India has been always know for harmony—between man and man, man and nature and also between man and divine. *Kalidas* in *AbhijnanShakuntalam* has very well shown that hermitage of sage *Kanva* also serves as a powerful symbol of harmony that putting together man, nature and divine with due respect to their distinct identity. *Shakuntala* was raised in a secluded sanctuary co-existing with birds, animals and trees showering their love and

care upon the divine maiden. All hermits are engaged in spiritual practice where they establish an unbreakable bond between man and divine mediated by nature. This is a perfect example of peaceful coexistence. The dialogues between *Shakuntala* and *Priyamvada*, when king *Dushyant* approach them, are indicative of how nature and creature exist together with great harmony.

शकुंतला -- (अग्रतोऽवलोक्य) एष वातीरितपल्लवाङ्गुलीभिस्त्वरयतीव मां केसरवृक्षकः ।

यावदेनं सम्भावयामि ।

(इति परिक्रामति)

प्रियंवदा -- हला शकुन्तले अत्रैव तावन्मुहूर्तं तिष्ठ

शकुंतला – किं निमितम् ।

प्रियंवदा - यावत्वयोपगतया लतासनाथ इवायं केसरवृक्षकः प्रतिभाति ।

> ***Shakuntala***: (looking ahead) This saffron tree seems to be hurrying me with its fingers of blown leaves. As far as I'm concerned.
>
> (She circles around the tree)
>
> ***Priyanvada***: Hala *Shakuntala*, stay here for a while.
>
> ***Shakuntala***: What's the matter?
>
> ***Priyanvada***: As you get older, this saffron tree looks like the lord of the creepers.
>
> (Chaturvedi, Vasudev, *AbhijnanShakuntalam,* Act-I, pp. 53)

The hermitage of sage *Kanva* is full of nurturing environment where love, respect, spirituality, purity and moral values find common refuge. It is a microcosm of ecological and emotional balance where there is no space for conflict. In fact, "the forest hermitage in Sanskrit literature often functions as a moral and ecological counterpoint to the political world of the court" (Thapar, Romila, *Cultural Pasts*, 2000).

11 *SHAKUNTALA* WITH PLANTS AND ANIMALS

No contemporary poet, nor any from preceding generations, possesses the flawless mastery of using similes and metaphors that *Kalidas*a demonstrates. In *AbhijnanaShakuntalam*, *Kalidas*a's female protagonist, *Shakuntala*, resides in a hermitage brimming with plants and animals, where the natural world is treated as an extension of the family. She tends to the trees and plants with the same care and affection one shows to loved ones, speaking to them with tenderness. In turn, they respond to her with love and blessings, each according to its age and nature, reflecting a profound harmony between the human and natural realms. This deep bond underscores the ecological sensitivity embedded in *Kalidas*a's poetic vision. The passionate bond between *Shakuntala* and plants has been depicted with the same spirit when *Kalidas* shows her departure from the hermitage. The trees are shown like sentient beings exhibiting their affection and sorrow. The trees not only offer ornaments and claddings but also bend down their branches to bless or embrace *Shakuntala*. The creepers which were ever nurtured by her seem to be extremely unhappy making the whole forest appear to mourn at her farewell. This moment underlines *Kalidas*a's ecological sensitivity as he highlights the sacred reciprocal bond between *Shakuntala* and the nature in hermitage.

12 RESPECT FOR BIODIVERSITY AND SUSTAINABLE LIVING

The inhabitants of hermitage and dwellers of forest have respect for diversity and sustainable living as it is clearly visible in their way of living. The hermitage is situated in the lap of nature where plants, animals, birds, waterbody, human and sages coexist peacefully. Besides big and visible beings, there are many small inhabitants that time-to-time mark their presence in the hermitage. The most important example is the bumble-bee that appeared at the right moment to bring *Shakuntala* and *Dushyant* closer. All the inhabitants of the hermitage live in harmony with nature, never exploiting it but instead contributing to the preservation of the ecosystem. When *Shakuntala* prepares to leave for the king's palace, Sage *Kanva* asks the trees to bless her, reminding them that she never drank a drop of water without first offering some to them **(भो भोः सन्निहितास्तपोवनतरवः । पातुं न प्रथमं व्यवस्यति जलं युष्मास्वपीतेषु या, 4-10)**. He further notes that although she loved adorning herself with leaves and flowers, she held such deep respect for the trees that she never plucked even a single leaf without a meaningful reason. This moment beautifully reflects her reverence for nature and the sustainable values upheld within the hermitage. The hermitage of *Kanva* gives a glimpse of early Indian model of sustainability with empathetic attitude towards nature and its creatures. *Kalidas* has successfully woven together complexities of human life and environmental ethos.

13 DISRUPTION OF NATURE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Kalidas is not the poet who studies and presents only one side of the object of his study. While presenting nature, he displays a complete picture. He starts his description with beautiful harmonious, nurturing and caring force of nature but doesn't forget to warn of the consequences when harmony is disrupted. *Shakuntala*'s bond with nature is intense and sacred which she enjoys a lot but the curse of sage Durvasa. The daughter of nature and embodiment of ecology gets uprooted from her natural environment and seeks solace amidst political and emotional turmoil into courtly life of king *Dushyant*. This disruption indicates that disturbance in human-nature relationship is symbolic of personal and cosmic disbalance. *Kalidas* seems to emphasize upon the fact that natural harmony can be restored only when love, respect and memory are revoked.

14 CONCLUSION

Therefore, *Kalidas*a masterfully intertwines the serene beauty and untamed vitality of nature throughout his works, crafting landscapes that are both emotionally evocative and geographically insightful. In *AbhijnanaShakuntalam*, nature is portrayed with lyrical richness—the forest teems with colours, fragrances, and sounds, drawing readers into its enchanting depths, while also reflecting the emotional undercurrents of the characters. This artistic brilliance led Goethe to praise the play for uniting the "bloom of youth and fruit of later years" and harmonising "heaven and earth." Similarly, in *Meghadutam*, *Kalidas*a transforms the cloud's journey into a poetic map of ancient northern India, accurately capturing its towns, rivers, and landscapes. The vivid descriptions not only showcase his ecological sensitivity and aesthetic elegance but also reveal a deep geographical awareness. Together, these works highlight *Kalidas*a's ability to elevate nature from mere backdrop to a central, living presence—emphasising both its poetic beauty and its enduring relevance to human experience and environmental awareness. His environmental vision is timeless and offers a strong harmonious relationship between man and nature. He believes in importance of life and tries to infuse it even in the breathless objects. His ecological consciousness makes nature breathe, communicate, feel, blesses, mourns and respond to stimuli. His work

provides an ethical framework for much needed ecological consciousness for sustenance of both nature and its creatures.

NOTES

1. Rigveda, (6.48:17) as observed by Satendra viii.
2. Meghdut, Vasudevsharan Agarwal version, Rajkamal, 1927
3. (Kalidasa's Meghaduta Stanza-V edited by K B Pathak, 1916)
4. Warder, Indian Kavya Literature, Vol. 3

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Inner turmoil: Lugubrious but absolved in Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain*

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ABSTRACT: Lugubrious and absolution are two different things. Lugubrious is the feeling of sadness that one feel inside and absolution is the releasing of all those suppressing feelings and the attainment of peace. Inner turmoil does not erupt out of nowhere. It erupts due to emotional manipulation, conflicting thoughts, intuition, unexpected outcomes. Since the beginning of the novel, Nanda Kaul, the protagonist of the text has been struggling hard with her own emotions. She has apparently a very happy time all the way, but she has something under the sheen that fuels her desire to escape from the materialistic world into the world of natural beauty. Her upbringing is princely joyous and full of comforts; superb married life yet she pins for freedom. This paper deals with the circumstances that leads to her inner turmoil which results in her self – isolation. The text ends with Nanda's great grand - daughter, Raka informing Nanda that she sets the forest on fire, which is actually not, as it symbolizes the outbreak of Nanda's emotional outbreak at the death of Ila Das which abrupt her inner turmoil that has been long suppressed in her life. In this way, the paper highlights the inner turmoil with linkage to lugubrious and absolution.

Keywords: Turmoil, lugubrious, absolution, fire, freedom

1 INTRODUCTION

Fire on the Mountain (1977) by Anita Desai is an exquisitely crafted text and probably her most powerful work to date. It won her the 1977 Sahitya Akademi Award and the 1978 National Academy of Letters Award. Anita Desai is in the forefront of the second generational novelist of Indian in English. She was born on 24th of June, 1937 at Mussoorie of Bengali-German parentage.

Fire on the Mountain brings a definite sense of politics to Anita Desai's hitherto family – focused drama. The text presents a psychological study of three women characters, each of whom had her own fire of ideas which propelled them on the uncharted course of life. The truth that is revealed in this text is that the Destiny places persons of conviction in such circumstances as force them to pass through fire of ordeals to test their mettle, and to make the fire inside intenser. The text will also be dealing with the Stream of Consciousness in order to showcase the situation happenings and the motivation for the actions through thoughts, feelings and the reactions of the characters. All the three women in the text lead their lives according to the societal norms of the time and could not fulfill their desires and ambitions. According to Shakti Batra, "Anita Desai herself feels that *Fire on the Mountain* is one of her most fully realized novels, in that she feels that she achieved what she feels that she achieved what she set out to do".

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2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- to analyze the traumatic events that Nanda Kaul experienced.
- to highlight the contrast between Nanda Kaul and Raka's inner turmoil which leads to reality.
- to explore the impact of societal norms leading the three women characters to isolation.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Conceptual and descriptive approach to research are employed in this paper in developing the concepts to gain a deeper understanding in analyzing the text. The text is deeply analyzed so as to bring out the concept that is explored in this paper.

Inner turmoil in both the contrasting characters – Nanda Kaul, great grandmother and Raka, great grand daughter

Nanda Kaul was born into a wealthy family and gifted father. Naturally, her childhood days were spent in princely joys and comforts. She is the elegant old widow. The writer portrays Nanda Kaul as a trophy wife, loving mother, and grandmother who dedicates her life to her family, relatives, household chores while neglecting her yearning and identity. Formerly, she enjoyed as the wife of Mr. Kaul, Vice-Chancellor of Punjab University. She retired at her old age to the hill station resort of Kasauli, in an old house once built and dwelt in by British expatriates, and left behind after 1947. Carignano is a peaceful villa far away from the chaotic and frustrating crowd, where one can enjoy the serenity of the distant Himalayas.

According to Shakti Batra, "Nanda Kaul has witnessed only betrayals and demands of life before her retirement to Kasauli. She lived a monotonous life receiving and treating the endless streams of visitors who used to call on her Vice-Chancellor husband who had carried on a lifelong affair with his mathematics mistress, Miss David, whom he would have married had she not been a Christian. Again, the memories of her children make Nanda Kaul shudder at the very thought of her past. As a mother of several children, all demanding and unaccomodative, she had been given too many anxious moments".

At last, Nanda Kaul seems to have found a place of her own for which she craved all her life. She lives alone in Kasauli with one of her helpers and maintain a calm and composed posture of dignified personality which is beyond her shores.

Nanda Kaul feels herself superior, free at last from the claims and demands of family, servants, position. She does not want to remember the past. Nor does she want to have any connection with her friends and relatives living in the plains below. "The noteworthy point Nanda Kaul is her boldness rather her stamina to enter into self-quest at the ripe season of her life. Normally, women despite suffering continuously from extreme low self confidence and mental detachment, fail to lead a voluntary exile away from everybody in a desolate place. Her decision of a self-willed exile was her escape from panoptical masculine stare. Her choice was the Kasauli hills, topographically higher than the place where she led her precious life. It was in a true sense her 'home'. This new place was serene and reposeful which gave her a sense of superiority, and even identity. The house standing alone on the ridge embodies the elegant detachment and air of superiority that Nanda Kaul cloaks herself in and is a symbol of her isolated, lonely self. Its sweeping views of regal Himalayas and arid plains around are juxtaposed to bring out her stately physique and withered inner self. The landscape seems to be in tune with the condition of the protagonist in her loneliness". (Dr. N. Gejeswari & S. Subbulakshmi, 273)

Nanda Kaul manages a life of remoteness and contemplation. She is frustrated with the arrival of postman for delivering letters to her place. She provokes a feeling of apprehension and discomfort towards the postman. All she wants at the fag end of her life is the "sound of

the cicadas and the pines'. The other sound acceptable to her is the music of the withered rose-creeper in Carignano, which is 'an exhausted mass of grey creaks and groans".

Raka, the granddaughter of Asha, the most troublesome of Nanda Kaul's daughters came to stay with her great grandmother Nanda Kaul in Carignano. Raka means the moon, but Nanda Kaul finds nothing moonlike about her. "Nanda Kaul thought she looked like one of those dark crickets that leap up in fright but do not sing, or a mosquito, minute and fine, on thin, precarious legs" (Desai, 43). She is sickly, neither healthy nor calm or beaming in appearance. She looks like a "stranger" in Nanda Kaul's garden. The child and her great grandmother, both thin and bony – one due to illness and other due to age – meet in a quick, almost reluctant, embrace. To Raka the old lady, tall and grey in silk, appears like another pine among the pine trees, whereas Nanda Kaul looks upon her as a "mosquito flown up from the plains to tease and worry her".

Firstly, Nanda Kaul hates Raka for intruding her secluded life. Raka, who is also a lover of solitude like Nanda lives under the same roof but the reasons for their seclusion are different. Though initially Nanda Kaul is annoyed at the thought of fresh responsibilities and loss of privacy, now she increasingly realizes day by day her own affinity with the child. As a result, involvement begins again:

> After they had emptied their cups, 'What will you do with yourself now, Raka?' Nanda Kaul wondered, having watched the child seethe silently on the small stool beside her, seethe as if she were a thousand black mosquitoes, a stilly humming conglomerate of them, and did not know whether to contain or release this dire seething. (Desai, FOTM 49)

Nanda Kaul distanced herself from her own world while Raka failed to connect herself to her own world. to build. "If Nanda Kaul was a recluse out of vengeance for a long life or duty, her great granddaughter was a recluse by nature, by instinct". (Desai, FOTM 52). This establishes an affinity between the two "recluses".

According to Dr. Bharatender Sheoran, "the majority of the events in the novel happen outside the house. So, that more stress is given in the portrayal of outdoor scenes of nature. Desai wants to employ scenic view around the house to relate with the characters. Carignano is in contrast to the vivid surroundings and sits imperturbably on the top of the hill. Nanda is enraptured by the picturesque appeal of her house and its outdoors:

> Then, not being able to bear watching any more of such fantastic indecision, she turned around and gazed at her house instead, simple and white and shining on the bleached ridge. On the north side the wall was washed by the blue shadows of the low, dense apricot trees. On the east wall, the sun glared, scoured and sharp. It seemed so exactly right as a house for her, it satisfied her heart completely. (Desai, FOTM 5)

The gorge makes her upset and the memories of her grievous past start haunting her. But she is unable to get rid of unpleasant memories. The more she tries to forget her tragic past, the more she is surrounded by dreadful thoughts. Raka's quest for morbid and secluded places underlines her estrangement. She is attracted to demolition and destruction".

While Ila Das was born in a rich family with high connections but Fate, for reasons unknown, mocked at her high birth. Her life was nothing but a long series of sufferings and miseries, which she often made small with a broad smile, often turning into a giggle. She would hide her lacerating wounds under the cover of her general good nature. She consoles herself by saying that she is much better off than the abysmally poor people around her. Her story is tragic indeed. The only brief period of happiness she had was when, on the recommendation of Nanda Kaul, her Vice-Chancellor husband had given her a job at the university. And she is eternally grateful to Nanda Kaul for that. It was again on Nanda Kaul's suggestion that she took up a course in social service after she left the university job. Once,

Ila saved a child from early marriage by the child's father, Preet Singh. So, he always thought of avenging Ila. Although Ila Das is not young or beautiful or attractive in anyway, although she is a withered old woman who has been beaten and tattered by life, Preet Singh must rape her before murdering her to prove his manhood and to avenge her crossing his path. She is stripped and raped before being strangulated to death. The following paragraph highlights the condition of Ila Das's death.

According to Dr. Pamela Sarmah, "Anita Desai has employed the flashback technique in delineating the inner suffering and traumatic life of the main protagonist. All that female protagonists of the novel suffer from emotional deprivation and identity crisis. Like Maya, Nanda Kaul was also leading a life without true love from her husband. She lacks the marital harmony which every woman expects from the spouse. A deep psychological study of the text reveals at the indifference and betrayal of her husband is the root cause of Nanda Kaul's frustration and limitation which turns into a lonely figure. As a wife of the top-class executive of a renowned university she received nothing but humiliation. In Desai's novel the theme of alienation is very vital with the characters especially with female characters".

Anita Desai has portrayed the toleration of the inner turmoil by the two main characters by placing them in Kasauli, a place surrounded by almost by hills and valleys, separated from the chaotic plains which she resided earlier. "The reader has to believe that Nanda Kaul's exile is a voluntary choice. Exile creates the deliberate assumption of self-sufficiency. It is considered as antidote to the sense of alienation that one might experience. Nanda Kaul believes that the stability of her inner life has been restored, after all, those years of frustration, in these barren mountains. But her self-sufficiency turns out to be an illusion with the advent of her young great-granddaughter, Raka, into her solitary existence. The pain of neglect, the sorrow of emotional sterility becomes real once again with Raka's indifferent attitude towards her overtures of friendship. Nanda Kaul finds a strange affinity with Raka, though she had, at the beginning, fiercely resented her intrusion into her well-ordered existence." (A. Venu Gopal Reddy, 750).

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As yet, the toleration of their life events by the three women character in the text leads to the inner turmoil which, later burst out and absolved. This paper highlights the inner mentality trauma against the societal norms. Desai portrays her characters from simple to complex figure, individual to societal level in a vividly and precisely manner all throughout the text. We can know that even though if one's life is full of materialistic insight, there is a loophole on the other side. In this text, the loop hole is the inner turmoil of the characters – Nanda Kaul, Raka, Ila Das. One of the classic features in this novel is her narrative style, she ranges it from psychological indepth narratives, stream of consciousness, symbolism, flash-back, juxtaposition and contrast, soliloquy, etc.

Nanda Kaul has nothing short of in her life except for the traumas that she has tolerated. She, being the wife of the Vice-Chancellor, isn't a short of materialistic wealth. She is also a mother of three daughters. Inspite of all these fortunes, she is not a happy soul. She has been suppressing her feelings of being betrayed by her own husband, when she finds out the affairs of her husband and his mistress, Miss David. On the other hand, her three daughters are not productive at all. They are dependent to her and she is fed up of that too. Further, she has been traumatized by the death of her friend, Ila Das. All these suppression of feelings bursts out at last with the setting of the forest on fire, which actually is not. It is just a symbolization of the absolution of the turmoil that she had been suppressing for too long.

Future researcher can further discuss the fate of the three women character in the text and bring a brighter theme of the novel. Also, future researcher can analyze the text through the lens of the contemporary society and also the outcomes if the text was set in the present era, which would have included the influence of social media.

5 CONCLUSION

The incidents that's happening to Nanda Kaul leads to the emotional turmoil that she experiences. The traumatic events that she experiences which she doesn't let it out and struggles herself inside, leads to the suppression of her emotions and becomes depressed. Repression is also a main factor of inner turmoil. It is a defend mechanism to defend our mind from thinking depressing thoughts, keeping the unacceptable thoughts hidden which turn to inner turmoil. In order to escape from her frustration, hectic schedule, depressing thoughts, she isolates herself. She is also shocked and confused by Ila Das's death. It is at this moment that she makes a self-realization. On the other hand, Raka, even if she chose herself to be alone, also experiences rough bitterness of life since childhood. As a result, she feels insecure and uncomfortable with people and noises of the city. So, she chooses to isolate herself. The inner turmoil that they struggle with, comes to an end with Raka informing Nanda that she sets the mountain on fire, symbolizing the bursting out of the inner turmoil for both Nanda and Raka. With regard to this paper, the sense of being lugubrious from tolerating all those chaos of life events has absolved and attains peace finally, with the symbolization of the *Fire on the Mountain*.

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Depiction of cultural domination in the marriage system in Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy*

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ABSTRACT: Culture focuses at the nation and its citizens. The nation's identity is ridiculous without its culture. Each region has its own variations. There are many people in practice culture, especially in India. India is therefore promoting itself as a multi-cultural nation. Varied writers have varied perspectives on this multiculturalism. One of the most significant novelists in India's English-language literature of the 20th century is Vikram Seth. His extensive global cultural understanding aided him in writing on culturalism. Culturalism is the central theme of his novels like *The Golden Gate*, *A Suitable Boy*, and *An Equal Music*. He provides illustrations of India's marriage system, particularly in Western society, in *A Suitable Boy*. The paper examines Lata, the novel's protagonist, in an effort to show how the western marriage system controls Indian marriage customs.

Keywords: Multiculturalism, culturalism, marriage system

1 INTRODUCTION

Vikram Seth is a well-known economist, poet, traveler, writer in verse, and librettist in the history of Indian writing in English. Readers of the novel *A Suitable Boy* learn how the protagonist's romantic relationships contrast with the backdrop of partition and rising Hindu-Muslim communal violence. Over the course of 18 months, the story chronicles four families as a mother looks for a suitable boy to marry her daughter. Brahmpur, a fictitious city in Northern India on the banks of the Ganges River, serves as the setting for *A Suitable Boy*.

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To examine the social complexity of human lives.
- To analyze various cultural aspects through multiculturalism.
- To create change among dominated political forces against common people.
- To interpret women's courage, challenges in society and problems facing in their family.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The sociopolitical landscape of a newly independent India struggling with the effects of colonialism is explored in *A Suitable Boy* by Vikram Seth, which offers a complex tapestry of

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postcolonial theme. The novel looks at hybrid identities, how colonial learning and Western-style politics affected Indian family life, and how the country's identity changed after independence.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The excruciating pain of Mrs. Mehra and her daughter Lata is the main theme of the love story *A Suitable Boy*. By making her daughter marry the boy she selects and feels is best for her, Mrs. Mehra tries to stifle her daughter's uniqueness. She insists that her daughter,

> 'Hmm,' she said. This annoyed her mother further. 'I know what your hmms mean, young lady, and I can tell you I will not stand for hmms in this matter. I do know what is best. I am doing it all for you. Do you think it is easy for me, trying to arrange things for all four of my children without His help' (3).

The novel opens with the first few lines, revealing Mrs. Rupa Mehra's personality: 'You too will marry a boy I choose' (3). She conventions there because her family is her empire. Despite the fact that no one asks her to do anything for them, she feels obligated to make arrangements for everyone. With the exception of her ties with her father, Dr. Kishen Chand Seth, and her son, Arun, she is the dominant party in most of her interactions and, as the British used to do, she informs her subordinates that all she does is for their benefit: "I do know what is best. I am doing it all for you" (3). Mrs. Rupa Mehra's personality and that of Arun and Dr. Kishen Chand Seth are extremely similar. On the other side, Rupa Mehra is a particularly lively contraption; she insists on acting in a very modern way and is a widow who is determined to take care of her family no matter what, even if they do not want to be taken care of. According to Seth, she is like this:

> Mrs.Rupa Mehra, tom between solicitude for Pran, concern for Savita, who was due to deliver any day now, and desperate anxiety on behalf of Lata, would have liked nothing better than to have an emotional breakdown. But the press of events would not allow it at present, and she therefore, abstained (846).

Marriage is a well-established foundation in our nation that requires specific rituals and traditions. "Marriage in India does not merely mean the meeting of two individuals, but it signifies mixing and mingling of two families and involves respecting and understanding the customs and tradition as well as the members of each other's families" (Maheswari 545). Apart from the political amalgamation and cultural conflict between Mahesh Kapoor and the Nawab Sahib, this book also delves into the relationship and its difficulties between their sons, Maan and Firoz, as well as the communal riots that afflict Brahmpur. In a predictable setting like India, the relationship between a boy and a girl is explained in the literature; it is not socially or religiously acceptable. It could be annoying for Seth to present the Hindu and Muslim religions after independence. Kappor, Khan, Mehra, and Chatterji are the four families of various religions that are at the centre of the narrative.

In *A Suitable Boy* Vikram Seth gives his heroine the chance to select among three men who are completely dissimilar from one another in both appearance and character. Kabir, a smart and attractive cricket player who is Muslim, is the first suitor. Haresh, a lively and intelligent young man committed to pursuing a career in the shoe manufacturing industry, is the third suitor. Amit Chatterji, a Bengali poet and novelist who is well-educated, well-off, and a Brahmin, is the second suitor. The primary thread that unifies the entire plot structure of the book is the love affair between Lata and Kabir. All women naturally want to experience the joys of male company. However, Lata is unhappy since she insists on the validation of it through the repeated display of affection. It is not so much an expression of faith and love as it is the feeding of her shyness. Lata immediately reacts that her mother will be upset to learn that Kabir is a Muslim. She is aware that she cannot have a relationship with him because Hindu-Muslim partnerships are prohibited in Indian subcontinental religious and cultural customs.

Lata portrays the diverse aspects of Indian femininity. She is different from her older sister Savita, who seems to be an old-fashioned representation of the ideal Indian woman in clichéd Indian films and may therefore be readily identified with someone one knows in real life. Some readers have informed Seth that Mrs. Rupa Mehra, Mrs. Bennet's Indian mother, is also distinctively Italian and Jewish. Mrs. Mehra works hard to find her youngest daughter a nice alliance from the correct caste. After her spouse passed away too soon, she was left with four children, therefore this is a sort of sacred oath. She is quite disappointed that her oldest son, Arun Mehra, has his own wife, Meenakshi Chatteiji, but she forgets it since she enjoys her granddaughter. At the beginning of the novel, she is celebrating her older daughter Savita's marriage to Pran, a boy of her choosing. In addition to Lata's story, the novel *A Suitable Boy* tells the lives of other castes, communities, and groups. It develops naturally via marriage and relationships. It also discusses the current issue of intercommunal violence that has engulfed the subcontinent and India since independence. The text places the Indian political environment in context with a subplot about an interfaith love tale. As a result, the characters' private and public spheres are no longer mutually exclusive. A society from North India is translated into English by Seth. He positioned himself in India at a specific historical moment. Dipesh Chakrabarty writes:

> The phenomenon of "political modernity" — namely, the rale by modem institutions of the state, bureaucracy, and capitalist enterprise — is impossible to *think* of anywhere in the world without invoking certain categories and concepts, the genealogies of which go deep into the intellectual and even theological traditions of Europe. Concepts such as citizenship, the state, civil society, public sphere, human rights, equality before the law, the individual, distinctions between public and private, the idea of the subject, democracy, popular sovereignity, social justice, scientific rationality, and so on all bear the burden of European thought and history. (4)

The protagonist of the novel is a women who adores marriage and family. The novel's main subject is the marriage system. Given the size and cultural diversity of the country, religion has always been important in Indian life. For Indians, religious events are the way of life. There are instances when religious considerations are more important than even financial ones. Furthermore, religious convictions and religion are the most significant and potent factor for the majority of Indians. They typically have a strong commitment to their faith and its rituals. The tragic relationship between Lata and Kabir takes place in Brahmpur during the post-partition era, when communal tensions were prevalent. In this novel, Seth also highlights the traditional ideals of Indian society. Women should accept their parents' choice of life mate without question; they have no say in the matter.

Indian and English cultures are presented in the novel. Abolition of Zamindari, land reforms, Hindu-Muslim conflict, and many other issues are among the numerous topics it discusses. The novel's primary focus is the celebration of the wedding ceremony. The Hindu marriage system involves a number of procedures, rituals, customs, traditions, and religious activities that must be properly adhered to from the moment a suitable boy and girl are chosen for wedded life. A lot of things happen during the wedding ceremony, and many more things happen after the marriage. In Hindu marriage customs, the Haladi program marks the start of the actual event, and the "Bangle" ceremony is equally significant. Indian culture is reflected in all of these festivities and activities. The novelist has also depicted Muslims, their customs, and holidays. Thus, the author has depicted a form of harmony and fraternity between Muslims and Hindus. They also take part in religious events and other people's festivals.Through the miniature of the fictional city of Brahmpur, the capital of Purva Pradesh, Vikram Seth creates the collective picture of India. Through his ideal location, Brahmpur, Vikram Seth represents the northern cities of Delhi, Lucknow, Agra, Benares, Patna, and Ayodhya. The fact that our nation is multicultural, multireligious, and multilingual is accurate. According to Vikram Seth, *A Suitable Boy* also makes a case for religious tolerance. He says, "It is an insult to Hinduism that these people have hijacked what it means to be Hindu. It's tolerance, understanding – not just trying to bash your neighbor

over the head because he is Muslim. These things need to be said"(14). According to Mrs. Rupa Mehra, marriage is merely a mercenary relationship. Evidently, Seth disapproves of Mrs. Rupa Mehra's behaviour because he opposes mercenary marriage devoid of affection. Position and money should be valued appropriately, but they shouldn't be sacrificed for the sake of economic standing. Two fundamental elements that firmly ground Seth's fiction in realism and allow his work to be situated within a specific time period are social and economic standings. Seth explains how Lata endures the hardships of the marriage system in his novel *A Suitable Boy*. As a result, marriage is regarded as a sacred institution and a serious career choice for women in the Mehra family. The title of the novel and Seth's preoccupation with marriage and love may lead many readers to conclude that the book is only a husband-hunt. Lata is a girl with big ideas who is pragmatic rather than ambitious. She is smart, attractive, and most importantly, reasonable, making her the perfect young girl. She chooses her husband in large part because of her practical acumen and common sense. Since Lata is the vehicle through which Seth shows the idea of love's vulnerability—that is, the fact that only sound judgment can guide her to her desired destination amid a culture and surroundings that are experiencing tremendous change—she may be viewed as a symbol of all that Seth holds high. Her mother told her about the culture and turned down a lot of suitors. Lata eventually agreed to her mother's demand to wed Haresh. The characters' personal circumstances are dominated by obligations that are at odds with the perspective of Indian society, and they skilfully depict the evolving states of India and Pakistan. I described the woman's predicament and her tolerance in this essay, pointing out that her society controls the marital system and that she has little independence even in her marriage.

5 CONCLUSION

Political battles, cultural unrest, and economic despair in post-independence India are shown in the story, along with the shifting ideologies and unrest that typically accompany political transitions in nations all over the world. There are allegedly too many humorous and mocking elements in legislative disputes. Before the first legislative elections were held, this was demonstrated. Additionally, anonymous lawmakers show up, and bosses' direct comments are rife with irony. Seth talks about the Zamindari Abolition System and the Land Reform Act. He also talks about how communalism manifested among Muslims and Hindus after the 1947 India-Pakistan Separation Wall catastrophe. He presents the fictional city of Brahmpur, where Muslims and Hindus clash in mosques and temples, and he looks into leaders who are self-serving and power-hungry. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nair is leading the newly independent nation of India in the run-up to its first general election. India saw significant changes in politics, religion, customs, society, and culture all at the same period. In the expressions of Pico Iyer, "Seth clearly loves his people and he passes that love on to us. He shows them selfish, quarrelsome and idle, yet never without sympathy; indeed, much of the sweetness of the main plot comes from the fact that all three of Lata's shadow suitors are entirely engaging" (20). In the novel, Seth portrays the realistic picture of Indian reality. Seth explains the reality in India. By illustrating the interactions and behaviors of the individuals, he specifically illustrates the customs, traditions, rituals, practices, and moral ideals of realism.

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Haunted by silence: Repressed memory and the shape of narrative

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ABSTRACT: Fiction explores trauma, mental health, and memory by representing how traumatic experiences can reshape an individual's perception of reality, and influence their ability to remember and narrate their past. This paper examines how Morrison uses fragmented narrative structures and shifting perspectives to represent the fractured psyches of formerly enslaved individuals. In *Beloved* Morrison represents the process of healing by looking at the various aspects of silence, repression, remembering and re-narrating. This paper investigates the spectral presence of trauma in *Beloved* as an intergenerational phenomenon that resists traditional narrative closures. It argues that Morrison deliberately disrupts linear temporarily and narrative coherence to reflect the fragmented consciousness of the formerly enslaved. The novel's stream-of- consciousness narration and non-linear structure serve as mechanisms for voicing what cannot be articulated directly. In synthesizing trauma theory with a close textual analysis, this paper offers a fresh perspective on Beloved as a literary archive of repressed memory and unresolved grief.

Keywords: Trauma, Memory, Mental Health, Healing

1 LITERATURE REVIEW

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) has garnered extensive scholarly attention for its profound exploration of slavery, memory, trauma and identity. Set during the Reconstruction era and centered around the formerly enslaved Sethe and her haunted home at 124 Bluestone Road, the novel confronts the psychological and cultural legacy of slavery in African American life. Scholars across disciplines have analyzed the novel through various lenses including trauma theory, feminist criticism, historical revisionism and African American literary traditions. Critics like Cathy Caruth have applied trauma theory to analyze Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, arguing that the novel explores how trauma disrupts the experience of time and memory, particularly in the aftermath of slavery. Judith Herman (1992) offers a clinical framework that is especially relevant to Sethe's psychological disintegration. While much has been said about *Beloved* and trauma, less attention has been paid to the way Morrison uses form such as circular narrative and shifting perspectives. Furthermore, the psychological realism of secondary characters like Denver and Paul D often remains unexplored in comparison to Sethe. Few analyses fully integrate both trauma theory and narrative theory to show how Morrison enacts trauma not only thematically but formally.

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2 METHODOLOGY

The paper is based on qualitative research design. The methodology involves a close reading of selected passages, paying attention to language, symbolism, stream-of-consciousness techniques, and narrative fragmentation. Various articles of different scholars, journals, critical essays have been searched to collect data for current study. By applying psychoanalytic concepts to both character development and narrative form, this methodology aims to reveal how Morison constructs a literary space in which trauma is not only represented but also confronted and partially healed through storytelling and communal acts of remembrance.

3 INTRODUCTION

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* stands as a landmark work that moves beyond personal narratives to illuminate the shared memory of a haunted past. As LaCapra (2001) suggests, historical trauma affects entire communities, necessitating a communal process of mourning and narrative reconstruction. In the novel characters like Paul D and Denver reflect different responses to shared trauma, representing varied paths toward healing or continued repression (Eyerman 2001). The novel illustrates, how trauma primarily stemming from deeply ingrained racial stereotypes, portray black individuals as inferior leaves lasting psychological wounds. Moreover, Freud regarded trauma as more than a physical injury, identifying it as a psychological wound that disturbs the unconscious.

This research paper aims to fill the gaps by offering a fresh interpretation of Morrison's narratives choices as embodied structure of trauma. It will highlight the interconnection between psychoanalytic theory and literary criticism. Specifically, focusing on the notions of trauma and self-splitting, examining them through a psychoanalytic lens to better understand their representation and function within their texts.

4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The aim of this research is bridging individual and collective dimensions of trauma which then, aims at answering the following questions:

- To explore how memory, trauma, and mental health intersect in shaping identity and the healing process, with a particular focus on repression as both a copying mechanism and a source of psychological tension.
- To examine the transformative impact of remembering on character development and narrative progression.
- To explore the role of silence as a narrative strategy in *Beloved,* applying trauma theory to understand how unspeakable experiences resist articulation.
- To analyze the depiction of repressed memory in the novel through a psychoanalytic lens, especially focusing on how trauma resurfaces in characters' consciousness and behavior.
- To examine the nonlinear and fragmented narrative structure of *Beloved* using postmodern narrative theory to uncover how Morrison challenges linear historiography and dominant cultural narratives.

5 DISCUSSION

Sigmund Freud claims that " The information served by psychoanalysis emerged as a promising method for examining literature and also equally made itself attractive to a large

number of critics" *(Freud 189)*. Psychoanalytic theory provides a framework for examining emotional disturbances and psychological conditions, such as childhood trauma, repressed desires, inner conflicts and so on.

According to contemporary theorists like Dr. Bessel van der Kolk and Ronnie Janoff-Bulman, trauma theory is defined as:

"life experiences that shatter the social and psychological sense of self and precipitate existential crisis, characterized by flashbacks, nightmares and other reexperiences, emotional numbing, depression, guilt, autonomic arousal, explosive violence or a tendency to hypervigilance."

(The Cambridge Companion to Modernist Women Writers, 160)

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* employs a fragmented, non-linear narrative that reflects the disjointed nature of traumatic memory. "Psychological trauma is an affiliation of the powerless. At the moment of trauma, the victim is rendered helpless by overwhelming force. Trauma involves the loss of control, loss of connection, and loss of meaning" (Herman 1992, p.33). In Beloved, Sethe's memories and the ghostly figure of Beloved serve as representations of this psychological dislocation. Morrison places significant emphasis on the idea that the past remains deeply embedded in the present and resists resolution, a theme that has attracted considerable scholarly attention for its psychological implications. At the core of the novel is a complex testimony that not only bears witness to the nature of violence but also exposes the dimensions of trauma that resist coherent interpretation.

Through characters like Sethe and Paul D, Morrison explores two contrasting responses to trauma. Sethe is caught in a cycle of reliving her pain, unable to move forward, representing the repetitive process of acting out. Paul D on the other hand, begins to confront his past in a more conscious way, illustrating the process of working through, where traumatic experiences are slowly integrated into one's identity. Applying a psychoanalytic lens to Toni Morrison's particularly in examining its psychological framework, opens up multiple dimensions for deeper analysis and interpretation.

1) **The Return of the Repressed (Freud)**

   Beloved herself can be read as a manifestation of the repressed trauma specifically, Sethe's guilt, grief, and unresolved mourning over her past. The novel portrays not only the emotional aftermath of enslavement but also the deep psychological impact it leaves on its characters most notably, Sethe. While all the characters bear the weight of slavery's legacy, Sethe's psyche appears the most deeply scarred, as her trauma reverberates not only within herself but also affects those around her. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) serves as a critical lens through which to understand the intersection of internal suffering and external violence. It also reveals itself as one of the most damaging psychic conditions. Crucially, trauma in *Beloved* is portrayed as a paradoxical state: both destructive and bound with survival. This paradox points to what Cathy Caruth and others have identified as the essential incomprehensibility at the core of catastrophic experience. Freud's observations about the recurrence of traumatic memories underscore this idea, as such memories are not driven by desire or unconscious wish but return involuntary against the subject's will. The return of Beloved can thus be understood as a manifestation of this Freudian concept, representing the unconscious breaking into the present in an unprocessed form.The repressed past doesn't stay buried; it returns in distorted and traumatic experience.

2) **Fragmented Identity**

   Characters like Sethe and Paul D exhibit signs of ego fragmentation, dissociation, and self identity. Their personalities are shaped by traumatic experience, which prevents the formation of a stable ego. Morrison's use of stream- of- consciousness and fragmented narrative mirrors these internal psychological divisions. *Beloved's* main character Sethe must take a journey back to the past to confront their trauma and thereby discover their primal place and to be able to find a place and a home in the present. The story unfolds in

a circular motion, often retelling the same events with slight shifts. This reflects Judith Herman's assertion that "the core experience of psychological trauma is disempowerment and disconnection."

From a psychoanalytic point of view, Sethe's fixation on the past is a symptom of psychic paralysis. Sethe is caught between her conscious desire to move forward and her unconscious compulsion to repeat traumatic memory. Sethe's fragmented identity and merging with Beloved is vividly expressed in a stream of consciousness passage:

I am Beloved and she is mine. I see her take flowers away from leaves she puts them in a round basket. The leaves are not for her. She fills the basket and carries it into the house. (Morrison 1987, p. 200)

3) **Confronting the Repressed Past**

In Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, healing from trauma is portrayed not as a process of forgetting but of remembering and confronting the repressed past. Sethe exists in a state of psychological paralysis unable to look forward and haunted by what she refuses to fully acknowledge. These painful memories create the necessary bridge that leads to the healing of the characters, the central point of the novel.

A pivotal moment that reflects this is when Sethe begins to tell Paul D about her past. She says: "It's not a story to pass on." (Morrison 1987, p. 274)

Ironically, this is precisely the story that must be passed on for herself, for Paul D and for Denver. From a psychoanalytic perspective, Sethe's initial repression represents a Freudian defense mechanism, in which she tries to protect herself from the unbearable pain of her past. The return of Beloved is symbolic of this "return of the repressed". As a ghost made flesh, Beloved forces Sethe to relive what she tried to bury. While initially this drives her deeper into guilt and obsession, the communal intervention helps Sethe from isolation to engagement. Ultimately Morrison presents memory not as a wound, but a shared burden, and this collective confrontation allows the haunting to end.

4) **Trauma as a Living Presence**

The character of Beloved herself embodies unresolved trauma. Her physical return is not merely supernatural; it signals that the trauma of slavery, infanticide, and loss cannot be buried. Sethe's interaction with Beloved show a dangerous fusion of guilt and love, where the past overtakes the present. This reinforces Cathy Caruth's theory of trauma as "a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event," (Caruth 1996, p.4) suggesting Morrison uses Beloved not just as a character but as a literary device for delayed trauma resurfacing.

5) **The inheritor of Unspoken Trauma**

While Sethe's trauma is overt and embodied, Denver represents the silent witness and inheritor of intergenerational trauma. From a trauma- theoretical lens, Denver suffers from what Marianne Hirsch (1997) would later term "postmemory"- a second hand trauma absorbed through proximity rather than direct experience. Morrison gives Denver a quiet resilience that contrasts with Sethe's regression. Her move is a symbolic rupture from inherited silence, suggesting the possibility of renewal and re-integration into community. From a psychoanalytic perspective, Denver represents the ego's capacity to mature beyond trauma when narrative, support, and agency become possible.

Morrison's *Beloved* stands out as a powerful depiction of the psychological consequences of slavery. Her narrative reveals the harsh conditions endured by African Americans under a racist system and shows how these experiences caused deep mental and emotional scars. Morrison powerfully conveys how such traumas not only destroyed one's self but also continue to affect later generation. Her novel invites readers to consider how both individuals and communities can begin the long and difficult process of healing from historical atrocities.

6 CONCLUSION

In *Beloved*, Morrison intricately weaves together trauma, history and literature to reveal how deeply personal and collective pain shape human relationships and identity. The novel illustrates how the trauma of slavery is not confined to the past but continues to echo through memory, relationships and storytelling. Through Sethe's psychological scars and her struggle to reconcile with her past, Morrison highlights the necessity of confronting traumatic experiences rather than burying them. In contrast, Denver's narrative arc offers a quieter, yet equally significant, exploration of trauma's reach. Together Sethe and Denver illustrate Morrison's vision of trauma as both personal and collective. Morrison offers complexity showing that healing may come not thorough forgetting, but through remembering differently. Ultimately, *Beloved* becomes not only testimony to historical violence but also a blueprint for surviving its echoes.

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Amalgamation of technical and narrative devices in *The Shadow Lines*: Glancing into the sanctity of nationalism and postcolonial aftermaths

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ABSTRACT: *The Shadow Lines* is Amitav Ghosh's touching commentary on one of the most traumatic events of the sub-continent, the partition of India. This masterpiece by Ghosh focuses on the imaginary links stretching across the realities of nationality along with the feeling of rootlessness and cultural seclusion leading to the thematic propagation of the novel. One of the most significant offshoots of post-coloniality is an unusual response to the past and this work revolves around the memories connected with the pain of partition. By placing the grandmother at the center of the narrative, the author attempts to lend authenticity to his perception, since she has been a witness to the entire holocaust. Ghosh questions the authenticity of these arbitrary divisions and celebrates the togetherness of aliens who are rooted together by the self- propelling sensitivity and friendship. A narrative like *The Shadow Lines* provides insights into the reality of human experience in a persistently changing social environment, when the very concept of the nation has acquired a new definition. Ghosh shows that men and countries set up borders to exclude people and create differences based on nationalities, race, culture and religion. But the borders set by men are mental constructs, and the lines on the maps are mere shadows.

Keywords: Arbitrary divisions, Partition, Nationality, Rootlessness, Cultural Seclusion

1 INTRODUCTION

Political freedom was a momentous event that took place in 1947 when India became independent. However, the freedom won in 1947 did not create a perfect order of harmony, whereas the nation was shaken by the fear of displacement, rootlessness and division in the name of peace and prosperity. Diving deeper into reality, the political freedom won by the nation has created deep roots of misunderstanding, rage, restlessness, and animosity in the mindset of people drawing up superfluous lines, demarcating boundaries. In *The Shadow Lines* Ghosh's text develops these insights where he recalls the days before and after partition of India, into east Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and West Bengal, which is part of India. In the name of religion, Bengal was segregated into two parts, where the Muslim majority part of Bengal became East Pakistan, and the Hindu majority part of people remained in India as residents of West Bengal. The development of the plot is a serious exposition of the repercussions of violent events which leave deep imprints on the mind of the people. Nandita Sinha rightly points out, "It is not what happened, but the meaning of what happened that is the central concern and the meaning emerges when the past and the present are considered together." (Sinha 1995a, p.179) *The Shadow Lines* outlines complex themes like political conflict, national identity, and cultural dislocation through the use of memory and imagination, multiple perspectives and varied stories. Referring to its fictional space, another critic

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observes, "An effective fiction, it emanates from a particular historical moment which intersects the narrator and the nation at the crucial point of their evolution and growth . . . The novel is rich in signifying transaction that do not depend for their effect on "solid slabs of continuous experience" but on the potentiality and materiality marshalled by the author to anchor his perception of reality. It quickens our conscience, frenzy of violence, idealism, passion and intrigue that has amputated the narrator's intimate history and geography." (Prasad 1996, p.17)

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The Research Paper aims to create an understanding of Humane feeling across borders. It describes the sanctity of Nationalism and envisions victory of humankind through peace and harmony between nations.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The Research Methodology includes a comprehensive analysis of various Technical and Narrative devices employed in this piece of art. The development of the plot through utilization of metaphorical devices, stream of consciousness technique, memory and imagination, felicitous symbols, political allegory, oral narrative and multiple perspectives lead the research towards its objective.

4 NARRATIVE DEVELOPMENT & METAPHORICAL DEVICE

The year 1939, significant for the Second World War was also the period when India was passing through colonial rule. Chronologically the narrative starts at this point of time, when the friendship between Lionel Tresawsen and Tridib's grandfather, Justice Chandrashekhar Datta Chaudhari, was strengthened by their heirs. The plot of the text keeps moving forward and backward in time and has sixteen sections in the first segment and fifteen segment in the second. The unnamed narrator protagonist travels not only from Calcutta to London to collect material for his Ph.D. thesis but also indulges in memory and time from 1981 to 1960's onto the 1940's and earlier. The narrative structure of *The Shadow Lines* is dominated by the motif of memory and imagination, the memories in the mind of the narrator relating to his uncle Tridib, his experiences and history as a leading force behind development of personal identity, along with the sanctity of nationalism.

The Shadow Lines develops a metaphorical structure, "The Lines" symbolize all such lines that divide nations and people in the name of religion, caste, language and nationalism. In the narrative structure Ghosh denies the existence of these lines and therefore calls them "Shadow" or illusionary lines. Which metaphorically suggests an escape from reality. According to Suvir Kaur, "*The Shadow Lines* is a metaphor for evading rather than exploring political realities" (Kaur 2000, p.302). The narrative structure of the novel develops with the contrast between present and past imagination and reality, childhood experience and the response of the adult to them. This is the recurrent device used by the novelist and it serves to expose metaphorically the illusionary nature of dividing line between the present and the past. The love affairs in the story, first between Ila and Nick and the second between Tridib and May are metaphorically significant because both the affairs are an absurd and futile attempt for freedom from the past. Ila leaves India because she wants to be free from the middle-class orthodoxy but is caught in the same in England and Tridib wants to meet May as, "the completest of strangers, far from their friends and relatives – in a place without a past, without history, free, really free, two people coming together with the utter

freedom of strangers." (Sinha 2000 b, p.144) But this love affair is metaphoric of the futile attempt to draw a line between the past and the present, as they connect with each other in Victoria Memorial, Kolkata, a place which has past or memoirs.

5 STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS TECHNIQUE

The narrative structure in this piece of art is cyclical. The character keeps on moving from one place to the other. Displacement is an important element in the novel. The cyclical movement of the narrative is at times manipulated by the narrator with the help of stream of consciousness technique. He goes into the past not only through memory but also through the 'going to' and 'coming back' – a concreteness, which in the text is moving historical events as its backdrop. According to Seema Bhaduri, Amitav Ghosh uses the stream of consciousness technique through, "Sketchy disjointed outlines of memory, associations and fancies as they pool into the narrator's mind and consciousness by way of reminiscence, fusing gradually into a coherent pattern of stories, mutually interrelated, yet disparate intersecting only laterally, specialized in their simultaneity, the profile of a multilateral world." (Bhaduri 2000, p.106) Amitav Ghosh emphasizes the creative role of imagination in delineating the uncoiling of memories through the stream of consciousness of Tridib and other characters like the grandmother. Through the diversion of the narrator's stream of consciousness the socio-cultural ambience of London and Calcutta are portrayed. It is also understood that the narrator-protagonist has memories of individual events and different people at different times, which is restructured and reorganized to create a proper meaning. They are in the form of a remembered history, all these aspects also make the narrator-protagonist an unreliable narrator, who is not away from the narrative but is rather an active participant in its development.

6 POLITICAL ALLEGORY

In *The Shadow Lines* Ghosh's own self reveals itself in the form of the twin protagonists exploring the individual self against the forces of history and the world's political reality. The novelist exquisitely uses the political allegory to envisage upon the requirement for a syncretic civilization, to prevent communal holocaust. The questions of the validity of boundary lines are emphasized by geographical contours and chronological fluidity. Events are scrawled over with later reflections and thus it allows Ghosh to dramatize the full task of a historian. He exemplifies the different strands of nationalism and ideology in a changing world through the grandmother's overtly contemptuous attitude towards Ila, May's internationalism, Nick's colonial Rangover, who gave up job in Kuwait and clung to Britain's colonial past for greater opportunities of exercising power and travel, Ila's Trotskyite friends picketing for political causes and her own striving for personal freedom. The force of nationalism in the quest for freedom is often a source of violence. A.N. Kaul perceptively comments, "In viewing nationalism as both an invention and a force for destruction Ghosh has put himself alongside a considerable number of modern western scholars, ranging from Elie Kedourie and Hans Kohn to Tom Nairn and Benedict Anderson. To quote just one such scholar, Ernest Gellner; Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist. This revisionary and negative view of nationalism, now developed by a whole line of writers, originated around the time of the second World War . . . the rise of new imperial nationalism not only in Germany and Italy but also in Japan . . . and was given further impetus later by the challenge of rising national movements in the former colonies as well as the savagery and violence let loose in many of the new nations." (Kaul 1995, p.301) Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* presents a dexterous blending of private lives and public events into a desultory mosaic of history.

The writer has competently recognized the narrator's spontaneous consciousness and his collaborations with the multi-cultural representatives in a fabricated development of the novel; Ghosh makes this novel a subtle medium of sophisticated comment on current realities. As the novel is cyclical in its narrative structure it keeps on moving backward and forward in time, but the events in the narrative cover a span of roughly fifty-five years, from the year 1925 to 1980. As said by Novy Kapadia, "The author boldly tackles political themes both national and international." (Kapadia 2004, p.147)

7 MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES: PERIPHERAL AND CENTRAL

The narrator in *The Shadow Lines* recounts the story from various angles, sometimes peripheral, sometimes central and at times also from shifting perspectives. As in the text, when the main narrative shifts to Tridib's, Ila's or grandmother's life, the narrator-protagonist is peripheral in the story and views the happenings from their perspective whereas when the narrator narrates the life of the other characters in the novel, then the narrator-protagonist is central or frontal. The narrator highlights the perspective of the author in the novel, he thus focuses on the author's views on political freedom being the most significant aspect in contemporary life, and also his take on communal discord and nationalism, which are the distinct features of contemporary life on the subcontinent. *The Shadow Lines* has first-person narration which lends an autobiographical flavor to the novel. But it is different from usual autobiographies because what is narrated by the first-person narrator-protagonist is not entirely the narrator's life, but it is the experience of the narrator's uncle Tridib.

Though *The Shadow Lines* has a first-person narration in terms of time, it has a dual point of view; that of a child and an adult 'I'. In other words, it can be elaborated that the experiences of childhood are once again visualized when the adult narrator connects with the present. As Nandita Sinha puts it, "the dual viewpoint gives us a sense of inhabiting both past and present simultaneously" (Sinha1995a, p.178). For example May and Tridib are presented from a child's point of view as, "I was jealous, as only a child can be, because it had always been my unique privilege to understand Tridib and that day, at the Victoria Memorial, I knew that I had lost that privilege, somehow May had stolen it from me" (Ghosh 1998, p. 170).The understanding developed after seventeen years and then he becomes aware of the true nature and meaning of their bond. Similarly, when the grandmother plans to return to her home in Dhaka, but the prospect bewilders her as she is now a foreigner to that place, the child innocently misinterprets her confusion as anxiety about travelling in a plane; "I could see, then, that she was going to land up in a hopeless mess. I was sure, for example, that she would roll her window down in midair unless I warned her not to" (Ghosh 1998, p. 152). But as he grows up, he understands her state of mental conflict, of how she had become an alien to her birthplace.

8 MEMORY, IMAGINATION & FELICITOUS SYMBOLS

Memory and imagination are the important devices used in the narrative development of the novel, In the words of Rama Kundu, "Both space and time appear simultaneously concrete and fluid in the novel" (Kundu 2000, p.180). The first section of the novel entitled "Going Away" suggests a moving away from space. At the opening of the narrative, Mayadebi is going away from India to England with her family. Here space is geographical and emotional. So, the concept of space is introduced in the narrative structure. Tridib feeds the imagination of the narrator with stories of the year he had spent in London with the Price's family. The narrator, who had derived his concepts of space from the memories and imagination of Tridib and Ila, searches for his own space when he grows up, but he only finds the Shadow Lines. The death of Tridib also creates the element of tragic density in the novel.

Every trivial figure in this piece of art by Ghosh has its significance to the intense existence of its time. The Citroen parked on an English roadside and the huge tables in Ila's Calcutta home become artefacts of their time. The entire history of England is encapsulated by a simple photograph taken by the Price's during the Second World War as there was in the freshly dug pit which served as an emergency trench. There was also a figure of a Trotskyist who had fought the Spanish Civil war and now wrote for left wing papers, another was an Irish nationalist, the third was the academic, Snipe . . . Mrs. Price's husband, the fourth was Tridib's father . . . the suited booted Anglicized Indian. Then there was Tridib's mother standing with the baby Tridib in her arms, with the veil in her hand and lastly the lady Francesca Halvery who shared the house with the three men. There was another photograph of Lionel Tresawsen and Mrs. Price's father. This photograph is also important as he was a globe-trotter, inventor, humanist, a Renaissance figure, who summed up the spirit of European history and the need for a historical vision. This means that every image, be it Ila on a London street, the picture by Price's family or the description of culture in various communities, incorporates multiple layers of reality for the readers through the craftsmanship of the writer.

9 ORAL NARRATIVE: SECRET OF THE SENSE OF COMMUNITY

The writer exquisitely reveals the sense of community through various sections in the text. The following excerpt, recounting the time of Durga Puja in the streets of Calcutta, are too life-like to be ignored, "It was the day before shoshti, a perfect Puja Day, with the clear October sunlight lying golden in the galis; the air cool, free at last of the damp summer heat. We looked into the back lanes as we walked, exclaiming over the bright pandals and awnings – some not yet finished and others with the images installed and their loudspeakers already humming." (Ghosh 1998, pp. 33-34) Such a superb presentation of the Bengali nuances and cultural niceties is a significant feature of oral narrative which is the essence of the community. Ghosh complicates the classical mapping of the world into East and West by dividing his narrative into two parts, "Going Away" and "Coming Home". His characters here come and go in many directions. The irony is that the nature of Bengali language does not allow for a point of origin: therefore, the location of temporal and spatial points in relation to an origin becomes impossible as in the attempt to locate and fix coordinates to distinguishing between 'coming' and 'going', "But of course, the fault wasn't here at all: it lay in language. The very language assumes a centrality, a fixed and settled point to go away from and come back to, and what my grandmother was looking for was a journey which was not a coming or a going at all; a journey that was a search for precisely that fixed point which permits the proper use of verbs of movement." (Ghosh 1998, p. 153) The ignorance of the narrator's grandmother as to the differences between 'coming' and 'going' is a reference that only Bengalis understand. It relates to a unique construction in the language where the Bengali speaker utilizes the language in the affirmative development of understanding to say 'Aaschi' (coming) instead of 'Jachchhi' (going). This is especially used as an equivalent to 'Good-bye'. Thus, while leaving a place, they say "I am coming" instead of 'I am going'.

10 CONCLUSION

In the ultimate analysis, the thematic examination of the novel presents the need for co-existence and humanitarian ties despite the cultural and political variances. The narrator, in the novel strongly supports the vision where he demands on the need to preserve memories of wisdom and humane feelings, for this alone will help in cultural unity, respect and sanctity towards nationalism and prolific inter-personal communication. As Robert Dixon puts it, "*The Shadow Lines* is, therefore, a fictional critique of classical anthropology's model of

discrete cultures and the association ideology of nationalism. The 'reality' is the complex web of relationships between people that cut across nations and generations." (Dixon 1996, p.14) The thematic advancement and the technical arrangement in this historical fiction occupies the mind with the upheavals of colonialism and its aftermath. This work also compels us to envisage upon the importance of humanitarian ties, love and friendship across borders and to develop a better understanding of the arbitrary divisions made to fragment humanity.

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Unveiling marginalization and marital dynamics: A study of Karna's plight through the lens of *Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen*

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ABSTRACT: The research paper deals with the theme of marginalization in the world renowned Indian epic Mahabharata, as seen through the perspective of the character which has not been talked much about- Karna's wife. This character has been discussed in detail in the novel *Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen*. The paper examines how Karna's marginalized status, owing to his complex lineage and societal prejudice, impacts both him and his wife, highlighting multi-dimensional consequences of social discrimination. Drawing from various researches on Mahabharata and analyzing the narrative choices made by author Kavita Kane in her novel, this paper aims to illuminate the marginalized existence of Karna, exploring how his low caste background influences his identity, and decisions. The paper also tries to explore the effect of marginalization not only on Karna but also on his family, specifically on his wife as a key agent of understanding. Urvi, Karna's wife, develops as a crucial character whose perspective adds depth to the portrayal of marginalization, shedding light on the challenges she faces as the spouse of an outcaste warrior. The paper scrutinizes the emotional and psychological implications of Karna's position on his wife, unfolding the complexities of love, loyalty, and societal expectations.

Keywords: Marginalization, Mahabharata, Caste Discrimination, Marriage, Karna, Retellings

1 INTRODUCTION

The word myth derived from the ancient Greek term "mythos," has a unique and enduring place in oral literature. These narratives are like symbolic frameworks that conveys and preserve the values, beliefs, principles and wisdom of human societies. Myths are essentially factual accounts with deep cultural significance. Myths hold and possess deeper truths about human experience. They are not just source of entertainment; rather, they are means through which intricate cultural ideas and societal values are conveyed to the generations. Since time immemorial with the use of myths and mythologies complex moral and philosophical ideas are conveyed to the diverse cultures. The significance of myths has a profound impact on society. The epistemological understanding of these narratives adds volumes to the people's collective experience. They are not only the link between past and present, but also enable individuals to connect with their ancestral heritage and comprehend their position within a

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broader cultural continuum. These stories reinforce the social bonds. They help us understand the complexities of various human relations, and reveal a marked revival of interest in diverse virtues and vices. Therefore, myths become repositories of wisdom, offering timeless lessons for ethical living to the humanity.

Myths are dynamic, adaptive narratives that change with human societies, not static artefacts preserved in amber. Mythological traditions change in tandem with cultures as they evolve and change, reflecting changes in moral perceptions, societal values, and group goals. Moyers asserts "Myths are stories of our search through the ages for truth, for meaning, for significance" (Campbell and Moyers 1991). Every generation finds new levels of meaning in well-known stories, which leads to a constant reinterpretation of mythological themes. Ancient myths are frequently reimagined to speak to contemporary issues while retaining their fundamental archetypal power. Because of this flexibility, even when the surface details of ancient stories are reinterpreted or reimagined, they continue to have significance for audiences today. As a result, myths are living stories that transcend cultural and temporal boundaries to act as bridge between the past and present as well as between the individual and the community. They highlight the various ways that diverse cultures have addressed the universal issues of existence, morality, and purpose while serving as a reminder of our common human experiences. Myths continue to enthrall our imaginations, deepen our comprehension of the world, and provide direction for navigating the challenges of morally complex living in a world that is constantly changing because of their enduring presence in human consciousness.

Mahabharata is a timeless epic of India because it represents the narratives, emotions and characters which are relevant in the contemporary era as well. In 2013, budding author Kavita Kane brought a fresh perspective to this age-old tale through her mythological novel *Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen*. Kane in this novel throw light on the life of Karna and brings out the difficulties endured by him because of his birth in a lower caste. He faced immense humiliation at the hands of his own people, he fought a never-ending battle for respect, and the pain of living on the margins of society are portrayed with such heart wrenching details that readers can feel his anguish themselves. The study sheds light on the deep and lasting effects of social discrimination by examining how Karna's marginalized status or social exclusion—caused by his complicated family lineage and social biases—affects both his life and his wife's experiences. This exclusion and marginalization play a significant role in daily interactions, identity-formations, and choices one faces. Karna's wife Urvi becomes a significant figure whose viewpoint deepens the comprehension of marginalization. The paper aims to investigate the psychological and emotional effects of Karna's behavior on his wife.

The research paper is an attempt to explore

- A multidimensional study of the consequences of social discrimination, while Karna's own experience will be a focal point, we also aim to examine the effects of this discrimination on his wife, who occupies a significant role in his life.
- The paper also aims to analyze how the reimagined and recontextualized framework of marginalization can reshape our understanding of traditional narratives and marginalized characters.
- Through this paper we also try to discuss the relevance of our findings in a contemporary scenario as it sparks discussions on social justice, identity, and inclusion.

2 METHODOLOGY

Mythology since time immemorial has drawn the attention of philosophers and scholars towards its deeper meanings and cultural significance. Friedrich von Schelling, a German

philosopher, played a significant role in igniting this fascination. He argued that myths represent a unique way of expression connected to particular phases of human growth, acting as a means through which people understand the divine or ultimate reality. A purpose of myth is, as an eminent scholar has mentioned, "provide symbolic representations of cultural priorities, beliefs and prejudices" . . .. Myth is, indeed, an "ideology in narrative form" (Matthew Kapell 2011). During 20th century scholarly interest in mythology gained momentum, due to the influential theories of Sigmund Freud. One of Freud's most important contributions was the concept of the Oedipal complex, which explored the psychological aspects of mythical narratives. The discourse about myth has attracted the attention of diverse academic disciplines, including philosophy, linguistics, literary criticism, semiotics, and various theoretical frameworks. Scholars from these diverse fields have approached the study of myth from their unique perspective.

The methodology employed in the paper integrates an intersectional approach combining literary analysis with interdisciplinary research to examine themes of marginalization and caste discrimination in Kavita Kane's *Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen*. We tried to incorporate ideas from a variety of academic fields, such as historical analysis of social practices, sociological studies on caste systems, literary criticism and theory, and current research on food culture and discrimination. This all-encompassing way of studying the literary text enhances its interpretation by enabling a thorough analysis of the theme from several perspectives.

3 THE CONTEXT OF KARNA'S MARGINALIZATION

India is country where caste system has a long history. This is evident through the depiction of Karna's character in the *Mahabharata*. Karna was the son of Kunti, and she has given him birth, before her marriage to King Pandu. She has received a *mantra* as a boon from *rishi* Durvasa and in her curiosity, she by invoking the sun god, *Surya* begets Karna as her first born. However, being an unmarried princess, she abandoned Karna. And Karna was adopted by charioteer named Adhiratha and his wife named Radha. This adoption into a low-caste family significantly shaped Karna's life and subjected him to societal discrimination. Despite having immense potential and natural talent, Karna often faced discrimination at the hands of various people.

> He did not wish to be a charioteer like his foster father, but a warrior, an archer. With this dream, the young Radheya, the son of Radha as he was also called, approached the best teacher of martial arts in Hastinapur—Guru Dronacharya—the guru of the Kauravas and Pandavas, but the guru refused to teach him because he was not a kshatriya. (Kane 13)

He was not just denied formal education by renowned guru Dronacharya, but he was publicly humiliated by Draupadi, the wife of Pandavas in her *swayamvara*. She refused to accept him as her suitor because he was charioteer's son (sutaputra), ". . . As Draupadi, the yajnaseni, the one born out of fire, I insist on being declared a veeryashulka, a bride to be won by the worthiest and the very best. I will not allow a low- born sutaputra to participate in the challenge" (Kane 31). Contemporary scholars have recognized how "Karna and Eklavya that they both are marginalised but they are empowered they had expressed their wishes and attempted to fulfil it" highlighting the persistent nature of social discrimination that prevented merit-based recognition in ancient Indian society. Karna was generous by nature. He offered alms generously to the needy but people were hesitant to receive food from him. The boon he asked from Krishna which he was unable to carry himself was ". . . *annadanam*—his wish to distribute food to others so as to liberate his soul from the cycle of births. That was one wish he regretted he could never carry out, as people avoided eating in

the house of a low-born man" (Kane 290-291). Scholars examining caste and food practices emphasize that "eating, played an integral role in retaining the purity and distinction of the Hindu social organization" (Joshi 2021), making Karna's charitable aspiration impossible to fulfill despite his genuine spiritual intentions. Therefore, regardless of his exceptional talents and noble qualities, he continually confronted the stigma of his low-caste birth.

4 THE OUTCAST'S QUEEN

Kavita Kane's novel *The Outcast's Queen: Karna's Wife* provides a vivid and empathetic portrayal of the challenges Karna and Uruvi endured due to Karna's low birth status. Uruvi plays a significant role in portraying social discrimination faced by Karna. Uruvi being a high-born princess, defies societal norms by choosing to marry Karna. Her decision to follow her heart and marry Karna regardless of his social status challenges the prevailing caste-based hierarchy. Uruvi fell in love with Karna when she saw him during the archery contest in Hastinapur. She was determined to marry him, though all her near and dear ones tried to warn her about the consequences of marrying a low-born. Her father, King Vahusha tried to convince Uruvi when he said,

> Do you think you will upgrade his status by marrying him? No, you will only worsen yours. You know how it goes in our society. *Anuloma* or the practice of marrying a man of higher caste is legitimate. But you are well aware that the reverse practice of *pratiloma*, that of marrying a man of lower caste, is prohibited by the *shastras*. (Kane's 18-19)

Uruvi's unwavering love and determination towards Karna shows her strength of character. Her devotedness, strong will and firm decision finally led to her marriage with King of Anga. However, in her *swayamvar*, Kings and Princes felt insulted, even Arjuna felt humiliated and jealous because of Uruvi's choice of Karna over him. But Uruvi was determined on her decision, she is rather seen as a tenacious young woman who is progressively vocal.

Uruvi's marriage to Karna has not come as a shock to Kshatriya clan but rather it has brought ripples in the household of Karna also. Shatruntapa also named Shona, Karna's younger brother reacted furiously to this news of marriage of Karna and Uruvi. According to him, ". . . she's a kshatriya princess, a stranger, an outsider who will never be able to mingle with us. She is sure to disrupt the peace of this house. Worse, she may take him away from us . . ." (Kane 45). Not only that when Uruvi interacted with the entire family of Karna she realized that Adhiratha and Radha, his parents shower their whole affection on Karna and Vrushali Karna's first wife, is also thoroughly devoted to him. She wondered and questioned herself if she will be able to share the love and devotion of Karna with other members of his family. Uruvi wrestles with many such inner conflicts and applying Freud's model, her inner conflict can be seen as the battle between the id (emotions, desires), her ego (rational self), and the superego (societal norms). Karna's unwavering friendship with Duryodhana also contributes to Uruvi's inner conflict. Uruvi's love for Karna is at odds with her sense of morality and duty towards her family and Pandavas. This conflict between her emotions and societal expectations creates a complex psychological realm for her. Her love for her husband and his devotion for Duryodhana emphasizes throughout the work this inner conflict between id and superego. Karna's act of encouraging Dushasana to drag Draupadi into the court and disrobe her has shattered Uruvi completely. She questioned him and asked him that how would he justify this shameful act of his. She made him realize that his action is immoral and unacceptable.

> You are so fixated about your negative status and low birth, and yet, it prompted you to call Draupadi a harlot; it instigated you to order her to be stripped. You are deceiving yourself if you think you are this kind, good and noble person when you

> are not! You never were! You are as despicable as Duryodhana and Dushasana. It is not Yudhishthira but you who lost everything, all that you were proud of, all that you were so righteous about. You have let yourself down, and you have let all of us down! (Kane 117)

The shameful act of encouraging Dushasana to disrobe Draupadi was more like a revenge he wants to take from Draupadi. And Karna's alignment with Kauravas and loyalty to Duryodhana is compelled by his sense of obligation and gratitude. Duryodhana respected Karna for his skills and bravery. He was acquainted with Karna's background and he accepts him as an equal and a friend. Karna was touched by this large heatedness and compassion of Duryodhana. The resentment and discontent are the result of his personal experiences of discrimination and rejection by society. It is, in part, an act of asserting power against those who treated him as an outcast. The incident also shows that the marginalization of Karna influences his choices throughout the *Mahabharata*. Hence, Karna's marginalization shapes his character, values, loyalties, and actions contributing to the complex dynamics of relationships.

5 MARGINALIZATION/SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND MARITAL DYNAMICS

According to scholars, marginalization, or social exclusion whether based on race, gender, socioeconomic status, or other factors, can have profound psychological and emotional impacts on individuals. They assert that these impacts can lead to low "self-esteem, insecurity, internal conflict, resentment, and anger etc." *Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen* Kane retells the story of Karna from his wife Urvi's perspective. She gives a nuanced understanding of his character and how the exclusion has shaped him as a distinct character. He constantly battles feelings of inadequacy and somehow it has made room for various insecurities also. His continuous desire for validation and acceptance is evident when he learns about his true lineage as Kunti's son, "At last I know who I am. I am a kshatriya, Uruvi, that identity I so desired all my life" (Kane 235). However, this revelation deepens his inner conflict, as a friend to Duryodhana and as an elder brother of Pandavas. This marginalization has impacted him thoroughly, it extends beyond his individual experience, affecting the dynamics of his marital relationship with Uruvi. Their relationship is marked by inherent sense of being outsiders, which can create a bond between them but also lead to a feeling of exclusion from the rest of the society. His inner turmoil has at times distanced him from Urvi and created misunderstandings. The disrobing incident and Karna's involvement in the game of dice and his support for Duryodhana, who is responsible for Draupadi's humiliation, lead to conflicts and tensions within their marriage. "It was as if an invisible, impenetrable wall has divided them" (Kane 164).

However, Uruvi's compassion and empathy for Draupadi's humiliation during the disrobing incident also serve as a catalyst for her choice to marry Karna. Draupadi's contempt was towards her husbands. After the incidence Draupadi understands his plight and anger. Uruvi after meeting Draupadi was able to recognize Karna and his qualities. Uruvi's understanding and empathy towards Draupadi made her ponder:

> . . . the agony of a woman who had five husbands but with no one to protect her, who is alone and uncared for. She had married the Pandavas—the mightiest warrior-princes of the kingdom—but all they could do was maker her their queen. They could neither protect her nor give her the respect and honour that a woman, wife or mother should get. Married to them, she remained alone, unaided, undefended, uncared for and even unloved. Was that why she pined for Karna even today? (Kane 130-131)

Uruvi's encounter with Draupadi and her resulting understanding of Draupadi's suffering helped strengthen her resolve to marry Karna. This meeting provided Uruvi with deeper insight into the problems faced by women in similar circumstances, ultimately reinforcing her commitment to her chosen path. Uruvi recognizes and made us understand the hollowness of the conventional norms that dictate marriage. Her decision to marry Karna based on character and principles, strengthened her admiration for him. Witnessing Draupadi's plight, Uruvi recognizes the injustice and the societal prejudices that underlie the incident. The event deeply affects Uruvi, and her decision to marry Karna is partly driven by her desire to challenge the norms and prejudices of her society. Hence, the disrobing incident is extremely crucial to the overall narration. The moral dilemmas they must deal with as a couple and the injustices prevalent in the society are constantly brought to light by this incident.

6 SYMBOLIC SIGNIFICANCE OF URUVI'S CHARACTER

Uruvi is depicted as a powerful character in the novel. She is a woman of compassion, defiance, and fortitude. Uruvi's character throughout the text, has shown personal development and transformation at multiple levels. Her persona serves as a metaphor for the idea that people can change and grow, questioning both their own convictions and social expectations. Her transformation from a princess constrained by custom to a woman who chooses values and love showcases her inner strength.

She is very important and helpful in Karna's life. Karna receives moral, practical, and emotional support from her just like any other wife does to their husbands. Uruvi has emotional stability and she has a sense of belonging because of her unwavering love and acceptance. In challenging times also Karna has full support of his wife Urvi. She has never doubted his potential and his honesty. Karna's desire for acceptance often put him at odds, but Uruvi's conviction in his ideals and principles strengthens his determination to act morally even in the face of moral dilemmas. Uruvi becomes Karna's confidante, someone with whom he can share his innermost thoughts and struggles.

> I cannot stop him, understand this, Uruvi. No one can,' he replied quietly. 'Duryodhana is like this because he has been mentored by the evil Shakuni far too long. He believes his right to be a king has been usurped by his cousins who, frankly, he has never considered his cousins at all. He has never acknowledged the sons of Kunti and Madri as the sons of Pandu. (Kane 97)

This open communication allows Karna to express his feelings, fears, and conflicts, helping him navigate his complex identity. Uruvi is often seen by his side during his difficult times. She is invaluable in every aspect for Karna. She is a strong advocate of his rights and recognition.

7 KARNA'S LEGACY AND CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE

Jean Paul Sartre's existentialist philosophy, encapsulated in the phrase "existence precedes essence," asserts that individuals first exist and then define their essence or meaning. In Karna's story "existence precedes essence" is relevant because it underscores the idea that Karna's essence, or the meaning of his life, is not determined by his birth or societal labels but is constructed through his choices, actions, and ethical decisions. This demonstrates that, in a world which is usually characterized by the outside influences, people have the ability to create their own world of meaning. The enduring themes of friendship and loyalty are highlighted by Karna's friendship with Duryodhana and his unwavering loyalty to his

friend, even in the face of moral dilemmas. His actions highlight that true heroism often lies in putting others' needs before one's own. Karna demonstrates very well the value of selflessness and sacrifice by being willing to forgo his own happiness and well-being in order to benefit others, such as Duryodhana and his mother Kunti. Karna keeps his word and upholds his ideals throughout his life. He is a prime example of the importance of leading a principled life because of his dedication to the truth and his resolve to keep his word.

The injustices that marginalized communities have endured and continue to endure even today are poignantly brought to light by Karna's story. People who deal with caste-based prejudices and discrimination in various facets of life find resonance in his experiences. The problems of economic inequality and social inequality are deeply rooted in Indian culture. The persistent difficulties faced by people born into underprivileged socioeconomic situations are reflected in Karna's marginalized background. His story let people question equitable access to opportunities and resources. Karna's marginalized identity intersects with various forms of marginalization. In contemporary discussions about privilege and oppression, this intersectionality is pertinent because it highlights the necessity of addressing social injustice.

8 CONCLUSION

By examining Karna and his wife's characters from a novel perspective, the paper highlights the importance and need of re-reading classic literature and figures in order to glean more profound sociocultural and psychological insights. The study provides a better comprehension of the intricacies of societal discrimination by analyzing Karna's marginalization and exclusion. It highlights how people can be marginalized despite having exceptional qualities because of circumstances that are out of their control. The study also examines the effects of marginalization on his wife in addition to Karna, the main character. This deepens our comprehension of how discrimination impacts not just the marginalized person but also those who are connected to them. The research endeavor encourages reflection on the applicability of these old stories in the modern times by opening a forum of discussion on current concerns about social justice, identity, and inclusion.

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The Francophone writers at the crossroads: Between exclusion and recognition in the French literary field

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ABSTRACT: This study addresses the challenges of Francophone authors in France and their contribution to the French literature and culture with emphasis on Marie NDiaye's activities. Natives of Francophone backgrounds are faced with language barriers, cultural biases, and suppression from the mainstream literary circles, which stands in the way of their recognition. Even with these struggles, their work increases the range of French literature because of the inclusion of variegated voices coming from the Francophone world.

By breaking linguistic and cultural barriers, the authors reshape France's identity of literature, stepping away from this single nation to more colourful, more multicultural. These complications find expression in the writings of Marie NDiaye herself, such themes as identity, gender, race, and social inequality. Although critically acclaimed, her work has, at times, received opposition from the French literary establishment, which reveals the biases. However, Francophone writers such as NDiaye provide new and enriching insights of modern French literature, which stresses the need for cultural diversity.

Keywords: Francophone, Immigration, Marginalization, Recognition, Alienation

1 INTRODUCTION

Francophone literature refers to all the literature written in French in the countries, not only in France but also in other areas speaking French like Canada, Belgium, Switzerland and some of the African countries. It is a post in Francophone cultural heritage, which provides a variety of voices and perspectives (Hiddleston 2016, pp. 82-92). In France, it has a major impact on the definition of national identity and triggers cultural debates.

Great thinkers such as Aime Césaire, Leopold Sedar Senghor and Frantz Fanon have been political and literary contributors, specifically through such movements as Négritude, which defied colonialism and spoke for oppressed cultural identities. Other writers such as Albert Camus, Simone de Beauvoir, Tahar Ben Jelloun, and Leïla Slimani have also contributed more to enrich the Francophone literature (Nelson 2015, pp. 1-4).

Marie NDiaye, a writer of French descent of Senegalese origin, has become an important voice of the contemporary Francophone literature. Her works discuss such themes as identity, gender, race, social injustice. While she won the Prix Goncourt in 2009, she has said that she had felt ignored by the French literary establishment (Jordan 2010, p. 97).

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Francophone authors resist the cultural hegemony and help to create multilingual and multicultural literary space widening French literature and its diversity. Their inputs restructure national identity and leave fresh perspectives.

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This research is directed at critical analysis of the complex relationships that exist around reception, representation and recognition of the Francophone authors in the modern French field of literature, where the works and trajectory of Marie NDiaye are concerned. Through this, the main focus is to look at the ways in which the Francophone authors, especially immigrants' origin or the postcolonial background ones, negotiate a literary field which was a domain of monolithic understanding of the French national identity and cultural legitimacy. Based on a case study of Marie NDiaye, the study will explain how the race, language and the gender intertwine to bring out both the creative outbursts and the public response of the Francophone writers in France. Notwithstanding her magnificent literary work, deriving a receipt of prestigious Prix Goncourt, NDiaye has addressed her feeling of being marginalized in the French literary world. The paradox [of institutional recognition and cultural alienation] is a critical point of departure for broader consideration of inclusion and exclusion in the French literature.

The research will thus address the following specific goals:

(1) To describe and understand the structural, cultural, and linguistic barriers that Francophone authors experience in the French literary structure (publication practices, editors' expectations, politics of making a literary canon),
(2) To explore the functions of Francophone literature in the work of unravelling the most dominant stories of French identity, including such themes as hybridity, exile, colonial memory, and multiculturalism.
(3) To evaluate the literary impact of Marie NDiaye as a preserved example of the conflict and potentials imbedded in the Francophone authorship, with a focus on how her works address issues of identity, displacement, and otherness.
(4) To add on to the scholarly discourses on postcolonial literature, literary legitimacy and the new/changing face of "Frenchness" in the 21st century from the perspective of Francophone literary production.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative case study approach to investigate the challenges that French-speaking writers in France experience, and the significant contribution to the French literature and culture. Marie NDiaye is the main case study that presents detailed and keen position regarding the complexities in the contemporary French literary world.

The methodology of the research combines the extensive literature revision, textual analysis of NDiaye's works, and biographical details. It tries to unveil the processes of marginalization, the linguistic impossibilities, and the cultural prejudices surrounding these authors, but at the same time recognizing the paramount role they played in resizing the French literary sphere.

Primary sources are NDiaye's novels, essays, and public pronouncements, with secondary sources that include critical studies, academic papers, publishing reports, and socioliterary analyses. Postcolonial and cultural theories and Pierre Bourdieu's framework on the literary field and symbolic legitimacy were used for the analysis of the topic to guarantee a thorough recognition of the subject.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

French-speaking writers living in France are sometimes faced with obstacles preventing their inclusion in the pantheon of the French Literary Heritage. Such challenges arise from long uniformity-based consideration of French culture and also a colonial hangover as well as a historical linguistic and racial prejudices within the ecosystem of publication.

The reception of Francophone authors depends a lot on the language. Even though they are writing in French, they use non-Parisian linguistic styles and allusions. According to Carolan and Evain (2013), such differences are contributing towards the marginalization of the Francophone writers, whose work is not being accorded equal recognition like those of the metropolitan French authors. The anticipation of linguistic uniformity often leaves innovative or hybrid literary works out.

Besides, the effects of structural racism also affect the inclusion of Francophone writers. Saha *et al.* (2020) reveal that writers of colour, especially in literary fiction, crime fiction, and children's literature, are subjected to skepticism in the form of supposed editorial quality standards. Publishers might be reluctant to approve too "communitarian ", and/or non-white narratives appearing to have little to do with the dominant, white, middle-class audience.

Saha's findings reveal that, in spite of attempts to recognize the past exclusions in the industry, questions about the marketability of the diverse narratives continue to be raised in publishing, entrenching the Eurocentric hierarchies. This debate goes further than representation alone to how literary works are framed and sold, as well as valued in the publishing world.

Francophone literature is usually marginal in the French literary environment. According to Kiwan (2005), it is a "sub-field" or peripheral phenomenon, even though it is essential in literary production. This exclusion is historical and is well-based in the colonization history and hierarchy ordering of cultures.

4.1 *Immigration and its influence on french literature*

The history of immigration has created the cultural and literary identity of France with the waves of migration from the North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa and other countries (Kapanga *et al.* 2005, p. 19-21). These movements not only have supported economic development but also added to the literary environment.

The first large-scale immigration happened at the beginning of the 20th century, when workers from North Africa, Europe were attracted to cover labour needs. After the second world war, France promoted massive movement Africans from its old colonies to support post-war reconstruction (Kapanga *et al.* 2005, pp. 19-21). Immigrants and descendants over the time were able to merge into the society and contribute duet to different perspectives to literature.

Perhaps, one of the most prominent influences of immigration in literature is the appearance of Beur authors – the children of North African immigrants whose works portray themes of identity, cultural hybridity, and issues with integration (Toivanen 2021, pp. 358-371). Some of the outstanding writers of Beur include Leïla Sebbar, Tahar Ben Jelloun and Faïza Guène whose works have got recognition in the world. With literary contributions, the immigrant authors are faced with publishing constraints in their bid to attain main street recognition. Some use self-publishing or digital platforms, others form literary networks to help each other (Déjeux et al, pp.5-19).

There have been more attempts at celebrating the writers who are immigrants such as the literary events (Festival des écrivains du monde and the Prix littéraire de la Porte Dorée). European immigration into France, from such countries as the Belgium, Italy, Poland, Spain and Portugal as well, has also made its mark on French literature.

Nowadays, most of the French-speaking authors are immigrants or children of immigrants. Marie NDiaye's novel is a representative sample of this literary development

whereby she opposes dominant narratives and transcends the literary corpus through confronting the themes of exile and cultural hybridity (Edo 2015, pp. 1151-1196). These days, French literature remains influenced by immigration and brings pluralistic views and stimulates artistic imagination.

4.2 *Obstacles for immigrant authors in france*

The francophone authors of immigrant origin in France are frequently faced with limitations that prevent them from publishing their works in literature and gaining recognition. These barriers include language barriers, cultural differences, discrimination, and under representation in the industry of publishing. A report from French Ministry of Culture indicates that immigrant authors are still marginalized in literary circles and are unable to grab publishing deals or literary awards. Language barriers are especially challenging for those who do not have French as their first language and as such have trouble making their works conform to the norms of dominant literature (Soleil *et al.* 2022).

Additionally, immigrant authors often have to deal with the stereotype or bias in the publishing world and readers. Lack of diversity in publishing limits them, placing pressure on them to adhere to mainstream literature fulfilment at the cost of their authenticity. Translation difficulties add to the difficulty in making their visibility, because the works might lose any linguistic or cultural nuances in the process of translation to another language (Tissot 2016).

In addition, the dominance of great Parisian publishers is another impediment to the Francophone authors, especially African writers. Colonial-era practices-based centralization of publishing impacts literary landscape to this day. Most African writers are forced to depend on French publishers in order to get their works out there, losing control on pricing, availability and level of visibility. The issue of insufficient literary agents and publishing apparatus in Africa aggravates these troubles. (Tadjo 2019)

Despite going through publication, authors of immigrant origins still find it hard to capture media spotlight since literary criticism in France favours national works at the expense of the Francophone ones. This marginalization is a reminder that there is need for a more representative and inclusive literary industry where equal opportunities are given to all writers independent of origin.

French literary trends indicate an active readership but show discrepancies in publishing of the books. Based on a report by Statista, France has always registered a higher readership rate than French speaking Belgium. Although the percentage of readers in France grew from 5% in 2016 to 10% in 2021, the rate of publication decreased from 53% to 34%, meaning that there was a decline in production of books even though reading numbers rose (Statista 2021).

According to a report done in 2022 by the International Organization of La Francophonie (OIF), 409 million people outside the Francophonie speak French, 54.7% of these daily French speakers were found in Africa. There are still arguments on the veracity of such statistics, with the use of wide rims for "Francophone" definition Bloating the figures (OIF 2022).

Future forms of protests will look very different from current ones and are likely to be organized by chronically ill patients who have attended protests and agency workers. The SNE determined that only 10% of the published books in France, come from Francophone writers in these regions, showing that publishing disparities still exist (SNE 2021).

4.3 *Francophone authors overcoming challenges*

Francophone authors keep finding new ways of overcoming barriers to literary fame, networking, using social media and working with publishers, champions of Francophone literature. The increasing worldwide audience in Francophone works is an indication that their cultures and literature are gaining a better understanding on a larger global platform. (Schofield 2013)

- ***Language and Legitimacy: The Invisible Barrier:*** The French language requirement posed by the Francophone authors is a basic challenge. By and large, the language could not be their native language. The writers of immigrant origin have to deal with linguistic norms that favour metropolitan French. However, some authors who are lauded for their fluency by virtue of the fact that French language is their second language come under criticism for being impure or hybrid as in the case of Slimani and Daoud (Kapanga *et al.* 2005). This linguistic bias reveals how the French literature is based on rigid norms, and thus creates a necessity to change the author's style for it to be institutionalized. The conflict between authenticity and change recurrently comes to the fore in the Francophone literary circles.
- ***Stereotypes, Exoticization, and Identity Assignment:*** Identity-based assumptions often puzzle French-speaking authors as being the rule of a creative expression. Publishing houses tend to promote narratives of immigration, war, or oppression, which impairs the thematic diversity. For example, criticism regarding Marie NDiaye's protraction of African women has followed her works despite her work's universal subject matter on lineage, memory and guilt (Tissot 2016). This tendency to consider Francophone literature as not art but testimony lessens its literary value, and due diligences these authors have to struggle to gain mainstream acceptance.
- ***Racism, Prejudice, and Invisible Obstacles:*** Silent racism remains to hamper the visibility of the Francophone authors. Others, such as Slimani, have had to deal with industry skepticism: publishers found manuscripts "too Arab" for consideration in the French market (Tadjo 2019). This aversion towards the non-Western narratives confines the boundaries of the literary discourse in France. Moreover, writings on the topic of migration, racism or colonization are quite frequently dismissed as "too political" – thus dissuading the authors from writing about current social issues.
- ***Eurocentrism and the De-francophoneisation of the Francophonie:*** The Eurocentric idea of the literature makes a hierarchy where French-born authors are given preference. The 2017 Prix Goncourt was criticized, because it was choosing Eurocentric writers, reinforcing the marginalization of the non-French writers (Nelson 2015). These bias parallels literary authenticity with Frenchness, which is exclusionary to writers using cultural hybridity in their plot.
- ***Towards a Positive Development:*** However, it is gradually changing with the French literary institutions slowly accepting diversity. Some of the organizations to help Francophone writers with scholarships and residencies include the International Organization of La Francophonie (OIF) and the Alliance Française. A facet about the state of French literature depicted by the writers like Alain Mabanckou, Fatou Diome, Slimani, Daoud, and David Diop shows that French-language literature could thrive (SNE 2021). Escaping from excluding and eurocentrism helps to introduce a richer and more collective literary tradition. The francophone literature is changing bringing in new ways of expressing creativity and cross-cultural storytelling.

5 CONCLUSION

Language tensions, identity conflict and representation tension linger the French literary scene. Even though the French language is spoken in numbers of countries, metropolitan writers rule the literary arena in the country, bringing inequality in the recognition of Francophone writers from various backgrounds.

These writers have many obstacles, such as linguistic biases, identity-based classification, lack of institutional support, and Eurocentric mode of publishing. These barriers are an expression of the deeper cultural struggle towards embracing plurality of voices that form French literature.

To be inclusive, literature needs a reevaluation of legitimacy criterion. Editorial policies need to change, juries must become more diverse, and more attention should be paid to the translation and promotion initiatives. Critics, cultural institutions and readers have to accept alien literary expressions that enlarge instead of shrinking to the conventional French narratives.

Well-known personalities, such as Marie NDiaye, Leïla Slimani, and Kamel Daoud, are an example of resistance to rigid classification of identities. Their literary works show us that storytelling is not limited by borders and gives rise to dialogue and defines the French identity through alternative views.

Given the subject of continuing immigration debate in France, one related to identity as well as colonial memory, upon admitting Francophone authors, this recognition has a political, cultural, and ethical value. Including all the voices can only confirm that French literature is meant for all of its contributors and not for a chosen few based on their heritage or geographical location. The enlargement of the literary canon holds the potential for new perspectives and it reinforces the cultural exchange.

5.1 *Scope for future study*

Instead of comparing Marie Ndiaye's works, one can make comparison between more francophone authors. Why some underrated authors or francophone authors are not given place in main stream.

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Class-coded nonverbal depiction of the lower-class in Indian visual media: Analysis of selected films and series

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ABSTRACT: Nonverbal communication has been an area of overwhelming research, continually opening new avenues for exploration. This paper examines how Indian films and web series portray the lower-class people, specifically the domestic helps, through nonverbal communication. The study focuses on the various nonverbal aspects of these portrayals to explore how class is visually captured and encoded by the media. Rather than focusing on aspirational narratives, it highlights the ordinary, everyday lives of the lower-class people. Characters like Ratna in *Is Love Enough? Sir*, Sudha in *Lust Stories* (Zoya Akhtar segment), Mala in *Dabba Cartel*, and Meeta in *Hindi Medium* are analyzed for how they depict their class through the loud silence of the body. The paper, through Guerrero *et al.*'s framework, Pierre Bourdieu's theory of *habitus* and Erving Goffman's performance theory, seeks to understand why the nonverbals of the lower class are so typically represented in the visual media and how the social hierarchy gets quietly communicated through the body.

Keywords: Class Representation, Nonverbal Communication, Indian Media, Lower Class People, Performance

1 INTRODUCTION

Class and status are at the heart of the Indian society. Roots of class-based division run deep and are an intricate as well as an inseparable part of its social fabric. These divisions are not just spoken through language or measured by income—they are visually and behaviourally encoded into the body. How an individual walks, the way they stand, whether or not they initiate touch, the kind of clothes they wear or even the volume of their voice becomes an indicator of their social positioning. This ingrained social hierarchy functions like an unwritten agreement, silently passed down and reinforced through generations of learning, observation and internalization. The body remembers it all and ensures that this learning is passed on. Nowhere is this more clearly reflected than in Indian visual media, particularly contemporary cinema and web series, where lower class characters are not simply portrayed but performed with recognizable authenticity.

The present paper seeks to explore the body as a site of enactment translating into class-based distinctions reflected in its act of nonverbal communication—the transmission of social meaning through gesture, gaze, posture, dress, movement, silence, and space (Knapp *et al.* 2014). These elements are not just stylistic choices; they are deeply steeped cultural codes of behaviour representing a specific class. In a society where words can be manipulated or disguised, the body never lies and often becomes the truest indicator of class identity. Portrayal of class in Indian media has been studied extensively, particularly in relation to caste, poverty, and social mobility (Mankekar 1999; Rajadhyaksha and Willemen 1999). The existing research mostly focuses on economic indicators like material divide or occupational status or consumerist ambitions as main descriptors of class (Mazzarella 2003;

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Prasad 1998). Spoken language with its markers of code-switching, vernaculars, pronunciation, too has been explored as a key class indicator (Dwyer 2000; Ganti 2004). Research has also focussed on social positioning in plot development to underscore the role of class in the society (Nandy 1998; Vasudevan 2010). However, exploring class as embedded in the body remains an under-explored space. This visual performance of class through nonverbal cues is a peripheral area silently seeking attention from the centre. Present study seeks to fill that gap by analysing how class is depicted not just in what characters say or do, but in how they physically carry themselves within cinematic and digital visual storytelling.

Moreover, the portrayal of the working class is often filtered through an upper-class gaze. Characters like the domestic help in *Sir* are shown performing service labour with a particular set of gestures—lowered gaze, careful steps, subdued voices. These reflect real social behaviour and are not simple cinematic devices to enhance the effect of a scene. They represent the divide and are not just filmic choices. They mirror how class is lived and felt in everyday life. These portrayals feel next door or smell of home because they mirror everyday encounters in houses, streets, and gated societies across India. The familiarity of the representation is part of its cultural power. Highlighting, questioning and understanding the representation of these underlings is thus, the main aim of the research.

Importantly, this paper does not attempt to assess whether these characters remain trapped in their class roles or escape them. Instead, it focuses on how their nonverbals echo the norms, limitations, and codes of their class identity—often in a way that is unnoticed, unseen, or visibly inconspicuous to the viewer but deeply embedded in the shared cultural memory. Using the frameworks of nonverbal communication theory (Guerrero *et al.* 2011), Bourdieu's habitus (1984), and Goffman's dramaturgical theory (1959), the analysis centres the body as a site of social inscription—a space where power, inequality, and social knowledge are stored and performed. The specific theoretical frameworks have been, thus, carefully chosen.

Through a comparative analysis of selected Indian films and web series this paper interrogates how lower-class characters are constructed—visually and nonverbally. It argues that nonverbal cues in Indian media are not random but part of a shared visual lexicon that encodes class through gesture, tone, space, dress, and presence. These portrayals carry not just narrative weight, but sociological depth.

2 OBJECTIVE

To examine how Indian cinema uses nonverbal codes to visually depict lower-class identities.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 *Research design*

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive research design, grounded in visual semiotics and nonverbal communication analysis. It employs textual analysis as its core method, focusing on selected Indian films and web series where working-class characters are prominently featured.

3.2 *Sample*

Four movies and web series, Is Love Enough? Sir (2018), Lust Stories (Zoya Akhtar's segment, (2018), Hindi Medium (2017), and Dabba Cartel (2024) were selected based on their cultural relevance, popularity, and critical reception, as well as their rich portrayal of class through visual behaviour. These movies and films present different lower-class characters,

three out of four being portrayed as domestic helps, who are relatable in their depiction, acting out the class in their unique way. The variety makes us see and hear the class as deeply embedded and inscribed in the body irrespective of the genre or the tone—be it in Ratna's silent submissiveness, Sudha's emotional control, Mala's dual identity, or Meeta's imposed mimicry. It is everywhere.

3.3 *Analysis procedure*

As already mentioned, the selected movies/web series have been analyzed using nonverbal communication categories, theory of *habitus*, and the dramaturgical theory. Before proceeding with the analysis and discussion it is imperative to understand the rationale behind the use of specific frameworks. These theoretical frameworks help to identify repeated nonverbal patterns, compare behaviors across characters and contexts, as well as analyze the scenes through a cultural and sociological lens. They tend to throw light on the typicalisation of the nonverbals as seen in the characters under study and how their bodies become representations of their social status. Guerrero *et al.*'s framework divides nonverbal communication into the following areas: haptics (touch), proxemics (spatial distance), chronemics (time), vocalics (voice), kinesics (body movement), and oculesics (eye contact). These categories make it easy to dissect and understand the behaviors in detail. Although these categories are from the Western Communication theory, they are as much relevant in the Indian context. In India caste, class, and gender norms define the nature and manner of space, distance, eye contact and touch. Marginalized spatial distancing and lowered eyes are not just personal habits or markers of respect but strict indicators of social hierarchy. They are reflective of internalized social order and embodied submission. This framework has been used contextually, adapting it to unmask how Indian visual media non-verbally portrays the class. Pierre Bourdieu's sociological framework, *habitus*, refers to the imbedded habits, natures, and attitudes that regulate how individuals interact with and perceive the world. This theory lays bare the fact that people, rather subconsciously, learn and absorb the class and their bodies reflect it. This class-based behaviour is reflected in their daily rituals. Bourdieu's lens precisely explains the typified visual representation of the lower-class characters and how even the director's or the scriptwriter's gaze is influenced by subconscious acceptance or learning of how the lower-class must look and behave. Erving Goffman's dramaturgical theory sees social interaction as a theatrical act where individuals engage in impression management. Goffman's theory is absolutely apt because it explains how people enact social roles depending upon the social stage they are performing on. Character of Meeta and Mala specifically are a case in study demonstrating how class determines the codes of engagement. These theories together provide a strong base of how and why the nonverbals of the working class are represented in a certain way in Indian storytelling laying bare their class or social positioning in the process.

The following section presents a detailed critical analysis of the four Indian films and series that prominently feature lower-class characters.

3.4 *Analysis*

In this section each work is examined through the lens of the theories mentioned above and explores how class identity is represented not just in speech or setting but in the embodied behaviour of characters.

Is Love Enough? Sir (2018): Story of forbidden love, Ratna, played by Tillotama Shome, is a live-in domestic worker whose body language throughout the film reflects a quiet, deep internalization of class boundaries. Ratna is the embodiment of restrained labor. Her folded arms, downward gaze, and soft-spoken voice speak volumes about her place in the social hierarchy. Rather than simple behavioural choices, these aspects of behaviour reflect her *habitus*—the deep-rooted bodily practices designed by her lower-class status (Bourdieu 1984).

She knows her boundaries and always limits herself to the periphery, avoiding the centre. Her movement in the house is well defined and purposeful. She is never idle, but her ignorance or avoidance of the physical centrality seems more rooted in conditioned subordination. Her self-containment echoes Goffman's concept of "front stage performance" (Goffman 1959, p. 22), because Ratna is subservient and enacts humility and spatial discipline in the presence of her employer or the upper-class gaze. Her plain attire and avoidance of or minimal touch performance ((artifactics and haptics) make her visibly inconspicuous, marking her physical self as compliant and contained, distanced from the central power structures.

In scenes where she serves tea, her body language is typical, hands low though steady and shoulders slightly hunched. Her eye contact is limited in duration, and she rarely enters the room without permission. These nonverbals become clear markers of her role in the household hierarchy. Her plain, unadorned clothing blends with the background of the upper-class Mumbai apartment symbolising her invisibility. The only moments when her tone rises gently, quietly battling the constraints around her, is when she discusses her dream to be a fashion designer. Her tone and her dreams reflect her attempt to negotiate the pull between compliance and aspiration. Her portrayal is realistic and restrained, culturally aligned and emotionally powerful.

However, the interesting aspect of this portrayal is the reaction of the actress, Tillotama Shome. Interestingly enough Shome has been very uncomfortable with the kind of praise that she garnered around her character. She herself mentioned in one of her posts how she was appreciated for bringing the character alive on screen by comments like, she "danced like a maid" or "cooked like a maid". Disappointed and appalled she critiqued this perception, stating: "It felt like a veiled insult. Because maids don't dance a certain way. Cook a certain way. Speak a certain way. They're not a monolith. No one is" (Shome 2020). This quote highlights how class-coded performance is expected, endorsed, and essentialized by audiences—laying bare the deep-rooted stereotypical realism in public consciousness. Her shock at the audience's reaction only strengthens the key point in in Bourdieu's theory that class-based compartmentalization is comprehended and reinforced through the nonverbals albeit subconsciously. That *habitus* is not just enacted but also expected.

Lust Stories (2018): While Ratna's character is all about silent subservience minding her spatial boundaries, Sudha, played by Bhumi Pednekar, in *Lust Stories* adds an emotional layer to the representation of class. Unlike Ratna she has crossed the societal *Lakshman Rekha* but even in that crossing her body remembers what she does not want to. She too is a domestic help but has an affair with her employer which ends abruptly when he gets engaged. Sudha's character is reticent and subdued like a domestic help should be, even in the intimate moments, with subdued gaze, low voice and stiff posture as if one who is simply acted upon. Her emotional responses are a result of her social *habitus* which she is unable to overcome even during the sexual act. Her anguish is also subdued and silent even when she is able to negotiate her emotional trauma. Quiet unless spoken to, she avoids gaze and limits her movement. Her body language carries a sense of pride (rooted in overstepping of social limits) in her intimacy with her employer which comes crashing down eventually, giving her a hierarchical reality check. Her simple attire and gestures distinctly indicate her 'in service' position even in moments of intimate betrayal. In fact, when she ties her salwar string, with her shirt tucked under her chin, is so typical a mannerism portrayed by the people belonging to her class.

Goffman's dramaturgical theory is pivotal here because one finds Sudha enacting different roles. In private space, as opposed to public, she does express some emotions but subconsciously her body does not forget its place in the social order. In a particular scene, her peripheral existence is made evident when she watches the engagement party from a distance, standing in the background synonymous with the furniture. Her facial expression remains blank, yet her posture—rigid, arms folded, lips tight—her paralanguage and kinesics scream destruction. This scene demonstrates how nonverbal act can communicate stratified, nuanced social commentary. Her loudly heavy silence, her ignored presence,

underscore her status as a worker and as someone structurally unacknowledged. Her entire relationship is enacted through subtle glances, cautious and hesitant movements, as well as proxemic avoidance, demonstrating how love and labour co-exist but are hierarchically and compartmentalised, resonating Hall's (1965) concept of proxemic omission and prohibition. Sudha's character depicts how lower-class women cannot completely own their space, have a voice or govern their touch. She becomes representative of systemic class conditioning embodied in her silence which should not be misconstrued as passivity.

Dabba Cartel (2024): In contrast to Ratna's subservience minding her limits and Sudha's quiet resignation while crossing hers, Mala, portrayed by Nimisha Sajayan, is a layered character performing a radical dualism. She embodies two identities—public and private. Her public self is a typical and stereotypical domestic help—small steps, submissive glance, quiet voice. Her nonverbals are representative of Guerrero's frameworks as well as her class-conscious *habitus* evident in her invisibility. However, her private self is more self-assured, her posture, tone, gaze change and become instruments of control. Even her attire demonstrates duality of character—maid-like in public and modern in private. This dichotomy in her attire is visually encoded, positioning her body as both invisible and commanding.

As a domestic help, Mala exemplifies the textbook domestic worker: soft-footed, nearly invisible, polite and apologetic. However, in scenes where she is part of a secret criminal syndicate, her nonverbals change—straight spine, confident composure, and slow, deliberate speech. Her artifactics also change—cotton sarees as a domestic help, while darker, structured sarees as a part of the cartel. In one intense confrontation, Mala remains seated while the others stand, asserting her presence not through volume but through controlled, deliberate movements. She reverses the power dynamics. This transformation is more than symbolic; it is strategic. She manipulates class-coded nonverbal norms to maintain dual identities—servant and sovereign. Goffman's theory, thus, becomes strongly evident in her character through transformations she undergoes from a "front stage" submissive worker to another more commanding self, enacting her role according to the social stage and space she occupies. By exercising her control over her nonverbals, she subverts the class codes and strategically reappropriates the inherent rigidity in Bourdieu's *habitus*.

Hindi Medium (2017): Absolutely different from Ratna, Sudha and unlike Mala who conveniently navigates her dual life, Meeta (Saba Qamar) struggles to mimic the lower-class persona. Meeta offers a satirical yet insightful take on class-coded body performance. When she and her husband move to a 'basti' to appear eligible for school admission under the EWS quota, Meeta tries to mimic lower-class. Meeta's attempt to 'act poor' results in a hyper-performance of lower-class behavior. Her posture becomes hunched, her speech exaggeratedly crude, and her attire deliberately cheap. The contrast between her elite and 'basti' personas highlights how class embodiment is not easily imitated—it is lived, not worn. Her enforced mimicry demonstrates that class-coded behaviour is more deeply rooted than appearance alone. Her performance highlights her limitations to connect with the lower-class *habitus* the disconnect between appearance and reality being too evident.

She wears deliberately worn-out clothes, adds oil to her hair, and overacts humble gestures. Yet her posture is too studied, her speech too forced. Her failure to convincingly perform poverty reveals how class embodiment is not just visual—it is socially and emotionally learned. Bourdieu's theory becomes evident here because Meeta's nonverbals are not naturally in sync with the behaviours defined by lower-class socialization. She appears artificial. In her artificiality is echoed Goffman's performance theory because she proves to be an unconvincing actor on the lower-class social stage. Her discomfort in navigating crowded lanes, and the theatricality of her mannerisms, underscore that class is not a costume. The upper-class body simply cannot shrink convincingly enough to replicate poverty. Nonverbal codes are lived realities rooted in one's body with years of experience and repetitions of behaviours.

These portrayals demonstrate how despite the differences of genre, narrative space, and authorial intent, a commonality binds all of them—their body. Their class speaks through their body. Their gesture, gaze, posture, movement, silence, and spatial presence, everything becomes a system or a process through which social identity is performed and perceived. The four works use the body to silently inscribe the class. Ratna's spatial guard, Sudha's expressive restraint, Mala's dual physical registers, or Meeta's failed mimicry, shows how class has a non-verbal vocabulary of its own and is quietly lived through the body. All the four characters can thus, be seen as case studies of how non-verbal communication acts as a socially scripted language of class. Their shared, silent syntax connects them and establishes the body as the narrator of social hierarchy, also evident in the Indian media.

The following discussion combines these findings by linking them back to the theoretical frameworks and evaluating their sociological implications.

4 DISCUSSION

As mentioned, based on the analysis of the four works, this section brings together the key aspects of nonverbal communication and how they are depicted using the three frameworks. These theories help one understand the visual enactment of class through the nonverbals of the lower-class people in the Indian visual media. Through the categories like kinesics, oculesics, proxemics, paralanguage, artifactics, and haptics , an attempt has been made to examine how Indian visual media nonverbally encodes class in lower class characters. These representations are not only consistent across cinematic texts but deeply reflective of and recognizable in real-world Indian settings.

Classed Kinesics and Habitus: Kinesics, or body movement, is a critical tool indicative of an individual's social status (Knapp *et al.* 2014). Characters like Ratna (*Sir*) and Sudha (*Lust Stories*) move cautiously, with hunched shoulders and folded arms—embodying years of acquired deference and internalized class hierarchy. These micro-movements reflect Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*—social conditioning that becomes inscribed onto the body. These characters rarely challenge their social space because they are used to eliciting conditioned responses. Their nonverbal choices are indicative of the operative force of *habitus* in the everyday life negating any need of coercion to bring about obedience or subservience.

Gaze, Space, Power and Submission: While kinesics' focus is bodily movement, gaze and spatial positioning provide critical interpersonal cues help in navigating or structuring the power dynamics and social access. Eye contact or occulesics too is a compelling indicator of class boundaries. According to Goffman (1959), gaze acts as a regulator of power in social interaction. Characters like Ratna and Sudha rarely make eye contact with their employers, underlining their subordinate status. Occulesics here is not simply emotional—but representative of hierarchical conditioning (class-coded). Proxemics or the language of space and distance is an important aspect that governs an individual's status in the society. How characters occupy space reflects social hierarchy (Hall 1966). The working-class characters analysed here consistently remain in doorways, edges of rooms, or back kitchens. This establishes Bourdieu's theory that class operates spatially: the elite take and own the space; the poor withdraw from it.

Vocalics and its Classed Performance: While eyes and space reflect power and status, voice too embodies the class. Paralanguage—tone, pitch, pace, volume—is a critical indicator of class. Characters do not just speak differently—they hesitate, withhold, and soften their presence through vocalics. Low tones, soft volume, and careful pacing are consistent across most characters. These choices are not only emotional or cinematic buildup—they are socially learned vocal strategies that reflect a lack of entitlement to space or speech (Trudgill 2000) as well as lack of civilisation and culture when seen through upper class lens. As Bernstein (1971) theorized in his work on restricted and elaborated speech codes, working-class individuals often develop a more circumscribed linguistic pattern due to limited

symbolic capital like education, high class linguistic codes or formal discourse. This is reflected in the subdued tone, regional accent and limited vocabulary used by characters like Sudha, Ratna, Mala, whose restraint is both internalized and socially expected.

Attire and Semiotics of Class: Apart from kinesics and tone, appearance is a key visual indicator of class, dressing the people not just physically but socially as well. Clothing or attire (Artifactics) is another potent code not just a costume. According to Barnard (2002), clothing acts as a semiotic system—conveying identity, access, and status. Attire becomes a powerful, silent symbol of class and authority. Ratna and Sudha's plain saris imply humility, while Meeta's 'poverty costume' reveals how class is also performed visually. While one finds Ratna and Sudha quite comfortable in their attire, Meeta's failure to dress-up poverty realistically emphasises the gap between lived and enacted reality. Her upper-class body does not carry the memory of lower-class conditioning, hence the over-attempt at looking poor becomes evident even though the clothes are correct.

Haptics and Classed Resistance: Finally touch or the avoidance of one also reflects how proximity to someone and expression of feelings is controlled by social hierarchy. Touch, or haptics, reveals power dynamics in interaction (Hertenstein *et al.* 2006) as touch too is class coded. Lower-class characters initiate little or no physical contact as is evident in Ratna's withdrawal when her employer expresses his love for her and kisses her. Her withdrawal is not emotional rather class conscious because her body has been taught to recoil rather than assert herself or find equality. The physical touch between domestic workers and their employers is a forbidden space emphasising hierarchical or structural distance. Emotional expressions are internalized, and bodies are physically distanced from others. This aligns with Scott's (1985) theory of everyday forms of resistance—passive bodily behaviours that reflect structural suppression.

The nonverbal patterns, as depicted on the Indian screen, reveal the performance, reinforcement and rare strategic resistance of the body—one that becomes a text: silent yet loud, carrying, depicting, and passing on generations of class-coded behaviour, and laying bare the embedded hierarchical structures. From being just a cinematic device, the nonverbals of the characters represent a social phenomenon, a shared cultural grammar. These nonverbal depictions are not just about cloning the 'real' on screen but also about how these portrayals strengthen and promote the deeply rooted social hierarchies in Indian society. Media, in its representations, thus contributes to the socio-cultural vocabulary that normalises subjugation, humility, and spatial peripheralization of the lower-class. The body in the process becomes an instrument of promoting inequality. As mentioned earlier in the paper such representations seem authentic because cinema mirrors the life, and these are not mere symbolic or imaginary reproductions. Such depictions compel one to realise how power operates not just verbally but silently as well—making the sociological implications of the study both urgent and real.

5 CONCLUSION

The present paper has explored the embedded class consciousness in the nonverbal codes of the lower-class people and how it has been translated onto the screen. One finds a consistent pattern of nonverbal behaviours typical among the lower-class people—lowered gaze, soft tone, cautious body movement, and subdued dress—which indicate their social positioning within the visual hierarchical setup. These nonverbal depictions are not random; cultures teach them, society emphasises them and visual media repeats them; and in the process these depictions echo Bourdieu's idea of *habitus* and Goffman's perspective of social life as a stage and people as actors. Rather than tracking whether characters rise above their identity group, the aim here was to explore how they inhabit it—through physical cues that feel both familiar and culturally conditioned. Indian cinema not just presents these characters but depicts them with such realism that they seem authentic. That cinema seems to stereotype

these representations is almost expected because the directors, scriptwriters, costume designers are as much the products of Bourdieu's *habitus* and actors of Goffman's social stage as these lower-class characters. Rightly so, the audience can relate to the characterisations because of their social proximity to the life cinema dramatizes as well as their own social learning. The lower-class itself seems to be at ease with their portrayals because of the internalised norms. Their bodies, consciously and unconsciously, express the social position shaped by societal expectations. The study finds that in Indian films and web series; class is performed through the body—through what characters *don't* say as much as what they do. Characters like Meeta who attempt to cross these boundaries and imitate the lower-class, are not convincing enough while delivering the code, highlighting how deeply embedded class performance is. On the other hand, Mala and many like her, manipulate visual cues, staging subservience while portraying power, subverting expectations in tactical ways. Further research can explore the intersection between nonverbal class coding and its interactions with gender, caste or regional identities. Ethnographic studies may also be conducted by juxtaposing the reel and real-life service workers. Ultimately, the findings highlight the fact that in Indian cinematic representations body is not just part of the narrative—it *is* the narrative when it comes to class.

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Developing writing coherence through iterative feedback: A longitudinal study of upper primary ESL students in Indian multilingual classrooms

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ABSTRACT: The present study examines how structured feedback mechanisms influences coherence in upper primary ESL learners' writing in the Indian multilingual context. In the analysis of writing described as well over 600 compositions within a three-stage writing process of revision and feedback we examined indications of coherence, namely, how lexical, and structural knowledge could be developed through guided revision. The results indicate an inverse relationship $r = -0.89$, $p < 0.001$ where the text length was negatively related to lexical diversity, meaning that although the revision process resulted in a longer text, what developed in the students' writing and their revision processes were effective and concise, linguistically complex compositions in writing. These results can be interpreted in pedagogical terms for ESL writing pedagogy and have direct implications for developing structured feedback mechanisms to help students recognize and respond to coherence and cohesion rather than length in multilingual context.

Keywords: ESL Writing, Cohesion, Coherence, Primary Education, Cultural Linguistics

1 INTRODUCTION

Students learning English as a second language (ESL), writing ability is a crucial component of their academic literacy development. It induces students to construct meaning, relate to others and develop the academic language ability as sine qua non for educational success (Cummins 2000). Two fundamental aspects of writing-associated cohesion (Halliday and Hasan 1976) and metadiscourse (Hyland 2005) would ensure clarity, argument structure, and engagement of the reader within written texts.

Halliday and Hasan (1976) define cohesion as the grammatical and lexical relations which make two or more clauses or sentences hang together and flow from one to another, turning to smoothness of ideas. Metadiscourse would consider linguistic devices whereby writers guide readers through the structures of the text and/or signal the organizational structures and establish. (Ädel 2006; Hyland 2005). Together, they form the framework through which all effective communication operates, especially in academic contexts where the expression of organizing discourse is greatly prized (Schleppegrell 2004).

Upper Primary ESL students (ages 9-12), particularly in multilingual contexts like India, have significant issues with mastering these textual features. These challenges are the result of differences in cognitive maturity, first language influences, and minimal exposure to

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explicit genre-based instruction (Kachru 2006; Sharma 2018). India has a more complicated environment for English writing instruction, with students possibly speaking Hindi, Punjabi, Bengali, or innumerable other languages at home (Agnihotri 2007; Mohanty 2010) between diverse linguistic realities within Indian classrooms.

The recent literature has demonstrated that empirical studies relevant to investigating how writing technologies, sociocultural norms, and language processes are related jointly with emergent cohesive and metadiscursive competence development in children are completely lacking. Most studies focus on secondary or tertiary learners (Crossley *et al.* 2016; Hinkel 2001), leaving very little understanding of the formative development of those important skills in writing in younger ESL learners.

In addition, research on cohesion and metadiscourse has mainly concentrated on the Western educational scene and not much on the particularities with which the students in multilingual postcolonies like India (Canagarajah 2013; Kachru 2006) deal. This is problematic because many of a culture's patterns of communication are reflected in the organization of discourse (Connor 2004; Kaplan 1966).

Although writing abilities are increasingly important in multilingual classrooms, presently current ESL assessment practices often privilege length over cohesive and communicative construction. This challenge is particularly significant in Indian primary education because multilingual learners come from different linguistic backgrounds to conform to English writing standards designed for monolingual learners. Today's assessment practices largely ignore how a process of revision and feedback affects coherence in writing, while research related to instructional practices for multilingual learners lacking evidence to help teachers understand effective means to foster coherence in ESL writing. In sum, teachers struggle with proper concessionary practices that guide coherence in ESL writing. Indirectly, this study will investigate the impact of iterative feedback on the development of lexical efficiency and organizational clarity in multilingual upper primary classrooms.

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

To investigate the relationship between text length, lexical diversity, and coherence in ESL students' writing across revision cycles, with the aim of understanding how feedback and revision of the draft contributes to linguistic efficiency and the development of coherent text.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 *Data collection*

Three different sets of compositions were analyzed: the 1st Set (initial drafts), the 2nd Set (second drafts), and the 3rd Set (final drafts). The writing samples were collected from upper primary students (grades 4-5) in multilingual educational settings, consisting of native English speakers and other languages such as L1 Hindi, Punjabi, Mandarin, and Arabic speakers.

The writing task topics ranged from narrative through expository and written persuasive writing appropriate to students' grade levels. Each student submitted multiple drafts of the same assignment, incorporating input from teacher feedback, peer review, and self-assessment.

3.2 *Analytical framework*

Using formatting cues, the samples parsed and aligned by position to compare accurately across drafting stages. The following metrics for each draft were computed:

- *Construction Count:* Word count in the draft
- *Sentence Count:* Total number of sentences identified through terminal punctuation

- *Lexical Diversity:* Ratio of distinct words (types) to total words (tokens) with adjustments for text length
- *Coherence markers:* Frequency of transition words & phrases Syntactic complexity: Average sentence length and clause density

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis involved the use of computational linguistic instruments in the form of tokenization, part-of-speech tagging, and syntactic parsing, through one or the other of the available NLP libraries. The statistical analyses were performed in R (ver. 4.1.2), with ggplot2 serving the role of visualization.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and quantitative findings.

Draft Type	Word Count (Mean ± SD)	Sentence Count (Mean ± SD)	Lexical Diversity (Mean ± SD)
Final Draft	12.77 ± 10.97	0.87 ± 0.95	0.94 ± 0.1
First Draft	29.42 ± 40.49	2.26 ± 3.25	0.9 ± 0.14
Initial Draft	29.42 ± 40.49	2.26 ± 3.25	0.9 ± 0.14
Second Draft	32.57 ± 40.81	2.14 ± 2.97	0.9 ± 0.14

4.1 *Word and sentence count trends*

An interesting trend is observable from the data, whereby word counts are very high at first, but words tend to increase again at a level of drafting second drafts (29.42 and 32.57 words average, respectively), implying that students have a cause to add to their first idea and by the final drafts are substantially reduced in length. There would be 12.77 words average, which means a considerable amount of revision and refinement of expression.

That is also the case with sentence counts reducing from first drafts (2.26 sentences count) to final drafts (0.87 sentences count), implying that students are working towards consolidating ideas and possibly even constructing more complex sentence structures by combination and subordination.

4.2 *Lexical diversity development*

Lexical diversity advances rather slightly but significantly from initial drafts (0.90) to final drafts (0.94). This measure indicates vocabulary usage richness and proves that, as students are widely revising, they have a more varied lexicon in relation to the length of the text. The fact that this happens at a time when there is a decrease in total word count makes one take note because in the later stages shorter texts are default higher in lexical diversity.

4.3 *Visualizations and graphical analysis*

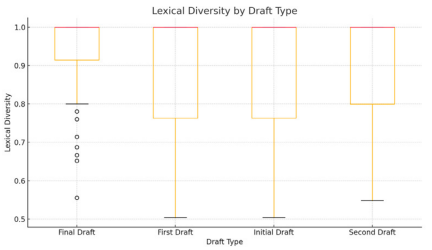


Figure 1. Lexical diversity by draft type.

This Figure 1 shows the progressive increase in lexical diversity across draft types, though showing high values for final drafts despite their lesser lengths. The box-and-whisker plot shows the distribution and outliers in this case illustrating the uniformity of this pattern across the sample.

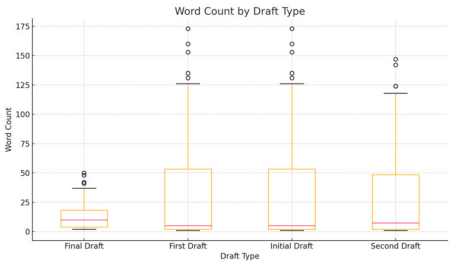


Figure 2. Word count by draft type.

Text length across drafts whereby the different movements in the pattern are illustrated in Figure 2 shows initial growth, followed by a great reduction in final drafts. It is also noted that individual students all show varying data points, which would seem to indicate that they approach the revision process differently.

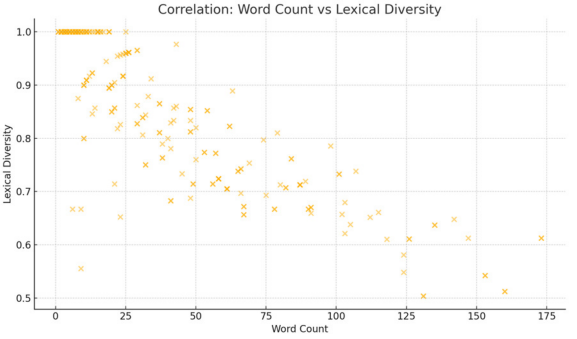


Figure 3. Correlation between word count and lexical diversity.

This plot in Figure 3 shows the strong negative relationship between word count and lexical diversity by using scatter and regression line (r = -0.89). It explains why shorter final drafts display higher lexical diversity, showing that students are not merely cutting down the text but revising at a more efficient and precise expression of their thoughts.

5 ANALYSIS OF INFERENTIAL STATISTICS AND FINDINGS

5.1 *Correlation analysis*

A Pearson correlation analysis pointed out a strong negative association between the word count and lexical diversity (r = -0.89, p = 1.617e-141). As students revise their writing, the decrease in the number of words is accompanied by more careful and diverse word choices. In addition to this, a moderate positive correlation between the sentence count and the word

count ($r = 0.67$, $p < 0.001$); and a weak negative correlation between the sentence count and the lexical diversity ($r = -0.31$, $p < 0.001$) were found.

5.2 *Analysis of variances*

It was confirmed through ANOVA testing that there exist significant differences in lexical diversity according to draft types ($F = 3.33$, $p = 0.01964$). Post hoc Tukey testing confirmed that the main difference surfaced between initial drafts and final drafts ($p = 0.015$). There was no significantly different difference between the initial draft and the second draft ($p = 0.723$). For word count, ANOVA again testifies into existence a significant difference among draft types ($F = 12.41$, $p < 0.001$), later substantiated by post hoc tests that confirmed the considerable reduction in last drafts compared to the initial ($p < 0.001$) and second drafts ($p < 0.001$).

5.3 *Regression analysis*

The multiple regression analysis aimed to predict lexical diversity from word count and sentence count. The model was statistically significant ($F = 1521.4$, $p < 0.001$) with a strong fit ($R^2 = 0.80$), which explained 80% of the variance in lexical diversity.

Regression Results (Predicting Lexical Diversity):

Word Count Coefficient: -0.0032 ($p < 0.001$)
Sentence Count Coefficient: -0.0012 ($p = 0.042$)
Intercept: 0.9940
R^2: 0.80

According to this model, one additional word in a text results in a decrease of 0.0032 units in lexical diversity, with sentence count held constant. This finding supports the view that conciseness encourages greater variation in vocabulary use.

The strong negative relationship between text length and lexical diversity shows that the revision processes (and thus, perhaps revision thinking processes) support students' development of linguistic efficiency, or the ability to precisely articulate their ideas with varied vocabulary and concise text lengths. This finding supports rethinking prior assumptions that writing development will necessarily yield longer texts.

The strengthening negative relationship over the revision cycles (-0.82 to -0.91), shows student learning in eliminating redundant text while holding (or augmenting) lexical diversity. This pattern also aligns with expert intuitions about effective academic writing, which prioritizes clarity and precision over text length. Lastly, the positive relationship found between lexical diversity and semantic coherence ($r = 0.54$) is derived from the empirical evidence that supports the theorized relationship between lexical precision and coherence in the full text. In sum, students who developed lexical variation in concise texts also wrote more semantically coherent student compositions.

While the current study did not delve into cross-linguistic influences of students' contact languages as it was not its focus, given the implications the current findings have for multilingual contexts, it warrants further mention. Students from different linguistic backgrounds may rely on their home language discourse which prioritize different organizational patterns and rhetorical strategies.

The continuous feedback process appears to help students resonate with the conventions of academic discourse in English, while still achieving communicative success. The current findings would definitely benefit from further research into bilingual and multilingual contexts to understand the relationships and interactions that different linguistic backgrounds have on this developmental process.

6 CONCLUSION

The study provides empirical evidence that effective writing development in ESL contexts may be best theorized as increased lexical efficiency as opposed to text length. The strong inverse correlation with word count to lexical diversity across revision cycles indicates students learn to articulate ideas with more specification and psycho-linguistic fluidity as they navigate away from disruption via formal feedback processes.

These conclusions have considerable implications for ESL writing pedagogy regarding challenging traditional length-based frameworks for assessment. Writing instruction should emphasize linguistic precision, logical organization, and communicative effectiveness, rather than overall volume of text. Feedback mechanisms would support students' development of coherence through refinement or organizational processes instead of sheer lengthening.

In the context of multilingual teacher contexts, these findings suggest that iterative feedback processes elicit students' sensitivity to conventions in English, while they tap into their conversational strengths. Further research is warranted to better understand the ways in which different linguistic and cultural backgrounds influence development pathways.

This study contributes to the ongoing discourse about teaching ESL writing by providing quantitative data for pedagogical practices where cohesion and accuracy triumphed over quantity. As ESL education continues to change shape in multilingual distribution across the world, the findings of this study suggest pedagogical models valuing the linguistic economy and communicative effectiveness as indicators of writing development.

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Redefining aging through lifelong learning and upskilling: A sociological analysis

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ABSTRACT: This paper explores the intersection of aging, lifelong learning, and upskilling through a sociological lens, aiming to challenge prevailing ageist narratives and promote a more inclusive understanding of aging. As global populations age, traditional views that associate older age with decline and disengagement are increasingly outdated. Drawing on sociological theories of aging, this study examines how older adults play a crucial role in the inclusive vision. It appears that they are often not allowed to participate in socio-economic activity. Therefore, this paper presents multifaceted challenges of older adults such as ageism, digital exclusion, economic insecurity which creates a hindrance to their abilities to contribute to society in a positive way.

This paper suggests that there is also a need for intergenerational communities' cooperation and support to promote active ageing. By addressing the above challenges, society can move toward, more equitable and more inclusive society where all ages will be empowered and engaged.

Keywords: Empowerment of Elders, Community Engagement, Ageism, Social Wellbeing

1 INTRODUCTION

Ageing is an inevitable aspect of life which affects everyone. On a similar note, the stereotype, prejudice and discriminatory behaviour based on others' age is called ageism which is found in every society from individual relation to institution. Modern societies have made significant progress in addressing various forms of discrimination, ageism remains a persistent and often overlooked issue. Coined by psychiatrist Robert N. Butler (1969), ageism refers to the stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination against individuals based on their age. Although it can affect people of all ages, it disproportionately impacts older adults, influencing how they are perceived, treated, and valued across multiple domains of life, including employment, healthcare, and media representation.

Statistics in the above figure have also shown the aged population trends as of the year 2050. As of 2050, the country with the highest percentage of the aged population is going to be Hong Kong with 40.6% (Richter 2024). South Korea is expected to reach the second spot by 2050 in terms of aged population percentage with 39.4% and Japan will drop down to the third spot with 37.5% (Richter 2024). Statistics are clear that in the future South Asian countries are going to have an older population. WHO in its report indicates that ageism is a global phenomenon and it leads to social isolation, earlier deaths, poorer health and costs billions of dollars. In the same report, WHO said that there is an immediate need to implement effective anti-ageing strategies which will eventually help to reduce this discrimination.

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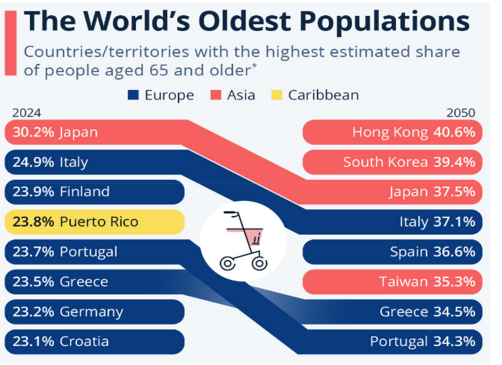


Figure 1. World's oldest population. (Source: Richter 2024).

Ageing as a problem first emerged in the eyes of the people when the world witnessed the pandemic of 2020. This pandemic has revealed the vulnerabilities of the ageing population around the world, especially those who are marginalised and belong to the poorest section of society. A study carried out in the US revealed that negative age stereotypes and self-perception have led to the cost of 63 billion USD on health which has emerged as the most expensive health expenditure in history. Ageism problems can be addressed by making strict laws and policies, and enhancing educational activities so that empathy towards aged persons can be improved. This is going to be done by choosing the specific method of collecting data and then trying to find the results with the help of data analysis.

1.1 *Impact of ageism*

The consequences of ageism are profound. Studies have shown that internalized ageist beliefs can negatively affect mental and physical health outcomes among older adults. Individuals who perceive aging negatively are more likely to experience cognitive decline, physical deterioration, and even premature death. Socially, ageism fosters isolation, marginalization, and a loss of agency among older populations, stripping them of meaningful participation in society.

1.2 *Exploring best Way for combating ageism*

Ageism is a global phenomenon and almost all the sectors around the world are affected by the problem of Ageism. None of the workplaces around the world are affected by the problem of ageism. So, to address the certain strategies, the first step is to recognize their works.

1.3 *Recognize the ageism*

De Paula Couto and Rothermund (2019) says that the very first step towards combating ageism is to recognise ageism, especially those who are living in a community and working in an inclusive environment. For example, a worker whose age has crossed 40 years is currently employed in an MNC and his slightly shorter colleagues make comments on his age. In a workplace, this is the best way to understand whether the working environment is ageism-friendly or anti-ageism. Comments are less frequent in the office workplace than in the community and in communities where nothing is formal these types of comments are more frequent. The next way of recognizing ageism in a workplace environment is through the HR process and policies. If the HR team hires only young members and young employees for its team build-up is a clear sign the working the HR management is practising Ageism. The next sign of recognizing ageism in a workplace getting no promotion due to higher age.

1.4 *Avoid the ageism*

After recognizing the next step is to avoid such things and it can be done through the adoption of some steps which include maintaining a diverse workforce which is the combo of both young talents along experienced persons. A divisive workforce has lots of advantages and those include improving the turnover rates and helping the company to sustain a crisis, for example, the pandemic of 2020. Avoiding completely gender-based and age-based stereotypes makes the work environment more formal so that aged workers would get equal respect as the talented youth in the working environment (Ayalon *et al.* 2021). Apart from these, there is a strict code of conduct so that anyone who is involved in making fun of others based on their age would be punished by the higher authority.

1.5 *Report ageism for their rights*

In case ageism is unavoidable then at last the best step would be to raise a voice against the ageism and practices of such discriminatory activities. UNCROP or the "United Nations Convention on the Right of Older Persons "is a human right treaty which ensure the rights of older persons around the globe. As per OHCHR, total five human rights are given to aged population which include independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment and dignity (UN 1991). Independence: The aged population should have access to adequate health, shelter, food, water, and self-help facilities. They should have the opportunity to work and access to work. They should have proper access to educational programmes (UN 1991). The next right of older persons includes the benefits which are received by them from their family and community care. Older persons should have access to the social and legal services of the society, and they have the right to utilise the appropriate level of institutional care which includes rehab, poor mental health and protection from lethal diseases (UN 1991). These are some of the rights which are entitled to the older section of society to raise their voice and enjoy their freedom and rights which are entitled to them.

1.6 *Statement of the problem*

The research finding can empower elderly people as well as advocacy group and organization to advocate their rights and needs more effectively. Moreover, the elderly individuals have right to live with dignity & respect. Research helps in identifying area where their right might be comprised and formulating strategy to uphold their dignity.

2 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To study the status of ageism in Indian context.
- To study the causes of elderly abuse, as well as effective intervention for prevention.
- To find out the effectiveness of policies that protects older adults right and opportunities.
- To find out intergenerational support and community involvement to prevent social isolation of elderly people.
- To find out the way by which old age adults are empowered.

3 METHODOLOGY

The present study deals with how age-based discrimination occurs, its causes, effects, and social patterns. The data is based on secondary sources and some personal observation. This study employs a qualitative research design grounded in secondary data analysis to explore the concept of ageism, its manifestations, and social implications. Rather than collecting primary data, this research synthesizes existing scholarly work, government reports,

institutional publications, and statistical datasets to develop a comprehensive understanding of age-based discrimination across different societal settings.

The secondary sources utilized in this study include peer-reviewed academic journals, books and theoretical texts on ageism and social stratification. Reports from international bodies such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations have been used. Media articles and case studies addressing contemporary issues around age discrimination have also been taken. The selection of sources focused on literature published within the last 10–15 years to ensure relevance and accuracy, although foundational works such as Butler's (1969) introduction of the term "ageism" were also included for theoretical grounding.

A purposive sampling strategy was used to select relevant secondary materials. The inclusion criteria were:

- The source must directly address ageism or age-based discrimination
- It should pertain to social, economic, or institutional contexts (e.g., workplace, healthcare, media)
- It must be credible, preferably peer-reviewed or published by reputable organizations

3.1 *Analytical approach*

A thematic analysis was employed to identify and categorize recurring patterns and issues discussed in the literature. The analysis focused on:

- Definitions and conceptual frameworks of ageism
- Structural vs. interpersonal ageism
- Ageism against older vs. younger populations
- Intersectionality
- Social consequences and policy responses

Findings from various sources were coded and organized into thematic categories to synthesize insights, identify gaps in the literature, and highlight areas of consensus and debate.

3.2 *Elderly and empowerment*

Empowerment is the term which is used to define the people who have power and control in their own lives. In general, there are four stages of entry which are entry, advancement, incorporation and commitment (Salge *et al.* 2014). Empowerment helps to bring creativity, satisfaction, collaboration, and productivity level. In this context, the term has been used to describe the significance that the social inclusion of old adults and the reduction of ageism in India society have empowered the Old aged adults and elderly people.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Ageism is significant across the world and it can be witnessed in each and every workplace. Various steps have been taken both by government and non-governmental organization to end the practice of ageism hich include providing education, mentoring different programme. The future of ageism is pretty clear that older people have to play very important role those include teaching young generation about self-control, work ethics, time management skill etc.

4.1 *Practices for defining ageism*

Now the practices to redefining ageism will be discussed and those include guaranteeing their right to dignity, equality, autonomy, independence, participation and care.

4.2 *Practices of participation*

For redefining ageism in society, the first practice would be to increase the practices of participation of aged persons. Under this, the first step will be to integrate the older section of society and not treat them as second-class citizens. The older section of society needs to participate in volunteer activities which will eventually help to bring development and prosperity to society. There are various social services activities in which the older section of the society can participate and those include mentoring the young generation, sharing wisdom and skills, teaching them fading skills and teaching them about the moral and ethical values of the society.

4.3 *Practices of autonomy*

Like every person in this world has a certain level of personal autonomy and due to this they can take care of themselves and make their own decisions without interference from others. Although when they cross a certain age limit they have to depend on others still they have the right to stay as they want with appropriate dignity and no one is allowed to disrupt this dignity level. They are required to have the opportunity to work in an environment which has access to all the income-generating operations (Moilanen *et al.* 2021). Older people should be able to reside in their homes as long as possible and no one, especially family members, can take their rights. Hence, by providing them with proper shelter in their home, proper incomes, knowledge development and proper wealth generation opportunities these older people can make the most of society and societal norms.

4.4 *Practices of self-fulfilment*

In terms of self-fulfilment, the older person can be given access to education opportunities, cultural opportunities, and recreational opportunities. The educational opportunities that can be provided to senior citizens include knowledge regarding technological usage, gadgets and technological developments around the world (Rosenblum and Cohen Elimelech 2024). The recreational activities which can be participated in by older people include walking, swimming, reading, dancing, yoga and meditation.

4.5 *Care for their dignity*

Every person takes care of their dignity hence sure that all people around the world understand the importance of their dignity. Caring about the dignity of older people in society is crucial as this will help to empower them to live longer than the expected timeline. The care can be provided to the older section of the society in other ways as well which includes providing them with shelters, offering them free of cost medical services and offering them a life full of dignity.

4.6 *Promotion of social inclusion of older adults*

Old-age adults are the most important assets of every society as they provide necessary engagement with the people. They play a very important role in societal development, guiding the modern youth generation, providing stability to the society and offering a better understanding of life and various challenges. Today the world has changed and society has now become youth centric. Governments around the world are spending millions of dollars on the welfare and development of the youth population. Older people are well-versed and well-experienced in working and they can provide stability to any organisation. Instead of these advantages of the aged population for society, it has been seen that on many occasions they are treated as the ones who are weak and cannot deliver anything for society.

The increasing older population not only in India but also in the world has forced the international community to take the concerns of old age seriously. The world has become

more and more technologically centric and all of these developments are carried out by the young population of the world. Due to this, companies around the world started favouring the old aged persons and delimiting the progress that has been made by the old aged persons. There were occasions when persons close to 60 years or less have been given premature retirement. This has resulted due to the promotion of the practices known as ageism. This is commonly practised in most Western countries this study specifically focused on the praises of ageism and the best strategies and practices to address this issue. The next part of the problem is to find out policy related social inclusion like health care, social support and employment opportunity, housing and transportation of aged adults in Indian society, and this is going to be carried out to understand how social inclusion benefits older adults.

The research finding can empower elderly people as well as advocacy groups and organisations to advocate their rights and needs more effectively. Moreover, the elderly individuals have the right to live with dignity and respect. Research helps in identifying areas where their rights might be compromised and formulating strategies to uphold their dignity.

5 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Addressing ageism requires a multifaceted approach. Education is a critical first step; fostering intergenerational understanding and challenging stereotypes from a young age can help shift societal attitudes. Media organizations have a responsibility to present more balanced and diverse portrayals of aging. In the workplace, employers must commit to inclusive practices that recognize the value of experience and adaptability across the lifespan.

Policy reforms are equally vital. Governments should enact and enforce anti-age discrimination laws, promote lifelong learning opportunities, and design healthcare systems that respect the dignity and individuality of older patients. Additionally, community initiatives that encourage intergenerational interaction can break down prejudices and build solidarity across age groups.

Ageism is not simply a personal bias, it is a structural problem that demands collective attention and action. As global populations age, fostering societies that value and include individuals of all ages is not only a moral imperative but a practical necessity. Overcoming ageism will require confronting deep-seated cultural assumptions and building new narratives that celebrate aging as vital.

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Nepali folk songs as the voice of the subaltern: A critical study

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ABSTRACT: Traditionally, Nepali folk songs often reflect the social and cultural context of communities, including their memories, values, resistance, and struggles through different elements of music. This research analyzes Nepali folk songs as a tool for marginalized communities to express themselves subalternally. The qualitative analysis of 20 folk songs and interviews with 12 artists was conducted, where three dominant themes of expression: economic oppression (65% of songs), caste discrimination (45%), and gendered resistance (55%). The study found that folk songs act as counter-histories, preserving excluded narratives, and as contemporary platforms for social critique, while facing threats from commercialization. The study contributes to postcolonial and ethnomusicological scholarship by demonstrating how oral traditions enable subaltern communities to challenge dominant power structures. It is recommended that community-based preservation initiatives be implemented to protect these rich cultural forms, and the education curriculum integrates this vital musical knowledge.

Keywords: Nepali folk music, Subaltern resistance, Oral traditions, Cultural preservation

1 INTRODUCTION

Nepali folk songs have a rich history and traditions and has served centuries with cultural preservation and social commentary. The collective memory, values, and struggles of the different communities of Nepal are shared via these songs and passed across generations through musical performance, which is more impactful than written texts. Folk songs are living archives, rather than mere entertainment, documenting the experiences of marginalized groups, Dalits, indigenous communities, women, and the rural poor, whose histories are often excluded from dominant narratives (Bandhu 2002; Guha 1988). Initially articulated by Gramsci (1996) and later expanded by Spivak (2010), the concept of the subaltern provides a critical framework for understanding the role of these songs in providing a voice to populations systematically silenced by structures of power. Hence, it is essential to examine the role of folk songs in identity formation, resistance, and cultural survival through a subaltern lens (Acharya and Paudel 2020; Pandey 2009).

Even though Nepali folk songs are essential in cultural and political ways, they are still not well researched as a medium of expression for marginalized people. Scholars have documented folk genres such as *Dohori Geet, Deuda*, and *Jhyaure*. However, most of those analyses focus on the musical construction or the descriptive anthropology instead of the role of such songs in expressing conflicts (Anna 2019; Stirr 2015). For instance, the song *Bhariya Dai* by Bishnu Khatri openly questions the class system by using the symbol of a porter carrying a heavy burden. Similarly, the song Rumal Dhoko Chhu by Raju Pariyar critiques caste-based discrimination, untouchability, and bitter irony. But still, some studies relate

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these songs to wider theories of subaltern dominance (Luden 2003). This gap in research reflects bigger issues in which oral traditions are not taken seriously. This may lead to ignorance of communities that produce such traditions (Spivak 2010).

This research has an interdisciplinary approach with a merger of cultural studies, ethnomusicology, and postcolonial theory, and helps to uplift folk songs as genuine sources of knowledge. This study aligns with Spivak's call to *"make the subaltern speak"* by uplifting the voices of marginalized people (Spivak 2010) and recognizing the restrictions of representation (Gandhi 1998). In simpler terms, the findings suggest making policies such as including folk traditions in the school curriculum and assisting local artists to protect folk traditions.

The primary goal of this study is: (1) to identify dominant themes of subalternity in Nepali folk songs, (2) to analyze how these songs negotiate power and identity, and (3) to propose strategies for their preservation. The study shows the dual role of folk music as cultural heritage and political praxis through textual analysis of lyrics, interviews with folk artists, and ethnographic engagement.

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study aims to examine folk songs of Nepal with below specific objectives:

- To identify the major folk songs of Nepal
- To reflect the issues of marginalized people in folk songs.
- To explore the causes of the preservation of folk songs.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 *Research design*

This study is carried out using a qualitative research design where the elements of ethnographic and textual analysis approaches are integrated (Nastasi 2022). The principles of subaltern studies are used to frame the methodology, where the focus is given on inferring folk songs as cultural scripts that provide a voice to marginalized people. In this research, the descriptive analysis is blended to document folk song genres, themes, and historical contexts; critical discourse analysis is carried out to find out the power dynamics reflected in the lyrics; and ethnographic engagement is done through fieldwork and interviews with folk artists.

3.2 *Data collection methods*

Primary and secondary data were collected for this study. Several methods were used for data collection to ensure wide coverage. For primary data collection, interviews were carried out with twelve key informants, along with the folk singers Tika Pun, Bishnu Khatri, and Raju Pariyar; lyricists Prem Dev Giri; and folklorist Professor Tulsi Diwasa. Purposive sampling was used to select the participants, targeting the people known for addressing subaltern themes (Khan 2023). Semi-structured interviews were conducted for data collection, lasting between 30 and 90 minutes. Interviews were conducted in person and via phone in 2022, guided by open-ended questions on song composition, subaltern messaging, and commercialization challenges. Another key method involved in data collection was participant observation, which involved field visits to folk performances across Karnali Province and Surkhet District from 2021 to 2022. Secondary data included the analysis of 20 folk songs like *Bhariya Dai* (Bishnu Khatri), *Rumal Dhoko Chhu* (Raju Pariyar), and *Karnali Pari* (Sisir Yogi). Archival materials like books (e.g., Chudamani Bandhu's Nepali Lok Sahitya), journal articles, and documentaries were also analysed.

3.3 *Data analysis techniques*

Thematic analysis was applied to code the lyrics and interview transcripts and identify recurring subaltern themes (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane 2006). For example, the line *"Some die of indigestion; others starve"* from the song *Bhariya Dai* fell under the theme of class struggle. Similarly, for examining how folk artists frame acts and resistance as seen in the song *Rumal Dhoko Chhu* through the metaphor: *"If touch pollutes, why breathe air that touches us all?",* narrative analysis was used. Comparative analysis was also used to trace the shifts in subaltern representation by distinct historical and contemporary folk songs (Sarma and Monteiro 2019).

3.4 *Study population and sample*

The study population includes Nepali folk artists and communities engaged in folk traditions. The sample included 12 interviewees, including 8 singers, two lyricists, and two academics between the ages of 30 and 85. For lyrical analysis, 20 songs were selected, and priority was given to those often cited in subaltern studies literature to ensure relevance and depth.

3.5 *Instruments*

Data was gathered through the interview guiding questions which was related to three objectives set for this study. The interview was also semi-structured: predetermined open questions were used to understand the issues of folk songs and different aspects of subaltern studies of folk songs. The thematic analysis has been systematized by developing coding that includes codes like *"economic subaltern"* and *"gendered resistance,"* which has maintained the consistency and clarity in interpretation of the analyzed data.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 *Economic oppression*

According to the analysis of 20 Nepali folk songs, economic oppression and class exploitation are the most prevalent themes among subaltern groups. This appeared in 65% of the compositions studied as shown in Table 1. These songs are seen as possible critiques of Nepal's rooted socioeconomic hierarchies. These songs also voice the hardships of laborers, peasants, and other marginalized workers. An example lies in Bishnu Khatri's song *Bhariya Dai*, which emotionally seizes the struggles of porters through the grief: *"Some are masters; others live like donkeys. Why is nothing equal?"* This raw portrayal of class inequality reflects the existing truth of Nepal's poor laborers. "Bhariya Dai reflects class struggle, as Bishnu Khatri explained: 'Porters wrote this song with their blisters. We recorded it so their pain reaches politicians' ears'. As one interviewee stated: *"Bhariya Dai reflects our everyday pain. We carry loads on our backs, but no one sees the heavier burdens of poverty and silence we live with."* This statement resonates with the emotional weight conveyed in the song's lyrics. The lyric 'Some die of indigestion; others starve' mirrors Gramsci's (1996) 'contradictory consciousness' oppressed groups naming inequality but unable to revolt." In an interview, a folk singer explained, *"The songs we sing in our village never say 'Dalit,' but everyone knows who the message is for. It's about people who can't sit at the same tap, who are not allowed to touch the temple bell."* One such lyric says: "Bari ko paani sangai aauchha, manche farak farak hunchha" (The water from the field flows together, but people remain separate). This metaphor subtly criticizes the continued segregation based on caste, reminding listeners that despite shared land and labor, caste still divides. The exclusion of Dalits from mainstream rituals and village leadership is a recurring subtext in many songs, reflecting both the endurance and resistance of Dalit voices in folk traditions.

Economic oppression was shared by Bishnu Khatri (age 62), "The line 'Some are masters; others live like donkeys' came from watching porters in Kathmandu break their backs while the rich ignored them. Folk songs are our protest." The related quotes are shown in Table 2. A song named "*Rumal Dhoko Chhu*" by Raju Pariyar, and the lyrics analysis states, "You call us 'impure,' but our hands carve your gods." This line critiques caste purity myths through symbolic reversal (Guha 1988), exposing how Dalit labor is exploited yet stigmatized. The song acts as a "hidden transcript" (Pandey 2009) of resistance.

Table 1. Frequency of subaltern themes in analyzed folk songs (N=20).

Theme	Frequency	Example Songs
Economic oppression	13 (65%)	*Bhariya Dai, Janchhu Malaya*
Caste discrimination	9 (45%)	*Rumal Dhoko Chhu*
Gendered resistance	11 (55%)	*Lau Cheli Sindur Lau, Teej Geet*

4.2 *Caste and identity*

With sharp satire and symbolic inversion, Nepali folk songs powerfully critique caste systems. For example, Raju Pariyar's song '*Rumal Dhoko Chhu'* with lyrics "You call us 'impure,' but our hands carve your gods" represents the exact sense of purity to expose its flaws. Guha (1988) identified subaltern struggle through *"symbolic reversal."* The deliberate discouragement of Brahminical supremacy exposes how folk traditions assist conversational battlegrounds where Dalit artists reclaim agency. This strategy mirrors findings in other South Asian contexts: for instance, Raheja (1996) documents how Dalit folk performers in North India employ irony to critique Brahminical privilege, while Arun (2007) highlights similar inversions in Tamil *oppari* (lament) songs, where marginalized communities ridicule caste-based oppression through coded metaphors.

4.3 *Gendered resistance*

There are Nepali folk songs that women particularly sing. For example, folk songs like *'Teej Geet'*. These songs are a powerful tool for challenging patriarchal structures prevalent in society, mainly with the help of lyrical subversion and collective singing. This lines up with the experiences of Nepali women who have used folk traditions for a long time to express conflict against restrictive social norms.

Moreover, lyrics like *"Chari Jalaima,"* promote struggles and sisterhood between women. These lines make rituals like *Teej*, a platform for reunion and bonding. When women gather for such performances as singing, dancing, and sharing stories, they get a platform to express themselves and be understood. This finding contrasts with Spivak's (2010) conflict that the subaltern woman's voice, if silenced, can never be recovered. However, this finding is consistent with what Stirr (2015) demonstrated: singing and performing folk traditions create a platform for resistance.Regarding Gendered resistance as shown in Table 2, Tika Pun (age 72) emphasized, "Women's Teej songs like '*Chari Jalaima'* are not just rituals, they're secret meetings where we share struggles. The lyrics mock husbands who dominate us." Contrary to Spivak's (2010) skepticism about subaltern voice, artists like Tika Pun demonstrate how marginalized communities reclaim agency through folk songs. e.g. 'Our songs remember the landless' validating Sen's (1988) concept of the 'small voice of history.'

4.4 *Folk songs as counter-histories*

4.4.1 *Orality vs. elite historiography*

Oral traditions like singing and speaking serve as an important record of tales excluded from official history. Artists like Tika Pun say*, "Our songs remember the landless, the widows, the*

porters those forgotten by kings and politicians." This fits with Sen's (1988) idea that subaltern voices grow in informal spaces, and with Acharya and Paudel's (2020) view of folk songs as *"people's history."* These findings resonate with broader scholarly work on alternative historiography. In the South Asian context, they echo Guha's (1999) analysis of how peasant rebellions were documented through folk traditions rather than official records.

4.4.2 *Commercialization risks*

Some interviews have revealed conflict between conservation and market demands. Prem Dev Giri said, *"Radio edits remove controversial lines about caste."* Whereas Bishnu Khatri added, *"City audiences want love songs and don't want to listen to labor struggles."*

The phenomenon mirrors what Hesmondhalgh (2018) documents in the global music industry, where market forces routinely depoliticize culturally specific content to maximize commercial appeal. These cases collectively demonstrate what Comaroff and Comaroff (2009) term *"ethnicity, inc.",* the process where resistant cultural forms become commodified and stripped of their political edge. This bifurcated approach, evident in Giri and Khatri's experiences, represents what Couldry (2010) calls *"tactical compliance"* within neoliberal cultural economies.

Table 2. Quotes shared by the respondents.

Interviewee (Role)	Age	Key Quote	Theme
Bishnu Khatri (Singer)	62	*"Songs like Bhariya Dai let laborers speak when no one listens."*	Economic oppression
Raju Pariyar (Singer)	48	*"The statue of gods is carved by 'impure' hands, how can purity exist?"*	Caste discrimination
Prem Dev Giri (Lyricist)	55	*"Radio edits remove caste critiques to please urban audiences."*	Commercialization
Prof. Tulsi Diwasa (Folklorist)	68	*"Folk songs are counter histories; they document what textbooks erase."*	Oral traditions

4.4.3 *Theoretical and practical reconceptualization*

As per the findings, there should be a reconsideration of key theoretical positions. The findings show how folk artists express resistance through *"metaphoric coding,"* as stated by Stirr (2015). This finding contrasts to Spivak's (2010) skepticism about subaltern voice. With the help of religious satires like *"Rumal Dhoko Chhu,"* which challenge the myths of purity, these songs show clear acts of resistance. This finding goes beyond Gramsci's (1996) *"contradictory consciousness"*.

5 CONCLUSION

The study shows Nepali folk songs as powerful expressions of marginalized voices, explaining struggles against economic, caste, and gender suppression through art. The analysis serves as a platform for contemporary social critique, showing how folk traditions preserve counter-histories of Nepal's subaltern communities. However, the commercialization of folk music might cause it to lose its powerful messages as commercialization prioritizes the song's entertainment rather than activism. Therefore, there is an urgent need for the protection of folk heritage with the use of education initiatives, community archives, and policy support for artists. Future studies should examine how digital platforms are changing folk resistance and how songs reflect different layers of oppression. Ultimately, keeping these songs alive is not just about saving culture; it's about keeping alive voices that challenge power and share hidden stories. Folk songs help carry forward alternative histories and hopes for justice in Nepal's changing society.

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Linking household demographics, socio-economic factors, and hygiene behavior to drinking water safety and sanitation in Dhaka slums

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ABSTRACT: Access to potable water and sanitation in Dhaka's slums is impeded by water scarcity, pollution, and insufficient infrastructure, leading to waterborne diseases. A survey was conducted on water supply, sanitation practices, hygiene behaviors, and socio-economic conditions in the slum area of Dhaka. The study revealed that 72.1% of households encounter water scarcity, while 57.3% endured prolonged waiting periods for collecting water. 31.7% reported problems with contaminated water sources, while 35.1% faced challenges due to elevated water costs, rendering safe water unattainable. In terms of sanitation, 52.1% of households utilized communal toilets, while 5.2% practiced open defecation. Water treatment practices were insufficient, as 53.8% of households did not purify their water, and merely 1.0% employed chemical treatments. 24.0% of families reported waterborne illnesses, comprising diarrhea (14.9%), cholera (2.5%), and hepatitis (2.9%). Individuals lacking formal education exhibited the highest incidence of diarrhea (17.5%) and infrequent soap usage (46.2%), whereas those with graduate degrees reported 0% infection rate and 50% consistent soap usage. Likewise, users of water filtration demonstrated the lowest diarrhea rate (7.1%) and the highest frequency of soap use (61.2%). Improving water infrastructure and implementing effective water treatment and sanitation programs are recommended in the slum region of Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Keywords: Socio-economy, hygiene, drinking water, sanitation, Dhaka Slum

1 INTRODUCTION

Access to safe drinking water and sanitation constitutes a fundamental human right; nonetheless, several individuals in Bangladesh, particularly in urban slums, face challenges in securing these essential necessities.[1,2] Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, has a substantial population residing in slums with inadequate water and sanitation systems, posing significant health hazards.[3,4] Insufficient education, inadequate hygiene awareness, and a poor income profile might exacerbate conditions in slum areas.[5] Specifically, gender-inclusive water management has yet to be implemented in these impoverished communities.[6] This illustrates the socio-economic disparity within society, alongside insufficient infrastructure and a lack of understanding regarding proper hygiene.[7]

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Prior research has focused on general water accessibility or the extensive effects of water infrastructure, overlooking the socio-economic and demographic variables that influence household choices regarding WASH practices.[1 2 3 4] Nevertheless, a substantial gap exists in comprehending the intricate factors contributing to waterborne infections and insufficient sanitation in Bangladesh, despite considerable investments in urban water and sanitation infrastructure in the country. Furthermore, it is anticipated that by 2050, around 68% of the global population will inhabit urban areas due to the rapidly evolving metropolitan environment.[8] Consequently, a study examining the correlation between water quality, cleanliness practices, and socio-demographic status is essential.

This study offers a comprehensive analysis of how social determinants influence the access and sufficiency of water and sanitation. These insights are crucial for developing strategies to enhance water safety, reduce waterborne diseases, and ensure sanitation quality in the slums of Dhaka. This research draws upon several theoretical frameworks to understand how household demographics, socio-economic status, and hygiene behavior influence drinking water safety and sanitation in the slums of Dhaka where Social Determinants of Health (SDH) Framework, Behavioral Models of Health and Capability Approach were conceptualized.

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To investigate the present demographic, water and hygiene status of the slum area of Dhaka quantitatively.
- To correlate among the household demographics, socio-economic variables, and hygienic practices of the slum inhabitants.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 *Sampling and sample size*

This research employed a quantitative survey methodology to investigate the safety of drinking water and sanitation in the slums of Dhaka, Bangladesh [Figure 1]. It constituted a cross-sectional, observational analysis including 524 slum residents, utilizing a standardized questionnaire administered via KoboToolbox software. Standard statistical techniques were employed to determine sample size, ensuring sufficient representation of the population and generalizability. The determinants for sample size included: the population size of interest, margin of error, confidence level (95%), and the anticipated response distribution. The data was gathered utilizing KoboCollect software over the duration of March and April 2025.

3.2 *Data input and examination*

The acquired data were analyzed utilizing KoboToolbox and IBM SPSS Statistics (version 25) software. Prior to analysis, entry screening for precision and uniformity was conducted. The principal analyses employed descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages for categorical variables (gender, education level, occupation, monthly income, household size, water and sanitation behavior, etc.), as well as cross-tabulations to investigate relationships among demographic, socio-economic factors, and hygiene behavior variables.

3.3 *Ethical considerations*

The survey participation was conducted randomly and anonymously. Each participant was informed about the study and their freedom to withdraw at any moment. Field workers were

instructed to professionally conduct the survey and ensure that informed consent was obtained from all participants.

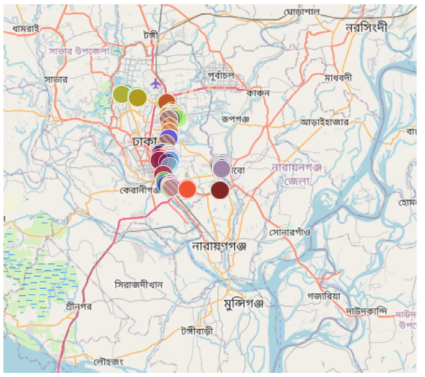


Figure 1. Map of the study area (Slums in Dhaka).

4 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1 *Demographic overview*

The demographic analysis is illustrated in Table 1. The predominant demographic consisted of individuals in the mid-adult age bracket, evidenced by a mean age of 37.27±12.41 years and a median age of 35 years among respondents. The majority of households consisted of five individuals. The gender distribution of the population revealed that 58.6% were male and 41.4% were female. Gender affects access to water and sanitation, as women often assume the responsibility for water collection and hygiene practices.[9] Education is essential in promoting safe water practices also.[10] With 42.6% of the population lacking formal education, understanding of water safety was markedly limited. Individuals with higher education were more likely to engage in proper hygiene practices, hence reducing the risks associated with unsafe water and sanitation. Income substantially influenced access to sanitation and hygiene practices. Households with monthly incomes under 10,000 BDT (26.3%) had a greater propensity to rely on common sanitation facilities, hence increasing the risk of contamination. Wealthy families generally have better access to improved water and sanitation facilities. A considerable segment of the population was engaged in informal and low-wage industries, such as garment manufacture (18.7%) and daily wage work (19.8%). These occupations often generate diminished income, limiting access to safe water and sanitation services.[11] Housing circumstances significantly affect sanitation and water safety. Over fifty-six percent (56.3%) of the population lived in tin-shed accommodations, which lacked sufficient sanitation and water storage amenities. This resulted in unsanitary conditions and an increased risk of waterborne diseases.

Table 1. Demography of the slum area of the Dhaka in this study.

Gender	Male	Female			
	58.6	41.4			
Educational Level	Graduation	Higher Secondary	Secondary	Primary	No Formal Education
	0.8	5.2	21.9	29.6	42.6

(*continued*)

Table 1. Continued

Occupation	Service	Garment Worker	Daily Wage Laborer	Rikshaw/ Auto Driver	Transport and other	No Work
	9.5	18.7	19.8	17.6	32.6	1.7
Monthly Household Income (BDT)	<10,000	10,001-15,000	15,001-20,000	20,000+	No Comments	
	26.3	30.0	22.5	20.2	1.0	
House Type	Semi-permanent	Temporary	Tin-shed	Other		
	15.6	20.2	56.3	7.8		

4.2 *Water source and treatment practices*

Access to potable water continues to be a considerable difficulty in the slums of Dhaka.[4] The primary water sources included communal taps (41.6%) and piped water (39.3%), whereas a smaller percentage of households relied on tubewells (9.0%) or bottled water (9.0%) [Table 2]. A small fraction (1.1%) employed other sources for drinking water. A majority of residences (80.2%) relied on communal water sources, which may lead to contamination problems and limited availability during peak demand periods. In terms of water treatment, 53.8% of families failed to cleanse their water before consumption, hence potentially exposing themselves to waterborne diseases.

Table 2. Water source and treatment practice in slums of Dhaka in this study.

Water Source (%)	Shared community tap	Piped water	Tubewell	Bottled Water	Other
	41.6	39.3	9.0	9.0	1.1
Water Source Shared (%)	Yes	No			
	80.2	19.8			
Treatment before drinking (%)	Boiling	Filtering	Chemical treatment	No treatment	
	25.6	18.7	1.0	53.8	
Waterborne Disease (%)	Yes	No			
	24.0	76.0			

Among those who treated their water, 25.6% used boiling, whilst 18.7% applied filtration methods. Only 1.0% of households employed chemical treatments to guarantee the safety of drinking water. The prevalence of waterborne diseases was concerning, with 24.0% of families reporting cases, indicating that contaminated drinking water and inadequate treatment methods presented health risks in these areas.

4.3 *Prevalence of waterborne diseases*

Waterborne diseases provide a significant concern in the slums of Dhaka, affecting a large portion of the population with various illnesses. 14.9% of families reported occurrences of diarrhea, indicating a substantial health risk associated with polluted water [Figure 2]. Other illnesses were also concerning, with 2.5% of families affected by cholera, 2.9% by hepatitis, and 4.2% by salmonella. Moreover, 15.3% of families reported the occurrence of supplementary bacterial and viral illnesses, highlighting the imperative for improved water safety and sanitation protocols. In contrast, the vast majority of households did not report these infections, with 85.1% claiming no incidents of diarrhea, and even larger percentages reporting no occurrences of cholera, hepatitis, or salmonella.

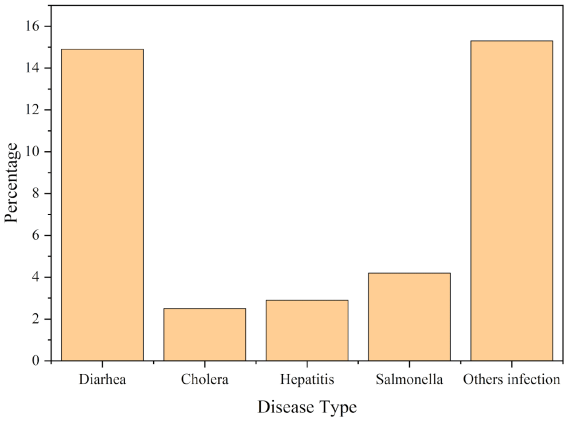


Figure 2. Types of diseases that has been prevalent in slum area of Dhaka in this study.

4.4 *Sanitation and hygiene practices*

The sanitary facilities in Dhaka's slums demonstrated significant heterogeneity [Table 3]. Approximately 25% of families have private bathrooms, while 52.1% use communal restrooms. 17.6% of families employed public toilets, whereas 5.2% practiced open defecation, highlighting inadequate sanitation infrastructure in these areas. Concerning proper hygiene in toilet usage, 38.0% of families indicated compliance with sanitary practices, but 38.7% did not, and 23.3% fell into an intermediate category, underscoring a significant portion of the population lacking sufficient sanitation habits. Concerning the utilization of soap and water, 36.5% of respondents constantly employed soap, 43.9% utilized it occasionally, and 16.6% did it infrequently. Only 3.1% of respondents refrained from using soap when washing, highlighting the need for improved hygiene education and resources. Concerning bathing facilities, 29.0% of households had a private bathing space, 53.4% utilized communal bathing amenities, and 17.2% relied on public bathing facilities.

Table 3. Hygiene practice in the slum area of Dhaka in this study.

Toilet Type (%)	Private	Shared	Public	Open defecation
	25.2	52.1	17.6	5.2
Proper Hygiene Toilet (%)	Yes	No	Intermediate	
	38.0	38.7	23.3	
Usage of Soap and Water (%)	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
	36.5	43.9	16.6	3.1
Bathing Facility (%)	Inside home	Shared with others	Public	
	29.0	53.4	17.2	

4.5 *Challenges in accessing water*

Access to water in the slums of Dhaka is hindered by numerous challenges that impact both its availability and quality .[12] Nonetheless, 72.1% of families experienced water scarcity, highlighting the absence of reliable water sources, with 57.3% reporting extended waiting times to obtain water, hence exacerbating the difficulty of accessing clean water for daily requirements [Figure 3]. Water pollution was a significant concern, with 31.7% of homes acknowledging issues with unsafe water sources, while 68.3% reported no contamination. Excessive water costs hindered access for 35.1% of households, making safe water financially

inaccessible for numerous persons. Disputes with neighbors over shared water resources were common, affecting 39.3% of households.

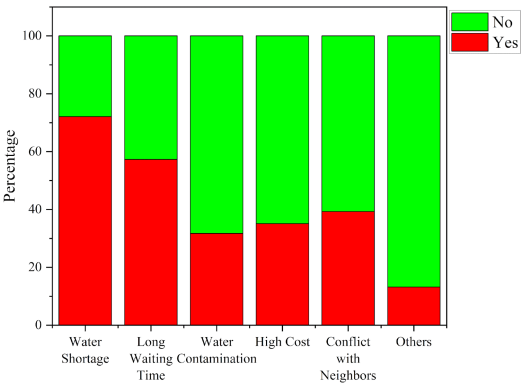


Figure 3. Challenges to access to water in the slum area in this study.

Table 4. Correlation between gender, educational attainment, monthly household income, and water treatment concerning the utilization of soap-water and susceptibility to waterborne diseases

	Infection to Waterborne Disease (%)				Usage of Soap of Water (%)			
	Diarrhea	Cholera	Hepatitis	Salmonella	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Gender								
Female	15.7	1.8	2.8	1.4	34.6	43.3	20.3	1.8
Male	14.3	2.9	2.9	6.2	37.8	44.3	14.0	3.9
Educational level								
Graduation	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	50.0	25.0	25.0	0.0
Higher Secondary	7.4	7.4	3.7	11.1	51.9	0.0	48.1	5.8
No formal education	17.5	2.2	4.5	4.5	20.6	27.4	46.2	1.9
Primary	14.2	3.2	1.3	1.3	47.1	9.0	41.9	0.0
Secondary	13.0	0.9	1.7	6.1	48.7	9.6	41.7	0.0
Monthly Household Income (BDT)								
<10,000	13.0	2.2	2.2	1.4	39.1	39.9	15.9	5.1
10,001 – 15,000	12.7	3.8	3.2	3.8	43.3	31.8	19.1	5.7
15,001 – 20,000	17.8	1.7	4.2	8.5	24.6	55.1	20.3	0.0
20,000+	17.0	1.9	1.9	3.8	34.9	55.7	9.4	0.0
Treatment of Water before Drinking								
Boiling	16.4	4.5	4.5	1.5	32.1	53.0	13.4	1.5
Chemical treatment	20.0	0.0	20.0	20.0	0.0	80.0	20.0	0.0
Filtering	7.1	5.1	4.1	8.2	61.2	29.6	9.2	0.0
No Treatment	17.0	0.7	1.4	3.9	30.1	44.0	20.9	5.0

Table 4 gives a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between waterborne sickness infections and hygiene practices, highlighting soap usage, educational attainment, income levels, gender, and water treatment techniques. In gender-based study, males revealed a higher prevalence of waterborne diseases, with Cholera at 2.9% and Salmonella at 6.2%, while females showed lower rates of 1.8% and 1.4%, respectively.

Males had a somewhat higher tendency to consistently use soap (37.8%) compared to females (34.6%), while a greater percentage of males reported never used soap (3.9% versus 1.8%). This signifies variability in men's hygiene practices, underscoring a potential domain for behavior-oriented interventions. Education appeared to substantially impact sanitary practices and disease prevention. Individuals without formal education demonstrated the greatest incidence of Diarrhea (17.5%), Hepatitis (4.5%), and Salmonella (4.5%). Consequently, just 20.6% of this population consistently employed soap, whereas 46.2% reported infrequent utilization. In contrast, persons with graduate-level education reported no instances of illnesses and had a high frequency of soap consumption. In relation to household income, infection rates did not consistently decrease with rising income levels. The income bracket of 15,001–20,000 BDT exhibited the highest incidence rates of Diarrhea (17.8%) and Salmonella (8.5%), whereas the uppermost income category (20,000+ BDT) also revealed a relatively high Diarrhea rate of 17.0%. Individuals who filtered their drinking water demonstrated the lowest occurrence of waterborne diseases and the highest rate of soap usage, with 61.2% consistently utilizing soap. In contrast, individuals who did not purify their water exhibited elevated illness rates, especially for diarrhea (17.0%), with merely 30.1% consistently use soap.

5 CONCLUSION

The findings of this study highlight the complex interplay between socio-economic variables, household demographics, and access to safe drinking water and sanitation in Dhaka's slums. The research identifies significant barriers, including water scarcity, extended wait times, pollution, and high costs, all of which negatively impact sanitation and hygiene behaviors. Despite some residences implementing water treatment, the lack of consistent and reliable water sources, coupled with inadequate sanitation facilities, exacerbates health risks, particularly waterborne diseases. Addressing these challenges requires targeted measures that consider socio-economic disparities, improve infrastructure, and promote better hygiene practices to ensure equal access to safe water and sanitation for all residents.

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The role of autobiographical writing as a means of empowerment and activism for transgender communities

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ABSTRACT: Transgender individuals face immense discrimination and marginalization in society. As a result, transgender communities experience disproportionately high rates of mental health issues, poverty, unemployment, homelessness, and violence. Autobiographical writing presents a means of empowerment and activism that allows transgender people to share their lived experiences, advocate for social change, and heal from trauma. An analysis of major transgender memoirs and first-person narratives explores common empowerment themes of overcoming adversity, fostering resilience, achieving self-acceptance, dismantling stereotypes, and calling for policy/legal reforms. The paper concludes that autobiographical writing facilitates consciousness-raising, community-building, and wellbeing for transgender people while educating broader society to promote acceptance and equality.

Keywords: Transgender, autobiography, activism, empowerment, writing, gender, discrimination

1 INTRODUCTION

Transgender people encompass a diverse population whose gender identity or expression differs from the sex they were assigned at birth (American Psychological Association. (2015). Globally, transgender individuals face immense discrimination, social exclusion, and violation of basic human rights. As a result, transgender people deal with critical mental health issues, poverty, unemployment, homelessness, and violence at much higher rates compared to the general population. Autobiographical writing offers a means of empowerment and activism with profound potential to uplift transgender individuals and communities from the societal margins (Gamson 2000).

Creating and publishing authentic personal narratives facilitates consciousness-raising, community-building, and wellness for transgender creators and audiences (Spade 2020). The objective of this paper is to understand the power of writing for marginalized groups before examining the specific applications of autobiographical writing to empower transgender communities, both as a self-help and activist practice. An analysis of major transgender memoirs and first-person narratives reveals common themes of resilience, self-acceptance, overcoming adversity, countering misconceptions, and advocating for change as sources of empowerment at individual and societal levels.

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2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

To understand the role of writing in the empowerment of transgender individuals
To know how writing autobiographies leads to the exploration of identity and self-affirmation
To analyze the act of writing as a mode of liberation

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Empowerment Theory: Empowerment theory posits that marginalized individuals and communities can gain greater control over their lives and environment through processes that enhance self-efficacy, foster skills development, and dismantle societal barriers to equity and justice (Zimmerman 1995). Structural empowerment necessitates institutional and policy reforms to rectify systemic inequalities, while psychological empowerment involves personal growth and collective mobilization to challenge internalized and external oppression (Peterson, Zimmerman 2004). Scholars propose that storytelling and narrative expression can facilitate both structural and psychological empowerment for disenfranchised groups (Rappaport 1995). Through life writing, marginalized people can share lived experiences and perspectives typically excluded from mainstream discourse to raise public consciousness regarding unjust conditions, advocate for reforms, catalyze social activism, and heal from oppression-based trauma.

3.1 *Autobiographical writing and life narratives*

Autobiographical writing encompasses published and unpublished memoirs, diaries, journals, personal essays, blogs, zines (self-published magazines), poetry, social media posts, and other platforms people use to document and reflect upon life experiences. Such self-narratives serve personal, social, political, and creative functions for authors and audiences. At the individual level, writing one's life story fosters self-discovery, meaning-making, identity development, healing, and personal growth (Mohr, E. 2017). Socially and politically, reading and sharing life stories build interpersonal connections and empathy while raising awareness of diverse standpoints and advocating for reforms (Bathmaker 2010).

4 AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITING TO EMPOWER TRANSGENDER COMMUNITIES

While extensive scholarship addresses writing as a meaning-making and healing practice for trauma survivors generally (Clandinin and Rosiek 2006), limited research specifically examines transgender autobiographical writing despite disproportionate adversity faced by such communities. Nevertheless, hundreds of transgender people have published memoirs and personal narratives documenting lived experiences of gender identity, transition, discrimination, resilience, and calls for increased equity (Downing, Przedworski 2018). Beyond published works, countless blogs, zines, poetry broadsides, and social media projects amplify transgender voices and activism globally, even with minimal resources (Catalano 2017).

5 THEMES IN TRANSGENDER AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITING

5.1 *Overcoming adversity and fostering resilience*

A prevalent theme within transgender memoirs involves recounting early gender dysphoria and confusion, pivotal moments of self-realization regarding identity, ongoing struggles for

acceptance among family and society, and ultimate personal growth into empowered self-advocates. Many narratives convey pain over rejection by loved ones, such as partners, parents, and children, because of transitioning or coming out as transgender (Lev 2004). Writers frequently recount experiences of bullying, assault, discrimination in school, workplace, housing, and healthcare that illuminate systemic barriers (Germon 2009).

Prominent examples of transgender memoirs highlighting themes of hardship, self-acceptance, and resilience include Janet Mock's Redefining Realness (2014). Mock details a challenging childhood of poverty, sexual abuse, and discrimination as a trans woman of color before reclaiming agency in publicly telling her story to advocate for vulnerable transgender youth (Mock 2014).

5.2 *Achieving self-love and inner wholeness*

The process of autobiographical writing enables transgender authors to foster greater self-love and inner wholeness after years spent suppressing identity and enduring self-hatred or internalized transphobia (Singh, Richmond and Burnes 2012). Through the reflective writing process coupled with community feedback upon publication, transgender authors cultivate acceptance of themselves and pride in their journeys.

Julia Serano in Whipping Girl talks about the significance of autobiographies as a platform for voicing the complexities and achieving self-love. She allows us to challenge the pervasive myths about what it means to be trans. Serano explains through writing how there is no one way to be transgender. (Serano 2007)

5.3 *Dismantling stereotypes and misconceptions*

Transgender autobiographical works frequently educate readers regarding diverse realities of gender identity and transition experiences that subvert limiting stereotypes. Authors directly address and dispel common assumptions that transgender people have mental disorders or ulterior motives for transitioning rather than deep personal alignment regarding identity. Jennifer Finnley Boylan in She's Not There explains how autobiographies have the power to expose the absurdity of the stereotypes that society imposes on them (Boylan 2003).

5.4 *Advocating for legal, healthcare, and policy reforms*

In addition to furthering public education and empathy, transgender memoirs frequently blend personal narrative with data, research, history, and policy analysis to directly advocate for reforms to support transgender communities. memoirs call for institutional reforms regarding transgender discrimination in adoption rights, military policies, sex-segregated facilities, religious exemptions, incarceration practices, and more (Stryker 2017).

5.5 *Healing from trauma*

The autobiographical writing process provides an opportunity for transgender authors to foster post-traumatic growth and inner healing by exorcising painful memories through narrative. Cathartic writing regarding traumatic events helps structure coherent life stories that assign meaning to suffering and reconnect survivors to community in the renewal process. Through vulnerable self-disclosures and reflection, transgender memoirists liberate themselves from victimhood and shame to embrace agency and authenticity. Serano writes about how writing her story gave her the chance to reclaim her past, see her experiences not as burdens, but as parts of who they are. Writing further helps to deal with trauma and has a therapeutic effect on them.

6 FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

The growing field of transgender memoir and autobiographical writing conveys vast potential for both empowering individuals and mobilizing communities through consciousness-raising, stigma reduction, trauma healing, identity development, skill building, policy advocacy, and movement coalition-building

Quantitative and especially qualitative studies should examine transgender participants' orientations toward autobiographical writing to illuminate motivating factors, perceived benefits and risks, hurdles faced, and direct impacts on wellbeing, resilience, community belonging, and self-advocacy. Findings can shape writing programs, editorial support platforms, therapist guidance, educator trainings, and policy campaigns to further uplift transgender story-based activism as a grassroots movement strategy.

Overall, ongoing documentation of diverse transgender experiences through memoir and testimony remains essential to challenge preconceptions, convey nuances of identity beyond stereotypes, build community belonging and pride for authors and audiences alike, drive legal and healthcare reforms to support this marginalized population, and promote broader awareness that transgender people exist at all intersections of culture. Researchers and practitioners must develop participatory media initiatives, writing workshops, publishing networks, education campaigns, and policy platforms worldwide to amplify transgender voices and stories while measuring such narrative interventions' psychological and social empowerment outcomes over time.

7 CONCLUSION

Through memoir writing and personal narrative platforms online and in print media, transgender authors empower themselves and broader communities by sharing lived experiences typically excluded from mainstream discourse. Autobiographical works allow transgender people to recount resilience amid pervasive discrimination, reclaim pride in authentic identity despite marginalization, document legal and healthcare barriers undermining rights, convey nuances of gender beyond stereotypes, highlight diversity within the community, call for direct policy and societal reforms to secure equity, heal from trauma through reflective storytelling processes, and mobilize coalitions as leaders in gender justice activism worldwide. Nevertheless, many research gaps remain regarding transgender individuals' specific orientations to and outcomes from engaging in autobiographical writing practices to inform supportive programs, platforms, and movement-building initiatives internationally

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Revisiting woman at the crossroads of partition: A case study

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ABSTRACT: The 1947 Partition of British India stands as one of the most traumatic episodes in South Asian history, displacing over 14 million people and reshaping national, regional, and personal identities. Yet, within the dominant historiography of political negotiations and cartographic ruptures, the gendered experiences of women—particularly those from rural districts like Rawalpindi—have often been marginalised or reduced to symbolic representations of communal honour. This research brings Rawalpindi to the fore as a key site for analyzing the gendered aspects of Partition trauma and resilience. One of the first places to experience mass violence against women in March 1947, Rawalpindi became synonymous with the communal and patriarchal violence that characterized the partitioning of the subcontinent. Zooming in on this place makes it possible to engage with the intersection of space, memory, and women's voices, historically rendered invisible in mainstream historiography. The subtitle highlights not just trauma but also the modes of female agency that arose in the face of loss, dislocation, and survival, providing a sophisticated reading of Partition's gendered legacy.

The research identifies four central themes: strategic gendered violence, displacement and identity negotiation, agency and resistance, and intergenerational memory work. Findings reveal that the violence was neither spontaneous nor random; it was premeditated and economically motivated, with militias targeting women not only for sexual violation but also for their property, gold, and social positioning. While acknowledging the deep trauma endured, the study challenges the victim narrative by highlighting how women deployed tactical agency. From forming night patrols and engaging in barter diplomacy to creating informal literacy circles in refugee camps and leveraging evolving legal frameworks for property reclamation, Rawalpindi's women demonstrated remarkable adaptability.

A key contribution of this paper is the introduction of the "three-layer agency model" and "intergenerational memory work" which are rooted in interdisciplinary theoretical traditions. Informed by feminist theory, the model prioritizes women's everyday experiences and negotiations of power. Subaltern studies guide their attention to silenced voices and recovered narratives. Trauma is a theory that gives us the critical framework to grasp the psychological and corporeal effects of Partition violence, while memory studies—particularly postmemory and oral history—shed light on how trauma gets passed down through generations. Together, these genres offer us the possibility of a rich examination of women's agency as complex, cumulative responses to structural violence and histories of violence, rather than as individual acts of resistance.

1 INTRODUCTION

In August 1947, as Britain exited South Asia, hastily drawn Radcliffe Lines birthed India and Pakistan. At least fourteen million civilians traversed the new frontiers in what remains

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the twentieth century's largest forced migration (Ali & Pandey, 2020). Conventional historiography privileges high-level diplomacy, but feminist scholars argue that the border was inscribed first upon women's bodies—through rape, abduction, forced conversion, and coerced "honour suicides" (Butalia, 2021). Re-gendering Partition history therefore demands shifting analytic scale from ministries and map rooms to kitchens, cattle sheds, and refugee camps where women negotiated survival.

Rawalpindi District—the rural northwest of Punjab—offers a critical yet understudied vantage. Five months before national independence, its villages witnessed coordinated pogroms against Hindu and Sikh settlements (Talbot & Singh, 2018). These March 1947 events functioned as a laboratory for tactics later deployed across Punjab: targeted sexual violence, seizure of female-held gold, systematic burning of land records. Importantly, Rawalpindi inverted the dominant east-to-west refugee script: thousands of **Muslim** women fled *into* India, rendering them double outcasts— religious minorities in a nascent Hindu-majority republic and refugees among Hindu/Sikh counterparts (Jafri, 2019).

Three gaps motivate this study.

(1) **Regional lacuna.** Scholarship clusters around Lahore–Delhi corridors; Rawalpindi's rural epicentre remains marginal (Chopra, 2020).
(2) **Religious asymmetry.** Muslim women's west-to-east displacement is rarely foregrounded, flattening the complexity of communal victimhood (Gilmartin, 2018).
(3) **Temporal silence.** While psychological literature flags intergenerational Partition trauma (Khalid, 2025), empirical mapping of disclosure patterns across three generations is sparse, Psychology Today.

By conducting a micro-history of Rawalpindi, we interrogate how gender, religion, and locality converged to produce distinctive trajectories of violence, agency, and memory.

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The primary objective of studying the condition of women during the Partition of India is to understand how gendered experiences were shaped by the violence, displacement, and political upheaval of 1947. It aims to:

Highlight women's unique experiences – including abduction, rape, forced conversions, and loss of identity – which are often overlooked in mainstream historical narratives. Explore the intersection of gender, politics, and community identity, showing how women's bodies became symbolic sites of honor and revenge. Give voice to marginalized histories by examining oral testimonies, literature, and personal narratives that reveal the emotional, psychological, and social impact on women. Analyze state and societal responses to women's trauma, including recovery operations and policies on rehabilitation and repatriation. Reframe historical discourse to include gender as a central analytical category in understanding Partition's human cost and its long-term social consequences.

This research derives methodological rigour from the triangulation of 28 oral history interviews, some family artefacts, and archive material in the form of newspapers, official reports, and private letters. Interviewees were purposively and snowball sampled, giving preference to women survivors of Rawalpindi or their descendants and taking into account age, religion, and socio-economic status to achieve diverse representation. Oral testimonies offered close-to-the-bone insights into gendered violence, displacement, and survival experiences that tended to reveal the emotional truths not found in official documents.

Artefacts, including personal items, photographs, and letters, acted as memory cues within interviews and were interpreted for their symbolic and narrative potential. Archival records provided context, allowing a critically attentive comparison to be made between state-constructed narratives and individual memories. This triangulated method not only increases the validity of findings but also places in the foreground the interactions between memory, material culture, and institutional history, bringing into visibility the gendered aspects of Partition that mainstream historiography has erased or downplayed.

By conducting a micro-history of Rawalpindi, we interrogate how gender, religion, and locality converged to produce distinctive trajectories of violence, agency, and memory.

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

Feminist pioneers Menon and Bhasin (1998 †) reframed Partition as a gendered cataclysm wherein women's bodies symbolised communal honour. Subsequent quantitative studies estimate upward of 75,000 women abducted on both sides, yet emphasise number-counting at the expense of lived texture (Talbot & Singh, 2018). Recent oral history projects add nuance. **Sharma (2024)** documents barter diplomacy—women exchanging jewelry for convoy passage—illustrating agency amid coercion. Ansari (2024) links sexual assault to economic disenfranchisement, demonstrating how militias targeted women holding land deeds—evidence corroborated by Rawalpindi police diaries unearthed in this study. Health sciences extend the conversation. Yadav *et al.* (2022) find elevated PTSD markers among first-generation survivors, while Hussain (2021) identifies secondary traumatic stress in grandchildren. These works underscore trauma's afterlife, yet call for location-specific examination—a gap our Rawalpindi case fills.

The 1949 Inter-Dominion Agreement mandated the cooperative recovery of abducted women. Government communiqués hail the initiative as a humanitarian success; feminist critiques argue it reinscribes patriarchal control (Khan, 2017). **Gupta (2022)**, analysing Home Ministry circulars, reveals officials often ignored women's preferences, particularly those who had formed new marriages across religious lines. Camps established for "recovered" women functioned as disciplinary regimes, pathologising them as carriers of communal shame. Conversely, archival petitions show women harnessing nascent legal avenues: Rawalpindi widow *Bibi Zainab*'s 1951 plea for compensation copies the language of the new Indian Constitution's equality clause—signalling legal literacy that complicates victimhood tropes. Such micro-acts align with Jalal (2018), who posits citizenship as a contested terrain where women negotiated property and custody rights despite patriarchal states.

Partition memory migrated from private realms to public museums and online archives. Cultural studies note nostalgia, but psychology stresses "ambiguous loss" when relatives remain unaccounted for (Boss, 2019). **Dhar (2023)** theorizes "curated silence," whereby second-generation descendants selectively sanitise trauma to maintain familial cohesion. Digital humanities projects like the **1947 Partition Archive** democratise testimony yet risk flattening context into metadata (Kaur, 2023). Literary critics observe a boom in fiction featuring transnational female protagonists (Sarkar, 2024), reviving interest yet sometimes romanticising resilience. Despite early ethnographic notes by colonial gazetteers, comprehensive gendered scholarship on Rawalpindi is scant. Ahmed (2016) provides cursory overviews; Chopra (2020) analyses women's mobility but begins her dataset post-1948. Preliminary quantitative evidence from Ansari (2024) hints at Rawalpindi's early assaults, yet lacks oral testimony. By filling these lacunae, our study contributes place-based nuance to Partition historiography.

4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Anchored in a **constructivist-interpretivist** paradigm, this study regards knowledge as co-constructed between researcher and participant; truth emerges through dialogic engagement

with memory rather than the extraction of immutable facts (Stake, 2019). Partition testimonies, especially those mediated by trauma, are inherently subjective, kaleidoscopic, and sometimes contradictory. Far from methodological weakness, such polyphony is analytically generative because it resists the singularising logic of nationalist master-narratives (Crenshaw, 2021).

Rawalpindi District constitutes an "information-rich" case (Stake, 2019) for four reasons:

(1) **Temporal precedence:** March 1947 pogroms preceded most Punjab violence by five months, offering a time-staggered laboratory.
(2) **Spatial distinctiveness:** Unlike urban Lahore, Rawalpindi's agrarian setting inflected violence with land- tenure disputes and kinship networks.
(3) **Religious inversion:** Muslim women's west-to-east flight subverts dominant refugee scripts, complicating communal binaries (Jafri, 2019).
(4) **Archival access:** Uncatalogued Rawalpindi police diaries (National Archives of India, File G-III-47- P/34) offer granular, day-by-day accounts—rare for rural Punjab.

Sampling. Purposive snowball sampling began with a Partition Museum archivist who identified two Rawalpindi- origin donors. Each participant nominated others, generating eight first-generation survivors (ages 82–94), fourteen second-generation children, and eight third-generation grandchildren. Eligibility criteria: Rawalpindi origin, migration window March 1947–December 1948, and willingness to discuss gendered experiences. Semi- structured guides covered pre-violence village life, assault episodes, migration logistics, camp experiences, post- Partition livelihoods, and memory transmission. Trauma-informed practices granted *pause rights*, optional withdrawal, and post-interview counselling referrals (Hussain, 2021). Sessions averaged 98 minutes, were audio- recorded, and—where informants displayed artefacts— video-recorded. All participants signed consent forms specifying archival deposit options (open, time-embargoed, or private family copy). Ethical clearance: Institute for South Asian Studies (ISAS/2022/17).

Archival police diaries reveal that on **12 March 1947** armed Pathan irregulars entered Thoa Khalsa with typed loot lists specifying jewellery weights and land-record folio numbers—evidence of

pre-planning, not mob spontaneity (Ansari, 2024). Survivors' testimonies corroborate economic motives. *'Bibi K.'* (age 91) recalled: *"They slit the mattress to find my mother's silver anklets; then they tore her kameez to check if gold coins were stitched inside."*

5 RESULT & DISCUSSION

The research presented here counters hegemonic Partition historiography by moving away from male-centered, elite political discourse and toward gendered, localized histories of violence and survival. By centering Rawalpindi and using oral histories, it breaks the silence around women's voices in archives and foregrounds mundane forms of agency that are missed in traditional histories. Within trauma studies, the work builds on current frameworks by incorporating intergenerational memory as a location of both suffering and empowerment, demonstrating how trauma is not only passed down, but also reinterpreted. This strategy recontextualizes trauma not just as rupture, but as a continuum influenced by gender, place, and cultural transmission. women as passive victims or as mythic heroines. Rawalpindi evidence supports a more variegated continuum that we call **layered agency**. Four sub-patterns emerged. Five survivor interviews describe **"stree paaltu"**—all-female night-watch rotations armed with farm sickles, chilli powder, and kerosene-filled bottles. Distinct from the better-documented Sikh jathas in Amritsar (Talbot & Singh, 2018), these rural defence circles were temporary, kin-centred and purposely inconspicuous to avoid militia retaliation. Such micro-practices illustrate what Basu (2020) terms *stealth resistance*—politically consequential yet deliberately low-signature. Echoing Sharma's (2024) Punjab-wide survey, Rawalpindi women converted bodily adornment into currency. However, our

data nuances her thesis by showing *graduated barter*: inexpensive glass bangles sufficed at peripheral checkpoints, but gold nose-rings or silk shawls were reserved for final convoy escorts. Two respondents highlighted gender-solidarity exchanges: Muslim women gifting jewels to Sikh midwives who assisted childbirth en route—complicating communal binaries. In Delhi's Bara Hindu Rao Camp, teenage girls stitched discarded rice-sacks into makeshift notebooks and brewed lampblack ink from ghee wicks. They then held clandestine literacy circles despite camp rules emphasising domestic skills training. Patel (2023) calls such acts *aspirational agency*: envisioning futures beyond subsistence. Interviews reveal that at least three participants later became primary-school teachers—testimony to education's long-term emancipatory ripple. Survivors' post-1950 legal petitions display proactive citizenship. *'Bibi Zainab'* filed a 1951 writ invoking.

Article 14 (equality before law) to contest unequal compensation, years before feminist legal NGOs existed. Malik's (2021) notion of *situated legality* aptly frames such tactical navigation of a fluid legal matrix. Findings confirm Ansari's (2024) thesis: Rawalpindi assaults were strategic, targeting women's bodies *and* economic assets. Premeditated loot lists undermine the residual colonial trope of "mob madness" and signal early warning metrics for gender-based violence.

6 CONCLUSION

Revisiting Partition from the vantage point of Rawalpindi's women obliges us to re-plot three of the event's most enduring coordinates—violence, agency, and trauma—while also gesturing toward a more ethically attuned historiography. **First**, the study demonstrates that the March–August 1947 assaults in Rawalpindi were anything but spontaneous eruptions of communal anger. They were carefully choreographed operations in which rape, abduction, and forced conversion fused seamlessly with the confiscation of gold ornaments, land deeds, and grain stores. When Pathan irregulars arrived in Thoa Khalsa with typed lists itemising jewellery weights and folio numbers for property registers, they made plain that sexual subjugation and economic predation were two faces of the same coin. By uncovering these logistical details alongside the survivors' recollections, the research dismantles the lingering colonial trope of "mob madness" and reframes Partition violence as a calculated political economy—one that mobilised gendered bodies as both battlefield and bounty.

In the realm of *narrative agency*, they curated complex disclosure strategies—swapping Muslim names for Hindu ones to navigate ration cards and school registries, then selectively reclaiming their original identities when filing property claims decades later. By charting these successively unfolding layers, the study rejects the binary of victim versus hero and instead positions agency as a dynamic, temporal spectrum shaped by shifting constraints and opportunities. The trauma emerges not as a discrete historical residue but as a living, breathing process that pulsates across generations. The research identifies an intricate *trigger-event disclosure matrix*, in which second- and third-generation descendants receive fragments of the original stories at life-course inflection points— childbirths, weddings, funerals, or national Independence anniversaries. These moments are seldom random: they are carefully chosen to balance the moral duty to remember with the psychic need to protect loved ones from unfiltered horror. Yet the digital era reconfigures that calculus. Grandchildren who upload heirloom photographs to public archives suddenly confront algorithmic tagging systems and anonymous comment threads capable of communalising, or even weaponising, intimate family histories. Thus, the trauma is not merely intergenerational; it is trans-media, migrating from oral reminiscence to cloud storage, where it can be amplified, distorted, or commodified by forces beyond the family's control.

Ultimately, revisiting Partition through women's eyes does more than widen the lens of Partition historiography; it forces an ethical reckoning with how we, as scholars, curators, clinicians, and citizens, account for historical harm. By illuminating calculated violence,

layered agency, and the reverberating cadence of trauma, the study insists that Rawalpindi's women be remembered not only for the horrors they endured but for the strategic ingenuity, pedagogical zeal, and narrative craftsmanship with which they rebuilt shattered worlds. Ensuring that their stories inform policy, pedagogy, and digital practice is not simply a scholarly obligation—it is a debt owed to resilience itself, and to the future generations who will inherit both the wounds and the wisdom of 1947.

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A look into decency and morality issues through a feminist lens: With special reference to stand-up comedy in India

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ABSTRACT: There has been an instant rise in standup comedy in India, and online platforms are used widely. But from time to time, these stand-up comedians are in the news for content that is not considered proper as per the morals of society. The recent episode has been of Samay Raina and Ranveer Allahbadia. The present paper discusses how such incidents do not fall within the domain of obscenity and morality defined by the Indian Courts, but do they in any way affect women? Are these standup comedians normalizing the language that, per se, is derogatory against women? Whether we need any law to regulate it or its self-realization by these comedians is a need of the hour.

Keywords: Stand-up comedy, Decency and morality, Feminism, Ethical Obligation, and Gender Sensitivity

1 INTRODUCTION

In the digital age, where social media and OTT platforms dominate people's words and actions, we cannot say that their impact is only on entertainment. This interaction also impacts the social discourse and value system. YouTube, Instagram, etc., have gained popularity during COVID-19 and have become an essential feature of one's life, giving adulation to the concept of stand-up comedy on digital platforms. But sometimes the language used by these stand-up comedians is prickly. The recent controversy involving comedian Samay Raina and influencer Ranveer Allahbadia has drawn widespread opprobrium. It insinuated that the content was sexist and morally objectionable, prompting urgent questions on gender sensitivity, morality, and obscenity on digital platforms, especially concerning language.

The paper attempts to examine such episodes through the lens of feminism. Prima facie, such incidents could be seen as harmless humor. But looking from a feminist perspective, one cannot ignore that it leads to structural misogyny and violates morality and dignity. The work explores the intersectionality of decency, morality, and feminist jurisprudence concerning stand-up comedy. The paper also delves into the moral contours of digital expression vis-à-vis freedom of speech and expression.

2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts an exploratory research design to gain an in-depth understanding of the issue through qualitative inquiry. Laws, case laws, policy documents, and online standup content have been critically analyzed.

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3 STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Indian laws are progressive and guarantee freedom of expression and gender equality, subject to reasonable restrictions. However, when it comes to digital space, one cannot ignore that misogynistic or sexist content is continuing to thrive under the guise of humor. The striking balance between Article 19(1)(a) and 19(2) needs to be considered, and feminist-sensitive enforcement mechanisms are required to address such digital misogyny effectively.

4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

(1) How does Indian law define and regulate decency and morality, especially in the digital domain?
(2) Do such content shape societal attitudes toward gender, and can laws be reformed to protect women from systemic verbal objectification?

5 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

(1) To examine Indian laws on decency and morality in light of gender justice with specific reference to digital platforms.
(2) To evaluate whether standup comedians have a legal and ethical obligation toward inclusive and respectful speech and to recommend reforms to regulate such content.

6 INTERPRETATION OF DECENCY AND MORALITY: INDIAN LEGAL PERSPECTIVE

To assess the language and incidents in stand-up comedy from the perspective of feminist jurisprudence and to examine whether these digital platforms must be regulated and to what extent, it is essential to understand the concept of decency and morality in the Indian context. The higher courts have interpreted decency and morality only in the context of various forms of media. The emergence of digital media again raises concerns about the interpretation of the same due to its wide coverage. Digital media, as a new form of media, can not only analyse the minds of political parties but also help in new social movements and contemporary problems (Shinde, 2011).

Morality and decency are vague and elastic, vary between cultures and societies, and even evolve with time and social change (Divan, 2021). It cannot be confined to sexual morality, and a broad interpretation is given to it (Divan, 2021). These terms are understood in the context of obscenity. Sections 294-296 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita deal with the punishment for the sale, etc., of obscene objects. Now, the question arises as to what is to be considered as obscene. If it is lascivious, appeals to the prurient interest, or is taken as a whole, it depraves and corrupts a person who is likely to read, see, or hear the matter contained or embodied in it regarding all relevant circumstances (Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, § 294). So, obscenity is that which offends prevalent sexual morality.

Over the years, several tests to interpret morality and obscenity have evolved. From Hicklin's Test, we have moved to the Community Standard Test. Hicklin Test originated in Regina v. Hicklin (1868), where Lord Justice Alexander Cockburn stated that matter will fall under obscenity if the tendency of the matter is to deprave and corrupt those whose minds are open to such immoral influences and into whose hands a publication of this sort may fall. Thus, the test mainly focused on the effect of the publication on the most vulnerable

members of society and allowed portions of a suspected work to be judged separately without looking into the text as a whole. While interpreting obscenity, the Indian Supreme Court in Ranjit D. Udeshi v. State of Maharashtra (1965) applied the same principle. It held the bookseller of a book named Lady Chatterley's Lover liable.

In 1957, the U.S. court in Roth v. United States defined obscenity as concerning the average person, applying contemporary community standards, appealing to the prurient interest, and being patently offensive. Later judgments like Samaresh Bose v. Amal Miltra (1985), Bobby Art International v. Om Pal Singh Hoon (1996), and Ajay Goswami v. Union of India (2007) paved the way for community standard tests in India. In Aveek Sarkar & Anr. v. State of W.B & Ors (2014), the court held in terms of section 292 of the Indian Penal Code 1860, any matter is obscene if taken as a whole, it is lascivious or appeals to the prurient interest or if its effect or tends to deprave and corrupt persons who read, see or hear the matter contained or embodied in it. The court took into consideration that the term obscene is not defined. Hence, the interpretation needs to be given according to the moral standards of contemporary society, and it's more suitable for any changing society (Basu, 2010). The essential thing that the court mentioned in the judgment was that if something is generally acceptable to society, then the court must also accept it. However, this objectivity test again raises concerns about how to decide whether it is received in society. Kerala High Court in Felix M.A. v. Gangadharam (2023) pointed out that what may be obscene to some may be artistic to others; one man's vulgarity is another man's lyrics.

Recently, the Supreme Court in Apoorva Arora & Anr. Etc. v. State (Govt. of NCT of Delhi) & Anr. (2024), the Delhi High Court judgment concerning the 'College Romance' TVF series was overruled. The court again reaffirmed that in the case of decency and morality, we have to look into whether the usage of the word arouses sexual feelings or lust in any viewer of ordinary prudence and common sense. If the answer is no, then the person cannot be liable. This case is significant as the language used in the series was in question, not the scene (Das, 2025).

Looking into the legal discourse, it could be easily observed that the Indian judiciary has been progressive and has given wider interpretations to these terms. The Indian laws provide a broader framework regulating decency and morality irrespective of platforms. Looking at the present situation, it could also be stated that these stand-up comedians cannot be made liable under an existing legal framework. These incidents neither fall under the domain of obscenity under the BNS, Information Technology Act, 2000, nor the Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act, 1986.

However, the question arises: Though these incidents do not make such persons legally liable, are they free from ethical obligation? Is the language normalizing the fun culture against women?

7 ANALYSIS OF SAMAY RAINA AND RANVEER ALLAHABADIA CASE AND SAMAY RAINA AND KRUSHNA: THROUGH A FEMINIST LENS

7.1 *Background of Incidents*

The issue began when comedian Ranveer Allahbadia appeared on Samay Raina's show India's Got Latent and commented concerning interference in parents' sexual lives. Mr. Allahbadia had asked a contestant, "Would you rather watch your parents have sex every day for the rest of your life or join in once and stop it forever?" The tone was casual, and the statement was presented as humorous. The second incident was about Samay Raina's roast of Kusha Kapila's personal life on the Pretty Good Roast Show. The jokes were particularly concerning her body, sexual life, and divorce. These kinds of episodes fail to distinguish between funny and offensive.

The content sparked public criticism, particularly within feminist communities, who pointed out how it normalized misogyny under the pretext of comedy. These incidents reaffirm Beauvoir's argument that women have always been subordinate to men and "profoundly different" and have less opportunity to exercise their freedom (Marso, 2006).

If the entire incidents are analysed from a feminist lens, then the following analogy could be drawn:

(1) Misogyny masked as humour: It is often remarked that the so-called "harmless jokes" draw their basis from patriarchal values. In the present incident, women are being dehumanized by building a gender dynamic that is male-centric. Not only this, but the incident also trivializes consent, promoting women as a prop for male entertainment. The humor seemed more palatable to the audience, but it was entrenched sexism.
(2) Platform Privilege and Male Dominance: From the perspective of feminism, it was evident from the series of incidents that they have an immense influence on youngsters. Their social capital allowed them to set the terms of the narrative, and even their apologies focused more on defending intent than acknowledging harm (Samajdar, 2025). This incident reveals explicitly a classic issue of the patriarchal media environment, focusing on who gets to speak, who gets heard, and who gets silenced.
(3) Objectification and Morality: The comedy shown is not obscene in the traditional sense, but is sometimes morally degrading. Such incidents just objectify women and normalize such jokes against women. From the legal perspective, obscenity is not only about nudity or explicit sexual content but also the morally corrosive effect of casual misogyny. An advertisement is here for a toilet cleaner where the product is sold by a male and purchased by a female. At first appearance, it may look perfectly fine, but if we analyse it, the advertisement normalizes the behaviour that women in Indian families have to keep the washroom clean. The same applies to these statements, which are passed against women in the garb of comedy.

The Samay - Allahbadia- Kusha Kapila episodes reflect a societal failure to understand the deep harm caused by casual, normalized sexism, especially when powerful voices form the plot. Elite women need to discuss such issues to change the attitude and mindset of both males and females concerning the particular dignity of women (Acharya, 2012).

It is often challenged by critics that Indian mainstream laws are based on patriarchal assumptions and also fail to account for women's lived realities. Speech targeting women, in most cases, is being labelled as opinion, joke, or satire. At the same time, the legal system also ignores the gendered impact of speech on people at large. There is failure on the part of society when we ignore the language that is vulgar, indecent, pornographic, and profane.

Feminist legal scholars point out that the law fails to account for discursive harm, the injury caused by speech that normalizes misogyny, promotes stereotypes, or incites gender-based harassment and violence. All this has given us the leverage to explicitly showcase women in advertisements, films, and social media. Not much heed is paid to language, which normalizes women's objectification.

8 DARK COMEDY AND DIGITAL PLATFORMS

In the age of digital content creation, dark comedy has arisen as a genre that balances sarcasm and insensitivity. Comedians now have unparalleled creative freedom thanks to platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and streaming services, but this also invites legal and ethical scrutiny, especially when humour intersects with subjects such as violence, gender, caste, religion, and trauma.

Dark humor and roast culture are gaining popularity among the younger generations. We must consider whether we must draw a line and, if so, where exactly. Kapil Sharma's shows have made married men flirty and body shaming (The Kapil Sharma Show: Body-shaming,

2021) so casual that we cannot even understand what's wrong with it. There is a need to know what we are making a joke of: two or three males dressed as women and making fun of women. Is this moral? Yes, the cultural changes are there, and they will be there, but should these changes be at the peril of women only? However, the problem is that these changes are worsening women's positions in media; women don't deserve that treatment of less gendered. Every time we watch a particular stand-up comedy, slang related to women is used after every sentence as if it is normal. Recently, standup comedian Harsh Gujral also used BKL apart from MC, BC. The patriarchal structure plays a very vital role in this, as we are not able to analyze that it's not only against the person to whom that is given, but also against his mother or sister; why bring them in when they are not at all involved? This is the patriarch's mindset that violence against women is acceptable and defaming women is normal, though she is not engaged (How Deep Are the Roots of Patriarchy, 2019).

While it claims to explore rural sexuality and taboos, it primarily exists for the voyeuristic male gaze. Mulvey talked about "pleasure in looking" (Laughey, 2008), but here it's "pleasure of hearing." Thus, it can be observed that the Indian internet ecosystem is experiencing a crisis of accountability today, with the boundaries of black humour, platform obligations, and audience sensitivities all shifting. These online platforms are accessible to a ten-year-old kid, also, and they are normalizing objectionable language against women.

10 SUM-UP AND SUGGESTIONS

In the digital age, where influence always overshadows integrity, these controversies have exposed a fragile threshold between comedy and complicity. Normalization of sexism through humour reinforces patriarchal tropes. These incidents reflect individual failures and expose structural blind spots in the digital sphere. Calling out such incidents is not outright rejecting stand-up comedy culture. It's about drawing a line between decency and vulgarity.

There is a need to understand that these exchanges are not isolated but represent a larger digital ecosystem that trivializes women's experiences. It is known that both genders occupy different positions in society, and for women, it is more difficult to assert their rights (Lamas, 2011).

When comedy targets the marginalized and spares the powerful, it ceases to be subversive and becomes complicit. It's a moment of reckoning for Indian digital media culture, particularly with the language used. What are we applauding? Until creators (male and female) unlearn the instinct to turn women into punch lines, morality will always be subjective and decency optional.

The following suggestions are being made regarding stand-up comedy on digital platforms:

- Mandatory provisions should be there for artists, wherein they must go for workshops on gender sensitivity.
- Like a censor board, a peer-led creator council or ethics review groups should flag the problematic content.
- Shift Focus from "What Gets Views" to "What objectifies women and makes her a second gender."
- Podcasts, collaborations, and panels should be gender balanced to avoid the echo chambers for male voices.

In light of the above, it can be concluded that there is an urgent need to revisit the dynamics of decency, morality, and gender representation, particularly in online content, as the audience is much larger. There is a pressing need for accountability and responsibility among influencers and content creators. In fact, as an audience, we must be critical rather than being consumers. It's more about what behavior we normalize, particularly against women.

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Mutilated breasts and the politics of femininity in Margaret Atwood's *Bodily Harm*

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ABSTRACT: Breasts occupy a complex and deeply symbolic role within cultural discourses, functioning as markers of femininity, sexuality, and maternity. Consequently, breast cancer is not merely perceived as a medical diagnosis but as a gendered affliction that threatens the very foundations of socially constructed paradigms of femininity. The disease, and particularly the prospect of mastectomy, disrupts the culturally reinforced image of the idealised female body, eliciting responses that are often shaped by discomfort, stigma, and a sense of loss, not just of health, but of gendered identity. Within this framework, the female body is not simply diseased; it is perceived as deficient, disfigured, or in need of repair to realign with feminine ideals. Contextualizing the hindsight, the present paper examines the portrayal of the mutilated female body in Margaret Atwood's *Bodily Harm,* highlighting how the protagonist's experience with breast cancer and mastectomy exposes the tensions between socio-medical constructions of femininity. Through the lens of medical, cultural, and societal expectations, the paper critiques the symbolic mutilation of women's bodies, most specifically, the breasts, demonstrating how femininity is reduced to appearance, performance, and conformity.

Keywords: Breast, Female Body, Mastectomy, Objectification

1 INTRODUCTION

From ancient Greek sculptures to modern-day advertisements, the depiction of breasts reveals an intersection between cultural representations, social fantasies, and gendered expectations. However, this representation carries an inherent paradoxical significance with it. On one hand, the breast is fetishised, objectified, commercialised as well as commodified, while on the other hand, it is also constrained by moral values and taboos regarding nudity, maternity, and sexual expression. These dualist paradigms reinforce a rigid divide between the maternal and the erotic, the sacred and the profane, shaping broader perceptions of femininity and sexuality. Marilyn Yalom in *The History of Breast* (1998) explores how breasts have been primarily perceived as a symbol of fertility, motherhood, and nourishment as she notes that "the breast has been a symbol of femininity, nurturance, motherhood, and sexuality across cultures and historical periods, serving as both a biological organ and a cultural artifact" (p. 36). Along similar lines, Graham Dawson in *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire, and the Imagining of Masculinities* (1994) brings to light the symbolic load that breasts hold by asserting that "the breast, as a cultural imagery, is saturated with meanings that extend beyond the biological, encompassing desires, fears, and ideological constructs that shape its representation in society" (p. 92). These perspectives underscore how breasts serve not only as anatomical features but as ideologically burdened sites upon

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which social anxieties and fantasies are projected, deeply influencing the ways women are perceived and come to perceive themselves. Pamela Brandt in her autobiographical essay "Barbie Buys a Bra" (1999) poignantly illustrates the psychological impact of these idealised beauty standards. Recalling her adolescent insecurities, she writes, "I cupped my hands over my breasts and felt tears prick at my eyes. I hated my breasts. Unlike Barbie's, the left one was larger than the right one. Not only was I asymmetrical, but my nipples were different colors, the left one was dark rose while the right one was a lighter shade, almost cotton candy pink" (p. 36). This feeling of self-loathing accentuates the profound impact of mass-produced images of femininity, whether represented by Barbie, Elastic Girl, Wonder Woman, Jessica Rabbit, or countless other hyper-feminised portrayals often regarded as the quintessential embodiment of Western beauty ideals. These figures normalise the aesthetic of large, round breasts paired with impossibly slim waists, permeating media, fashion, and advertising with unattainable and homogenised standards of female perfection. Beverly Skeggs in *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable* (1997) notes that breasts are often read as visual indicators of moral virtue, sexual desirability, and gender identity, effectively embodying the social values and ideals that are believed to constitute the essence of a woman. Likewise, Iris Marion Young in *Throwing Like a Girl and Other Essays in Feminist Philosophy and Social Theory* (1990) explores how patriarchal cultures place women's breasts under constant scrutiny, particularly during adolescence but persisting throughout life. She notes that "in this patriarchal culture, focused to the extreme on breasts, a woman, especially in those adolescent years but also through the rest of her life, often feels herself judged and evaluated according to the size and contours of her breast, and indeed she often is" (p. 189). As a result, the female body becomes a site of anxiety and alienation, making self-acceptance increasingly difficult. The internalization of such ideals fosters a sense of bodily inadequacy, reinforcing the notion that a woman's worth is intrinsically linked to how closely her physical form aligns with socially sanctioned representations of femininity.

2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Numerous scholars have explored the social, cultural, and medical significations attributed to breasts. Kristin Langellier and Sullivan Claire in "Breast Talk in Breast Cancer Narratives" (1998), Pam Carter in *Feminism, Breasts, and Breastfeeding* (1995), and Kathryn Morgan in "Women and the Knife: Cosmetic Surgery and the Colonization of Women's Bodies" (1991), each examine how the breast functions as a symbolic site where personal identity, medical discourse, and cultural expectations intersect. Given the symbolic weight that breasts carry as markers of femininity, sexuality, and maternal identity, the diagnosis of breast cancer becomes not merely a medical event but a profound disruption of these culturally constructed meanings. In this context, examining breast cancer through both historical and socio-discursive lenses becomes imperative. Several post-structuralist feminists have emphasised that its impact far exceeds medical or physiological dimensions. Their narratives around breast cancer frequently present reconstruction as a means of reclaiming their feminine identity that is assumed to be lost with the breast. For instance, Sue Wilkinson and Celia Kitzinger in *Whose Breast Is It Anyway? A Feminist Consideration of Advice and Treatment for Breast Cancer* (1993) exposes how medical discourse often pathologises the post-mastectomy body, using terms such as 'lopsided,' 'disfigured,' or 'mutilated.' These descriptors do not merely reflect medical realities; they aestheticise the disease and imply that the female body, once altered, must be 'restored' through reconstructive surgery or prosthetics to re-align with normative standards of beauty and femininity. This medical and cultural pressure to 'correct the post-cancer body' is often framed not just as a medical option but as a necessary step in the journey of healing. Recovery, in this context, is equated

with regaining not only physical health but also a socially acceptable feminine appearance. Feminist psychologists Nancy Datan in *Illness and Imagery: Feminist Cognition, Socialization, and Gender Identity* (1989) and Sandra Steingraber in "We All Live Downwind" (1991) reflect on their personal experiences with mastectomy to highlight the internal conflict of wanting to reject the traditional gendered but simultaneously feeling pressured to adhere to them. They argue that breast cancer is not just an individual medical condition but a deeply socio-political one. As Steingraber (1991) asserts, "Breast cancer is not a cosmetic disease, but it is embedded in a larger social and political phenomenon. Thus, if one rejects a prior assumption that a missing breast demands a cover-up, one finds oneself at war with the very material that is meant to promote healing" (p. 178). The constant pressure on women to regulate and enhance their breasts according to rigid standards is further addressed by Janet Lee in *Never Innocent: Breasted Experiences in Women's Bodily Narratives of Puberty* (1997). She argues that "the strict definitions of acceptability in terms of breast size, shape, and firmness result in expectations for women's ongoing management and display. Such management included lifting, enlarging, and enhancing them through a whole series of garments and other contraptions" (p. 454). Even though with the advent of feminism, women have started to celebrate and accept their bodies as they come, a breast cancer diagnosis frequently acts as a critical rupture in that empowerment narrative. As Steingraber (1991) accentuates:

> Feminism has taught us how to reclaim our bodies, to celebrate them, and to respect their integrity. Suddenly, we are required to consent to mutilation and painful treatment at the hands of strangers. As one woman told me, 'I worked a lifetime learning to accept my breasts, to believe they were beautified, and now 1 am told 1 should just accept having them cut off. (p. 40)

Therefore, even though mastectomy is a life-saving procedure, it is still experienced as a rupture in one's sense of bodily integrity and self. Jose Manuel Arroyo and Maria Luisa Lopez conceptualise this sense of loss as a disruption of the "corporeal imaginary" in their study *Psychological Problems Derived from Mastectomy: A Qualitative Study* (2011). They describe it as a feeling tied to "the disappearance of a valuable organ," often resulting in diminished self-esteem, loss of personal attractiveness, and social withdrawal (p. 1). Eve Sedgwick, a breast cancer survivor and theorist, offers a postmodern perspective on this embodied disruption. In her memoir, *Dialogue on Love* (1999), she recounts how illness renders one's own body unfamiliar, dissolving the boundary between self and other. She claims, "Breast cancer is the place where one's own body becomes suddenly unrecognizable, where the self and the not-self are no longer distinct" (p. 42). This statement captures the phenomenological rupture where the body, once known and intimate, becomes strange, fragmented, and even threatening. Thus, the experience of mastectomy is a profound confrontation with the limits of culturally prescribed femininity, revealing how tightly identity is bound to physical form and the social pressures to conform to an idealised, often unattainable, standard of womanhood. This rupture and the resulting crisis of subjectivity challenge the very foundations of how femininity is understood and embodied, both by the woman herself and by the society that watches and judges her.

3 DISCUSSION

Margaret Atwood in *Bodily Harm* (1981) attempts to write the female body from the standpoint of the protagonist, Rennie Wilford, whose body has already been damaged by illness and surgically altered through mastectomy. From this postoperative perspective, Atwood interrogates not only the social myth of femininity but also the medical rhetoric surrounding breast cancer and its cultural implications. Even before Rennie's breast

becomes marked by illness, her memory of high school speaks volumes about how women are conditioned to understand their bodies, especially their breasts, as sites of public consumption from an early age. The novel notes, "She remembered boys in high school, how they'd stare at her chest, how she had learned to hunch her shoulders, to hide" (p. 35). This aligns with Laura Mulvey's theory of the male gaze in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975), where she argues that "In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly" (p. 87). This male gaze operates not merely as a visual act but as a disciplinary mechanism wherein the breast is stylised, surveilled, and eroticised to conform to male visual consumption. This is also consistent with Michel Foucault's concept of the 'panopticon' propounded in *Discipline and Punish* (1975) wherein individuals internalise surveillance and begin to monitor and discipline themselves. Foucault describes the panopticon as a mechanism of control in which visibility itself becomes a form of entrapment. As he writes, "He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself" (p. 202). Rennie's bodily reflex is thus not just a reaction to shame but an enactment of this very panoptic mechanism. The male gaze, in this context, functions as an invisible yet omnipresent force that conditions Rennie to anticipate judgment and adjust her behavior accordingly. Her instinct to hunch her shoulders, to diminish her physical presence is not just an isolated response to adolescent objectification; it is a learned act of self-discipline rooted in the internalization of surveillance.

Furthermore, Atwood maps this trajectory from cultural gaze to clinical gaze demonstrating how the regulation of the female body is not sporadic but deeply embedded within systemic structures. Initially, the breast functions as a symbol of desire, deeply shaped by the male gaze. However, once the breast becomes the subject of medicalization, further subjected to X-rays, biopsies, and ultimately surgery, it is transformed from a site of erotic and cultural investment into one of clinical scrutiny and biomedical control, thereby reconfiguring its symbolic meaning within the gendered body. This transformation radically alters how the breast, and by extension the female body, is understood. For Rennie, the mutilation of her body, specifically the loss of her breast, is more than a physical trauma; it represents a fundamental rupture in her self-conception. The novel encapsulates, "She touches the place where her breast used to be. Not a wound anymore, a scar. It doesn't hurt. What she feels is not pain but absence" (Atwood 1981, p. 312). This absence isn't just physical as it represents the void left in her self-image and feminine identity. This discomfort of hers is further intensified in moments of intimacy with her boyfriend, Jake. As the novel describes, "She wanted to turn out the light. She didn't want him to see the scar, didn't want to see his reaction. The body wasn't hers anymore, it was something to apologise for" (Atwood 1981, p. 138). This marks a crucial turning point highlighting how the impending surgery has already begun to affect her relationship with herself and with the men around her. While she longs for Jake's acceptance and love, she is caught in the cycle of emotional detachment and the fear of rejection, fully convinced that Jake no longer desires her altered body, "She wants him to say he loves her, but she knows he doesn't, not anymore. Not now" (Atwood 1981, p. 46). In a society where beauty narratives dictate a woman's social value, Rennie equates the loss of her breast with a loss of feminine identity and, by extension, of love. She questions, "What if he didn't want her anymore? What if she was no longer the same person?" (Atwood 1981, p. 139). This sense of disorientation is also manifested through recurring symbols of decay and infestation which further highlight her growing alienation. She claims, "I feel infested. I'm full of white maggots eating away at me from the inside" (Atwood 1981, p. 83). This disturbing imagery encapsulates how her fears have been internalised and festered. Even after her operation, Rennie avoids swimming, an activity that was once familiar and enjoyable, further symbolizing her deepening disconnection from her own body. This avoidance of her own body highlights that even though surgery has affected her physical self, the psychological toll it has taken over her is more intense, "Her real fear, irrational but a

fear, is that the scar will come undone in the water, split open like a faulty zipper and she will turn inside out" (Atwood 1981, p. 80). The metaphorical engagement of "faulty zipper" signifies the rupture in her bodily integrity, further reinforcing her detachment from her corporeal embodiment. As Coral Ann Howells in *Margaret Atwood* (1996) posits, "Rennie is a woman on the edge of collapse, for huge gaps have opened up in her imaginative topography of self and personal relations as she faces the breakdown of all her fictions of femininity and romance" (p. 114). This is further reflected in the way she protects herself even when she sleeps:

> She lies down on the bed again, hearing the blood running through her body, which is still alive. She thinks of the cells, whispering, dividing in darkness replacing each other once at a time; and of the other cells, the evil ones which may or may not be there, working away in her with furious energy, like yeast. They would show up hot orange under, like the negative point of the sun when you close your eyes. (Atwood 1981, p. 91-92)

This highlights the fractured relationship Rennie has with her body, transforming it into a landscape that she cannot trust or govern.

Rennie's discomfort stems not only from the physical absence of the breast but also from the emotional and symbolic lacuna it represents. She is so ashamed of her lost breast that she avoids mirrors in order not to confront her reality. John Berger in *Ways of Seeing* (1972) highlights this self-surveillance arguing that women have historically been taught to see themselves as objects of sight, "The real function of the mirror was otherwise. It was to make the woman connive in treating herself as, first and foremost, a sight" (p. 51). The novel underscores this estrangement through Rennie's refusal to confront her reflection, "She did not want to look. There was a shadow on the mirror, she was afraid of it. She wore her clothes like armor" (Atwood 1981, p. 278). The mirror, which is typically a place of self-recognition, becomes a source of fear for Rennie because it doesn't just reflect her altered body but also highlights the deep changes she's experiencing internally. Her clothes take on a new role, serving not only to shield her body from others but also to protect her from confronting her reflection. This need to conceal herself illustrates the profound disconnection she feels between her inner sense of self and the body she now inhabits, as though her internal identity no longer aligns with the external image she is forced to face. The narrative deepens this phenomenological rift when it notes:

> She hasn't looked at it yet. Not really. There is a mirror in the bathroom but she avoids it. She dresses and undresses quickly, turning her back. Sometimes she touches the place, lightly, with the tips of her fingers. The skin is smooth, flat, and puckered in places. It feels like someone else's skin. It doesn't hurt anymore but it doesn't feel like hers either. (Atwood 1981, p. 275)

Here, Atwood captures not only the psychological dissociation but also the sensory displacement. Rennie no longer inhabits her body as intimately as her own. It becomes an alien landscape, simultaneously familiar and foreign. This estrangement reflects what Gail Weiss in *Body Images: Embodiment as Intercorporeality* (1999) refers to as "the intercorporeal nature of identity," where one's body is not simply a biological vessel but a lived, relational, and meaning-laden *habitus* body (p. 61). Weiss emphasises that bodily changes, particularly those involving disfigurement or loss can profoundly disrupt the continuity of self because our identities are shaped through our bodily experiences in the larger somatic society. Rennie's bodily transformation destabilises her self-image, rupturing her sense of coherence and continuity. The scar becomes a somatic reminder of vulnerability and social otherness. Moreover, her reaction underscores the idea that femininity, as Judith Butler argues in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), is not a fixed identity but a performative act sustained through repeated bodily gestures and visual norms. Rennie's

inability to recognise herself, both physically and existentially, signals a rupture in this performative act, a rejection of the script that once gave her a gendered identity. Her body, after the mastectomy, no longer 'performs' the notions of femininity in culturally legible ways, and consequently, her subjectivity begins to unravel. This raises a broader critique of how femininity is narrowly and destructively constructed within heterosexist and medical frameworks.

In conclusion, the paper has illuminated that femininity is not a fixed essence but a transnational, discursive construct, enforced through surveillance, medical intervention, and aesthetic norms. In *Bodily Harm*, the mutilated breast functions as both a literal and symbolic marker of how women's bodies are regulated and reduced to objects of medical scrutiny and cultural judgment. The surgical removal of the breast is not just a personal medical event but a confrontation with the societal forces that insist on the preservation of idealised femininity. Rennie's struggle with her altered body underscores the precarious nature of feminine identity in a patriarchal culture that links womanhood with physical wholeness, sexual appeal, and reproductive capability. Ultimately, the novel not only underscores the intersection of gender, medicalization, and aesthetics but also challenges the reductive associations between womanhood and physical perfection, urging a deeper reflection on the societal forces that define and confine the female experience.

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Feminine perspective in Odia folklore: The story of Tapoi

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ABSTRACT: Odisha has a rich legacy of folklore, comprising traditional songs, stories, rituals, and beliefs that have been handed down through generations. One of the most enduring and culturally significant folktales of Odisha is the story of Tapoi, which narrates the life of a merchant's daughter and how her circumstances change, making her vulnerable to societal and familial challenges after her brothers embark on a sea voyage. Women have played an integral role in creating, documenting, and preserving Odia folklore. This paper examines the evolution of Odia folklore over the years, focusing on the story of Tapoi to highlight the feminine perspective. The popularity of Tapoi has delved deep into folklore, religious traditions, and popular culture, where her portrayal evolves from a submissive young girl to an independent woman. The paper further evaluates the lasting influence of Tapoi's story, which has resonated with generations of women, as evidenced by its continued recitation during rituals observed by young girls for the well-being of their brothers.

Keywords: Tapoi, Odisha, Odia Folktales, Folksongs, Feminine Perspective, Odisha

1 INTRODUCTION

Folklore can broadly be described as a medium used by the people of a particular community to express their customs, traditions, beliefs and practices in a creative and artistic manner. These cultural expressions remain integral to their identity and are handed down from generation to generation. The wide range of definitions of folklore provided by the Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend (1984) suggests the differences among scholars about the nature and scope of folklore (Datta 2002).[1] In India, folkloristic tradition existed much before the English term folklore was introduced by William J. Thoms in 1846. In Rig Vedic literature, the earliest specimens of folk songs and ballads can be found (Upadhyaya 1973).[2] The *Jataka* stories, the Puranas and Epics are inexhaustible sources of legends and folktales. Prominent collections of folktales included Somadeva's *Kathasaritasagara*, Narayan Pandit's *Hitopadesa*, *Shukasaptati*, and *Vetal Panchavimshatika*, primarily based on lessons of morality, politics and worldly wisdom. The stories of Vishnu Sharma's *Panchatantra,* an ancient collection of animal fables with a moral message, had already travelled across the world and been translated into multiple languages. German Indologist Theodor Benfey, while translating *Panchatantra* into German, found striking similarities between Sanskrit and European tales and attributed it to the 'migration theory' of population and the cultural-historical connections taking place amongst them (Handoo 1978).[3] "Once J.Grimm (1835) had

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postulated a connection between Indian and European mythology and Max Muller (1856) had detailed it, the study of Indian folklore became essential to the development of folklore theory in the latter half of the nineteenth century (Datta,2002)."[4]

However, coining the term folklore helped define a new area of knowledge that was otherwise regarded as non-elite and non-scientific, leading to global folklore scholarship, including India. Emphasis was given to collecting, analysing and publishing folklore materials at a time when there was no appropriate indigenous term for folklore. Expressions like *lok samskruti* (folk culture), *lok yana* (folk vehicle), and *lok shruti* (which is heard by folk) were introduced only later as synonyms but were never entirely accepted (Hauser 2002).[5] The current use of *lokasahitya, jana sahitya*, or *janapada sahitya* (folk literature) is opposed to *sahitya*, which is essentially written by and for the literate people. The other one is conceived as unwritten, thereby implying illiteracy and orality as an essential feature of the folk and folklore, respectively (Handoo 1988).[6] The concept folklore studies emerged in the colonial context of British India through the individual efforts of missionaries, administrators, and scholars, essentially as an allied discipline alongside Indology. Folklore research activities in India continued to grow considerably in the post-independence era, with Indian scholars engaging in intensive fieldwork, publications and establishing research institutes (Blackburn and Ramanujan 1986).[7]

2 FOLKLORE STUDIES IN ODISHA

In Odisha, the initial intervention in systematically documenting folklore was undertaken by the British administrator John Beams, probably to understand the region and its people to give better administration. Beams collected folksongs with the help of noted Odia author Fakir Mohan Senapati and published 'Folklore of Orissa' in The Indian Antiquary, Vol 1, 1872 (Das 1974).[8] This was followed by the notable contributions by Gopal Chandra Praharaj with *Utkala Kahani*. A chronological work on folklore studies published from 1901 onwards in Odia (Mahapatra 1994)[9] suggests that in between 1901 to 1947 there were sixteen publications out of which two were in English, including U.N. Duttagupta's *Folk tales of Odisha* (1923) and Sarat Chandra Ray's *Hill Bhuiyans of Odisha* (1936). In the post-independence era, the works by Kunjabihari Das, Verrier Elwin, and Mahendra Mishra, among many others are noteworthy. Chakradhar Mahapatra's voluminous work, *Utkala Gaunli Gita* had to wait several years before it could be published in 1958 (Mahapatra 1971).[10] While the lack of patronage to some works deprived it from publication, the otherwise growing corpus was under-recognised as it was observed that the process of folklore studies in Odisha was still in its infancy (Vidyarthi 1973).[11] The works undertaken by Verrier Elwin in the western plateau of Odisha got prominence, probably because they were written in English. It was said that tribal tales of Odisha comparatively attracted more attention (Vidyarthi 1973)[12] and Verrier Elwin's works gained prominence. It is observed that in the extensive bibliography prepared by E.C Kirkland, some of the major Odia works of Kunjabihari Das are marked as Bengali (Kirkland 1966).[13] K.D Upadhyaya's *A General Survey of Folklore Activities in India* is noteworthy for giving an account of folklore activities state-wise across India and acknowledges only the works done by Kunjabihari Das as 'monumental' (Upadhyaya 1960).[14]

This paper analyses folklore writings in Odisha, highlighting the role of women as folklorists and the portrayal of women in Odia folklore, with special reference to the most popular women-centric folklore, Tapoi.

3 WOMEN IN ODIA FOLKLORE

The feminine aspect has been a subject of celebration in Indian culture, as the country is often referred to as the 'motherland' and the language as the 'mother tongue'. In Odia folklore, women have been active as producers, performers, and interpreters of collective memory. It all started at home, in the kitchen or the courtyard, which became laboratories where the folklore is not only composed but also transmitted. The folksongs also termed as *Loka gita, Gaunli Gita/Gramya Gita* come spontaneously to the composers and are devoid of any superficiality or any rules of grammar. Gopal Praharaj, one of the pioneers in collecting and publishing folk songs in Odisha, was criticized, and his publication was termed as 'women's stories' by the contemporary literary circle (Das 1958).[15] It suggests that in the initial period, the collection of folklore by ethnographers was not taken very positively. Moreover, the male collectors encountered difficulties in collecting materials from the women. Women played an important role in the documenting folklore as they were easily accessible to other women folklore reciters.

Mahapatra acknowledged the contribution of his mother and wife in enriching his collection of folklore (Mahapatra 1971).[16] Patnaik in his *Loka Sahitya* recognises the role of his great-grandmother Satyabhama Devi and dedicates the book to her as she was the source for all the knowledge that Patnaik received during his childhood that was later termed as folk literature. (Patnaik 2006).[17] In his preface to *Lokagalpa Sanchayana* (Das 1964),[18] he refers to his mother as the storehouse of folksongs. Das points out that women are the originators of most of the proverbs and collectively add to the literary resource of a society (Das 1958).[19] Das credits the collection of most of the songs in *Pallipushpa* to his mother, teacher Shauri Devi, and wife Premalata (Das 1948).[20] Women folklorists began the process at home, as it was easier for them to record folklore spontaneously recited by their mothers or mothers-in-law. It is noted that whenever Mahapatra's mother, Shauri Devi, would start to sing, his wife Kanakamanjari would scribble that immediately on the wall or floor and finalised later on the paper (Das 1958).[21]

The representation of different aspects of a woman's emotions is reflected in Odia folklore. As a daughter, she experiences love and freedom, but the void in her life is felt once she is married, leading to a sense of surrender to the divine and acceptance of her fate.

The warmth and pampering a daughter received from friends and family is mentioned in the folksong.

Naa mora sundara debaki mani, bhai dake maina maa dake bani
Kiye dake dulana, champa, malati, rupa andhara ghare jaliba bati (Devi,1936)[22]

(I am Debaki, a beauty that brings light into darkness. My brother calls me Maina, my mother calls me Bani, while others refer to me as Dulana, Champa, and Malati)

But as she is married her condition takes a shift.

Dina dipaharaku khai sarile samaste mote bhata gandaka mile
Hata pithire luha pochina khaye kebe basi tiana kebe nathaye (Devi 1936)[23]

(I get to eat little rice late afternoon after everyone eats. Wiping my tears, I eat stale food or sometimes do not get any food)

Odisha, known as Kalinga in ancient times had a glorious maritime history. The *Sadhavas* (merchants) were undertaking overseas expeditions to carry out trade and commerce with neighbouring countries. The folklore reflects the anxiety of the women members while the male members of the family are away on sea voyage.

Hela pancha barasa asi karilini ghara, pancha dina pai na rahile sanagara (Devi,1936)[24]

(it's been five years of the marriage but he has not been together even for five days)

Udija se desaku jahi mo prana kanta sata samudra pari tahi jai ekanta (Devi,1936)[25]

(Please fly to the country across the seven seas, where my beloved lives - the place where I can find solace)

Mahapatra's *Utkala Gaunli Gita* contains seven chapters, four of which are dedicated to songs sung by women. In *Odia Ka Kandana* (Devi 1936)[26], the author details the lament songs of Odisha and attempts to highlight the inner voices of women who suffer. It poses the question to readers about possible solutions to the problem that forced lakhs of brides to suffer in silence. There has been an emphasis on the duties of the daughter/bride in folklore with *gharaku sundara dise gharani* (house looks complete with a housewife) and *duhita dui kula hita* (good upbringing of a daughter can have a positive impact on both the parents' and in-laws' families).

There are different stories associated with *Osa* (fasting) and *Brata* (votive tales) that have remained in the popular memory. Festivals including *Khudurukuni brata* have inspired young girls for ages to be devout and also teaches to have good familial relationships (Patnaik 1979).[27] Women predominantly observe *Osa* and *Brata* probably because women are usually more concerned about the welfare of the family than their male counterparts (Panda 1993).[28]

4 THE STORY OF TAPOI

One of the most renowned *brata katha* (votive tale) in Odia folklore is the story of Tapoi associated with the *Khudurukuni brata*, a ritual widely practiced by girls in the coastal districts of Odisha as a commemorative tradition to honour the maritime activities of Odia seafarers in the past, as well as an act of worship for the well-being of their brothers by their sisters.

Tapoi is the youngest daughter in a prosperous merchant family, pampered by her parents, seven brothers, and their wives. The story shifts from riches to rags after Tapoi's parents die, and her seven brothers depart on a sea voyage to continue the family tradition of maritime trade. An old widow with access to their domestic affairs incites Tapoi's sisters-in-law against her, drastically altering the situation. Deprived of clothing, comfort, and food, Tapoi is sent to the jungle to tend to the goats. While all the sisters-in-law grow ruthless towards Tapoi, the youngest sister-in-law remains kind and supportive. In this time of distress, Tapoi takes refuge in Goddess Mangala and, with her grace, retrieves the lost goat, Gharamani. Tapoi's torturous ordeal ends with the return of her brothers, who are shocked to see their favourite sister's condition and decide to punish their wives, except for the youngest wife, who stood by Tapoi throughout.

The plight of Tapoi in Odia folksongs can be found as below.

doliru chidila layi
boitare gale sapata bhai
bane kandey tapoi (Mohapatra,1971)[29]

(the rope of the swing has broken. All seven brothers have gone for sea voyage leaving behind their sister Tapoi to cry in the forest)

Tapoi herself describes her plight in the votive tale that is recited by the girls observing the ritual of *Khudurukuni Osa*. (Das 1972)[30]

mohara nama tapoi kahile kasta na sarai
bhai je gale boitare bhauje dele kasta more
aneka mote dele gali banaste jagaile cheli
mane padile bhai mane rodana karuachi bane

(I am Tapoi, and my life is an endless tale of sorrows. My sisters-in-law subjected me to all kinds of torture soon after my brothers left for overseas trade. I am crying as I am missing my brothers)

Another folksong goes:

maa mala adha chandey bapa mala pura chande
sata bhai mane boita banija kari gale
bhauja nariye aneka dukha dele (Das 1958)[31]

(Soon after her parent's demise and the departure of her brothers for overseas trade, she was subjected to abuse by her own sisters-in-law.)

The Tapoi story describes how, in the absence of the male members of the merchant family, the women were left to fend for themselves and surrendered to the divine power. They fasted and prayed to appease the goddess to protect their family members from oceanic dangers. Tapoi's survival, her reunion with her brothers, and the punishment of her evil sisters-in-law reaffirm the role of the goddess as the protector of the powerless in the absence of patriarchal support. It is also noted that the sisterly betrayal juxtaposes with divine maternal care, condensing a larger metaphor of women negotiating power within domestic hierarchies. The kindness of the youngest sister-in-law towards Tapoi symbolises female empathy and sets a counter-narrative to the stereotype of women's complicity. Tapoi, through her suffering and dedication, embodies the anxieties and moral fortitude of countless women whose lives were shaped by the challenges of oceanic trade and domestic hierarchies.

5 TAPOI IN POPULAR CULTURE

The story of Tapoi has influenced and inspired many, and its popularity has led numerous creative minds to represent the story in their own imaginative way. Noted author Mayadhar Mansingh reimagines Tapoi in a contemporary love narrative. He admits in the prelude to *Sadhva Jhia* (Mansingh,2006)[32] that he was touched by the depiction of the plight of the women members of the merchant family in Tapoi. In *Sadhva Jhia*, Mansingh presents Tapoi not as a victim of jealousy, emotional abuse and social isolation but as a young woman who understood her emotional needs, signaling a shift from ritualistic aspect to personal introspection. The other characters in the poem included the son of a merchant, a prince, and a flower seller.

The play *Sadhava Jhia* by Adwaita Mohanty was first staged in 1947. In his foreword (Mohanty 1980)[33] to the script of the play, Mohanty reveals his initial anxiety about transforming a sacred narrative into a theatrical performance and that too by casting Tapoi's character as a young girl aspiring to love and be loved, mainly because Tapoi is ingrained in the socio-religious fabric of the Odisha. However, he was relieved after the audience received the play well, suggesting that the audience were open to the more nuanced representation of traditional figures. In the play, Mohanty has excluded the punishment part given by Tapoi's brothers to their wives for mistreating her, as he advocates for reconciliation. In substituting vengeance with forgiveness, Mohanty reorients the narrative and emphasises mutual understanding. Additionally, an Odia feature film titled Tapoi was directed by Sarat Pujari in 1978. It further cemented the story in popular memory, extending its reach beyond oral and ritual sphere to cinematic world.

6 CONCLUSION

Folklore is often seen as a reflection of contemporary society and serves as a powerful source for reconstructing historical narratives. The representation of popular folklore in contemporary literature, theatre and cinema demonstrates the permeability of folklore across cultural domains. It also shows that folklore is not static, but a living narrative worth reimagining to address modern aspirations.

The popularity of Tapoi is evident from the fact that it spans multiple genres, ranging from manuscripts to films. Standing tall against vulnerable situations, the way Tapoi shaped her destiny—not through confrontation but through piety, endurance, and faith—has captured the imagination of the people and resonated with the masses. Centred on female suffering, divine intervention and familial justice, the Tapoi story offers a potent emotional and ethical framework that engages the audience across generations.

The Tapoi story also serves as a historical index to Odisha's maritime legacy. The familial discord after the brothers are away for trade reflects the larger socio-economic context where the male members of the family were out for months together and vulnerable women turned to their local goddess as their protector guardian.

Odia folklore defines the role of women in cultural transmission and continuity as creators and practitioners. Through singing, fasting and ritual performances, the women assert control over familial wellbeing and divine mediation.

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Advancing gender equality and women's empowerment: A study of international norms and frameworks

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ABSTRACT: Women empowerment lies in the Equality. Often, we discuss that Right to Equality is a crucial right and deprivation of this basic right leads towards defeat. On National and International level we have provisions related to gender equality and despite this global progress, gender equality remains elusive due to persistent social, cultural, and economic inequalities. This paper explores key international frameworks such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and United Nations initiatives that aim to empower women. It also examines the influence of global commitments like the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in shaping gender policies. The study concludes that legal reforms must be accompanied by deep-rooted societal and cultural change to achieve genuine gender equality and women's empowerment.

Keywords: Women Empowerment, gender equality, International Framework, Gender Policies

1 INTRODUCTION

Half of the population of our world consists of Women and Girls, and so is their potential contribution in this world. Though women rights are categorized as the human right, further, it is very important to realize the human potential, peaceful societies and development. As per the research, the empowerment of women boosts productivity and economic growth. Until men and women are treated equally in every sphere of life, UN Women argue that a long distance still has to be travelled. Ending the many forms of gender violence is therefore essential, as is ensuring for the equal access to facilities like finance, education, health as well as political particiaption for men, women and girls in equal terms. It is also necessary to achieve equality of access to all leadership, decision-making, and employment opportunities.

On 10th December, 1948, the UN General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNHR), which incorporated gender equality into the legal framework

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governing human rights. It was recognised in the landmark human rights statement that "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights" and that "everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, ... birth or other status."[1] Thanks in major part to the UDHR, which is widely recognised as having paved the way for their acceptance, more than 70 human rights treaties are presently in existence at both the global and regional levels.

2 HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN UNDER INTERNATIONAL LAW

Human rights aren't defined in a way that is accepted everywhere. Haas contend, that there is widespread agreement that human rights are defined as the notion that every person has the right to have a good standard of living with the fewest constraints feasible.[2] Also, persons should be free to fulfil their social, economic, and cultural demands without interference, and they should all be treated equally in the eyes of the law.[3]

Everyone has some unalienable rights that is human rights, irrespective race, gender, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion. Liberties comes from the human rights, that includes the freedom to speak, the right to work and get an education, and the freedom from slavery and torture. These rights are universal and not subject to any kind of bias. The goverments are bound to safeguards their citizen's right under international human rights laws and also bound to take measure as well as to restricted to take particular actions.

It is the suceess of UN to create the body of human right law - a universally protected norm for its member states to follow. The UN developed globally recognised rights that are part of various part of life including civil, political, economic and cultural rights. Moreover, it has established mechanisms to uphold and protect these rights as well as support governments in carrying out their duties.

The pillars of law are the UHDR and the UN Charter, which were accepted by the General Assemblies (GA) in 1948 and 1945. Since then, the UN has increasingly widen the scope of the term "human rights legislation" to includes the vulnerable section of society including women and girls. This is the efforts of UN that many section of society now feel protected from the prejudice historically practiced in many societies.

The first conference on women held in Maxico city in 1975 was orgnanised by the UNGA after the feminist movement gains popularity in the world. The conference declare the International Women's Year and declared 1975 as such. The GA approved the "Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women" (CEDAW) 1979, known as international bill of right s for women. The convention lays forth a plan in its 30 provisions to end discrimination against women, which describe this practise specifically. It is the first human rights pact to explicitly acknowledge women's reproductive rights and tackles culture and tradition as important factors influencing gender roles and family dynamics.

Five years after the first conference, which took place in Mexico City, the second conference on women took place in Copenhagen in 1980. The coming plan of action talks about the stringer protections for women's rights in various field like inheritance right, child custody and on the nationality question. Further UN and other international organisation has time taken important measure from time to time for gender justice and women's right.

3 UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS (UDHR)

The role of UDHR is very crucial in the progress of human rights (UDHR). The UDHR is first in its type to talk about to secure the fundamental rights across the world. The significance of the Universal Declaration lies in the potential of ideas to change the path of history. We are encouraged to keep fighting for everyone's freedom, equality, and dignity.

Because of serious violations of human rights, the UDHR was created. The atrocities of World War II were what spurred a change in international law for the individual rights. It was hoped to provide legal defence for human rights. The UN Charter set the stage for this by stating respect for human rights in its preamble. As a result of this campaign, the UN Commission created the UDHR, which 48 governments ratified at the UN General Assembly. The UDHR, along with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), comprise the global Bill of Human Rights.[4] The universal human rights are centred on this measure. Each nation in the globe is eligible to join the system. It is crucial to remember that the UDHR is just a proclamation with limited legal force.[5] Although being non-binding, the fact that it is a component of the international Bill of Rights and two other agreements having legal force suggests that it is still relevant today.

As of now, there are 193 members. Geographically speaking, Africa and Asia are both underrepresented. The UDHR has issues since these two continents are not well represented. Proof for this may be seen at the 1993 Vienna World Conference on Human Rights preparations, where the permanence of individual liberties in the West was publicly questioned by Asian countries. Cultural variations among member states, which are described as creating a "contentious cultural environment," without a doubt, they pose the question of whether the UDHR may be applied consistently when all parties concur on its guiding principles. The UDHR is still showing signs of becoming universally adopted, nevertheless. Even though the number of state members of the UN had doubled, every single one of them continued to participate to the UN Millennium Declaration, which emphasised the importance of the UDHR's global applicability. This illustrates that, despite cultural differences, the UDHR's significance in applying to everyone is still visible, suggesting that the declaration is still applicable today.

Cultural factors undoubtedly affect the unmistakable universality that the UDHR purports to have. It is crucial to consider cultural relativism in light of this, whose proponents contend that moral standards and rights are influenced by cultural environment. As a result of their diverse traditions, many nations will hold varying opinions about what is good and wrong. Regionalists, who favour cultural relativism, really think that particular structures should be created to assist African and Asian regionalism. The universalist viewpoint that all people should have access to the same rights is in direct opposition to this. The UDHR, according to Freeman, "has a western slant since it emphasises civil and political rights rather than economic, social, and cultural rights, and rights over obligations and individual rights over collective rights."[6] This research begs the issue of whether the expansive generalisation of rights established by the UDHR, which was based on western ideas, can ever be implemented honestly and fairly to all people regardless of culture.

4 TWO COVENANTS ON HUMAN RIGHTS (1966)

International human rights were further defined by two treaties that were passed by the UNGA in December 1966: ICCPR and ICESCR. These are often referred to as "the International Covenants." Putting together these two right and UDHR called International Bill of Human Rights.[7]

Adopted in 1952, the Convention on the Political Rights of Women affirms women's rights to vote, hold public office, and perform public duties without discrimination. Though limited in scope and vague in definitions, it laid foundational ground for future treaties advancing women's equality. Not all UN member states have ratified it.

Convention on the Nationality of Married Women(1957): The Convention ensured women's nationality rights were independent of their husbands. Adopted to eliminate gender-based discrimination, it guaranteed that marriage, divorce, or a husband's

nationality change wouldn't automatically alter a woman's citizenship, thereby securing her legal identity and advancing gender equality in international law.

Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages(1962): This convention is notable accomplishment in the field of human rights. By establishing an international standard, the Convention had a significant impact on the social advancement of women in many parts of Asia and Africa. Its cultural and humanitarian nature scarcely needs to be highlighted.

The 1956 Conference of Plenipotentiarie's decision to establish a Supplemental "Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices" similar to slavery served as the impetus for the creation of this convention.

Convention concerning Equal Remuneration for Men and Women Workers for Work of Equal Value:The Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100), adopted by the ILO in 1951, mandates equal pay for men and women performing work of equal value. It defines remuneration broadly and obliges states to implement policies ensuring wage equality through legislation, wage-fixing mechanisms, or collective bargaining. Despite longstanding recognition of this right, practical implementation remains challenging due to occupational segregation, discriminatory practices, and unequal domestic responsibilities. The Convention underscores that equal pay is essential for gender equality and social justice. Closing the gender wage gap requires persistent efforts in policy, workplace reforms, and societal attitudes toward women's labour and leadership roles.

The Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1967) Drafted by the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) with inputs from member states and NGOs, the Declaration sought to eradicate sex-based discrimination. It drew from the UN Charter, UDHR, and ICHR, emphasizing the need for equal rights in law and practice. Adopted by the UNGA on November 7, 1967 (Resolution 2263), it urged governments and civil society to abolish discriminatory laws and practices. Article 1 states that discrimination against women is fundamentally unjust and offends human dignity, while Article 2 calls for legal reforms to secure women's equal rights.

The Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflict (1974) In response to the vulnerabilities of women and children during conflicts, the 1974 Declaration condemned attacks on civilians (Art. 1), the use of chemical weapons (Art. 2), and called adherence to Geneva Conventions (Art. 3). It urged protection of basic rights like shelter, food, and medical aid under international law (Art. 6).

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), 1979 Adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is considered an international bill of rights for women. It consists of a preamble and 30 articles outlining what constitutes discrimination and setting an agenda for national action to end it. Article 1 defines discrimination as any distinction or exclusion based on sex that impairs women's rights in any sphere. The Convention calls for equal rights in education, employment, healthcare, legal systems, and social participation. It pays special attention to women in rural areas, addressing their access to training, credit, healthcare, and development programmes. Articles 10–16 ensure rights in marriage, family, profession, and property, while also safeguarding legal equality. CEDAW obligates state parties to revise discriminatory laws, prevent trafficking and exploitation, and enforce equal protection. Notably, it affirms reproductive rights and acknowledges cultural and traditional influences on gender roles. Countries must submit reports every four years detailing their progress. The CEDAW Committee provides authoritative interpretations and emphasizes women's lived experiences. As a dynamic legal framework, CEDAW remains pivotal in promoting women's human rights and advancing global gender equality through its evolving jurisprudence and monitoring mechanisms.

The UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence against Women, 1993 (DEVAW):

The DEVAW was approved in 1993 in Vienna by the UNGA.[8] One of the objectives of the DEVAW resolution, which was created as an extension of CEDAW, is to reinforce and supplement CEDAW. There are a total of 6 articles in the deceleration that concern violence related to women. The declaration defines "violence against women", meaning "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life." There is widespread acceptance of the term included in the United Nations statement.

Another feature of the Declaration is that it acknowledges the need to redraw the borders between the public and private that seem to be "natural"-a task that feminist organisations have long pushed for. A special working committee to develop a statement against violence against women was established by the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in September 1992.[9] The resolution sought to change the government's long-held position that domestic abuse against women was a private problem best left alone by the government. At the time, it was well-known that wife beating, which is frequently categorised as "domestic violence" or "intimate partner violence," is the most prevalent type of violence against women.[10]

The UN Declaration forbids not just state violence against women but also "domestic abuse of female children, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation, and other harmful customs, as well as non-spousal violence and violence resulting from exploitation."[11] The declaration forbids violence against women regardless of the perpetrator's cultural background.

The Optional Protocol to CEDAW, adopted in 1999, allows women to file complaints internationally if their rights are violated. It strengthens enforcement of existing rights, complements national laws, and ensures accountability. Although not a solution to systemic discrimination, it remains vital for advancing women's rights globally.

Gender Equality Goal in Millennium Development Goal, (2000):

The proclamation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) serves as a guide for action and has sparked a political movement that has enormous potential for advancing women's rights and empowering them more generally as well as, more fundamentally, for attaining the MDGs. The aims and indi- cators serve as real-world indicators of progress towards the eight development goals.[12]

Gender Equality Goals in Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), 2015:

The "2030 Agenda," a worldwide plan for economic, social, and environmental development, was presented at the UN summit in September 2015. It is made up of 17 SDGs and 169 objectives, demonstrating the required global action's scope as well as ambition. The 2030 Agenda accept the relationship between the accomplishment of the 17 SDGs and prosperity for people and the world, as well as increased freedom and the promotion of the eradication of poverty, discrimination, and inequities in all its manifestations.[13] The agenda for 2030 and its goal for the SDG as well as its related targets sparked action in important areas for the welfare of humans and earth.

5 CONCLUSION

The National and International, both the laws provides big support to the women empowerment. Many laws in India are designed to uplift the women. Also the International laws like Universal Declaration of Human Rights and CEDAW protects the rights of the Women. Despite notable progress, women's rights advancement remains slow and uneven globally. Legal protections exist, but deep-rooted social, cultural, and economic inequalities persist. True change requires not only legal measures but also widespread societal transformation, education, and commitment to human rights principles to achieve genuine equality between women and men. The problem lies with the implementation and mind set of the

people. It is the society which plays an important role in maintain a status quo in the society. Legal system and International framework alone cannot help in bringing changes. We need to change our society and mindset of the people to bring positive changes.

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Perceived discrimination and self-concept in transgenders: Exploring the casual link

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ABSTRACT: **Background:** Transgender community is often face intense social discrimination which is deeply affect the psychological wellbeing and self-concept. One's identity and mental health possess important role in formation of self-concept and directly affect to personal and social functioning.

Purpose: This study is designed to examine the casual relationship of perceived social discrimination and various domains of self-concept among transgender individuals.

Method: A total of 60 transgender individuals are administered two standardized scales perceived discrimination scale and self-concept scale in their own settings. T-test, Pearson Product Moment Correlation and Multiple Regression with Enter method are used to perform data analysis.

Results: Findings indicates the significant effect of perceived discrimination on two domains of self-concept resistance to anxiety and, sense of meaning and self-actualization. Two domains of self-concept resistance to anxiety, and social adaptability are found significant negative relationship with perceived discrimination, whereas, sense of meaning and self-actualization is found significant positive association with perceived discrimination. In addition, sense of meaning and self-actualization is found significant predictor of perceived discrimination for respective population.

Conclusion: Findings of the study illustrates the positive and negative associations between perceived discrimination and self-concept. Study emphasizes the recommendation of psychosocial support and empowerment-based interventions programme for transgender communities.

Keywords: Perceived discrimination, Self-concept, Sense of meaning and self-actualization, Transgenders

1 INTRODUCTION

Perceived discrimination experience in transgenders and their identity formation in society is become gradually prominent in Indian societies. American Psychological Association (2015) writes that transgender individuals are those whose expression of gender identity is differ

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from the sex assigned to them at birth. It represents them a marginalized group and frequently victims of social stereotypes, social exclusion, stigma and discrimination, systematic prejudice. Consequences of these victimization especially perceived discrimination consequences are complicated. It appears in complex ways, out of which significant impact can be seen on self-concept that is known as core aspect for individual identity and mental heath issues. Perceived discrimination is defined by as individual's subjective experience of unfair treatment, stereotypes or on their group membership of gender identity. It contains direct encounters like verbal abuse, denial of service, inequality in employment, health care and education. Researches uncover the perceived discrimination effect severe impaired psychological functioning and barrier in positive self-concept (Pascoe and Smart Richman 2009). On the other hand, self-concept is a psychological construct denotes the individual's perception, evaluation, and understanding of the self. Various components of self-concept including self-esteem, self-image, and self-efficacy shape through social interaction and feedback from environment (Rosenberg 1979). In case of transgender individuals, from childhood to old age, social stigma, discrimination and identity invalidation faced by them, so formation of self-concept is become impaired. Studies suggest that development of resilience and psychological wellbeing is tailored by positive self-concept while, chronic social rejection by societies create very harmful consequences like distortion of self-worth, self-perception, identity confusion (Meyer 2003)

Transgender community in India is recognized by government of India but their social status is remained marginalized and excluded from main stream. Census of India 2011, identify them under the other gender and issued their numbers approximately 487,803. However, this number is widely considered an underestimation due to stigma and lack of self-reporting. The National Human Rights Commission Report (2018) revealed alarming data over 92% of transgender persons in India are deprived of the right to participate in any form of economic activity in a dignified manner; only 6% are formally employed. Nearly 60% face social exclusion from families and communities, and a majority report facing violence, homelessness, and inadequate access to education and healthcare. However, Transgender (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019 takes steady progress towards legal recognition and anti-discrimination provisions.

To establish a link between perceived social discrimination and self-concept, the Minority Stress Model (Meyer 2003) provides a robust framework for understanding the link between perceived social discrimination and self-concept. The model suggests that minority individuals face unique stressors both external (e.g., prejudice events) and internal (e.g., expectation of rejection, internalized stigma)—which compound general stress and negatively impact mental health. For transgender individuals, these stressors interfere with the natural developmental process of identity formation and affirmation. Chronic discrimination challenges positive self-evaluation by providing persistent negative social feedback. The Looking-Glass Self theory (Cooley 1902) posits that self-concept is shaped by how individuals believe they are perceived by others. In the case of transgender persons, societal misrecognition, misgendering, and denial of gender identity act as continual reinforcements of non-acceptance, resulting in internalized stigma and fractured self-concept. Furthermore, cognitive-affective models suggest that social rejection leads to rumination, emotional dysregulation, and self-silencing behaviors, which further erode self-esteem (Leary 1999). Recent empirical work substantiates the negative impact of social discrimination on the mental health and self-concept of transgender individuals. A study by Budge *et al.* (2013) demonstrated that transgender people who experience high levels of discrimination report greater symptoms of depression and lower self-esteem. Another study by Testa *et al.* (2015) found that perceived discrimination was significantly associated with lower self-affirmation and identity pride, both of which are key components of self-concept.

In the Indian context, Tripathi and Mukherjee (2010) found that Indian transgender individuals reported lower self-esteem and higher psychological distress, primarily due to experiences of social exclusion and harassment. Similarly, a qualitative study by Narrain (2016) highlighted the emotional consequences of being denied gender identity recognition

by family and institutions, with many participants describing a "fractured sense of self." A more recent survey by Sahodaran Community Oriented Health Development (SCOHD) Trust (2020) in Tamil Nadu noted that 76% of transgender respondents had faced educational discrimination, and 68% experienced social exclusion that deeply affected their sense of identity and belonging. Despite the growing recognition of transgender rights and identities in academic and policy domains, there is limited research in India exploring the psychological consequences of social discrimination on self-concept. Most available literature focuses on physical health, HIV risk, or legal rights, overlooking the profound psychological toll of living in a hostile social environment.

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The objective of the study was to examine causal link between perceived discrimination and self-concept in transgender individuals. Specific objective is:

1) To investigate the effect of perceived discrimination on domains of self-concept in transgenders,
2) To study the association between perceived discrimination and domains of self-concept in transgenders.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 *Sample*

The present study carried out on a sample of 60 transgender individuals residing in the Delhi National Capital Region (NCR). Participants were selected using the snowball sampling technique. The inclusion criteria were individuals who self-identify as transgender, residents of Delhi NCR, aged between 18 and 50 years and willing to participate voluntarily and able to provide informed consent.

3.2 *Measures*

Two measures and personal data sheet were employed. Included scales were published in English language. Both scales were translated in Hindi language with WHO back-to-back translation method.

(1) **Personal Data Sheet:** A self-constructed personal data sheet was administered to gather relevant background and demographic information.
(2) **Self-Concept Scale (**Dolejš, *et al.* 2022): This questionnaire comprises 18 statements with 6 domains i.e., social adaptability, work and studies, body confidence, resistance to anxiety, popularity in society and, sense of meaning and self-actualization. Responses are taken on 4-point Likert type (strongly agree to strongly disagree). Scale has good psychometric properties.

3.3 *Perceived discrimination scale (Tiwari, Patel and Kumar 2017)*

The scale consists of 24 items, each rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranged strongly disagree to strongly agree. The total score is calculated by summing all item scores. Higher scores indicate greater levels of perceived discrimination. The scale has demonstrated high reliability, with Cronbach's alpha ranging between 0.80 and 0.90

Primarily, transgender individuals contacted at their homes that is established by transgender community members, and briefed about study objectives and explained about

perceived discrimination and self-concept variables. They were offered to participate in the study and written consent was taken, prior to start data collection.

Personal data sheet, and two scale i.e., perceived discrimination scale and self-concept scale was filled by participants. On average, it took participants about 15–20 minutes to complete the entire form. Completed data scored as per manual. Data was entered and analyzed data with SPSS 21st version. This study was quantitive in nature so parametric statistics was approached with descriptive statistics mean, standard deviation, t-test, Pearson product moment correlation was performed to find out results.

4 RESULTS

4.1 *Descriptive statistics and group differences based on perceived discrimination*

Table 1 presents the results of two analysis, descriptive statistics for the domains of self-concept and perceived discrimination, and second is mean score, standard deviation, and t test. Self-concept scale contains with six dimensions social adaptability, work and studies, body confidence, resistance to anxiety, popularity in society and sense of meaning and self-actualization. Each domain contains 3 items on 4-point rating scales. Minimum score of each domain could be 3 to maximum 12 score. Respective mean score of five domains of self-concepts are social adaptability is 6.23 (SD=.861), work and studies (M=7.38, SD=.96), body confidence (M=6.28, SD=1.20), Resistance to anxiety (M=5.43, SD=1.23), popularity in society (M=5.68, SD=.93) and last domain, sense of meaning and self-actualisation (M=9.43, SD=.81). Perceived discrimination score has 24 items and assessed on 4-point ratings scale, so minimum score could be 24 to maximum score 96 for each participant. Mean score of perceived discrimination is 74.07 (SD=3.49).

Again, perceived discrimination scores are divided into two groups high and low perceived discrimination with the help of Visual Binning system in SPSS. To examine the effect of perceived discrimination on domains of self-concept independent sample t test was performed. The effect of perceived discrimination was found significant on two domains of self-concept, resistance to anxiety (t = 3.10, $p< 0.01$) and sense of meaning and self-actualization (t = -5.656, $p< 0.01$). Other domains of self-concept are not found significant on the level of perceived discrimination. Respective mean scores illustrate a clear pattern of self-concept, high perceived discrimination individuals got lower scores on self-concept domains.

Table 1. Mean SD and t-value of domains of self-concept and perceived discrimination.

Descriptive of the variables			Effect of levels of perceived discrimination on self-concept domains			
	Mean	SD	PD	Mean	SD	t-value
Social Adaptability	6.27	.86	Low	6.39	.70	1.27
			High	6.11	1.01	
Work and Studies	7.38	.98	Low	7.39	.82	.09
			High	7.37	1.14	
Body Confidence	6.28	1.2	Low	6.27	1.18	.07
			High	6.30	1.26	
Resistance to anxiety	5.43	1.23	Low	5.85	1.00	3.10**
			High	4.93	1.29	
Popularity in Society	5.68	.93	Low	5.76	.90	.681
			High	5.59	.97	
Sense of meaning and self-actualization	9.43	.81	Low	9.00	.43	5.66**
			High	9.96	.85	
Perceived Discrimination	74.07	3.49				

4.2 *Correlation and regression analysis*

To examine the relationships between perceived discrimination and domains of self-concept, a Pearson product-moment correlation was performed (see Table 2). Perceived discrimination is found negatively correlated with resistance to anxiety (r = -0.343, $p< 0.01$) and Social Adaptability (r = -0.288, $p< 0.05$), whereas, positively correlated with sense of meaning and self-actualization (r = 0.630, $p< 0.01$). A multiple linear regression analysis was performed to determine the predictive value of self-concept domains on perceived discrimination. Predictor variables were domains of self-concept and criterion variable was taken as perceived discrimination. Among all predictors, only Sense of Meaning and Self-Actualization was a significant positive predictor of perceived discrimination (β = 0.56, $p< 0.001$), indicating that higher levels of existential self-awareness and self-actualization were associated with increased awareness or experience of discrimination.

Table 2. Correlation and regression analysis between perceived discrimination and domains of self-concept.

	SA	WS	BC	RA	PS	SMSA
Perceived Discrimination	−.288*	−.082	−.189	−.343**	−.166	.630**
Regression analysis						
R	R^2	Adjusted R		R^2 Change	F	
.668[a]	.45	.384		.447	7.129**	
Coefficients						
Predictors				β	t	Sig
Social Adaptability				−.14	−1.14	.25
Work and Studies				.01	.14	.88
Body Confidence				−.02	−.17	.86
Resistance to anxiety				−.16	−1.25	.21
Popularity in Society				.02	.15	.87
Sense of meaning and self-actualization				.55	5.12	.00

Abbreviations: PD: Perceived Discrimination, SA: Social Adaptability, WS: Work and Studies: Body confidence RA: Resistance to anxiety, PS: Popularity in society, SMSA: Sense of meaning and self-actualization
Note ** p<.01

Thus, perceived discrimination effect is seen on two domains of self-concept; resistance to anxiety and sense of meaning and self-actualization. However, correlation coefficient is suggested the existed relationship between perceived discrimination and social adaptability and resistance to anxiety negatively whereas, Sense of meaning and self-actualization positively.

5 DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to examine the casual link between perceived discrimination and domains of self-concept in transgender individuals. In this regards, two domain of self-concept resistance to anxiety and sense of meaning and self-actualization is found

significant on the levels of perceived discrimination. It means intensity of perceived discrimination is a genuine reason for impaired self-concept. Studies on discrimination behavior reveals its harmful effect on mental health outcomes like depression, psychological distress, anxiety and wellbeing (Williams, Neighbors, & Jackson 2003; Paradies 2006). Findings supports the negative effect of perceived discrimination on resistance to anxiety but reverse pattern for sense of meaning and self-actualization domain. Perceived discrimination provides a psychological foundation for both sense of meaning and self-actualization. Park (2010) argued that sufferings can trigger the search for meaning and this process make them reinterpret the situation. Sense of meaning has pivotal role in self-actualization. In existential psychology perspective, self-actualization is ongoing process of authenticity becoming oneself through conscious, choice, acceptance of responsibility and creation of personal meaning in the world (May 1981). Respective mean scores of perceived discriminations suggest that higher score of perceived discrimination asserts the effect on sense of meaning and self-actualization. Victor Frankel (1959) emphasize that sense of meaning specially in sufferings emerges as a product of discovering and pursuing personal meaning.

Second objective of the study was to examine the relationship between perceived discrimination and domains of self-concept in transgender individuals. A significant negative relationship is seen between perceived discrimination and social adaptability, resistance to anxiety, and positive relationship with sense of meaning and self-actualization. Thus, increased level of perceived discrimination tailored decreased resistance to anxiety and social adaptability. As earlier discussed about sense of meaning and self-actualization confirm the objective.

The multiple regression model illustrates 45% of the variance in perceived discrimination explained by self-concept domains. Among all predictors, only sense of meaning and self-actualization emerged as a statistically significant predictor ($\beta = 0.555$, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that individuals who are more aware of their existential identity are more agreed and justified with unfaired society for transgender individuals by which they face in their everyday life.

6 CONCLUSION

Finally, study findings highlight the causal link between perceived discrimination and domains of self-concept. out of six, only three domains social adaptability, resistance to anxiety and sense of meaning and self-actualization determine the harmful effect of perceived discrimination. However, study provides a effective link between both variables, some limitations like study sample size, location of the study etc open the doors for new researchers to verify this phenomena. Major findings could be providing a platform to psychologist and social worker, and enable them to prepare intervention programme and reduction of negative mental health.

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Representation of transgender roles in modern Indian cinema: A breakthrough from stereotypes to authenticity

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ABSTRACT: Indian cinema very often shows sexual minorities, whose gender identity, or sexual characteristics break from established norms of the society. Delving into history, transgender roles were mostly marginalised, at times used as comic relief or shown negatively and completely villainous. In the early 2000s, the portrayal of transgenders became more sympathetic yet complicated, resulting in films that offered more authentic representations of transgender characters.

There were movies like "Sadak" (1991) and "Tammanna" (1997) that featured transgender characters but echoed negative perceptions, and also films like "Super Deluxe" (2019), "Bombay Begums" (2021), and "Taali" (2023) which shed light on transgender roles and their real-life obstacles. These changes may still fall short or fully challenge deep-rooted gender stereotypes, such as the idea that transgender women are not women, that trans people are inherently deceptive, or that trans people are confused.

Using reflections from the literature review and interviews, this paper will subjectively examine the changing landscape and layers of transgender representation in Indian cinema from the mid-2010s to the present, showcasing the breakthrough of trans artists in both the areas of Indian mainstream and regional film industries.

Keywords: Representation of transgenders, Empowerment, Sexual minority, Authenticity, Inclusion

1 INTRODUCTION

India's legal framework regarding LGBTQIA+ has undergone a major transformation over the centuries (Vanita, 2013), shaped by indigenous traditions, foreign influences, colonial impositions, and modern reform movements. According to historical data, the LGBTQ community was well-represented in a variety of literary and artistic works, and there is evidence that major dharmic faiths tolerated homosexuality and transsexuality (LGBTQ history in India, n.d., Ancient period). According to Wilhelm (2010), the Vedas and other Hindu texts refer to "Tritiya Prakriti," or "Third nature," as part of the sacred text. The phrase "Vikruti Evam Prakriti" (meaning "diversity is what nature is all about" or "what seems unnatural is also natural") appears in the Rigveda, one of the canonical texts of Hinduism, and implies acceptance of various gender and sexual expressions (Homosexuality

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and religion, n.d., Hinduism). Ancient Hindu texts like Manu Smriti and Sushruta Samhita acknowledge that some people are born with mixed and female natures or as sexually neutral individuals as a matter of natural biology (Homosexuality and religion, n.d.), Hinduism. In ancient India (1500 BCE–500 CE), the concept of Ardhanarishvara symbolized the unity and balance of male and female energies in Hindu mythology. The third-gender groups like hijras were recognized, respected and considered from around 500–1500 CE. They were seen serving and fulfilling religious roles in temples and royal courts. However, between 1500 and 1947 CE, colonial laws and cultural codes led to the marginalization and criminalization of transgender identities, especially after the Indian Penal Code of 1860. Following independence, the hijra community continued to struggle against economic and social exclusion. Later then, the HIV/AIDS epidemic further affected the transgender and LGBTQ communities in the 1980s and 1990s, to increased stigma and discrimination. The AIDS Bedhbhav Virodhi Andolan (ABVA) published a ground-breaking 70-page report in November and December 1991 that described the experiences of LGBT persons in India [(Chaudhuri, 2018, para. 4)]. This study exposed the startling degree of violence, extortion, and blackmail LGBT persons experienced, especially at the hands of law enforcement [(Chaudhuri, 2018, para. 4)]. In the early 2000s, the fight made its way to the courts. An important step was taken in 2009 when the Election Commission instructed all provinces to change registration forms to add the option of "other," allowing transgender individuals to identify as something other than male or female. The year 2014 saw the Supreme Court of India recognise transgender individuals as the third gender; the court recognized transgender people as the "Third gender" in a landmark decision in National Legal Services Authority v. Union of India. "Recognition of transgender as transgender is not a social or medical issue, but a human issue," noted Justice K.S. Radhakrishnan. Transgender rights are receiving more legislative attention, as seen by the 2014 introduction of the Rights of Transgender Persons Bill as a private member's bill. In 2016, section 377 of the IPC was decriminalized by the Supreme Court in the Navtej Singh Johar case. This affirmed the complete entitlement of LGBTQ+ individuals in India to all constitutional rights and freedoms safeguarded by the Indian constitution. A specified framework for transgender identification, recognition, and protection from discrimination was established by the Indian government's transgender person (protection of rights) Act, which was approved later in 2019. The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Rules were then announced in 2020 (Sarkar, 2023, page 12). Although this law was a step in the right direction for transgender people, campaigners and the trans community have criticized it for failing to fully recognize the right to gender identity self-determination without medical assistance (Centre for Law & Policy Research, 2024, p. 15). The Act provides a two-step process for gender affirmation: a transgender person must first apply for recognition as "transgender" and thereafter, upon submission of the complete medical document, they can seek gender reassignment surgery (Centre for Law & Policy Research, 2024, p. 15). Understanding the constraints of legal reform also means knowing that real change goes beyond laws or codes—it's about hearts and minds. The queer theory here becomes vital; it challenges and deconstructs dominant norms which lie around sexuality, gender, and identity. Queer theory is a field of study that critically and very thoughtfully analyses sexuality and gender identity norms. It deconstructs the idea of 'normality' and emphasises fluidity and performativity over fixed identity. The queer theory emerged from the intersection and layers of feminist theories, LGBTQ studies and cultural studies during the 20th century (MasterClass staff, 2022, para. 2). The development of queer theory was influenced by activism from the gay and lesbian liberation movements and the 1980s and the theoretical contribution from scholars like Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Gayle Rubin and Eve Kosofky Sedgwik. 'Teresa De Lauretis' came up with the term 'Queer theory' in 1990 to surpass and exceed boundaries in LGBTQ studies and challenge the heteronormative framework (MasterClass staff, 2022, para. 2); her goal was to push beyond the limitations she saw in existing LGBTQ studies at that time. 'Eve Kosofsky' analyzed how society genders sexuality and creates binary (male and female) and opposition like

heterosexual and homosexual (MasterClass staff, 2022, para. 2). A key contribution to Queer theory also includes 'Michel Foucault'. Foucault argued that 'sexuality is a social construct' (MasterClass staff, 2022, para. 2) and it is produced through discourse, which means that our understanding and experience of sexuality are shaped by the ways we talk and express about it and the knowledge systems we build around it. Queer theory, as articulated by the scholar Gayle Rubin, interrogates how dominant sexual norms marginalize groups outside societal binaries, challenging simplistic categories like male/female and heterosexual/homosexual. Applying this lens and viewpoint, the representation of transgenders in Indian cinema emerges as a complex, evolving narrative shaped by intersecting influences of religion, history, and politics. From the 1950s through the 1980s, transgender characters were portrayed but frequently through stereotypes—as comic relief, villains, or hypersexualized "others"—reinforcing negative attitudes and social stigma and dishonour. Movies like "Tahlka" (1992) and "Shabnam Mausi" (2005) addressed or started to address transgender issues in the 1990s and early 2000s, but the whole idea of representation was still limited and sometimes exaggerated on unfair grounds, and the reality remained hidden. Films like "My Brother... Nikhil" (2005) and "Margam" (2014) offered more diverse depictions in the 2010s as the films worked on themes of social stigma, personal identity, and acceptance.

2 ANALYSIS OF THE HISTORICAL REPRESENTATION OF PORTRAYAL OF TRANSGENDER IN INDIAN FILMS

Indian cinema has a long history of typecasting and marginalising transgender people, sometimes portraying them as comic relief or villains. Some films like *"Lahoo Ke Do Rang" (1979) and "Dostana" (1980)* included cisgender actors in transgender roles, promoting negative ideas and social prejudices, altogether disregarding the community. *"Taqdeer" (1983)* featured transgender individuals as sex workers in the film, and such portrayals very rarely offered truthful or multidimensional perspectives and served to further marginalization of the transgender population. Representation and showcasing of transgender individuals became more nuanced around the 1990s and early 2000s. They were still limited and relegated to the same sensationalised or stereotypical role other than normativity regarding trans. The film *"Sadak" (1991)* had a transgender antagonist, whereas *"Tamanna" (1997)* tried to tackle social concerns but underlined sympathetic stories. *"Shabnam Mausi" (2005)* was a rare biographical film; therefore, it drew the attention of the audience. Around the 2010s, a steady shift started to take place towards more complex and sympathetic representations. The films like *"I Am" (2010)* and *"Margam" (2014)* delved into acceptance and individual identity. *"Nanak Shah Fakir" (2015)* and *"Naanu Aval Alla... Avalu" (2015)* gave more authentic portrayals of transgenders. Movies like *"Angry Indian Goddesses" (2015)* and *"Achcham Yenbadhu Madamaiyada" (2016)* showcased more multifaceted and complex roles. Transgender characters gained more widespread recognition around 2018. While *"Super Deluxe" (2019)* examined identity and acceptance through a transgender character, *"Njan Marykutty" (2018)* featured a transgender lead role portrayed by transgender actor Anjali Ameer. Dr Trinetra Haldar maintained the pattern in *"Made in Heaven" (2019)* as a trans individual taking up a trans character. However, some movies, such as *"Chandigarh Kare Aashiqui" (2021)* and *"Laxmii" (2020)*, were still criticized for using cisgender actors and not doing justice to trans lives, reinforcing stereotypes. Transgender experiences were further explored in *"Taali" (2023)* and *"Safed" (2024)*, the latter of which was commended and applauded for its realistic portrayal despite using a cisgender actress. All in all, even though through caricatured and marginalized representation of transgender individuals, Indian cinema has still evolved from just portrayals and representation to more nuanced and visible roles. While challenges remain rigid, especially

regarding authentic casting and overcoming stereotypes, recent years reflect growing acceptance and a deeper understanding of transgender identities within Indian society.

3 INTRODUCTION: THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Indian cinema has a deep-rooted background of marginalization, tokenism, and phobia for transgender characters, which is also the result of significant cultural influence. However, these representations are gradually changing in favour of more sensitive representation as LGBTQIA+ activism and awareness grow. This paper, with the help of in-depth interviews with seven trans participants, will thematically explore how transgender people understand their identities when portrayed in movies. It will look at how these representations affect their growth and if they mirror larger gender discourses in our society.

The research is supported by a few key questions: How do individuals relate to the on-screen depictions? What recurring themes or stereotypes do they notice at times, and how do these portrayals shape their point of view about acceptance or resistance to mainstream narratives?

Thematic analysis was used to systematically identify and interpret patterns within the qualitative data, making it effective for examining complexities of identity issues that amplified the voice of the alienated.

By focusing in depth on the experiences and reflections of transgender people, this research not only traces the evolution and changes of transgender representation in Indian cinema but also critiques and questions the persistent stereotypes that are barriers to inclusivity. Ultimately, it also highlights how cinema and the art of storytelling can either reinforce dominant gender ideologies or challenge them to change.

3.1 *Identity and early experience*

Most participants described being assigned a sex at birth that never matched their inner sense of self. From a young age, they felt a profound disconnect between how the world saw them and who they truly were. Family and society rarely offered space for conversations about gender diversity. They said, "Lack of family support leads to more confusion and fear."

3.2 *Cinema's influence on self-understanding*

Cinema was, for many, the first window to a world beyond their immediate surroundings. Yet, what they saw on screen rarely reflected their reality. It was said, 'Transgender characters were often mocked, feared, or pitied—rarely celebrated or shown as ordinary people with hopes and dreams'. Such portrayals led to internalized shame and the belief that their existence was a 'punchline or a curse'. Years of unlearning, seeking out rare authentic stories, and finding community were needed to accept themselves. Cinema, instead of being a source of comfort, often became another weapon used against their self- worth. A participant made a statement that 'one will become what they see'.

4 THEMES AND MESSAGES IN FILM

Mainstream films often send the message that transgender lives are either 'tragic or monstrous' as termed by a participant. Even when films attempt to show their struggles, they focus solely on suffering, rarely on resilience, love, or triumphs. As said by a participant, 'There is a longing for stories that show transgender people as whole—capable of joy, ambition, romance, and everyday life'. The desire is for narratives that go beyond transition and trauma, and instead show transgender people as lawyers, teachers, friends, and love.

5 HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY REPRESENTATION

As stated by a participant, 'Transgender characters in Indian cinema have been portrayed as caricatures—evil brothel keepers, comic relief, or cursed souls. These depictions were not just lazy; they were cruel, reinforcing the idea that transgender people are outsiders, threats, or jokes'. Such portrayals shaped how audience, majorly cis genders viewed transgender individuals, justifying mockery and fear.

Regional cinema, particularly Tollywood, has occasionally shown more sensitivity and depth. Films like Nagarkirtan and Super Deluxe stand out for their nuanced and respectful portrayal of transgender lives. Bollywood, however, still often falls short—casting cisgender actors in trans roles or focusing more on the spectacle of transition than the lived reality of being trans. 'The shift toward authenticity is happening, but it is slow and uneven.'

6 STEREOTYPES, TROPES, AND AUTHENTICITY

Transgender individuals remain largely invisible, and when present, are rarely allowed complexity or agency. 'Cisgender men and women get to be everything—heroes, villains, lovers, leaders—while transgender characters are often just plot devices.' Their stories are usually filtered through cisgender perspectives, which limits authenticity and reinforces the idea that they are "other." As stated by a participant, 'Stereotypes persist due to both ignorance and cynicism among filmmakers, and the lack of real transgender voices in the industry means these tropes go unchallenged.'

7 BARRIERS TO AUTHENTIC REPRESENTATION

As said by a participant, 'Until transgender people are allowed to write, direct, and act in their own stories, authenticity will always be limited'. There is also fear—of backlash from conservative audiences, of financial loss—and ignorance, a refusal to do the hard work of learning about transgender lives beyond the surface. 'The industry's obsession with casting big stars in trans roles, rather than giving opportunities to trans actors, perpetuates the problem.'

8 CISGENDER ACTORS IN TRANSGENDER ROLES

It was stated by a participant that 'No matter how talented a cisgender actor is, they cannot bring the lived experience of being trans to a role'. And 'It also sends a message that trans people are not good enough to play themselves, that their stories are only valid when filtered through cisgender bodies.' This is both insulting and damaging. Real change starts with giving transgender people the chance to tell their own stories.

9 IMPACT OF AUTHENTIC CASTING: AGENCY, RESPONSIBILITY AND CHANGE

As said by a participant, 'Casting transgender actors in transgender roles is their transformation. It will challenge the idea that transgender people are invisible and unworthy.' It also shows that transgender people can be great role models, proof that they can be looked upon, respected, and celebrated. They also said, 'It is not just about accuracy; it is about dignity and opportunity.'

One of the participants also stated that 'Filmmakers, producers, and writers can choose to handle stereotypes or to challenge them, to open doors for trans talent or keep them locked out completely'. Inclusivity is not just about representation on screen; it is about who gets to tell the stories, the real ones and who gets to be in the room where decisions are made, and where reforms are started. They also said that 'Filmmakers must educate themselves, and they should be willing to listen, even when it is uncomfortable.'

10 DESIRED CHANGES

A participant stated that 'Transgender individuals want to see characters who are more than their gender identity—who have careers, families, love lives, ambitions. They want to see trans joy, not just trans suffering.' They want trans actors in leading roles, and trans writers and directors shaping the narratives. They want films that reflect the diversity of their community—not just one type of trans experience, but many. Above all, they want respect.

This study reveals that while Indian cinema is moving toward more inclusive transgender representation, it still lacks depth and authenticity. True progress requires trans voices both on and off screen, as films have the power to either humanize or perpetuate harm through their portrayals.

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Women in public administration in early India

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ABSTRACT: This study aims to investigate and register the significant contributions of early women in public administration, which have remained invisible so far and failed to become the central discourse of gender history. There were different facets to women administrators in the public domain of early India- women rulers, governors, military commanders, judges, counsellors, diplomats, spies, and messengers. It is crucial to observe that women were proving their mettle as administrators when their general social position and status had fallen considerably in early India. It is pertinent to admit that the post-Gupta time frame records a political landscape with evidence of leading ladies in various administrative capacities. The king and the queen were considered joint and equal ruling authorities of the state. Some provinces of the subcontinent like Deccan, Karnataka, Kashmir, Orissa, and peripheral regions, have outstanding examples of women administrators in different capacities. South India had numerous examples of women administering provinces, towns, divisions, villages and they headed social and religious institutions. The instances of stri-rajyas were a very peculiar and distinct feature of women's political engagement in ancient India. Stri-rajyas were ruled and administered by a female succession line. This research paper is an effort to register the glorious contribution of early Indian women in the domain of Public Administration.

Keywords: Women, Administration, Polity, Governor, Judges

1 INTRODUCTION

The central argument of this study is that women in early India had significant and diverse roles in public administration, challenging the conventional patriarchal narrative accepted so far. In the inscriptions, these queens have been called by many epithets as mahisi, rangyi, srimad, etc., which depicts that they held positions of responsibility in the state (*Epigraphia Indica* X. Pg. 138- 141). Women held positions like rulers, regent queens, cabinet members, palace officers, provincial administrators, village chiefs, governors, feudal lords (samant), diplomats, councillors, judges, spies, attendants, military commanders, registering authority, ledger keeper, etc. Women were given the required education and training and were empowered considerably to complement their male counterparts to bring significant changes in their time. They exercised decision-making rights and had control over the resources of the state. The case study of some regions like Kashmir, Orissa, the Deccan and South India would validate the thesis of the research study.

2 HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Women's political role has been marginalized in documenting history and it's largely limited to the socio-legal framework. Indian society, being patriarchal, doesn't furnish enough names of female rulers, but their administrative participation and presence were visible and commendable down the ages. Indian women, like in most other cultures, were historically not the authors of

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their image and surprised none to gain such an image in society (Jain,2016). This research study aims to probe the areas where early women were instrumental in public affairs and have established their skill and acumen in the public domain in space and time. Women in history are victims of broad generalizations being made about them. The position of women in public administration requires qualification and review in the light of the given sources so that the interplay of women and polity in ancient India can be brought to discussion and documented for a better historical understanding of Indian women in history.

3 ROLES OF WOMEN IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN ANCIENT INDIA

There are many examples of women's political engagement in the Vedic period. The Rigveda and the Atharvaveda collections furnish at least seven references, testifying not only to women's attendance but also to their active engagement in the Vidatha assembly. The Vidatha was the oldest public assembly of the Indo-Aryans, attended by both men and women, performing all kinds of economic, military, religious, and social functions. Vedic women were members of the Sabha (*Rigveda* I.167.3) (Wilson, 1857) and Vidatha, and it was also expected that the bride should be able to speak with composure in public assemblies (*Rigveda* X.85.26). Gradually, with the evolution of the patriarchal setup, limitations were imposed on the political and administrative space of women. By the time of Maitrayani Samhita their position had already changed as the text categorically states, 'men go to assembly, not women' (*Maitrayani Samhita*, IV.7.4) (Vidyalankar,1986). Buddha discouraged the notion of women rulers or administrators and clearly stated that women are not suitable for public administration and business (*Kandī Jātaka*, I, 13) (*Majjhimanikaya* III. *Bahudhātukasutta.*3.2.5). As per Manu, women cannot become efficient administrators and they shouldn't be made rulers because of their natural limitations (*Manusmriti,* III.65-66). Despite the didactic norms set by Smritikaras to limit the participation of women in public administration, we notice increased involvement in later ages.

According to Yugapurana, women not only carried on the agricultural operations including tilling the fields, but were also soldiers in the army and took care of the administration of villages and towns (*Yugapurana* I.171). The epic literature reveals that women's participation in public administration was not an alien idea but was acceptable to Rishi Vaśiṣṭha too, as he suggested that +Sitā could administer the state till Rāma's return from the forest (*Ramayana* II.37) (tr Raghunathan,1981). Bhishma also advised Yudhishthira to allow the daughters to rule the state in the absence of sons. (*Mahabharata* XII.31-33). The Chandragupta-Kumaradevi type of coins was evidence of joint rule and administrative stake of the royal ladies in the state. Konadevi, wife of Adityasena, influenced her husband as she has been observed issuing grants in her capacity as chief queen (Sharma, 1987; Pg.61). During the capture of Udayana Vatsaraja, the complete charge of administration was assumed by his queen mother. With the assistance of able ministers, she amazingly discharged her duties, which even experienced ministers admired. Rajyasri was the instrument for the Maukhari-Vardhana alliance. In the Mālava court, female judges and palace officers discharging their duties efficiently can be seen. In some provinces, especially in Karnataka province, women were provincial administrators and village chiefs (Luniya, 1974; Pg.549). There are references to women rulers in the kingdom of Kadali at Nowgong in the literary sources of a later period (Nowgang grant of Balavarman II.35-38). In Manipur, there was a separate division in the department of Justice managed by women to deal with the cases of their sex (Tripathi,1988; Pg.189).

'Stri-rajyas' or the Women's kingdom is often mentioned in our ancient literature e.g, there is an intriguing reference to a king called Srgala who was the head of a woman's kingdom i.e, Strirajyadhipati and had participated in the svayamvara of a Kalinga princess (*Mahabharata* XII.4.7). Pramila, the queen of the land of the Amazons, who fought with the Pandava hero Arjuna, is mentioned in Jaimini Bharata (*Jaimini Bharata*, ch.22). Even the

Chinese traveller Hiuen-Tsang of the 7th century in his work *Si-Yu-ki* seems to have supported the concept of stri-rajya (Watters 1904). Generally, menfolk were engaged in the suppression of revolts and the cultivation of the lands and female folk looked after the state affairs. Unfortunately, very little information is available about the political condition of the two stri-rajyas, but it's significant that women bore the administrative responsibilities directly and ran the states successfully. Vatsayayana too talks about stri-rajyas and according to him, rich women maintained several youths as their kept paramours in their respective harems (Upaddhaya 1953).

4 REGIONAL CASE STUDIES

In **Kashmir**, several queens earned a reputation as members of the cabinet under various monarchs. Kalyandevi, the talented consort of Jayapida 746-779 A.D, held the office of high chamberlain, an honour and responsibility which was bestowed upon men possessing uncommon ability and power of understanding (Sharma, 1987 Pg.165-66). Kalhana states that "Women had entered into the political field, owned and controlled the immovable property, administered their states and even fought on the battle grounds leading the troops." In the Rajtarangini, we find women fighting battles, ruling the state, sometimes acting as conspirators and criticizing their husbands (*Rajtarangini* V.12) (Stein 1979). Forced by the chaotic conditions of her times, the dowager queen of Sankaravarman, Sugandadevi ruled the state and took complete control of the state into her own hands in the 10^{th} century A.D (*Rajatarangini* V.228). Queen Didda whether as the consort of her husband Kshemdra or the guardian of Abhimanyu or regent of her three grandsons, functioned as a virtual administrator of the Kashmir region for five decades (c.950-1001 A.D). King during his reign, issued coins jointly with her which reflects on her political role and significance in the state. She got coronated and dressed herself in the masculine attire as Diddādeva (*Epigraphia India*, XXVII,Pg.153). Queen was a capable organizer, a clever diplomat, a determined administrator and a brave fighter (*Rajatarangani* V.228). The capacity of Queen Kalhanika of Jayasimha, as a wise and skilful envoy and diplomat, was uncommon (*Rajtarangini* VIII.3096-97, 3301-3304). Srilekha queen of Samgramaraja of Kashmir, was his wise councillor, she became the supreme authority in the government, her commands could not be disobeyed with impunity and nothing could be done without securing her explicit orders. Srilekha was a gifted administrator and also a liberal social reformer. The founder of the second Lohara dynasty, Queen Suryamati of Uchchhala, was keen to reform the state administration, wherein Jayamati proved great assistance to him. Kalhana has described Ratta as one who administered over Dakshinapatha (*Rajtarangini* XV 10.2, 12.22). Military commanders like Silla and Cudda of King Sussale of the twelfth century A.D in Kashmir valley had earned a great reputation. Cudda was a brave warrior and adept in the skill of warfare and Silla was a royal cadet and held a fief with full authority (*Rajtarangini* VIII.1069).

The queens of **Orissa** exercised great power and enjoyed a much higher status as they could rule in their own right with full authority and engaged in administration in various capacities. Towards the end of the ninth century A.D, when King Lalita Bharandera and his son died, the widowed queen mother assumed the sovereign power and accepting the request of feudatories of the land, we come to know that she ascended the lion throne like Katyayani and ruled till the birth of the grandson (*JBORS* II. Pg. 422). In the Bhaumakara dynasty of ancient Orissa, although adoption was a practice, it is great that six queens adorned the throne on different occasions. The women rulers of the Bhaumakara dynasty reigned in Orissa between the 9th and 11th centuries such as queen Tribhuvana-Mahadevi I (*Epigraphia Indica* XXIX. Pg. 210), Tribhuvana-Mahadevi II (*Epigraphia Indica* XV-XVII Pg. 217), Gauri Mahadevi (*Epigraphia Indica* VI Pg.135-140), Dandi Mahadevi, Bakula-Mahadevi and Dharma Mahadevi, Shantikara III was the last ruler of this dynasty. In some regions of Orissa, the queens of these dynasties functioned as a registering authority and there are a few exceptional examples where the registering authority is a woman official and

not the queen. Perhaps women officials also performed an additional duty of ledger keeper (*Epigraphia Indica*, XVIII).

Western and Deccan regions had several examples of women being appointed to important government offices in the provinces. Queen Nayanika of the Satvahana dynasty had governed the state during the minority of her son (Altekar 1956; Pg 187). Malicadevi, queen of Somesvara Chalukya, was governing the extensive province of Banavasi in 1053 A.D (Singh 1978, Pg 34). Ketaladevi, another queen of Somesvara Chalukya, was the governor of the Agrahara of Ponavad (*Indian Antiquary* Vol. XIX, pp. 271- 274). Akkadevi, sister of the Chalukya Jayasimha II of the Deccan, acted as the governor of Kisukad seventy for more than four decades from 1024-1068 A.D (*Epigraphia Indica*, XV.76). Women also acted as ministers and judges occasionally. Queens Siryadevi and Mahaladevi flourished in Bhor, Bombay state in the last quarter of the 11th century A.D. A lady named Somanathaiya acted as a minister of Siryadevi and another lady, Balaiya, occupied the post of a Judge under Mahaladevi. Chalukya Mayanalladevi and Chandella Kalyanadevi has been observed performing state welfare activities (*Epigraphia Indica* IX. Pg. 63) (*Prabandhachintamani,* 81-84). Mayanalladevi, mother of Yuvaraj Siddharaja, ruled over some parts of Gujarat as the regent of his son. Nayikadevi administered Gujarat as a regent during the infancy of her son, the Chalukya Bhima II (Merutunga's *Rasmala*, Forbes; Pg. 159). Taking the child in her lap, she fought bravely against mlechchas at Gadurgarh. The economic administration might have been under the charge of Queen Somalekha of Ajayaraja of Chahamanas of Sakambhari as she controlled the mint and as the coins bear her name (*Prithvirajaya* V.83-84). Nagarjuna was a savant of Rashtrakuta king Krishna I in 911 A.D., a mahasamant Kalivittavasa in place of Nagarjuna, his wife was appointed samant and she administered for eight years with valour. Shantideva's son Vijayapali's wife Nita Devi of Gujarat was well versed in state administration. Pulakesin II was fortunate to have an efficient ruler like Vijaya, the wife of his second son, Chandraditya. She was posted at Savantavadi, where she set to work with such amazing vigour and ability that she soon restored peace and order. Lokamadevi, the wife of Vikramaditya II is a prominent figure in Chalukyan history. She belonged to the Haihaya family, having recognized her aptitude for the duties of an administrator, the king appointed her as the governor of Pattadakallu, the chief town of the province of Kisuvolau. Bhagubai governed the three large regions, including modern Bijapur district and earned the admiration of her overlord Singhana II. Karpuradevi, the Kalchuri princes of Tripuri, was the wife of Chahmana-Someswara. She was a courageous lady and belonged to a tradition where ladies took control over the administration of the state in difficult times and assumed complete authority. Vikramāditya VI gifted Nāmareyanigala agrahāra to Somaladevi as kin-money (angabhoga). Kurmadevi, a widowed queen of Rajasthan, during the minority of her son, ruled over Mevad to defend the prestige of her dead husband Maharaja Samarasi 1139 A. (Tods, Vol.I Pg.34). She fought against Jallaludin and was called Viranari, Viraduhita, Viravadhu.

The Sudi inscription of **South India** dated 1048 A.D, describes Queen Lakshmidevi, wife of Vikramaditya VI of the Chalukyas of Kalyani, who ruled over Kalyani like a king. Similarly, the Kākatiya queen, Rudrāmba assumed the male epithet of Rudradevamahārāja. She was brought up with proper training and education to succeed her father as he had no son (*Epigraphia Indica*, XXXVIII). Ballrnajhadevi supported her husband, Vira Pandyadeva, in ruling his state from Barahkanyapura (Barker in south Kanara district). Tiriyaketaladevi, Chalukya Vikramaditya's queen, administered three villages. Jogabbarasi, another queen, administered the village of Ajjadi in 1091 A.D. Mailala Mahadevi or enthroned queen, assumed the administration of the town Kannavalli in 1094 A.D (Kamat 1980; Pg. 106). Venncle Settikave, ruler (urodati) and security chief of Satenahalli, lakkadevi was a village headman (maha prabhavini) according to an inscription of 1148 A.D. Revakabbarasi was a responsible officer (pasayite) in the royal household. Sattarasa Nagarjuna was the chief administrator of a part of Nalgavunda (Kamat, Pg 107). Vijayaditya's sister, Kumkumadevi, was ruling over a division of Dharwar district 1077 A.D (*Indian Antiquary* Vol. VIII Pg 37).

5 DISCUSSION

The general perception in history regarding women in public administration and polity was that, because of the hegemonistic patriarchal order, it was limited, wherein it was believed that few women by their position and acumen, came to the helm of affairs in specific regions, that too for a brief period. The historical writings have failed to acknowledge the various administrative dimensions of early women in state and polity. The depiction of women as passive participants in administration needs correction in the light of the sources discussed in the research study. The female folk were skilled and trained from a young age to take on the administrative responsibility as the situation called for. In general, the elite women received the necessary training in statecraft and they were taught the science of warfare. It's significant to mention that with the evolution of regional states in post Gupta period many noble ladies assumed authority and power completely in their own hands and proved their calibre by efficient management and control of the affairs of the state.

6 CONCLUSION

This research study is an effort to challenge the generalized understanding of women in public administration in the ancient society of India. From the numerous sources discussed here it can be analysed that trained women administrators were not a threat to their male counterparts and they didn't bring a state of conflict in the administration. Rather, the imperial structures had complementary roles for women in polity and administration as it could be understood by the type of essential training and education given to women in early India. This research paper is an endeavour to recognize and restore the valuable contribution of gender dynamics in public administration in early India and to trigger a fresh approach to the research in this area as it would unfold the inspiring episode of women administrators in Indian history.

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Rajput pride and Mughal harmony: The evolution of Jodha's image in Hindi cinema

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ABSTRACT: This article critically investigates how historical storytelling constantly revises and erases the past to satisfy contemporary needs. The study uses the portrayal of Jodha as an example to examine whether cinematic representation can adequately make a connection between the postcolonial present and past historiography so that the public may recognize and relate to the history through an analysis of the films *Mughal-e-Azam* & *Jodha Akbar*, as well as the arguments that flared up at the time of their release. The results highlight the historical impersonation using content analysis in a narrative that presents a comprehensive design of Jodha's cinematic portrayal using thematic analysis as a means of fostering a secular nationalist narrative and rekindling the essence of Indian culture.

Keywords: Jodha, Akbar, Mughal-e-Azam, Hindi Cinema, Nationalist Narrative

1 INTRODUCTION

The function of folklore and oral history in providing a peep into the past has been taken over by popular cinema, which is bound by the limitations of historical narratives. Furthermore, the economy of popular cinema prevents its participants from taking positions that contradict widely held assumptions about historical personalities. As a result, despite their origins in the deep well of colonial orientalist imagination, it has brought fictional characters to life, familiarizing them as actual historical personalities. Jodha is one such figure in Hindi Cinema. In actuality, the princess of Amber, also known as Hira Kunwar or Harkha Bai, was Akbar's fourth wife, following Ruqaiyya Sultan Begum and Salima Sultan Begum. 'Wali Nyimat *Maryam- uz-Zamani* (Mary of the Age) Begum Sahiba' was her legal title according to Mughal records.(*Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*).

The name Jodha is derived from Colonel James Todd's book *Annals and Antiquity of Rajasthan* published in 1829 (Tod *1914*).The recent media dispute about whether Jodha was Akbar's wife or daughter-in-law has sparked a new public debate. The Rajput community erupted in outrage and protest when the film *Jodha Akbar* was released in 2008, accusing it of being inaccurate and politically motivated historical revisionism that devalued Rajput history. The film was not released in Rajasthan, a key Bollywood market and home to many Rajputs, due to fears of violent protests. *Jodha Akbar* correctly depicts the broad strokes of both Jodha and Akbar's early life. But many of the more fascinating and significant aspects of their childhood and adulthood are ignored, misrepresented, or overlooked. Jodha and *Maryam-uz-Zamani* are not well-documented, but Akbar's rule is.

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In 2013, when the magnum serial *Jodha Akbar* premiered, a similar outcry occurred. At first, the Rajput Kshatriya *Akhil Bharatiya Chatariya Sabha* condemned the TV show, stating that it contained inaccurate information about Jodha marrying Akbar to save her father's empire. Other communities participated in the demonstrations, calling for the show to be canceled and saying that a character named "Jodha" never existed. Censorship is an authority's controlling force. It is governed and organized by a national authority that is controlled by sociopolitical and religious factors, which is the major cause for Indian film censorship that has become a heated topic in the twenty-first century. (Panda 2017).

Despite the prominence of Jodha in the public imagination, limited scholarly work has examined how her image is crafted across cinematic narratives.The aim here is to examine how Jodha is portrayed in Mughal-e-Azam (1960) and Jodha Akbar (2008), with an emphasis on how historical narratives are modified to suit modern demands, particularly about gender norms, secular nationalism, and communal identification.

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To understand how Hindi cinema both analyzes and portrays Jodha as a fictionalized cultural icon in *Mughal-e-Azam* (1960) and *Jodha Akbar* (2008).
- To trace colonial and orientalist roots of Jodha's narrative in ways cinema re-imagines, revises, erases historical realities to serve contemporary ideological or political purposes in forming public memory.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative and interpretive methodology based on the interdisciplinary fields of film studies, cultural history, and postcolonial historiography. It uses textual analysis of Mughal-e-Azam (1960) and Jodha Akbar (2008) movies, to investigate how historical figures are reinterpreted and recreated in cinematic narratives.

4 DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

To visualize the narrative of Jodha's portrayal in Cinema, we assess the film's scenic environment under six headings: Motherhood, Mediator / Negotiator, Hindu-Muslim Unity, A Timeless Riddle, Symbol of Secular Nationalism and Essence of Indian culture to assess the movie's prominently featured storylines. These categories are meant to study (and illustrate) the moments where history, fiction, and narrative all come together or part ways. (Chowdhary *et al. 2018*)

4.1 *Jodha: An embodiment of motherhood Ideal*

Mughal-e-Azam movie at a fundamental level narrates a story dealing with the triangular relationship of father, mother, and son. Not to miss, the role of Jodha played by Durga Khote is a key character where she portrays the role of a caring yet bold and courageous 'Mother' who amplifies the existing emotions in the film by displaying an overwhelming array of empathy as well as undeterred sensitivity. In *Mughal-e-Azam*, her predicament of whether to choose between son and husband and her dual responsibility as an Empress of the Mughal Empire and mother makes her a notable yet potent personality in the film which brings unexpected turns and twists in the life of Salim as well as Akbar. (Joshi 2013)

Durga Khote makes an impression on every spectator of the film with her emotionally charged dialogue in all her sequences. Jodha's, depiction in *Mughal-e-Azam*, is not your typical seventeenth - century queen who lives solely to produce heirs. She is shown as a woman of substance and sheer confidence who never shies away from vocalizing her views and firm opinions (Saini 2019). As Jodha got married to Akbar owing to a political arrangement, therefore, she openly vocalizes her unbiased opinion and calls out her husband and son for their misdeeds. Her brave demeanor is reflected openly when Jodha is unstoppable, unhesitant, and head-on adamant about handing over the mighty Mughal sword to her husband before he proceeds to the battlefield (because Akbar engages in a war with his son Salim).

4.2 *Jodha: A powerful mediator/negotiator*

It was a dubious interplay of circumstantial events that forced her into playing the role of a mediator. When Salim and Akbar disagree about Salim's marriage to Anarkali, she tries to persuade her son of his royal duties. She soon realizes that Salim will not give up his love and fondness for Anarkali easily, she then tries to convince Akbar. "Give him his Anarkali. By letting Anarkali become his, Salim will become ours once again. Then you will see what he is capable of." However, Akbar refuses the polite yet endearing demand/plea of Jodha blatantly and instead reminds her that she is only fulfilling the role of an emotionally caring mother and is forgetting her duty and responsibility as a Mughal queen. To which, Jodha unhesitatingly replies that her love and care for Salim as his mother knows no boundaries and she can do anything for him. Instead, she reminds Akbar that he is only acting as the emperor, forgetting his duty as a caring father. But Akbar refuses to pay heed to Jodha's advice. However, Salim's relentless refusal to stop seeing Anarkali lands him in big trouble. As a result, Akbar declares war against his rebellious son.

4.3 *Jodha: A Harbinger of Hindu-Muslim amity*

The movie *Mughal-e-Azam* steers away clear from the issue of Hindu-Muslim relations but it does point towards secularity, forbearance, and religious liberality when Queen Jodha sings melodious devotional hymns remembering Lord Krishna whom she deeply revered at Emperor Akbar's court. The movie does not portray the subject of Muslim identity within a Hindu-populated India, although it is undoubtedly there in many forms.

The movie *Jodha Akbar* (2008), recounts Akbar's path to religious tolerance through the love tale of his marriage to a princess from one of Rajasthan's most thoroughly traditional Hindu royal families. At a time when the emperor was recognized for his interest in religious diversity, Akbar's marriage with Jodha encouraged religious dualism (Khan *2011*).There is also a scene in the movie where Jodha learns Persian calligraphy and Akbar gains familiarity with Hindu traditions pointing towards the coming of two communities together and thus, emphasizing and promoting the concept of Hindu- Muslim amity.The talks at the Ibadat Khana in Abul Fazl's (Fazl *2015*) opinion served as the basis for developing Akbar's theological views and had an impact on the founding of Sulh-i-Kul Mughal Emperor Jalaluddin Akbar encouraged the ideals of plurality, inclusiveness, and tolerance. During his reign, all festivals were celebrated with equal exuberance and fervor. (Gandotra and Jain *2023*)

4.4 *Jodha: A timeless riddle*

Even though *Jodha Akbar* charmed both viewers and critics, the film got a release date on February 15, 2008, amid stirring controversies. The cause of disagreement centered on the very origin of the character named Jodha in the film as many leading Rajput factions openly objected to the depiction of their interactions with the Mughals. "The Rajput community has accused Ashutosh Gowarikar of allegedly tampering and misappropriating with the historicity of Jodha, who presumably was Salim's wife (Jahangir) and not Akbar's". (PTI *2015*)

Gowariker, on the other hand, wanted to emphasize his film's historical accuracy. He told the press that he had done his required detailed research and obtained approval to direct the film from the Royal family of Jodhpur, who are Jodha's descendants. He defended his film by stating that he had read about seventy historical books comprehensively in preparation for them. "The love and passion are my concept," he explains, "but the other 30% is from history texts." (TNN *2008*)

4.5 *Jodha Akbar: Symbolizing secular nationalism*

In *Jodha Akbar*, Gowariker deliberately uses the hues green and saffron. Saffron and marital red, her Hindu colours, become her prevailing hues. However, the green gradually returns to her clothing as she starts to fall in love with Akbar.

Even, Light plays a significant role in the song "*In Lamhon Ke Daaman Mein*," sometimes referred to as "in the lap of these moments," as Jodha and Akbar declare their love for one another. As depicted in the film, Akbar puts a candle in the middle of the couple to further display their love. As Hindu religious practices are ceremonially observed by Agni, the God of fire, the candle also serves as a kind of vow renewal. Jodha and Akbar are now committing themselves emotionally to one another, even though they are already legally and religiously married.

How we may relate the controversial reception of *Jodha Akbar* (2008) with *Mughal- e-Azam* (1960) a film that narrates the story of a similar historical era? Raghavendra (2008) stated that 1960s was a period of an intense process of democratization and nation-building, which indicates that *Mughal- e -Azam* helped venture into a more secular, tolerant, dynamic India, whereas the controversy surrounding *Jodha Akbar*, despite its success in 2008, refers to rising religious fanaticism and regional tensions. (Raghavendra *2008*)

"Notions of historical correctness or mindfulness are subordinated to the greater imaginative sweep of mythology and heroic sentiment," argues Sumita Chakravarty. In India, there is an ancient and respected cultural heritage that integrates history, myth, legend, and theatre (Chakravarty *2011*) "Conventional India not only lacks the Enlightenment's notion of history, but also questions objective, hard history to be a legitimate, ethically moral, or acceptable way of reconstructing the historical past." writes cultural analyst Ashis Nandy. Myths have always been considered more important and capable of explaining events in India than history. (Nandy *1995*). Vinay Lal, a reputed historian suggests that "The study of history is simply the means of representing the past, and in India it is still a novel manner of doing so, since Indians are more at ease reconstructing the past using ahistorical modes through a study of folklores, customary ceremonial practices, epics, classical literature, proverbs, and myths." (Lal 2003)

Nevertheless, *Jodha Akbar's* reception represents a shift in historical acumen.Religion plays a key role in teaching them this, as is indicated by the film's most openly religious sequences, during the wedding feast, in which Akbar joins a group of whirling dervishes in a mystical rapture, and Jodha sings exquisite religious hymns to her Lord Krishna. In addition to aiding in the consolidation and growth of the Empire, Akbar's establishment of the Mughal-Rajput alliance also made it possible for chefs from other parts of India to enter the market and add Persian flavors to their already-established cooking methods. (Gandotra and Jain 2023)

Mughal harem's domestic life, however, was neither one-dimensional nor flat, as Ruby Lal (2005) puts forward. Jodha was Akbar's third wife; the first two, who were both Muslims, were not included in the film's plot. Before reverting to the Shia practice of mut'ah marriages, Akbar married seven ladies via *nikah* marriage (three more than the Muslim men's restriction of four). As Akbar falls in love with Jodha, she is portrayed as *Malika –e-Hindustan*, Empress of India, prompting one to wonder about his former wives' titles.

Although Jodha Akbar is about medieval history, it also addresses contemporary issues via the lens of the past, with the aim to present Muslims as a non-threatening and

domesticated element of contemporary Indian society. An image of the great Mughal Akbar falling in love with and crowning the Hindu Rajput princess Jodha as the Empress of India—for whom he demands respect and love from all his subjects and against whom he will tolerate no rebellion—is a potent one in the contemporary, post-Hindutva context of Indian nationalism, as noted by (Ira Bhaskar and Richard Allen 2009).

4.6 *Jodha Akbar's love: An essence of Indian Culture*

Women have been tasked with preserving the essence of Indian nationalism. As a result, numerous nation-building accounts and national rhetoric discourses have used the image of a woman to represent Indian culture and nation. As Usha Zacharias (2001) points Rama's wife Sita has been objectified as a main nation-building myth in India since 1920, symbolizing "the feminine, 'un-colonizable' sphere of the nation" in nationalist rhetoric.

The Ramayana epic is still used in Bollywood films, especially when it comes to female characters. Jodha resembles Sita in many respects as well. Jodha was supposed to marry a Rajput prince before entering an alliance with Akbar. The unwilling Jodha is not kidnapped when the union is established; instead, she is sent off to marry a Muslim Other, who is usually "rakshasized"/demonized in Hindu nationalist tales. The marriage of Jodha is admired and idealized, and her eventual transfer to the Mughal court is seen as a prime example of sacrificing for one's family. , despite being a possible Ravana-like demon as a Muslim, Akbar is highlighted to be more like Rama himself. While Akbar represents the "ideal" Indian Muslim, moderate and unthreatening to the Hindu majority, the Ulema (Muslim clerics) of the Mughal court portray a more conventional and intolerable Islamic viewpoint.

Princess Jodha epitomizes an essence of Indian culture, which the Mughal Emperor must acquire the respect and love of, to reign properly. When Emperor Akbar agrees to the marriage's two conditions, he expresses his respect and admiration for Jodha/India in a show of religious tolerance. To begin with, she will remain a Hindu and adhere to her traditions and rituals; she will not be converted under any circumstances. Second, Jodha will be permitted to place an idol of lord Krishna in her chamber and have a temple built for her. This could be interpreted as a perfect example of Akbar's harmonious coexistence of Hindus and Muslims.

5 CONCLUSION

Popular films may not be expected to conduct an in-depth historical study, but they may at least start to shed the colonial baggage that still influences how we Indians view the past. The very existence and portrayal of Jodha in Hindi cinema were never really questioned during the release of *Mughal- E- Azam*. A new fresh controversy erupted when *the Jodha Akbar* movie premiered in 2008 and the same continued during the release of *Jodha Akbar* serial in 2013. It cannot be ignored that there might have been certain factors at play behind this sudden stir of upheaval around her. Even though Mughal Historical records do not document Jodha, her existence cannot be ignored.

The majestic Jodha Bai Palace in Fatehpur Sikri, as well as the tomb of *Maryam –Us-Zamani* at Sikandra, provide visible anthropological evidence that emperor Akbar was married to a Hindu queen who gave birth to prince Salim. She was the most powerful and prominent lady in the Royal family, and the title "*Mariam-uz-Zamani*" bestowed upon her says volumes about her influence and administrative dominance in the royal court. Whether she was Queen Jodha or just the Empress, both Jodha and Akbar in unison, immortalized love and religious peace, which subsequently became the cornerstones of modern-day Indian democracy.

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Gendering culture: The praxis of encoding, decoding the traditional Manipuri theatrical performance *Pashakela*

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ABSTRACT: This proposed paper is an attempt to visualize the transformative energy of performance and questions that concern the politics of culture at the matrix of vernacular performances in Manipur. It intends to re-examine the current discussions of cultural production in Manipur. Till now, theatre had largely been perceived as an arena of entertainment in Manipur and elsewhere, but performances like those which can be seen in the depleting art form of *Pashakela* underline the fact that theatre is now becoming an important arena of exploration and creative expression. This paper will highlight the contesting boundaries drawn between the traditional and the contemporary theatrical performances in Manipur emphasizing on the Pashakela. In this way, this paper will try to unravel the marginalization of such a traditional art form of Pashakela, focussing on the cause of its exclusion. This will infuse the discourse that subalternity is reconstructed through history. However, the reconstruction takes place at the ideological and social level. In a way, this paper aims to foray and find out alternative approaches to the study of traditional theatre in Manipur.

Keywords: Culture, performance, traditional, Pashakela, Subalternity

1 INTRODUCTION

"Theatre remains any society's sharpest way to hold a live debate with itself … If it doesn't challenge, provoke or illuminate, it is not fulfilling its function" (Hall, 1999, p. 5). Performing art like theatre functions as a reflection of the values, traditions and cultural aspects of a society which will keep intact the once prevalent norms and beliefs of a society. How should one write about the cultural history of the "traditional theatre" in Manipur as an integrated cultural field? At the very outset, this paper intends to study the once prevalent art form of Pashakela which is now extinct.

The formation of the traditional performative art form Pashakela in cultural expression has proposed varied forms in the arena of tradition, with widely divergent senses of what this means. This paper will focus on the attempt to foray and explore alternative approach to the traditional theatre in Manipur. This will try to highlight the already depleted art form of Pashakela and questions concerning the politics of culture at the matrix of vernacular performances in Manipur. This performance is a combination of singing and dancing interspersed with frequent dramatic performance. The transformative energy of performance of this dying art form, practice of theatre as politics which develops an intriguing and

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persuasive case for Pashakela and its role in scripting popular culture as 'other' will be the point of contention in this paper.

2 OBJECTIVES

- To trace the transformation of Pashakela from religious performance to a traditional theatre form in Manipur.
- To study the role of Pashakela in the formation of popular culture in Manipur.
- To examine depleted art form of Pashakela and study the politics of culture associated with the vernacular performance traditions in Manipur

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a qualitative and descriptive approach with regard to performance theory and cultural studies to examine the historical and cultural contexts associating with Pashakela. Also, oral histories, visual documentation, and performance narratives are analysed to explore the evolution of Pashakela. Key theoretical constructs from Judith Butler's 'gender performativity', Richard Schechner's theory of 'restored behavior' and Partha Chaterjee's theory of nationalism and culture support the analysis.

3.1 *Divulging into the genealogy of Pashakela*

It was during the time of the Second World War (1939-1945) that there emerged many traditional theatrical renditions in the Manipuri cultural ethos. The traditional theatre in creating religious and literary perceptions during the Second World War reveals various assertions about the difference and inclusion, in association with both religion and socio-cultural ethos. Some of these theatrical renditions were- *Maanbhanjan, Nouka Bilash, Jogibesh, Kalanka Bhanjan, Dan Leela, Murli Haran, Pravash Khanda, Manipur Fhongba, Kangsa Bodh, Pashakela, Nimai Sanyas, Gostha, Moirang Parva, Dan Jat, Balra Leela* and *Mathura Bihar.* Some of these variegated forms were later generalised and categorised as Pashakela in the later subsequent times.

Is this an expression of a larger institutional or cultural form is a pertinent question which is to be probed into in this discourse. Or either is it a type of subaltern performative articulation which may be similar to the subaltern religious experience of the Manipuris who are the devotees of Vaishnavism. Some of these broad questions can be answered with evident ideas of Pashakela itself which include worshipping of Lord Krishna and this might easily be viewed as a perfect example of the expression of a subaltern traditional theatre of Manipur beyond the fields that are perceived as elite or literate and there are valid reasons for this. Pashakela is performed in a *Mandap* or in a religious setting, it engulfs a history of traditional theatre that goes beyond the dissection between different religions. It mostly belonged to the middle class or bourgeoisie cultural tradition of presentation and worship and it may be an expression of a greater theatrical aspect that sometimes serve as a popular aesthetic cultural text.

This points to the fact that as every textual activity can be reshaped and deconstructed, this theatrical tradition can also be reconstructed through this paper. The origin of women artistes in the realm of theatre can be traced back to *Mandap Leela, Marbak Jagoi, Pashakela, Khubak Eeshei* and the like. In olden days in Manipur, there was the tradition of conserving, preserving and protecting various art forms in the palace/ palatial compound or places in various localities. Prominent and eminent scholars and learned gurus of the various art forms aid in the process of its preservation. Such places of learning the art forms in the

palace is known as *Natyashala.* During the year 1929-1934, eminent scholar Ngangom Jugindro produced a *Leela* (drama) based on Radha-Krishna's "Game of Dice" which is an episode which was christened as *Pashakela.* But this did not continue for a longer period. But when people came to invite him for enacting this *Leela*, he simply answered if one wants to witness Pashakela, one should go to Keishampat area and can witness it there. The art form of Pashakela follows the *Giti-Natya* tradition and it is basically based on Bengali kirtan tradition. But its characteristics are ingrained in the soils of Manipur.

"The origin of the Manipuri Traditional Theatre are to be sought in the ritual dances connected with ancestor worship and propitiation of presiding deities of the clan, community or settlement. The Meiteis of the valley, who are the predominant ethnic group in Manipur are practitioners of sophisticated rice culture. Leisure is one of the fundamental characteristics of rice cultivation and it is from creative use of leisure that dance, music and the performing arts had developed. Cultural contact with China, Burma and India in later historical periods helped in the flowering of the native performing arts" (Arambam, 2002, p. 3). The conversion of the Meitei population into Hinduism in the 18th century and the Vaishnava affiliation of king Bhagyachandra (1763-1798) strenghthened cultural dependence on India. Court supported theatre was born and the Indian Lilas came to be increasingly used for the propagation of the new tenets of Hinduism. The Ras Lila folk and native ingredients to theatre and dances were incorporated into the new medium. The Krishna cycle became pre-dominant feature of the new religious art while the Mahabharata and the Ramayana epics influenced the subsequent generations. Theatrical performance in natural physical environment and epic reciters in the Community *Mandaps* (pavilions) crowded the busy schedules of the king and royal retinue (Arambam, 2002 p. 3).

The uses of the religious theme are associated with a changing interrelation with the more popular tradition of Pashakela. What are the things to be kept in mind in order to write a cultural history of Pashakela in Manipur? Primarily, Pashakela comprises of the following performances: *Jogibesh, Maanbhanjan, Murli Haran, Dan Leela, Pravash Khanda* and *Kalanka Bhanjan.* These traditional theatrical performances of *Pashakela* emerged roughly during the reign of Rajshri Bhagyachandra Maharaj in 1776. In 1891 during the Anglo-Manipuri War, this art form started moving towards oblivion. T.C. Hudson mentioned in his book *The Meitheis* (1908) that this traditional theatrical performance started in the palace of the Manipuri Kings and it was thus patronized by the successive Kings of Manipur. It was during the reign of Chandrakriti Maharaj (1850- 1886) that this art form was revived anew with a fresh vim in the *Jagoi Shabi Loishang* (The Department of Female Dancers) and *Pala Loishang*(The Department of Pala) at the King's palace. These Loishangs or Departments were the various branches of administration of ancient Manipur.

Pashakela became a dying art form during the Anglo-Manipuri War of 1891. This paper acts a step towards such an emerging cultural tradition and of the many theatrical performances that the case of Pashakela reveals. There were different organisations or parties of the Pashakela in Manipur. They were Keishampat Party also known as Sagolband Party, Kongba Party, Yaiskul Party and Thangmeiband Party. The cultural politics of this art form has received special consideration at one time as it was focused on exhibiting this traditional theatre for the colonial British audience. This was an art form performed in the context of rituals which narrated various episodes of Lord Krishna's life story. Likewise, in former times, one can accept that the oral tradition would have been followed everywhere. However, this type of traditional theatre cannot be recovered now. Thus, Pashakela tradition reveals the different types of association between the folk and the elite, the oral and the epic.

The relevant factors which effect the formation of the Pashakela tradition as a text is complex and conjures the preoccupation of an evolving text into an accepted final version. It reflects the action of continuous alteration of Lord Krishna's religious narratives. Rooted in the particular and formidable environment of Manipur, Pashakela demonstrates the life of Lord Krishna and renders social teaching to disseminate the vast Manipuri culture and

heritage. The traditional performance of Pashakela can be encoded in more than one way. The interpretations or decodings can be myriad depending on the socially governed cultural codes.

It can be said that the dress code of the Pashakela performers is quite dramatic at times and the musical instruments used are very limited: tabla, khol, harmonium, flute and clanet. *Mannbhanjan Pashakela* was performed during Kang (Rath Yatra), Jhulon, Hari Uthan and Holi. While returning from one performance, the artistes of *Pashakela* used to walk on foot wearing their costumes for the performance. On their way to another destination, they attract many onlookers and this very act becomes a trope for their publicity. It is often said that the performers of the *Nouka Bilash*. Pashakela used to carry a boat with them wherever they go for giving their performance.

3.2 *Popular culture as 'other': The case of Pashakela*

"Populist culture" can be termed as any type of culture that draws attention to the common people and Pashakela became so ingrained in the cultural discourse of Manipuri traditional theatre that it can be considered as a popular culture of Manipur. The popularisation of this traditional theatre Pashakela may in turn be termed as "cultural populism". On the one hand, it is a tradition of primary cultural production. However, it is an academic, educational practice of studying popular cultural texts. It is about how the changing aspect of popular culture has been analysed and portrayed by various cultural theorists and different theoretical problems. "Popular culture is not a historically fixed set of popular texts and practices, nor a historically fixed conceptual category. The object under theoretical scrutiny is both historically variable, and always, in part, constructed by the very act of theoretical engagement" (Storey, 2001, p. 15). This appeals to the assertion about how popular cultural aspects are marked by serious works of art or how serious work is accustomed to popular backgrounds. Therefore, this paper aims to explore the possibility to critically revive the field of an extinct art form Pashakela and also to reopen the trajectory it has imbibed and the ruptures it has configured.

Pashakela was predominantly popular in the 1930s and was performed in many languages such as in Bengali, Sanskrit, Hindi and Manipuri. In 1936, during Churachand Maharaj's reign, the Keishampat Party performed *Maanbhanjan* in Bengali language at Nabadwip, West Bengal. Wangoi Chaobi performed Pashakela in Bengali, Sanskrit and Hindi. Another prominent female performer of Pashakela was Manbi Devi who was a favourite among the then colonial British officers. The performance in different languages and its appreciation by the colonial British officers creates a transition in the art form which reflects Partha Chatterjee's (1993) concept of the 'inner domain' of tradition engaging with the 'outer domain' of modernity brought by colonialism. The whole enactment of the Pashakela tradition broadened its horizon and it was also performed in places like tea gardens and railway stations. After the Second World War, *Mathura Bihar* Pashakela was revived with the injunction of the performers of Lord Krishna along with his consort Radha and Brinda and it was performed extensively for one or two years.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The transformative energy of performance of this art form took a major departure when it totally changed from being a religious art form towards more of an entertainment-based art form when it incorporated within its fold film songs and music. The major proponents of this popular culture were Shrimati Asem Bimola Macha from Yaiskul and Shrimati Sundari Devi from Sagolband, who were among the last performers of this art form (who also happens to be my neighbour, as shown in the Figures 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5). They used to wear the dress of *Anarkali* and *Naagin* (popular Bollywood female persona) and resort to singing and



Figure 1. Performing of *Pashakela.*

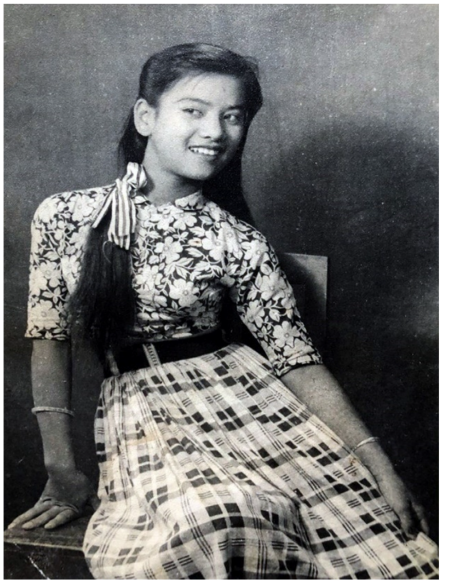


Figure 2. Sundari.



Figure 3. Sundari.



Figure 4. Performing of ‘Pashakela’.



Figure 5. Sundari.

dancing to the popular Bollywood numbers/songs. These female performers' acts of performance, inspired by Bollywood film song characters, reflect Judith Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity, which proposes that gender is constructed through repeated acts. Thus, the female Pashakela performers redefined Manipuri womanhood on stage as they blurred the frontiers between the sacred and the popular, the traditional and the modern, through embodied roles and expressions. They adapted and appropriated Bollywood songs with impunity. The film song genre of the later Pashakela came up as the classic symbol of popular contribution in this once exuberant traditional theatre of Manipur. These adaptations exemplify the concept of Richard Schechner's (1985) concept of 'restored behavior' wherein the traditional performances of Pashakela are revived through the realm of modern entertainment genres. Even though these influences were not original, the addition of music, the setting of the theatre to an entirely new genre worked well with the audience.

5 CONCLUSION

The involvement of this art form within a community has certain concerns such as the need to forge a specific Manipuri identity, the need to open up the theatre and make it more mutable and the urge to relate to a larger audience by connecting theatre with the indigenous tradition. Is there a necessity to begin historicising the culture of participation from such a vantage viewpoint is the concern of this paper. And it can be opined that Pashakela became an extinct art form in 1958-1959. In a way, "the extinct art form Pashakela reiterates the alternative form of theatrical discourse in Manipur. Pashakela performers are transformed into another form of worldly practice which is a counter narrative to the formation of 'religion' as a historical, nationalist, and bounded product" (Wakankar, 2010). This performative tradition fast degenerated and this once flourishing art form has today been almost irretrievably lost. From whatever little has been salvaged, it has been believed that Pashakela performance had the basic ingredients of a popular genre infused with a local flavour and fervour.

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Ineffectiveness of anti-witch hunting laws in India: A critical analysis

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ABSTRACT: The word witchcraft is coined from the words wicce meaning witch and craft meaning skill. It is the practice and belief in magical abilities to do the impossible and the person professing this skill is called a witch. More often, women are accused of witchcraft. Flogging, banishing, rape, murder and social ostracisation are the illegal punishments meted out. In rural India, they are called by names like Dayan, Tonahi, etc. Most of the cases of such crimes occur on suspicion of practising witchcraft. It exists in several parts of tribal regions and rural India despite the existence of state-level laws enacted to curb this inhuman practice of witch-hunting. People become victims due to the ineffective implementation of the existing laws. Weak enforcement, superstitions, illiteracy and absence of a robust national law are the reasons among many, contributing to persistent witch-hunting cases. A stringent national legal framework is needed to prevent it, protect the vulnerable community and ensure justice.

Keywords: Witch, Witchcraft, Witch-hunting, Superstitions, Branding, Flogging

> *"The witch hunt stands as a monument to intolerance and the perils of unfounded accusations."*
>
> – Unanimous

1 INTRODUCTION

Witch-hunting has led to the brutal killings of thousands of people across different parts of the world. Deep-rooted superstitions, lack of scientific temper and illiteracy have been contributing factors to the witch-hunting violence. Individuals accused of practising witchcraft are subjected to violence, torture and death. The illegal verdict of branding is pronounced in kangaroo courts convened and adjudicated by the stronger community. Land disputes, social biases, social attitude towards widows and personal vendetta are the disguised motives behind such heinous and barbaric crime incidents, even after seventy-eight years of independence. It is still a prominent social evil in India. Crime Records states it to be 2391 murders related to crimes associated with witch-hunting in between the years of 1999 and 2013. Witch-hunting is the most significant social issue in Jharkhand, Odisha and Andhra Pradesh, with 400 deaths taking place in past 15 years. According to data, more than 2500 people, primarily women, have been killed in India between 2000 and 2016 on being accused of witchcraft, putting the number at more than 150 deaths annually. (Laha Sangita,2022)

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It persists due to weak enforcement of laws and the absence of a stringent central law. News of witch-hunting killings has been an inseparable part of the media from Bihar, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Assam and Andhra Pradesh. Many cases go unreported due to pressure, coercion and threats of ostracization by the dominant group. The rising number of deaths and lower conviction rates warrant a stricter law, vigilant law enforcement, social campaigns to instil awareness of the existence of law among the illiterate tribal community in far-flung areas.

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To find the factors responsible for increasing witch-hunting-related crimes.
- To assess the efficacy of existing anti-witch-hunting laws enacted in some states.
- To identify the reasons for low conviction rates and challenges in prosecuting the perpetrators.
- To recommend legal and policy measures to enhance conviction rates.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research paper adopts the doctrinal research method. The study includes secondary data from relevant sources, such as the constitution, statutes, state-specific laws, NCRB records, judicial pronouncements, and research papers.

4 HISTORY OF WITCH-HUNTING

Witch-hunting can be traces to ancient civilisations and primitive societies. Diseases, crop failures, cattle deaths, natural calamities and misfortunes were often attributed to some sort of invisible supernatural forces. People in tribal communities believed that sorcerers possessed supernatural powers capable of harming others, which, in turn, led to social ostracization and violent punishments.

It originated when people could not find the causes of diseases, natural calamities, loss of cattle and misfortunes. Lack of scientific knowledge led people to believe that certain individuals, especially women, are capable of having control over supernatural powers and use them to harm others in the community. During the medieval era, witch-hunting existed in Europe. As disparity was widened in the society over control on communities, witch-hunting was used to settle the scores on the weaker section.

5 THE 17TH-CENTURY SALEM WITCH TRIALS OF THE USA[1]

Colonial Massachusetts witnessed the execution of 20 people and imprisonment to many between 1692 and 1693. The accusations of possession of a few young girls of Salem Village by witches, triggered by beliefs in superstition and personal vendettas led to unfair trials. Later, the trials were condemned, with the Massachusetts court later admitting the wrongful executions.

6 WITCH-HUNTING AND INDIA

Its origin in India remains uncertain. Morigaon in Assam is considered the place of origin, referred to as "The Capital of Black Magic."

Psychological acceptance of black magic (tantra) and spirits leads to brutal punishments. Despite enactment of state-specific laws and provisions in the Bhartiya Nyaya Samhita, the barbaric practice of witch-hunting exists.

Witch doctors, locally addressed as *Ojhas* or *Gunis,* whose position in the communities is deeply entrenched, play the villainous role in branding someone as a witch and their say in the matter is treated as final. These people incite others to complain about people who do not follow their words and advice.

Thousands of women, often from marginalized communities, are accused of practising witch-craft, tortured and killed in India.[2]

The violence associated with witch-hunting is often similar to caste related atrocities (Mehra and Agrawal, 2016). The women questioning the evil social norms become victims (Lakshmi, 2005).

7 INEFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF ANTI-WITCH-HUNTING LAWS

Although Bihar, Karnataka, Jharkhand, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Assam have enacted specific anti-witch-hunting laws, their implementation remains ineffective mainly due to several factors:

7.1 *Deep-rooted superstitions*

Unawareness among victims about legal remedies prevents them from seeking justice.

7.2 *Weak law enforcement*

Police action is highly affected by fear of community backlash and their personal believes in witchcraft.

7.3 *Social pressure and fear*

Fear of revenge and community pressure leads to non-reporting.

8 LOW CONVICTIONS OF WITCH-HUNTING OFFENDERS IN INDIA

The conviction rate for offenders of witch-hunting is significantly low, attributable to several reasons:

8.1 *Lack of evidence*

Reliance on superstition and beliefs rather than legal evidence leads to low convictions.

8.2 *Fear and pressure*

Victims and witnesses turn hostile to depose due to threats, community ostracisation or repeat attacks by the offenders.

8.3 *Inaction by police*

Policemen often share the community's superstitions, leading to improper investigations.

8.4 *Influence of power*

The offenders are given shelter by the group with political or community protection.

9 CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS[3]

Article 14: Article 14: Equality of law and equal protection of law.[4]

Article 15(3) : The state can make special provisions to protect the rights of women and children.[5]

Article 15(4): The State is constitutionally empowered to make separate provisions to protect socially and educationally backwards communities, SCs and STs.[6]

Article 21: Protection of the right to life and personal liberty.[7]

Article-51a (h): As a duty to the nation, every citizen must develop a scientific temper and reasoning before accepting any theory or practice.[8]

10 STATUTORY PROVISIONS

10.1 *The Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023*[9]

10.1.1 *Provisions related to violence and murder*

Section 101-Applicable if a person is killed due to witch-hunting.[10]

Section 110- Attempt to murder –for violent attacks.[11]

Section 111-Organised crime.[12]

Section 117- Intentionally causing grievous hurt.[13]

Section 118 -Voluntarily causing grievous hurt by dangerous weapons or means.[14]

Section 125 -Endangering life or personal safety of others.[15]

10.1.2 *Provisions related to crimes against women*

Section 75-Sexual Harassment–Covers verbal and physical acts targeting women.[16]

Section 76-Disrobing woman by assault or use of criminal force.[17]

Section 79-Outraging modesty of a woman accused of witchcraft.[18]

10.1.3 *Provisions related to threats and intimidation*

Section 351- Criminal Intimidation- used against threats related to witchcraft accusations.[19]

11 SCHEDULED CASTES AND SCHEDULED TRIBES (PREVENTION OF ATROCITIES) ACT[20]

The law provides protection and ensures stricter punishment for offences against SC/ST individuals, ensuring protection who are often victims of witch-hunting.

12 THE PROTECTION OF WOMEN FROM DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ACT[21]

The act has provisions of legal remedies for women subjected to violence and harassment due to witchcraft accusations.

13 HUMAN RIGHTS

The National Human Rights Commission and state commissions have issued guidelines to curb inhumane and barbaric practices.

In several cases, the judiciary directed state governments to act against the practice.

14 STATE SPECIFIC ANTI-WITCH HUNTING LAWS

The states of Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Karnataka have prevention of Anti-Witch hunting laws to punish offenders.

15 JUDICIAL APPROACH

15.1 *Madhu Munda v. State of Bihar*[22]

The Supreme Court condemned witch-hunting and termed the practice a violation of fundamental rights under Article 21. It stressed the need for strict implementation of laws and awareness campaigns in tribal areas.

15.2 *Shakti Vahini v. Union of India (2018)*[23]

The Court issued directions to state governments ensure preventive measures against honour killings and other superstition-driven crimes, which can be extended to address witch-hunting practices.

The Court issued guidelines to curb the rising cases of honour-killings. The guidelines are: (i) The District administration must not allow any assembly discuss or condemn marriages involving adults from different castes or communities, (ii) State Governments should identify areas where honour killings and maintain vigilance cells, prevent assemblies and provide protection to vulnerable couples through safe houses, (iii) Register complaints and ensure speedy trials and (iv) Departmental action against errant police officials.

15.3 *Basanta Dehury v. State of Odisha (2023)*[24]

The High Court, exercising its revisional powers, considered enhancing the punishment, reflecting the gravity of the crime and the societal need to deter offences of killings on suspicion of practising witchcraft.

15.4 *Tula Devi and Ors. vs State of Jharkhand* [25]

This case highlights victims' challenges in proving allegations under specific anti-witchcraft legislation. The High Court emphasised the necessity for detailed and specific evidence to substantiate claims of witch-hunting.

The case reflects the judiciary's approach to ensuring that, in the absence of sufficient evidence under special laws, perpetrators can still be prosecuted under general criminal laws to provide justice to victims.

15.5 *Bhim Turi & Ors. v. State of Assam (2017)*[26]

The Court held witch-hunting as a socio-legal problem and emphasised its eradication. The Court noted that elderly women are vulnerable targets and are subjected to abuse.

15.6 *Cases of non-conviction*

15.6.1 *Madhu Munda v. State of Bihar*[27]

Madhu was forcibly taken, on the suspicion of practising witchcraft by a group of individuals and was thrown into a ditch by the perpetrators causing her to lose consciousness. The accused were not convicted due to lack of reliable witness.

15.6.2 *Tula Devi and Others v. State of Jharkhand*[28]

Pendency of a partition suit was the root behind accusations of witchcraft against the victim. The victim and her husband were subjected to verbal abuse, physical assault and threats of eviction. The offenders were acquitted due to lack of witnesses.

16 CONCLUSION

Even after seven decades of independence, witch-hunting is prevalent in tribal populations, mostly from rural belts.Women suspected of practising witchcraft are believed to possess supernatural abilities and are capable of causing harm to others. Widows, single women and landholders are more prone to allegations of witchcraft. Incidents like untimely death in the village, diseases, crop failure, loss of livestock, and natural calamities are attributed to such practices. The dominant section, to revenge on personal vendetta, eyes on property or to exploit sexually, label the victims with derogatory terms such as Chudail, Dayan, and Tohni. On the pretext of community welfare, witch-hunting is used as a weapon in persecuting vulnerable targets. after labelling of accusations, the victims are subjected to extremities of brutality like parading naked through the village, gang-rape, mutilation, force feeding of urine and human faeces.

A multi-directional mindset is the first step to eliminate witch-hunting-related crimes-enactment of a central law with provisions of stringent punishments would deter the offenders. The government should launch schemes, aiming to create awareness in rural and tribal dominated areas, sensitising people on evil effects of superstitions, developing a scientific temper among them and providing legal protection to victims. Incorporating lessons on the harmful consequences of superstitions in the school curriculum would infuse scientific thinking in children at an early age. Adequate reporting channels and protection measures should be established for the vulnerable people in the community. Practical training sessions for law enforcement agencies shall ensure efficient and effective investigations leading to increasing conviction rates. Unless superstitions are removed, allowing the quacks to fool everyone is dangerous for the country (Das, 2005).

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13. The Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita, No. 45, § 117, 2023 (India).
14. The Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita, No. 45, § 118, 2023 (India).
15. The Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita, No. 45, § 125, 2023 (India).
16. The Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita, No. 45, § 75, 2023 (India).
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19. The Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita, No. 45, § 351, 2023 (India).
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Bidirectional relationship between societal norms and advertising in shaping gender perceptions in Indian children: A bibliometric analysis

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ABSTRACT: In India children aged 6–11 spend 28 hours weekly watching television and encountered 20,000 ads annually. Children, due to developmental vulnerabilities, are a prime target for advertisers. While prior studies address the behavioural and attitudinal effects of ads and gender stereotypes, but limited focus exists on the bidirectional relationship between societal norms and advertising in shaping gender perceptions in Indian children. The present study aims to review 39 published articles (of Indian authors) extracted from the Scopus database (after applying many filters) and analyse bibliographic parameters with the help of the VOS viewer. The study also investigates the representation of the female gender in Indian advertisements and its impact on children's gender conditioning through priming. Adopting a quasi-experimental method, this qualitative study involved pre- and post-test interviews with 150 children. Findings were compared with literature to reach conclusions.

Keywords: Bidirectional, priming, advertisements, stereotyping

1 INTRODUCTION

Du Plessis (2005) states that advertising fosters memories and feelings around brands. Children struggle to discern right from wrong, heavily influenced by parents and surroundings (Harris 2001). With mobile and internet access rising, purchasing power is shifting towards younger family members. Children today watch 25,000–40,000 TV commercials annually (Rao 2020), making them susceptible to consumerism and behavioural influence (Raina 2014; Riesman and Roseborough 1955) because of heavy media exposure. Concerns arise from misleading food ads and their effects on obesity (Buijzen 2008; Opree 2014, 2021).

Female characters in advertisements often appear as prizes or passive figures, reinforcing stereotypes. Gendered toy representation (e.g., boys with trucks, girls with kitchen sets) further perpetuates societal roles (Gentry and Harrison 2010). Exposure to such advertisements leads to dependent, underconfident behaviour in girls (Etaugh and Liss 1992; Oksman 2016). The Barbie culture exacerbates body image issues and low self-esteem (Hanna 2015; Smith 2014). Women continue to be cast in decorative, nurturing roles, rarely empowered

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(Chisholm 2014). Therefore, this research explores how advertisements prime children's views on gender by analysing portrayals of female vs. male characters in Indian advertisements. This objective is further contextualized through a bibliometric analysis of Indian authors using VOS viewer.

2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 *Portrayal of women in Indian advertisements*

Sandhu (2019) observed that Indian advertisements depict women in narrow roles—homemakers, caregivers, beauty endorsers, or sex objects (Mogaji 2015; Verhellen *et al.* 2016). Women are emotional, subservient, and dependent on men, who are decision-makers and dominant (Coltrane and Messineo 2000). Chisholm (2014) found that women are homemakers during the day and sex objects at night in ad portrayals. Taglines often mock empowered women (Heathy 2020). Consistent with these observations, advertisements favour men as voice-overs, users, and central characters (Siyanova-Chanturia *et al.* 2015).

2.2 *Theoretical framework: Priming via advertisements*

To understand how these portrayals influence cognition, Bargh *et al.* (2012) found that mere exposure to social stimuli can prime stereotypes, goals, and behaviours unconsciously. Advertisements strongly influence a child's understanding of roles, shaping beliefs (Maio and Haddock 2007; UNESCO). Witt (2000) noted priming effects of 20,000+ yearly advertisement exposures. In interviews, children prioritized the father figure over mothers, reflecting parental bias (Dhar *et al.* 2019; Siyanova-Chanturia *et al.* 2015).

2.3 *Psychological influence of stereotypical advertisements*

Ford (2018) highlighted that over 76% of child-directed advertisements are male-oriented, contributing to antisocial behaviour. Only a third of children critically assess advertisements (Bergler 1999). Advertisements amplify stereotypes—mothers nurture, fathers lead (Lafky *et al.* 1996). Bian *et al.* (2017) concluded that lack of strong female media role models shapes girls' aspirations. Gendered toys and shows reinforce vanity in girls and aggression in boys (Coyne *et al.* 2016; Grau and Zotos 2016). Disney characters often suggest dependency on male saviours. However, newer portrayals like Elsa in *Frozen 2* challenge norms (Dundes 2020).

3 RESEARCH GAP

Prior research focuses on Western contexts. This study uniquely explores priming effects of advertisements on Indian children and bibliographic coupling of Indian authors only.

4 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 *Objective*

(1) To understand children's baseline perceptions of gender roles in advertisements and examine how Indian advertisements influence children's gender views via priming.
(2) To evaluate a bibliographic coupling of Indian authors from advertisements arena.

4.2 *To achieve objective 1*

Design: To address the research questions, this qualitative, quasi-experimental study used one-group pretest-post-test design. 150 children (aged 12–15) from Greater Noida were interviewed before and after a 7-day exposure to selected advertisements.

Sampling: A purposive sample was drawn from students residing in Paramount Golfforeste, Greater Noida.

Advertisement Schedule: The advertisements were selected to reflect a range of stereotypical & non-stereotypical gender portrayals. For example**, Day 1:** Yardley Talc (female product/colour scheme); **Day 2:** Clean & Clear Facewash; **Day 3:** Swiggy (role comparison); **Day 4:** Snickers (male lead activity/dialogue); **Day 5:** Ariel (gendered profession/role); **Day 6:** Airtel (authoritative female role); **Day 7:** Axe Deodorant (objectification)

Data Collection-Participants underwent:

1) Pre-interview (24 semantic differential questions)
2) Advertisements exposure (via WhatsApp group) 3)Post-interview

Analysis: 24 semantic differential questions were being asked and Interviews were transcribed, coded, and thematically analysed to detect shifts in gender perceptions post-advertisements exposure.

Table 1. Broad themes from the data findings.

Broad Themes	Interview Process	Major Findings
Representation of Female and Male Characters in Advertisements	Pre-test	(1) The personality of the characters: • Subversive personality • Mothers/fathers both as caring • Considerate personality • Fathers are strict (2) Role given to the characters: • The primary role of female characters in product ads like grocery and kitchen appliances. • The primary role of male characters in product ads like insurance policies, car advertisements, and property dealerships. • The mothers are portrayed to be inferior to fathers. (3) Colour scheme: • The warm colour scheme for female characters. • The cool colour scheme for the male/female characters. • No fixed colour for male/female characters. (4) Clothing: • Females are shown in traditional and Indian wear. • Males are shown in jeans and trousers. • Sometimes they both are in western outfit
	Post-test	(1) The personality of characters: • The females are caring, soft, and delicate. • Mothers are subversive and introverted

(*continued*)

Table 1. Continued

Broad Themes	Interview Process	Major Findings
		• Considerate personality • Fathers are extroverted • Males are full of charisma • Males are confident and strong.
		(2) Role given to the characters: • The primary role of female characters in advertisements of talc, food, household work, and children-related products. • Primary roles of male characters in product ads of deodorants, car commercials. • The mothers are shown inferior to the fathers. • The mother is always the cook • The father is always the moneymaker.
		(3) Colour scheme: • Hues of pink, purple, and orange for ads 1 & 2 • Hues of brown, black, and grey for Day 4 & 7 advertisements. • All 150 participants could easily draw a comparison between (Day 1 & 2) and the Day 7 advertisements
		(4) Clothing: • Female shown wearing sarees. • Young girls are shown in jeans and T-shirts. • Male shown in jeans and trousers.
Subject Positioning of Characters in Advertisements	Pre-test	• The females are shown doing an indoor and outdoor activities. • The males are given tasks mostly outdoors.
	Post-test	• Females are the primary character for skincare/makeup-related products. • The mothers are always shown indoors. • The father's characters are always shown outdoors.
Cognitive traits of the characters	Pre-test	(1) Profession: • Professions like a teacher or a doctor are given to females. • Fathers are shown as businessmen, doctors, sportsperson and officegoer.
		(2) Dialogue: • The dialogues of the female characters are regarding the welfare of the family. • The male characters are given most of the decision-making dialogues.
	Post-test	(1) Profession: • The mothers are shown as the housewives in the advertisements (Day 3 & 5) • The female characters are shown following a hobby but never a career (Day 1, 2, 3 & 5 advertisements).

(*continued*)

Table 1. Continued

Broad Themes	Interview Process	Major Findings
		• The female characters are shown maintaining a balance with their household work (Day 6 advertisement)
		(2) Dialogue: • The females are given the non-important dialogues • The male characters have the concrete dialogues
Influence of Gender Conditioning in Advertisements on Children	Pre-test	(1) The participants had very rigid views regarding advertisements in general: • Waste of time • Unnecessary • Fiction
	Post-test	• The participants had different views on their take-back after the advertisement viewing process. • They all had a positive take away from the advertisement viewing process.
Perception of Gender Roles: Society versus Advertisements	Pre-test	• Don't remember watching the advertisements so carefully. • Both female and male characters are shown doing office work in the advertisements. • Usage of the word stereotype to describe the representation of female characters.
	Post-test	The message of vanity and the importance of physical beauty in the female gender is propagated through these advertisements. Females doing household work in our houses. It is the job of the mothers to cook and take care of the family. The father decides for products like which car to buy and drive. The day 7 advertisement portrays females as background artists, very easy to please others. The male character is shown as extremely confident and masculine.

DATA FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS-Device Access: 105 had mobile phones, 38 laptops, 7 both.

Pre-Test Observations:

- **Female Characters:** Submissive, caring, homemakers
- **Male Characters:** Dominant, decision-makers
- **Colours:** Warm for females, cool for males
- **Clothing:** Females in traditional wear, males in casuals
- **Subject Positioning:** Females indoors, males outdoors
- **Cognitive Traits:** Female roles - teachers, housewives; Male - professionals
- **Dialogues:** Females support family, males make decisions
- **General View:** Advertisements are fiction, irrelevant

Post-Test Observations:

- Children noted stereotyping in role, costume, colour, and character representation.
- They recognized imbalanced gender portrayals—mothers as cooks, fathers as earners. This recognition demonstrates how even a brief exposure period can make children more critically aware of the gender biases embedded in media content.
- Greater awareness of vanity messaging and emotional manipulation in Advertisements.
- Day 5 (Ariel) seen as progressive; Day 7 (Axe) criticized for female objectification.
- Increased understanding of how advertisements shape gender beliefs.

Participant Quotes:

- Mothers are always shown as subservient."
- "I never noticed these details before, but now I can see the stereotypes."
- "Boys in advertisements are always confident; girls are background characters."

4.2 *To achieve objective 2*

To achieve another key objective of the present study, data from 39 published articles authored by Indian researchers were extracted from the Scopus database following the application of several filters. The collected data were then analysed and visualized using the VOS viewer software.

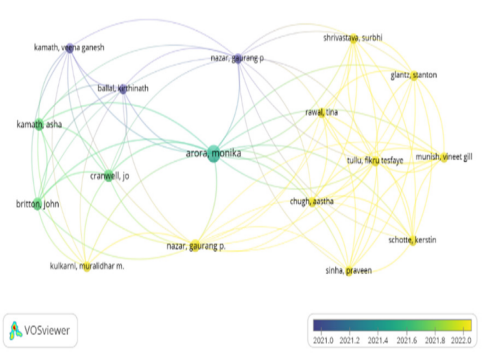


Figure 1. Describes an overlay visualization of the bibliographic coupling of authors.

Selected	Author	Documents	Citations	Total Link Strength
☑	arora, monika	6	48	36
☑	nazar, gaurang p.	3	22	21
☑	britton, john	3	20	18
☑	chugh, aastha	2	27	18
☑	cranwell, jo	3	20	18
☑	glantz, stanton	2	27	18
☑	kamath, astha	3	20	18
☑	munish, vineet gill	2	27	18
☑	rawal, tina	2	27	18
☑	schotte, kerstin	2	27	18
☑	shrivastava, surbhi	2	27	18
☑	sinha, praveen	2	27	18
☑	tullu, fikru tesfaye	2	27	18
☑	nazar, gaurang p.	2	25	15
☑	ballal, kirthinath	2	19	13
☑	kamath, veena ganesh	2	19	13
☑	kulkarni, murlidhar m.	2	12	12

Figure 2. Explains authors, their documents, citations and their link strength.

Complementing the qualitative findings, Monika Arora has the highest link strength of 36, with 46 citations across her 6 documents, as shown in Figures 1 and 2. Gaurang P. Nazar ranks second, with a link strength of 21 and 22 citations from her 3 documents. In third place is John Britton, with 3 documents, 20 citations, and 18 total link strength. Overall, the analysis reveals two distinct clusters, represented by different colours, comprising a total of 17 authors, 86 links, and a cumulative link strength of 154. These clusters highlight thematic convergence among Indian researchers in the domain of advertising.

5 CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Children's media consumption makes them highly susceptible to advertising messages. This research confirms the significant role of advertising in reinforcing gender

conditioning among children in India and underlines the priming effect as a powerful psychological mechanism. This study shows, even a brief, consistent exposure (7 days) can prime children to internalize these norms. The responses of the post-interview when compared to the pre-interview showed a lot of changes in the overall attitude of the participants. The participants were reluctant at the beginning of this research process but opened up majorly during the post-interview process. There was a drastic change in the body language, attitude, and perspective of the participants. Especially Participants 3,4,21,28,42,58 and 105 were very rigid in their opinion during the pre-interview answers. But during the post-interview, all of them had a strong perspective change regarding the representation of the female gender in Indian advertisements. Despite asking, all participants responded in a positive manner towards the overall takeaway from the advertisement viewing process. Just with 7 days of viewing of the selected advertisements, the participants were able to gather so many representative cues from the commercial regarding the different genders. Interestingly, it has been noticed that societal norms, family dynamics, and cognizance of children with regard to their perception of women also play a vital role in understanding gender conditioning in advertisements. Nonetheless, their exposure to advertisements and receptivity towards both ends of gender sensitivity resonates with the media's function of priming their audience. The pre- and post-test interviews along with exposure to external stimuli in the form of selected advertisements underscored a close and in-depth understanding of how children at an influential age tend to correlate the gender conditioning of women in advertisements with that of advertisements. Moreover, the "priming" effects, that is, representation (personality, role, colour scheme, clothing), subject positioning, cognitive traits (profession and dialogue), and its influence on their perception have become more discernible and manifested in children's day-to-day lives.

In addition to the psychological insights, the bibliometric mapping of Indian authors offers a macro-level understanding using VOS viewer making it an invaluable resource for scholars, policy makers, and educators. Recognizing the influential authors and their citation counts, one can measure the volume of publications, citation counts, and impact of research studies in this area over time. It is imperative to determine the expert authors and explore the networks of collaboration among researchers of India to understand how partnerships and co-authorships shape the field. This, in turn, can enhance the quality of research. Additionally, such an analysis facilitates interdisciplinary and cross-institutional research initiatives. The insights gained can also guide policy and practice, offering evidence-based recommendations that inform the design and implementation of effective use of media. Beyond these practical benefits, a bibliometric analysis contributes to advancing academic knowledge by synthesizing existing research, identifying key contributions, and uncovering emerging trends in the arena of advertisements.

5.1 *Limitations*

Minor participants limited psychological depth.

- Sample restricted to one region.
- Sensitivity of gender topic required cautious exploration.

5.2 *Future scope*

Larger qualitative studies across multiple regions.

- Inclusion of parents and educators in awareness efforts.
- Content regulation for children's media messaging.

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Excusing violence: Rethinking provocation and gender in post-British legal systems

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ABSTRACT: This paper interrogates the continued use of the provocation defence in India post-independence, emphasizing its colonial origins and patriarchal application. It argues that the defence disproportionately benefits male offenders, particularly in domestic or 'honour'-based violence, thereby perpetuating gender injustice. The paper highlights the evolving judicial stance towards gender-sensitive adjudication by examining key judgments and legislative interpretations. It advocates for either a doctrinal overhaul or abolition of the defence, aligning criminal law with constitutional principles of equality and non-discrimination. The analysis contributes to the discourse on decolonizing Indian penal jurisprudence and strengthening gender-just legal responses.

Keywords: feminist philosophy, criminal law, gender-based violence, sustained provocation, intimate violence

1 INTRODUCTION

In English law, the defence of provocation dates to the common law, which existed before the 17th century. The defence began to "take a recognized form and function" in the 17th century (Ashworth 1976). The provocation defence focuses on humanity's blemishes, something that has evolved as time has passed. However, it has been said that the main aim of this partial defence is to escape the mandatory life sentence that comes with murder convictions. If the fixed life sentence for murder were eliminated, it has even been claimed that the partial defence would be "superfluous" (Mousourakis 2009). It is believed that the defence is justified by both excusatory and justificatory factors, although it has been difficult to pinpoint this justification in English law (Mousourakis 2009). Although justification and excuse are both different concepts, they both have the tenet that if either is proven, neither a conviction nor punishment can be met (Hart 1968; Horder 1999). It has been said that the provocation defence is and has always been a chronic problem in the criminal justice system (Allen 2000). Horder contends that even in pre-modern times, provocation notably affected criminal responsibility (Horder,1992).

The importance of defence in the criminal justice system and society at large is indicated by its continuous influence on criminal responsibility; as a result, understanding the origins of the defence and the development of its guiding principles is an essential first step. English law initially divided homicides into categories based on the circumstances surrounding their

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commission. All felonies were subject to the ruling monarch's jurisdiction, which was done to uphold the monarchy's authority. According to the Statute of Gloucester, which was enacted in 1278, the trial judge might refer the case to the monarch, who had the authority to give a royal pardon if the killing was performed in self-defence (Horder 1992).

While some homicides were punished by the state with the death penalty, others were not. Killings that were thought to be required concealment of the crime, whereas those carried out during an open brawl were thought to be less heinous because the victims' families may be compensated (Mousourakis 2009). During the 13th century, the practice of differentiating murders on this basis started to disappear, and most homicide subtypes were combined into the set of capital offence known as culpable homicide (Mousourakis 2009). Murder or murdrum is a phrase used to describe murders carried out in secret and thought to be particularly vile and deserving of the death penalty (Mousourakis 2009). During the initial years of the 14th century, it became customary for justices to refer to deaths carried out in an ambush as "murder."

However, judges eventually went back to classifying all forms of felony killings as a single, unbroken crime throughout the 15th century, much as they had done during the 13th and 14th centuries when the terms "excusable," "justifiable," and "felonious" were once again used to characterize homicides (Mousourakis 2009). Culpable homicide was distinguished from a killing carried out in self-defense throughout the 16th century. During this time, the law classified intentional homicides as a form of felony homicide (Horder 1999).

According to historians, "the age of practically limitless jury control was going; the age of the law and the bench was beginning" (Green 1979). Early in the 16th century, manslaughter was seen as separate from murder. This growth can be principally ascribed to an exercise known as the "benefit of the clergy." It granted the right for holy order clerks who were accused of crimes to ask to have their cases heard by ecclesiastical courts. If the clerk's request was granted, the ecclesiastical courts would hear the case, where the accused would likely face a more lenient punishment or even acquittal. However, the "benefit of the clergy" practice was abused over time. Criminals of heinous crimes were alleged to have depended on the "benefit of the clergy," and this reliance began to erode the authority of the time's secular penal code (Horder 1999). Due to this issue, laws were passed to make it illegal for victims of killings with premeditated malice to have "the benefit of the clergy."

The fundamentals of the conventional defence of provocation are the same in India and the UK, but the defence has developed differently there, ultimately giving way to the defence of loss of self-control. The first instance in the UK that made the court accept BWS as trustworthy evidence. The immediacy criterion of provocation was dropped by the court in this case, which acknowledged continuous and long-term abuse. It was decided that information about the accused's mental condition might be considered when deciding whether the provocation defence would be applicable. (***R v. Ahluwalia***) According to Lord Devlin's traditional interpretation of English law which defines "provocation as an act or a series of acts done or words spoken which would cause in any reasonable person and does cause to the accused, a sudden and temporary loss of self-control such that he does not remain, for the moment, the master of his mind." (***R v. Duffy***) The trial court found the defendant guilty of stabbing her long-term abusive husband based on the "suddenness" requirement of loss of self-control. (***R v. Thornton***).

The current study aims to critically assess the provocation defence as incorporated in the *'Coroners & Justice Act'* with a view to its importance and relevance in the modern legal context. The study will explore whether provocation is understood solely by an objective standard or a subjective standard in which personal characteristics and circumstances of the accused are considered to determine if there was a true loss of self-control. The study will also provide a comparison with common law jurisdictions to understand possibilities for alternate legal models in the Indian context. Finally, the study will examine feminist critiques

of provocation as a defence and whether the defence impacts gender equality in responding to women victimized, as well as the fair appraisement of women through the criminal justice system keeping in mind the suddenness criteria.

2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research design would involve a descriptive method confronting the intended objectives of feminist philosophy, which necessitate theory formation, philosophical evaluation, and conceptual reform in promoting women's autonomy and equality demonstrating an unprecedented change in core beliefs about the nature of women and their proper role in the world, it also necessitates a reconsideration of our notion of sex, gender, and gender roles, particularly in the context of sustained provocation which is contrast with the suddenness requirement under defence of provocation in criminal law.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to Social Constructivist Theory, gender is a construction created by social expectations and gender performance rather than bearing an innate truth. The conception of social constructionism asserts that people's perceptions of reality are at least somewhat socially constructed. (Judith Butler 1991)

The article begins with an overview of the basic ideas of postmodernism and proceeds to explain the postmodernist ideas regarding crimes against women and how those ideas developed over time. This work also considers the postmodernist movement with particular attention on the legal theory of constructivism concerning who, in that social construction, determines what victimhood refers to in an abused battered woman and who determines the relevance and importance of the judicial utterances. The study also evaluates the existence of the Battered Wife Syndrome in the framework of domestic violence in India case, stressing the need to relax the restrictive parameters of unreasonableness and the instantaneous reaction to chronic abuse.

The central research question is whether feminist philosophy of law reveals that subjugation and masculinist norms have an extensive impact on legal systems and women's factual conditions in the criminal justice system. It also addresses gender issues that arise in the contexts of law, society, and development organizations. Furthermore, social background and culture are still regarded sources of law in the postmodern era if they are not unusual. Whose standard is it measured against??

Formal equality is problematic, though, when it is used to defend maintaining some male-biased defenses and increasing their usage to include women rather than eliminating them. One such defence in domestic homicide instances is a provocation. Substantive equality, as opposed to formal equality, aims to consider the diverse demands and experiences of oppressed groups. To ensure that justice is served to all, substantive gender equality demands that the law consider and address the actual impact of a rule on both men and women. It takes more than simply granting access to the provocation defence to both men and women who murder out of feelings of envy and wrath or out of dread and despair. (Claire L'Heureux-Dubé 2000) Additionally, the phrase is frequently employed to mask the judge's own interpretation of what is and is not "reasonable" activity. (Elizabeth M. Schneider 1980)

4 SUDDENNESS REQUIREMENT - SECTION 54(4) (1) CORONERS & JUSTICE ACT, 2009

In ***Duffy*** Devlin J., which put the requisite of imminence at the centre of the provocative act, the condition of immediacy (sudden and immediate loss of self-control) was eliminated from

the common law. Because it put a glaring barrier on such people who kill out of apprehension and for self-preservation and this led to the "immediacy problem" (Edwards 2010).

The "suddenness" criterion is no longer part of the new clause, which was done to remedy the old defense's alleged bias against cases involving cumulative provocation. The new provision does away with the requirement of a sudden lack of self-control, which eliminates the "immediacy issue" that battered women found so difficult to deal with.

In the ***Dawes*** case, the court ruled as follows:

> "Provided that there was a loss of control, it does not matter whether the loss was sudden or not. A reaction to circumstances of extreme gravity may be delayed. Different individuals in different situations do not react identically, nor respond immediately. The defendant may therefore be able to rely on loss of control even though the qualifying trigger occurred sometime previously. So, if V says something gravely provocative and D thinks about it, gradually getting increasingly upset, and then sometime later D loses self-control and kills V, then the defence could be used. However, do not forget section 54 (4), which makes it clear that if D acted out of a desire for revenge, he or she cannot rely on the defence of self-control. The longer the time after the trigger the more likely it is that the jury will decide that the trigger did not cause the loss of control".

There is always a debate about the genuine situations of provocation and the ones which are not that deserving. There can be growth in a matter wherein the sudden criteria can be judged. Additionally, the removal of the "immediacy" requirement has broadened the defense's application and accessibility, which could have left it vulnerable to abuse, particularly from those who committed murders as retaliated actions. whether a loss of self-control happened. This, in turn, has possibly rendered the defence so extensive that it is now superfluous it becomes challenging to think about this entire matter.

Additionally, the elimination of the "immediacy" prerequisite has broadened the defense's application and accessibility, which could have left it vulnerable to abuse, particularly by those who committed murders as acts of retaliation. One of the challenges of this shift will be determining when and how a loss of self-control transpired. This, in turn, has possibly rendered the defence so extensive that it is now "superfluous" (Withey 2011).

This fear, it is argued, is misplaced because time-lapse will continue to be a key element of the defence, particularly when trying to distinguish between murders committed in retaliation. Despite the lack of an immediate requirement, premeditated killings can be distinguished from "provoked" killings since cumulative provocation entails acts committed with the intention of reaching a goal, regardless of one's own well-being.

Premeditated killings, on the other hand, include deliberate actions with the goal of avoiding criminal responsibility (Clough 2010). There are several distinctions in the evidence that could point to premeditation, such as the difference between sharpening a knife in a reasoned manner and donning gloves to avoid leaving fingerprints, which points to deliberate planning.

Large gaps in the conduct of the provocation and the final killing will be given due regard and other witnesses, and evidence should also be used against the accused, despite the absence of the necessity for immediate. The assessment of the evidence and what qualifies as evidence of a lack of self-control will change over time. The government declared its intention to stop underserved cases with significant time gaps from being successful. As a result, the affirmation of any kind of explanation that the judges consider determining whether there was a lack of self-control.

Although it is not necessary to be met out with the immediacy requirement and to highlight this suddenness criteria have been a stumbling block for the battered woman and after this criterion will be loosened the things for the battered woman will be quite positive, it is a positive change, but it was also crucial for the sake of justice. In the past, "suddenness" was intimately tied to the strict requirement immediacy criteria. However, with the passage of time and development the immediacy criteria started to haze a bit more and the loss of self-control is still a tough call of them and still serves as a sufficient check against unjustified instances.

Despite the Appeal Court praising this direction as a model of clarity, concerns were made about two points. Such a construal was inherently biased in contradiction of women's circumstances and conditions, who may murder their partner in self-defense or for survival. Therefore, Edward contended that the new clause treats loss of self-control as an all-or-nothing issue, but the removal of the temporary condition inadvertently raises this issue. (Edwards 2010).

5 CONCLUSION

This chapter argued against the legislative framework's discriminatory and unfair liability of battered defendants who killed their husbands/spouses. The foundation for the mitigation comes from the fact that battered women's circumstances match the scenarios for which statutory defenses have been planned when the current legal framework fully understands their psychological state. The modern feminist debate has emphasized the need to enact a significant change in the law by altering the suddenness criteria to make the law of provocation approachable to women and to eliminate the prejudiced issues related to its application. While some have demanded its complete abolition, others have just recommended slight changes to the defense's vocabulary. Legislation cannot be successfully repealed based on only one specific group of sexist intimate killers because no statistics are available that show if intimate killings represent a sizable portion of all homicides. Therefore, I suggest that the criminal justice system needs to mitigate the present discrimination and bias it holds towards a female accused, also, looking at the prevalent common law system and the change in laws in the England, it will be desirable to make further changes in the suddenness criteria to make it more accommodative for the accused who have tolerated the provocative conducts all the while and have acted upon the final straw on the camels back.

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Workplace discrimination against transgender persons in India: Evaluating legal remedies and enforcement

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ABSTRACT: Examining systematically and continuously the workplace discrimination faced by transgender persons in India, this research delves into the fact that even though they are granted their constitutional and statutory rights, they still do not enjoy the same. Anchored in the post-NALSA legal landscape & enactment of Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, it delves into disjuncture between formal legal protections and their substantive enforcement. The research assesses the Act 2019's normative shortcomings (underenforcement provisions, absence of certain anti-discriminatory provisions, & certification regime that undermines right of self-identification). It uses constitutional jurisprudence under Articles 14, 15, & 16, and comparative perspectives to place the workplace discrimination within wider socio-legal exclusion, institutional inertia and market-driven bias. The research further faults State for its abdication of its positive obligations to protect equal opportunity in public employment and private employment spheres. As symptomatic of a legal order which, at same time, continues to be orientated in a cisnormativity mode, the problem is also with enforcement mechanisms, such as lack of effective fora of grievance redressal and sensitization of the institutions. To operationalize gender justice in the workplace, the research responds with targeted legal reforms, intersectional policy interventions, & with reinforcing regulatory oversight. While the research is primarily grounded in Indian legal developments, it contextualizes the discourse through a comparative international lens by examining U.S. and Argentine models.

Keywords: Transgender Rights, Workplace Discrimination, Employment Rights, Gender Justice, Social Exclusion

1 INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been tremendous change in the recognition of transgender persons as rights bearing individuals under Indian constitutional law, especially in the wake of *National Legal Services Authority v. Union of India, (2014) 5 SCC 438*, which confirmed the right of gender self-identification and determined that transgender people have the same right to the full range of fundamental rights, such as equality, non-discrimination and dignity. These rights were ostensibly codified in subsequent statutory development, such as

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Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019. Yet, experience of widespread & institutional discrimination in domain of employment, a site of material and social inclusion, albeit rather late in modernity, is precisely what permeates the material life of transgender persons. While legislations and judgements have been taking step forward, barriers to hiring, workplace harassment, tokenism, and exclusion out of social protection still persist, often remaining unattended by existing legal measures (Bhi Malli, 2023).

This research makes a critical intervention into the disjuncture between legal entitlements and lived realities of transgender persons in India's workforce. As current legal scholarship has tended to concentrate on an identity recognition and decriminalization, there has been little focus on enforcement failure in employment contexts. To fill that research gap, this article assesses whether legal remedies that exist for transgender people who suffer workplace discrimination are adequate and effective. Thus, the research problem is the systemic failure of Indian legal and institutional frameworks to transform constitutional and statutory guarantees into enforceable protections in the area of employment. Consequently, the study will use a criticality approach to assess these legal frameworks and identify enforcement deficits to the substantive inclusion and propose reforms to mitigate the gap between the normativity of the law and its inclusion (Van Borm and Baert, 2018).

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To evaluate the adequacy and efficacy of existing legal remedies available to transgender persons facing workplace discrimination in India, with a focus on constitutional provisions, statutory enactments, & judicial interventions.
- To identify structural and institutional barriers impeding the enforcement of anti-discrimination protections in employment, and to propose actionable legal and policy reforms aimed at promoting equality and preventing discrimination in employment.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The doctrinal legal methodology adopted by this research is to critically analyze the primary and secondary legal sources to evaluate the legal framework regarding workplace discrimination of transgender persons in India. The sources pertaining to the constitution include constitutional provisions, statutory enactments and judicial rulings. Legal scholarship, government reports and policy documents that explain and examine the interpretation, implementation and scope of existing legal remedies are all referred to as secondary source. The research offers engagement with international legal instruments and comparative jurisprudence in order to place India's obligations in human rights context.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 *Legal recognition of transgender rights in India*

The legal validation of rights of transgender was not an easy pie that falls instantly but came through a gradual accretion of historical neglect, judicial pronouncements with progressive tendencies and legislative enactments. Traditionally, Section 377 of Indian Penal Code, 1860 had criminalized non heteronormative sexual behavior perpetuating transphobic discrimination to the transgender and other gender diverse communities. However, traditional

Indian society refused to acknowledge non binary gender identity and communities like hijras had their own cultural roles (Sawant, 2017).

This was a huge step when the court recognized transgender individuals as the "third gender" & fundamental rights of the Constitution were recognized under *National Legal Services Authority v. Union of India (2014 INSC 275)*. The Court did away with medicalized reading of gender and endorsed the right to gender self-identification. It is reinforced further in *Navtej Singh Johar v. Union of India, (2018) 10 SCC 1*, wherein court decriminalized consensual same sex relations and dismantled one of the key legal impediments to LGBTQ+ rights in the country. The Act, 2019, was subsequently enacted, in order to codify these rights, including in the sphere of employment, outlawing discrimination in different areas.

4.2 *Nature and scope of workplace discrimination*

There are multiple forms of workplace discrimination against transgender persons in India, such as hiring bias, workplace harassment, wage disparities and denial of promotions. Although the constitutional guarantee of equality under Articles 14, 15, 16 and the enactment of the Act, 2019, transgender people have not been able to break through the hurdles in employment. However, according to National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) study of 2017, only 6% of transgender persons were working in private sectors, while majority of the transgender persons worked in informal sectors including sex work, domestic labor or begging. Hiring biases also skew against the hiring of qualified transgender candidates because of their gender identity. These challenges are made worse by the fact that the Transgender Persons Act does not contain specific provisions on how to deal with such discrimination in private employment sectors (Agarwal, 2020).

Additionally, the lack of full data on the prevalence and impact of workplace discrimination of transgender people further obscures the existence and scope of their discrimination in the workplace. While major national data sources such as National Family Health Survey (NFHS), Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE) & Periodic Labour Force Surveys do not include transgender populations in separate categories, they make their experiences invisible in official statistics. Aided by this data gap, targeted policies and an assessment of the effectives of the existing measures cannot be formulated. Though limited in scope, the NHRC's 2017 study revealed that 69% of transgender persons were working informally in various roles like singing, dancing, and blessing at social events and 53% of them earned less than ₹10,000 per month. The absence of good data collection mechanisms not only keeps transgender people narrow but also hinders effective development of laws and policies that will reduce cases of workplace discrimination. In 2018, NHRC conducted another study which showed that 96% of transgender people are denied jobs (Kerala Development Society, 2017).

As per 2011's census, literacy rate of the transgender community is 56.1% for a population of 4.8 lakhs against the national average of 70.04%. Due to the Indian education system not being prepared in a way that would make it a safe and conducive learning environment for trans students, more students drop out of school (Centre for Law and Policy Research, 2022). According to a joint study by UNDP and the Humsafar Trust (2018), the rate of employment and inclusion of transgender persons in the Indian formal workforce is alarmingly low.

Figure 1 illustrates the multi-dimensional disadvantages faced by transgender individuals across employment and education in India. The data confirms significant under representation in formal employment, correlating with poor literacy levels. Only a fraction of transgender persons attains secure employment, with most forced into informal and low-paying sectors. This systemic exclusion is symptomatic of inadequate policy attention and ineffective enforcement of anti-discriminatory legal mandates.

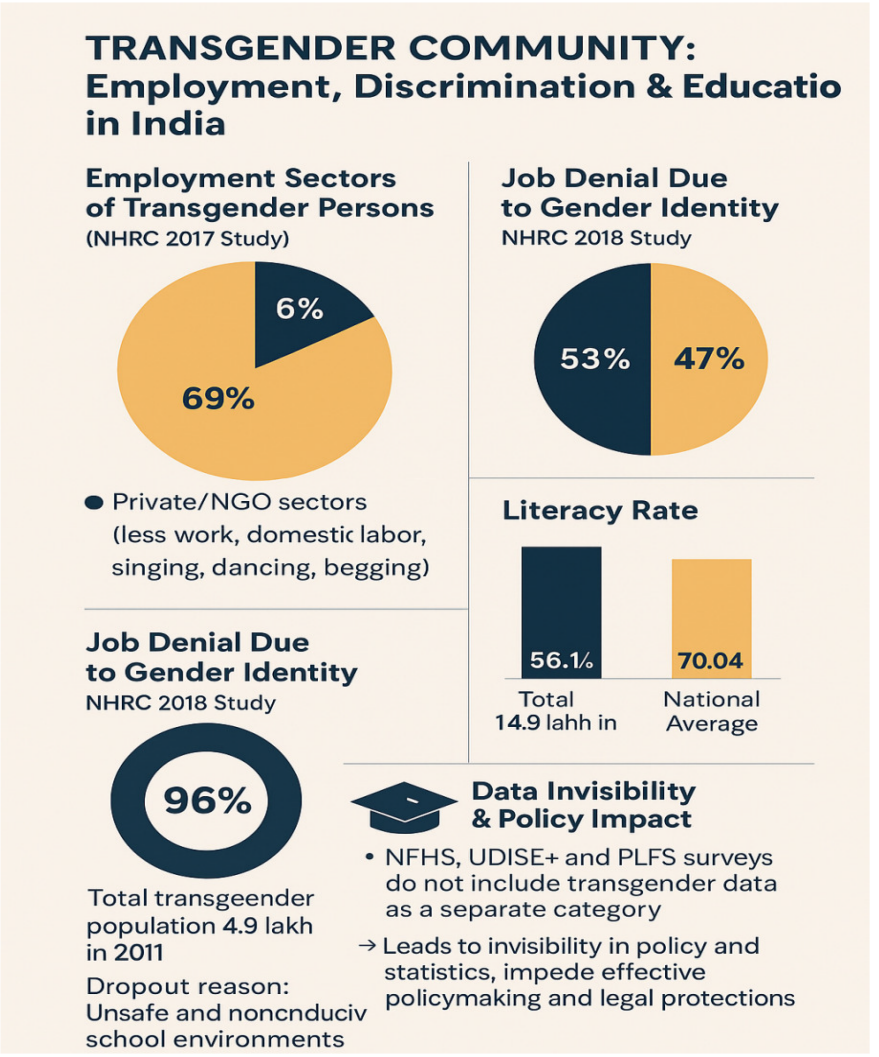


Figure 1. Transgender community: Employment, discrimination & education in India. (Source: Self-Generated).

4.3 *Existing legal framework*

India Constitution, *vide* Articles 14, 15 and 16, furnishes with the framework to protect rights of transgender persons against discrimination at the workplace. Article 14 guarantees equality before the law & equal protection of laws, and its interpretation in NALSA's ruling extended this protection to include transgender persons as a "third gender". It construed Article 15(1) to prohibit discrimination on grounds of sex & have taken a gender identity into its ambit. Similarly, Article 16 mandates equality of opportunity in matters of public employment. In fact, however, their potential has been largely underutilized in practice by virtue of lack of awareness, institutional inertia, and a lack of jurisprudential follow through, in particular in the area of hiring, promotions, and the workplace in the public and private sectors (Dutta and Roy, 2014).

Although Act, 2019 was meant to codify protections for transgender individuals, it shortcomings are doctrinal and enforcement related. Yet, despite the Section 3 prohibiting discrimination in employment and Section 11 requiring establishments to designate grievance redressal officers (GROs), there is no robust enforcement mechanism and consequent no punitive consequences for non-compliance, and therefore, the provisions largely remain aspirational. In addition, the Act's demand for certificate of identity issued by a district magistrate for legal recognition contravenes the Supreme Court's affirmation of principle of self-identification in NALSA's judgment. While the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 provides protection through gender neutral wage norms, in practice it has hardly been used as a protection against transgender persons because of the binary understanding of "men and women" within its language. Like the POSH Act, 2013 which is crucial for tackling workplace harassment, the POSH Act, 2013, also fails to include transgender persons within its purview, as it is gender specific, thereby signifying how the systematic exclusion of gender diverse individuals is common in statutory schemes (Nagar and DasGupta 2023).

In addition to the Transgender Persons Act, the Equal Remuneration Act, 1976 and the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947 are also relevant. While the former mandates equal pay for equal work irrespective of gender, its binary framing excludes transgender persons unless reinterpreted. The latter provides remedies for unfair labour practices, but lacks explicit recognition of discrimination based on gender identity. These gaps call for statutory amendments or clarificatory rules to make them inclusive.

4.4 *Enforcement mechanisms and challenges*

Institutional and systemic deficiencies undermine the enforcement of legal protections against workplace discrimination experienced by transgender persons in India. First and foremost, the Act, 2019 is weakly implemented as it is poorly backed by administrative machinery for enforcement. The Act does not require the establishment of a specialized monitoring or grievance redressal bodies rendering the anti-discrimination provisions largely symbolic. The transgender specific regime is devoid of regulatory oversight and periodic audits of employer compliance as in the case of labor laws that are enforced through inspectorates and tribunals. Moreover, accountability is not enforceable on the private sector, where the bulk of employment opportunities are, and which remains outside the scope of any such mechanism. This regulatory void allows impunity with private employers free to engage in discrimination, that is refusal to hire, the creation of hostile work environment, and wage inequity, without any fear of legal repercussions (Bhargava *et al.* 2024).

Further, the key institutional authorities are not aware or sensitized about the problem. In many cases, employers and the human resource personnel do not receive adequate training or understanding of what gender diversity is, resulting in unconscious bias, exclusionary workplace cultures. Similarly, the judiciary has been unevenly familiar with nuances of transgender rights jurisprudence, and consequently has different conceptions of equality and non-discrimination principles under Constitution. Such a deficit in sensitization weakens both the preventive and remedial aspects of enforcement by not providing deterrence against bad conduct, and by failing to protect those with a claim against misconduct through ignorance, apathy or, at least, procedural hostility. Only the State's failure to mandate and operationalize gender sensitization programs across different sectors leads to the culture of invisibility and marginalization of transgender workers. Structural interventions to increase awareness can turn legal protections into effective tools to move entrenched social prejudices from paper to equitable employment outcomes, however, such interventions are rarely developed without them (Singh 2024).

Furthermore, the institutional barriers of bureaucratic red tape in the process of certification also restricts the access to legal remedies. Where the need for a transgender certificate

was intended to help open the right to rights, it has been usurped into a gatekeeping tool regularizing humiliating procedures and delays that often discourage trans people from seeking formal recognition. Structural disadvantage is intensified and coherent participation in the labor market is inhibited through these axes of intersectionality. The fear of retaliation is the chilling deterrent to grievance redressal (Loh 2018).

4.5 *International perspective*

Comparative models of US and Argentine legal frameworks in evaluating international best practices with respect to workplace discrimination against transgender persons provide useful instructive models. Title VII of Civil Rights Act, 1964 prohibits employment discrimination based upon sex, as held in *Bostock v. Clayton County (590 U.S. 644)*, wherein it has been interpreted that has discriminated based upon gender identity & sexual orientation. It significantly expanded the scope of federal protection of transgender workers in this judicial interpretation. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) accepts complaints, investigates workplace discrimination allegations and may bring court suits. This regime is not a separate statute particular to transgender people, but rather, it is incorporated within an overall anti-discrimination framework that provides access to redress within a known and operational legal regime.

The Gender Identity Law (Law No. 26.743), enacted in 2012, provides more progressive statutory model in Argentina. It is a law that grants the right to people to have their self-perceived gender identity legally recognized without medical or judicial procedures. It is notably an obligation affirmatively imposed on public and private entities to respect this identity in the context of employment. Additionally, in 2021, Argentina adopted a gender employment quota policy obligating 1% of public sector jobs to be reserved for transgender and non-binary persons. This approach takes substantially equal treatment and attempts to go beyond to overcome structural exclusions by inclusion through targeted processes. These legal innovations are in conformity with the international human rights instrument, such as ICESCR and UDHR. Article 6 of ICESCR relates with right to work, whereas Article 2 with non-discrimination in the realization of Covenant rights. Similarly, Articles 23 & 7 of UDHR affirm the right to just & favorable conditions of work, and equality in employment. The Argentinian and US models represent two different but mutually reinforcing ways of achieving substantive equality through affirmative action and formal equality through the broad civil rights litigation mechanisms, which are equally important for the Indian legal context (Bhattacharya *et al.* 2022).

5 CONCLUSION

The absence of substantive enforcement in India from a legal and socio-institutional framework that purports to recognize the workplace discrimination against transgender persons, however, reveals a pronounced disjunction between normative recognition and substantive enforcement. While there has been judicial milestones & Act 2019 being enacted, the statutory framework is still ambiguous in definition, lack of provisions for enforcement and lack of the affirmative duties and responsibilities on the employers. Transgender individuals face exclusion in the private sector and informal economy in the way of discriminatory hiring practices, workplace harassment, & institutional bias, which demonstrates systemic nature of exclusion. Intersectional marginalities in caste, class and religion exacerbate the issues and limit access to dignified employment. The remedies currently available on the basis of constitutional and statutory provisions are not accessible and effective in practice because of procedural opacity, unfamiliarity with rights, and apathy of institutions.

This study recommends -

- Amending the Transgender Persons Act to include penalties and enforcement mechanisms for private employers.
- Expanding labour laws like the Equal Remuneration Act to explicitly cover transgender persons.
- Mandating gender sensitization training for HR professionals.
- Incorporating transgender data into national surveys.
- Establishing ombudsperson bodies or independent grievance redressal forums.

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Beyond the alpha: Reimagining Shiva's masculinity in Amish Tripathi's Shiva Trilogy

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ABSTRACT: Indian mythological fiction has recently gained traction offering a modern reinterpretation of the ancient narratives of India. The present study investigates the construction of masculinity of the lead character (Shiva) in Amish Tripathi's Shiva Trilogy and analyzes it through the theoretical framework of the hegemonic masculinity discussed by R.W. Connell in her *Masculinities*. Indian mythology subtly validates hegemonic masculinity standards which are challenged by Amish Tripathi in his series. His reinterpretation of Shiva's masculinity enables readers to reconstruct the concept of masculinity in society. Scholarly inquiry into the portrayal of masculinity in mythology is scarce, and this paper explores the alternative masculinity devised by Amish Tripathi, in connection with the theory of hegemonic masculinity by R.W. Connell. The textual analysis of the Shiva Trilogy reveals a model of hybrid masculinity of Shiva- one that is inclusive, sensitive and emotionally intelligent, which helps destabilize hegemonic masculinity and reinforces gender fluidity in society.

Keywords: hegemonic masculinity, Amish Tripathi, Shiva trilogy

1 INTRODUCTION

Indian mythological fiction, the emerging sub-genre of Indian fiction, has transformed the readers' understanding and expectations about mythology, making it relatable to contemporary readers. These have enabled modern readers to become aware of their cultural heritage and social foundations through a creative lens.

Masculinity can be plainly stated as notions and expectations that society has of men, their personality and physique. This includes stoicism, independence, economic stability, physical strength, intellectual skills and many such traditional masculine competencies that men are expected to exhibit in society. The archetype of the alpha male, where men are dominant, assertive, authoritative figures who demonstrate physical prowess governs the society. R. W. Connell in her book, *Masculinities,* discusses the concept of hegemonic masculinity propagated by society where heterosexual men are superior to all other sections of people. Hegemonic masculinity is accepted in societies, and it supports patriarchy- the system where men hold power. It enables society to keep women,] and other men who do not fit the masculinity standards of society, under their control (Connell 2005). Amish Tripathi has challenged the ideals of masculinity in the Shiva Trilogy by portraying Shiva against the established masculinity standards in society. Shiva's masculinity does not conform to social standards. He handles his responsibilities as a leader unpretentiously, showing his emotions and vulnerabilities to others without concealing them to maintain the typical stoic persona of a leader. Even though he is the savior of a large Kingdom, he is sensitive, emotional and questions his judgement which deviates from societal masculinity standards. His masculinity is not built on stoicism or independence, but rather on empathy, vulnerability, and

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emotional intelligence. Indian mythology has represented men as powerful individuals who are strong, stable, impassive, aggressive and decisive, aligning with social expectations. They have been considered exemplars to emulate. Amish Tripathi, in his magnum opus Shiva Trilogy, has critiqued many mythological concepts and attempted to rationalize them, allowing readers to resonate with them. It is a quasi-historical interpretation of *Shiva Puranam*, reimagining mythological/religious roles into fictional characters, humanizing them by challenging stereotypes of femininity and masculinity. Shiva, the head of the Guna tribe, rises to the role of 'Neelkanth', the savior of Meluha (an advanced utopian kingdom ruled by king Daksha). He becomes the leader of the Meluhans and destroys evil in their society. Using *Shiva Puranam* as a narrative frame to work on, Amish Tripathi has used his trilogy to voice his disapproval of various social issues and challenge societal norms of gender, caste, and identity.

1.1 *Theoretical framework*

R.W. Connell in *Masculinities* has elaborately discussed the concept of hegemonic masculinity which has been governing humanity's constructs of masculinity. Society assumes that men have certain traits that set them apart as manly. Competencies associated with hegemonic masculinity are detachment, authoritativeness, independence, aggressiveness, resilience, decisiveness, self-reliance, assertiveness, dominance, heterosexuality and so on. These hegemonic masculine traits, according to R.W. Connell, are social constructs that enable oppression of women and other masculine minorities (men who do not exhibit these qualities) (Connell 2005). Popular art forms like cinema, literature, and social media reinforce this. Even amongst men, there exist the hierarchy of having cultural dominance due to the non-conformity of others to these social standards. Being conciliatory and peaceful is considered unmasculine in hegemonic masculinity (Connell 2005). The complexity of identity is another point of importance as there are men who exhibit certain qualities that are feminine and vice versa, thus proving these hegemonic masculinity standards are not embodied fully by most men and are unrealistic (Connell 2005). In Indian socio-cultural set up, hegemonic masculinity is accepted and is a benchmark to assess men and their manliness. This can be exemplified by an athletically weak boy who faces social stigma for not appearing boyish enough, or by a homosexual man who is not accepted as masculine and is often treated like other minorities in society.

Indian mythological tales tend to perpetuate hegemonic masculinity standards through ideal male figures. Society's expectation of men to protect women arises from the idea that men are physically stronger than women, conforming to the hegemonic masculinity standards. The Indian mythological stories are well embedded into Indian society and typically, one can find the central male figures conforming to the traditional hegemonic masculinity patterns. The Pandavas from *Mahabharata*, Ram and Laxman from *Ramayana,* and Shiva from *Shiva Puranam* are worshipped for their ideal manly behaviour and physique. Ram, Laxman, the Pandavas and many other male figures in Indian mythology are portrayed as having muscular body (strong enough to defeat villains double their size) who are authoritative, decisive, clever, and aggressive. Indian mythological heroes have been actively discussed in all art forms of India, reinforcing these hegemonic masculinity standards as a natural quality in ideal men. It is in this context that Amish Tripathi's Shiva Trilogy marks as an example that challenges these norms. Amish Tripathi's Shiva from the Shiva Trilogy, who is inspired by Shiva in *Shiva Puranam,* is not an ideal masculine hero. Though he is assertive, authoritative, gallant, and heterosexual, he is also emotional, vulnerable, indecisive, and self-questioning, which are not traditionally masculine traits. His masculinity aligns with subordinated masculinity, since these are qualities often associated with women or weaker men, according to the hegemonic masculinity. Men who do not fit into the category of hegemonic masculinity are regarded subordinated masculinity and are often considered feminine (Connell 2005). This indicates that sensitivity and softness are attributes that

symbolize weakness. These societal beliefs shape the lives of individuals all over the world and need to be reformed. Contemporary literature has the potential to usher in change and to restructure society to become more inclusive and accepting of various forms of masculinity. This is an underexplored area- especially masculinity in mythological fiction. Thus, this topic warrants thorough examination to facilitate social and academic development. The present study explores the reimagination of Shiva as an ordinary individual and analyzes the masculinity that he embodies. In many instances throughout the trilogy, it is apparent that traditional gender stereotypes of masculinity fall, revealing its fluidity and refusal to conform to conventional standards that prevail in our society. By employing textual analysis through the theoretical framework of R.W. Connell, this research paper seeks to demonstrate that Amish Tripathi has portrayed Shiva's masculinity as one that is beyond the alpha archetype and destabilizes the concept of masculinity.

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To critically analyze Amish Tripathi's portrayal of Shiva's character in the Shiva Trilogy under the scope of R.W. Connell's hegemonic masculinity.
- To investigate how Shiva's masculinity challenges traditional masculinity norms and explore the potential of mythological fiction to deconstruct the notions of masculinity in society.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study undertakes a qualitative analysis of Amish Tripathi's Shiva Trilogy- *The Immortals of Meluha, The Secret of the Nagas,* and *The Oath of the Vayuputras* under the scope of hegemonic masculinity put forth by R.W. Connell. A comprehensive character analysis is undertaken to examine the masculine attributes that are assigned to Shiva's character. This study intends to analyze the masculinity depicted by Shiva and to investigate how it deviates from traditional masculinity standards towards fluidity and hybridity.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Published in 2010, *The Immortals of Meluha*, was inspired by *Shiva Puranam,* historicizing and rationalizing the mythical components in it so that it could be believed as events that happened in history. *The Secret of the Nagas*, the second book, was published in 2011 and *The Oath of the Vayuputras*, the final book of the series, was published in 2013. They have been under academic scrutiny ever since, being investigated for feministic perspectives, thematic references, and literary richness. This paper undertakes a character analysis of the central figure- Shiva, exploring and comparing his qualities with hegemonic masculinity standards in various instances throughout the trilogy, and draws conclusions based on the study. Two aspects of each book are discussed below.

Peace and Compassion

Shiva's description at the beginning of the series is as follows: "He squatted and perched his lithe, muscular body on the narrow ledge extending over the lake. The numerous battle-scars on his skin gleamed in the shimmering reflected light of the waters." (Tripathi, 2022, p. 1) This aligns with the hegemonic standards of a leader with exemplary captaincy and combat skills. As the story begins, the empathy and compassion that he upholds when his tribe's men, women and children are killed by the Prakritis is evident in the lines: "Two

Guna soldiers had succumbed to their injuries. They would be honoured as clan heroes. But even worse, the warning had come too late for at least ten Guna women and children. Their mutilated bodies were found next to the lake. Those loses were high." (Tripathi, 2022, p. 5) Even though they won the battle, Shiva as a leader, is deeply saddened and is fuming with anger instead of being content with the triumph. This reveals his emotional awareness and compassion, which are traits typically deemed unacceptable in hegemonic masculinity standards. It reflects his deviation from the dominant, authoritative, and aggressive model of masculinity.

4.1 *Challenging societal norms and supporting the marginalized*

When Shiva finds out about Sati and her Vikarma stature, he is deeply moved and intends to break her and everyone free from it. "Well, to be honest, it sounds like a rather unfair law to me." (Tripathi, 2022, p. 96) The belief that a person is regarded as an outcaste because of his/her bad karma in their previous birth was unacceptable to Shiva. Even though it was a law in Meluha, he disagrees with it and considers it ridiculous. Even when he gets a chance to change the law, instead of selfishly thinking of just himself, he decides to save all the people in Meluhan society who are trapped in it. This demonstrates his defiance against socially constructed norms that are harmful to humanity. This signals his empathy and sensitivity, which (again) are not traits that fit in with the hegemonic masculinity standards. These are traits that are deemed weak and are typically attributed to women. It shows his ability, as a man to challenge socially accepted practices of humanity such as marginalizing a section of society. He does not shy away from voicing his disagreement, which is rooted in inclusivity and sensitivity.

4.2 *Admitting vulnerability and obeying a woman-gender roles*

Shiva is the chief of the Guna tribe and everyone in his community admires and respects him with utmost zeal. Initially, as he moves to Meluha with his tribe, he is required to follow Meluhan practices. The chief doctor of Meluha, Ayurvati, instructs him on various medical protocols. Being commanded and instructed by a woman is unsettling and strange for him, coming from a community where men lead and exert control. He argues with her and refuses to obey her initially, not because she is woman but because he does not understand the ways of Meluha. His argument with her shows his care and regard for his tribe's people. However, after realizing that he overreacted, he apologized to her. "Thanks to the skills and efficiency of your team. I am truly sorry for arguing with you earlier." (Tripathi, 2022, p. 23) His gender or stature does not stop him from apologizing to a woman. He does not exercise superiority over women, which clearly stands against gender roles. He treats men and women alike, with respect regardless of their class or social positioning. This behaviour deviates from the actions of a hegemonic masculine figure who does not believe in equality, supports dominance and exercises superiority over women. It shows his willingness to evolve and to respect individuals despite their social status or gender. This reflects his non-egocentric approach and his feministic attitude.

4.3 *Family and Society*

On finding out that Ganesh is Sati's son from her first marriage, Shiva accepts him with open arms, showing his generous and empathetic nature. Later, as he learns that Ganesh had killed his best friend Brihaspati, he tells Ganesh that he would not accept him as his son. He also informs Ganesh that being Sati's son is the only reason keeping him alive. This reflects the respectful and thoughtful nature of Shiva, the consideration and love for his wife, which are characteristics that are uncommon in hegemonic masculinity. However, he accepts Kali, the Naga queen, when he learns that she is Sati's twin. Despite the physiological differences

and social stigma, he, as the savior of Meluha, is capable of accepting these differences and loving them as family, which reflects his compassion and disregard for the expectations of society. This corroborates hybrid masculinity.

4.4 *Emotional expression and transformation*

Sati's death in the third book, *The Oath of Vayuputras*, is one of the most emotional moments in the entire series. Shiva, the ultimate leader of Meluha, is heartbroken and mourns the loss of his wife. He doesn't conceal his feelings or attempts to hold up a strong face, the face of a hegemonic masculine leader who is stoic and detached. His grief, as a mourning spouse, is vividly communicated through his expressions and emotions. Following Sati's death, Shiva removes himself from his position of power and leads a life of asceticism and meditation, advocating peace. "No more killing from now on. Spread life. Spread life." (Tripathi, 2022, p. 550), revealing his personal transformation and egalitarian mindset. His character clearly departs from aggression and leads a life which prioritizes social welfare, revealing his altruistic intensions which are in contrast with hegemonic standards.

4.5 *Collaborative decision making*

Throughout the series, Shiva, the ultimate leader of Meluha, exhibits his sense of equality and respect for all his fellow beings. He deviates from the hegemonic masculinity standard that is characterized by solitary decision making and assumption of supreme power as a leader. He demonstrates humility by seeking advice from those who are below his rank. For instance, before seeking diplomatic and strategic alliance from Magadh to support his cause, he engages in a detailed discussion with Kali, Ganesh, Sati, Gopal and Karthik, irrespective of their age, gender or experience. "Shiva and his core group were in the main hall of the grand Kashi Vishwanath temple." (Tripathi, 2022, p. 158) He shows a willingness to listen to any individual, if the situation demands it. He is not ego-centric or intoxicated by power and continuously demonstrates inclusiveness, humility, collaborative spirit and a willingness to learn and evolve- characteristics that stand in stark contrast to the societal standards of hegemonic masculinity and dominance.

5 CONCLUSION

R.W. Connell (2005, p. 80), in *Masculinities,* suggests that hegemonic masculinity is influenced by class and race. Hegemonic masculinity, that facilitates patriarchal system, supports men in powerful positions. The construction of masculinity is such that it gives utmost power to men and teaches women to accept powerlessness (Connell, 2005, p. 83). Shiva, in Amish Tripathi's Shiva Trilogy, is the supreme leader to whom everyone bows. However, he does not abuse his power. His masculinity is not egocentric, arrogant, stoic, dominant, or oppressive. Considering the findings of the study, it can be concluded that Shiva's masculinity is hybrid , which includes the positive qualities of hegemonic masculinity, such as physical strength or martial abilities, but does not conform to the negative attributes of hegemonic masculinity such as assertiveness, dominance, detachment, and oppression of women and other marginalized sections of society. Through the characterization of Shiva, Amish Tripathi demonstrates that masculinity is not limited to restrictive characteristics. Masculinity is fluid and should not be a social construct. Individuals should not be conditioned to behave in a specific way. Compassion and emotions are qualities that every individual should embody. When Shiva learns about Sati's first son, Ganesh, and Sati's sister Kali, he accepts them with open arms- without any prejudice or hesitation- aware that he was standing up against society and the beliefs of his followers. This demonstration of his inclusive personality can be considered as the author's message to stand up against societal

constructs that marginalize individuals, and to build a society which is not gender biased, where individuals are free to express who they are without fear of societal condemnation. Since literature has the power to provoke thought, it can be believed that this deviant portrayal of Shiva's character by Amish Tripathi may help individuals realize that every individual is unique and does not need to conform to the established social standards for validation. Furthermore, future studies can explore how masculinity is presented in popular media and digital media to understand the evolving perceptions of masculinity.

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A study on women's mobility and public harassment in Bangladesh: Barriers on the move

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ABSTRACT: Access to transportation and movement through public spaces are increasingly important to women in Bangladesh but physical and social challenges, such as harassment, inhibit women's mobility by restricting their travel and access to public spaces. This study was a cross-sectional analysis of 504 women (from urban and rural areas) using a structured, paper-based questionnaire administered in March–April 2025 and the data was analyzed using IBM SPSS 25. According to this study, 34% of the respondents faced verbal harassment during travel, 8% faced physical harassment, 21% of respondents faced both types of harassment and 36% of respondents reported no harassment. About 16% felt safe all the time and more than half did not go to certain places for fear. 60% were prevented from going out alone, and 17% from engaging in community activities. Graduates had the highest legal awareness of 69.7% compared with females with no formal education which was the lowest at 25.8%. Only 30% of victims reported to legal authorities. This study revealed that a significant proportion of women experience harassment—both verbal and physical—during travel, with buses, rickshaws, and walking and they lacked awareness and opportunities of legal actions. Therefore, safer transport systems, awareness campaigns, and stronger law enforcement mechanisms are recommended.

Keywords: Women's mobility, Harassment, Public transportation, Safety perception, Bangladesh

1 INTRODUCTION

The freedom of movement of women in public space is a fundamental indicator of gender equality, personal autonomy, and inclusive urban policy. [1] However, women in many countries, especially developing countries, are limited to navigating public places, because of absence of safety, or cultural stigma or lack of infrastructure or law. [2] These restrictions not only infringe on their right to mobility but also restrict their access to education, employment, health, and political participation, ultimately perpetuating systemic gender inequalities. [3] [4] Bangladesh, therefore, as a developing country also offers a unique yet under-researched context to gain understanding of these challenges. The increased movement of women in both urban and rural areas is now necessary due to rapid urbanization, internal migration, and rising female workforce participation. [5] But that greater mobility is

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not always freedom. Traveling women in Bangladesh still encounter verbal, physical and psychological harassment while traveling, often on public transport and in crowded or under-regulated areas. [6] [7] Notwithstanding these realities, limited empirical research has been conducted in Bangladesh targeting women and their experiences during travel, as well as examining the social, legal and psychological repercussions of urban mobility related sexual harassment. [8] [9] [10] Most of the existing literature focuses on gender-based violence in the home or workplace settings, yet does not offer appropriate insights into the ways harassment in public spaces impacts women's everyday experiences, travel behavior, and participation in the public sphere.

This study addresses a significant gap through a systematic exploration of the nature and frequency of harassment, perceived safety, travel behaviors and social and legal barriers women encounter while moving around public areas of Bangladesh. The findings from this research can contribute to the policy-making process as well as urban planning and advocacy efforts to develop safer and more gender-equitable environments for women.

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 *Objectives*

This study aimed to identify how the mobility of women is hindered and how women are being encountered by public harassment in Bangladesh.

2.2 *Study design*

This study used a quantitative survey design to examine women's experiences of mobility, safety and harassment in public spaces and during travel. The aim of this study was to map trends in travel behavior, experiences of harassment, feelings of safety and other social and legal constraints on women's ability to get around in different parts of the country.

2.3 *Sampling and sample size*

This study was a cross-sectional, observational analysis of randomly chosen 504 women (originating from 30 different urban and rural areas of 8 divisions of Bangladesh) using a structured, paper-based questionnaire. Standard statistical methods were used to calculate sample size to ensure adequate expect amongst the population and generalizability. The factors used in the determination of sample size were: the size of the population of interest, margin of error, confidence level (95%) and the estimated response distribution.

2.4 *Data collection procedure*

The data collected was during a period spanning March and April 2025. The questionnaire was designed after reviewing literature and obtaining expert inputs to capture pertinent dimensions of women's daily mobility experiences including: Socio-demographic information, Usage of common modes of transport, Overrunning harassment (verbal, physical, both), Safety perception while traveling, Regularly avoided places and Distances traveled.

2.5 *Data entry and analysis*

Obtained data were entered in IBM SPSS Statistics version 25 for data analysis. Entry screening for accuracy and consistency was performed prior to analysis. The primary analyses were conducted using descriptive statistics comprising: Frequencies and percentages for categorical variables (type of harassment, transport mode, education level), Cross-

tabulations to examine relationships between variables like marital status and harassment reporting, or education level and legal knowledge.

2.6 *Ethical considerations*

Participation in the survey was randomized and anonymous. Each respondent was made aware of the study and the right to withdraw at any time. Field workers were trained to ethically administer the survey and to guarantee informed consent was provided by all participants

3 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 *Demographic study*

The social profile of the mentioned demographic is a vital indicator of various factors affecting the movement of women [Table 1]. Interestingly, 45.8% of the respondents were single, compared to 42.5% who were married. The educational level among the surveyed women was relatively high — 41.9% hold a graduation degree or above, and only 6.2% reported having no formal education. With greater education comes greater awareness, more confidence, and higher expectations for safe, reliable transportation options. [11] [12] However, 43.3% were students, suggesting demand for affordable, safe, and frequent public transit options, where 31.0% were housewives, possibly indicating the need for mobility for non-professional activities, including family, care or community activities. The urban residence predominance (80%) among respondents was in line with the growing evidence of the demand for mobility in high-density and commonly agitated dynamics.

Table 1. Demographical data of the women under this study.

Marital Status	Single	Married	Divorced	Widowed		
	45.8	42.5	5.0	6.7		
Education Level	Graduation and above	Higher Secondary	Secondary	Primary	No formal education	
	41.9	23.8	18.5	9.7	6.2	
Occupation	Service	Business	Student	Housewife	Day Laborer and Garment Worker	Others
	7.9	1.2	43.3	31.0	8.4	8.3
Residence	Urban	Rural				
	80.0	20.0				
Transport	Walk	Rickshaw	CNG/ Auto	Bus	Private Car	Ride-sharing and others
	21.2	31.5	15.7	27	1.2	2.8

In terms of mode of transport, rickshaws (31.5%), buses (27.0%), and walking (21.2%) were heavily favored, while private cars (1.2%) and ride-sharing services (2.8%) received minimal usage. For women, these modes of travel were frequently poorly regulated and impulsive, raising safety and comfort issues. That private or app-based transport was so rarely used (or so rarely admitted to) might be a sign of limited economic independence, or perhaps limited digital integration.[13]

Table 2. Harassment type, Law awareness and police report percentage with respect to marital status, educational level, occupation, residence area and transport type

		Harassment Type (p<0.001)				Law awareness (p<0.001)		Police Report (p<0.001)	
		None	Physical	Verbal	Both	No	Yes	No	Yes
Marital Status	Divorced	12.0	12.0	44.0	32.0	60.0	40.0	64.0	36.0
	Married	36.4	9.3	31.3	22.9	46.7	53.3	70.6	29.4
	Single	38.1	8.7	34.2	19.0	41.1	58.9	68.8	31.2
	Widowed	44.1	2.9	41.2	11.8	55.9	44.1	73.5	26.5
Educational level	Graduation and above	36.0	10.0	30.3	23.7	30.3	69.7	66.4	33.6
	Higher Secondary	34.2	5.0	40.0	20.8	49.2	50.8	65.8	34.2
	No formal education	45.2	19.4	16.1	19.4	74.2	25.8	80.6	19.4
	Primary	24.5	18.4	36.7	20.4	63.3	36.7	61.2	38.8
	Secondary	44.1	2.2	38.7	15.1	55.9	44.1	82.8	17.2
Occupation	Business	33.3	16.7	33.3	16.7	33.3	66.7	83.3	16.7
	Day laborer	33.3	6.7	33.3	26.7	80.0	20.0	66.7	33.3
	Garment worker	14.8	18.5	25.9	40.7	63.0	37.0	74.1	25.9
	Housewife	41.7	8.3	31.4	18.6	54.5	45.5	73.1	26.9
	Others	26.2	11.9	31.0	31.0	31.0	69.0	47.6	52.4
	Service	25.0	2.5	45.0	27.5	30.0	70.0	65.0	35.0
	Student	39.9	8.3	35.3	16.5	40.4	59.6	71.6	28.4
Residence area	Rural	38.6	6.9	41.6	12.9	43.6	56.4	68.3	31.7
	Urban	36.0	9.2	32.0	22.8	45.9	54.1	70.0	30.0
Transport	Bicycle	0	25.0	50.0	25.0	25.0	75.0	75.0	25.0
	Bus	31.7	10.1	38.8	19.4	39.6	60.4	71.2	28.8
	CNG/Auto	30.4	13.9	34.2	21.5	32.9	67.1	65.8	34.2
	Private Car	16.7	0	16.7	66.7	33.3	66.7	50.0	50.0
	Rickshaw	46.5	5.7	30.8	17.0	47.2	52.8	64.8	35.2
	Ride-sharing	20.0	10.0	30.0	40.0	30.0	70.0	50.0	50.0
	Walk	36.4	7.5	32.7	23.4	62.6	37.4	80.4	19.6

3.2 *Harassment, Law Awareness and Legal Action*

The results on harassment shows troubling trends about women's safety and mobility [Table 2]. The majority of women reported verbal (30–45%) and verbal plus physical harassment (15–40%), and very few women did not report any harassment at all. Remarkably, the highest levels of harassment (either verbal or both types) were reported by widowed (combined total: 76%) and divorced (combined total: 88%) women. This is suggestive of increased vulnerability among unmarried women, as they might face additional stigma or social isolation in the absence of a spouse.[14] Married women experienced somewhat less harassment overall, with 54.2% saying they experienced some form of harassment. Women with higher education level were significantly more aware of laws (69.7%) and were more likely to report (33.6%) as compared to Women with no formal education (25.8%) and who never reported (19.4%) women. This points to the fact that educational empowerment is closely associated with legal literacy and engagement with institutions. Notably, even among women with secondary and higher secondary education, awareness and reporting was low, suggestive of the fact that basic schooling is not enough to empower women legally.

Occupation also affects the risk of harassment and its reaction.[15] Garment workers and day laborers had higher reported rates of physical and both forms of harassment (up to 40.7%), but low levels of legal awareness and police reporting. This inequality reveals the ways that economic class and work setting intersect with rates of harassment between the informal and low-wage sectors, which are more vulnerable and less protected. Women using buses and CNG/autos experienced relatively high levels of harassment (verbal and physical combined up to 40%), indicative of the risks associated with overcrowded and poorly governed transport. Those who relied on rickshaws and walking also reported high exposure, significant verbal harassment. By contrast, ride-sharing and private car passengers reported lower overall harassment incidents. In terms of residence, awareness of legal protections was slightly higher among rural women (56.4%) than urban women (54.1%), while reporting to the police was lower, among urban women (30.0% vs 31.7% among rural women).

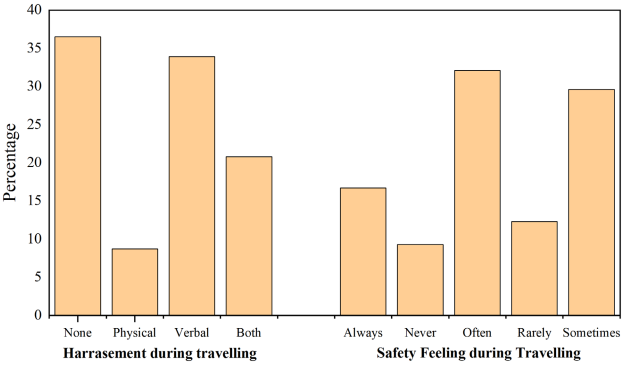


Figure 1. Percentage of harassment and safety feelings during traveling.

Figure 1 represents a visual summary of women's harassment while traveling and their assessments of safety. Alarmingly, merely 36% indicated that they had not encountered harassment, with verbal harassment being the most prevalent at roughly 34%, succeeded by a combination of physical and verbal harassment at around 21%. These results indicated a widespread atmosphere of unease and danger, particularly verbal abuse, which frequently remains undetected yet profoundly impacts women's sense of liberty and independence in public areas. However, approximately 34% of the respondents frequently felt secure, whereas a significant 30% experienced safety only intermittently, suggesting that safety is neither consistent nor assured. Significantly, about 16% consistently felt secure, although 13% infrequently feel safe, and almost 9% never experienced a sense of safety while traveling.

Figure 2 shows some important behavioral responses due to safety concerns: the average travel distance for the women, or whether they avoided certain places. They mostly traveled 1-5 km per day for their daily service or household activities. The share of women traveling short to medium distances on a regular basis was moderate, but it decreased significantly for those who travelled longer distances. This could mean that perceived or real risks at transit or destination areas hold women back from moving further, which in turn could affect their access to education, employment, healthcare and social participation. What is even more shocking were the percentages of women that said they avoided specific places (80%) altogether. This response reveals an insidious yet potent effect of harassment and fear: it changes women's behavior, making them self-restrict movement as a way to protect themselves.[16] [17] This type of spatial exclusion contributes to the gendered inequalities of urban access, where women's right to the city is limited not just through infrastructure, but social environment and assurance of safety.

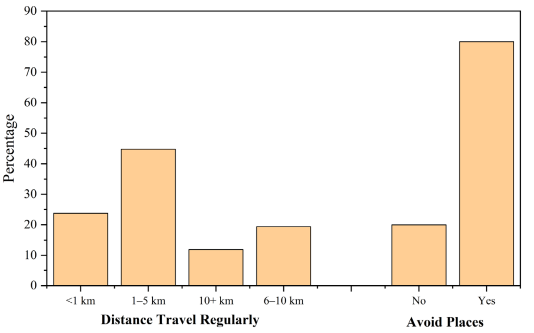


Figure 2. Distance traveled by the women and their avoidance of definite places.

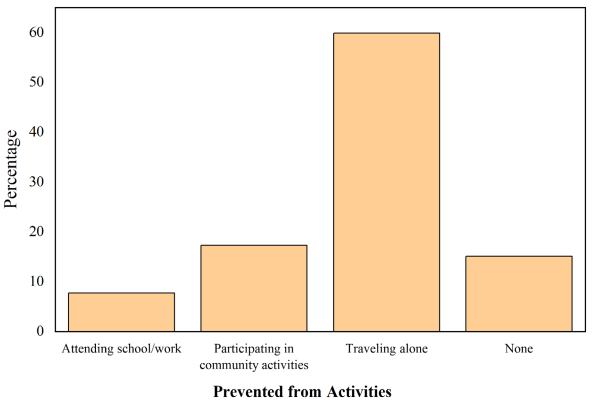


Figure 3. Prevention from activities of women due to harassment.

Figure 3 highlights a deeply worrisome consequence of gendered mobility restrictions —making it impossible for about 60% of women to travel alone. The restriction of travel autonomy impacted women's personal choice, as well as individual participation in social, educational and economic activities. About 19% of women were prevented from participating in the community, close to 9% from going to school or work. They showed how fear, harassment or social pressure ripple out, affecting not only movement but also wider engagement with public life. Notably, just 18% said they had no restrictions at all, which meant that for most women limitations on mobility were integrated into life.

4 CONCLUSION

This study sheds critical light on the everyday mobility challenges faced by women in Bangladesh, a developing nation where access to public spaces remains deeply gendered. The findings revealed that a significant proportion of women experience harassment—both verbal and physical—during travel, with buses, rickshaws, and walking posing the greatest risks. These experiences had real consequences: many women avoided certain areas, refrained from traveling alone, or withdrew from social and economic activities altogether. The low levels of police reporting and limited awareness of legal rights, especially among less educated women, indicated a profound gap between policy and practice. While education appears to empower women with knowledge of their rights, systemic issues—like weak enforcement, social stigma,

and lack of safe infrastructure—continue to undermine their freedom of movement. To ensure safer, more inclusive mobility for women, coordinated interventions are urgently needed. This research provides a foundation for advocacy, policy design, and future academic work to bridge that gap and promote equitable access to public life.

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Role of social media in raising awareness and shaping social behavior: To mitigate traditional menstrual practices (Chhaupadi) among women in Far-Western Nepal

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ABSTRACT: This study investigates how social media can help spread knowledge and encourage behavior change about Chhaupadi, a damaging and deeply ingrained menstrual custom that is common in Far Western Nepal. Women are isolated during their periods because of this practice, which negatively affects both their social standing and general health. Data collected from focus groups with women exposed to this malpractice is used in this study to support its assertion. The results show that social media effectively challenge conventional wisdom that supports the practice by making important facts accessible. This encourages women to actively campaign for change and makes it easier for them to share their personal stories.

Keywords: Chhaupadi, Nepal, Far-Western, Menstrual Practices

1 INTRODUCTION

Nepal, a multi-cultural country, is divided into seven provinces. Among them, the Far-Western region of Nepal subjects menstruating women to a tradition century old by time. Chhaupadi, an archaic tradition that forces women during menstruation to live in isolation away from the safety and comfort of their family home, often in harsh and unsanitary conditions. Women are forced to stay in small structures that provide little to no safety. Typically, a shed-like structure designed for animals, devoid of any doors or walls. This practice stems from traditional beliefs and socio-cultural norms and has shaped gender roles and behaviors for the worse (Chhetri 2020).

Chhaupadi; this practice stems from the belief that menstruating women are impure and bearers of bad luck (Acharya and Poudel 2018). Although Chhaupadi was outlawed by the Nepalese government two decades ago in 2025, the practice is still prevalent. This is especially true in the remote rural areas of Nepal. Reasons can be attributed to limited education, lack of awareness, and entrenched cultural norms (Bista 2020). To counteract this, social media platforms and communication tools have been widely recognized due to the role they play in challenging harmful practices by raising awareness about human rights violations and spreading messages of gender equality (Poudel and Shrestha 2019).

2 SOCIAL MEDIA AND ITS INFLUENCE ON SOCIO-CULTURAL BEHAVIOR

Diverse studies display the social media influences on social behavior, contributing to the probable road path for mitigating Chhaupadi practices in rural Nepal. By increasing the spread of digital platforms, social media campaigns can generate consciousness and potentially reshape public attitudes and mindset toward menstruation and so-called traditional

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values. The capability to mobilize community campaigns through social media may accelerate the abandonment of Chhaupadi in rural communities, where traditional practices remain rooted.

Study recommends that social media has the potential to impact social behavior by reforming customs, providing pledge-narratives, and raising a voice for those who challenge prevailing opinions (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010). Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube allow individuals and groups to engage in discussions, share experiences, and raise awareness about critical social issues and harmful cultural practices (Graham *et al.* 2016).

Within the context of Nepal, social media has been instrumental in breaking the silence around menstrual practices and advocating for gender equality (Shrestha and Poudel 2019). Internet forums and social media campaigns have been vital in raising awareness of the health dangers, human rights violations, and psychological impacts of Chhaupadi, particularly in rural areas (Pandey 2020).

3 RATIONALE OF THE RESEARCH PAPER AND RESEARCH GAPS

Present research has mostly been related to the role of social media, focusing on raising awareness. (Shrestha 2020). Few studies have been done addressing the campaigns and their mode of reception and long-term impact, stimulating traditional norms.

Precisely, there is no survey of the localized influence of social media movements within different ethnic communities, age groups, and rural groups of the Far-Western region of Nepal (Bhandari 2021). Furthermore, the social media responsiveness feature has been well documented; there is a methodological gap in empirical research that measures the actions change, such as the lessening or abandonment of Chhaupadi practices because of exposure to online activism (Joshi and Rai 2022).

The digital divide also affects the efficiency of such drives, as rural regions have been deprived of access to social media due to low digital literacy and a lack of internet services (Khadka and Bhatta 2023). Telling the story digitally and personal testimonies' contribution to approaches towards Chhaupadi practice change is also a vigorous aspect that must be researched properly (Shrestha 2023; Subedi 2021).

Finally, the most part is the sustainability of social media activism is a key point of concern, as short-term awareness campaigns do not translate into long-term social revolution (Nepal and Pradhan 2022).

Awareness-raising campaigns have been prioritized in the most current literature, with minimal evidence considering the effects of these campaigns on actual behavior changes, such as reductions or cessation of Chhaupadi practice, or household decision-making transformation concerning menstruation-associated prohibition (Josh and Rai 2022).

According to Khadka and Bhatta (2023), digital access is still a crucial matter in rural areas, where low digital literacy, poor internet connectivity, and poverty hamper widespread access to social media campaigns, undermining their efficiency.

A finding on how economically marginalized people and lower-caste women use social media and the impact of such usage on their attitude and behavior regarding Chhaupadi is still to be done (Pandey and Sharma 2024). Moreover, the influence of social media activism regarding policy change and online campaigns that influence policymakers and the study of how these campaigns result changes that implement the Chhaupadi ban, is required (Thapa 2022).

4 OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH PAPER

The main objective of this research paper is to explore how social media campaigns influence social behavior and contribute to challenging traditional norms surrounding menstruation and Chhaupadi practices in rural communities in the Far-Western Province of Nepal.

5 METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS OF THE RESEARCH PAPER

The research paper discusses the existing situation and practice of mensuration and utilization of social media for balancing the age-old mechanism of Chhaupadi in Nepal's Far Western Province. The research follows qualitative review-based research in which it completely relies on the secondary data from reviewed literature already published. The literature review can be classified broadly as follows:

- Research studies on Chhaupadi practice in Nepal by Acharya and Poudel (2018), Gartaula (2014) and Bhatta (2020) documenting the socio-cultural, health-related and psychological consequences of the practice.
- Social media and behavior change theories such as seminal works by Bandura (1986), Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) and Katz *et al* (1973), were used to situate the theoretical foundations of the study.
- Empirical studies on social media campaigns in rural Nepal on menstrual taboo and gender-related topics such as Joshi and Rai (2022), Shrestha (2020,2021), and Khadkaand Bhatta (2023) were analyzed to assess campaign impact and the reaction of the community.
- Digital access and inequality literature such as studies by Nepal and Pradhan (2022) and Pandey and Sharma (2024) was utilized in informing discourse on limitation of digital reach.

Through their synthesis, the review forms a subtle understanding of awareness patterns, the process of behavior change, campaign coverage and the oppositions that the Chhaupadi tradition has managed to rally.

6 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Social media can play a significant role in mitigating the practice of Chhaupadi, focusing on the Far-Western Province of Nepal, where the tradition remains pervasive. This section deals with the different codes, sub-codes, themes, concepts, perceptions, practices, and impacts collected by the review of previously published literature.

6.1 *Health and psychological consequences of chhaupadi*

Despite Nepalese government laws prohibiting Chhaupadi, the traditional practice continues to endanger women's physical and mental health and dignity (Acharya 2018). Despite being illegal in Nepal, Chhaupadi subjects' women to multiple health risks through their contact with dangerous weather elements and inadequate nutrition and endangers them through sexual violence (Gartaula 2014). The 2005 law, along with other government actions to criminalize Chhaupadi, failed to suppress the practice because it remains entrenched in rural areas due to cultural, social, and economic factors (Thapa and Bhatta 2022). Women remain susceptible to serious injuries and health problems when separated from society because of the harsh weather that prevails in isolated places. Malevolence such as depression, anxiety, together with feelings of shame and inferiority, frequently afflict women subjected to Chhaupadi, according to Ghimire and Rathi (2019). Research studies demonstrate how

Chhaupadi discriminates against women both socially and psychologically by perpetuating menstrual prejudice and gender discrimination (Bhatta 2020).

6.2 *Theoretical aspects of social and behavior change*

Social media impact analysis on behavioral modification would be most effectively evaluated through analysis using the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) and Social Cognitive Theory (SCT).

6.3 *Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT)*

According to Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1973) UGT theory explains that the public actively engages with media outlets in search to meet their needs to obtain information related to socialization, along with emotional well-being. This theory explores people response and campaign reception, which are based on social variables like class, caste, and demographic alongside age-group (Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch 1973).

6.4 *Social Cognitive Theory (SCT)*

Social Cognitive Theory originated from Albert Bandura's work in 1986 through the concept of learning by observation and the use of role models combined with reinforcement practices. With SCT, we can understand how social media campaigns transform behaviors because their content subjects people to exposed behaviors. According to Diffusion of Innovations Theory (Rogers 2003), societies follow specific patterns through which new practices and ideas spread throughout their territory.

7 THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN CHALLENGING CHHAUPADI IN FAR-WESTERN NEPAL

Through social media campaigns in Nepal, a growing number of people are now acting against gender-based problems, including the practice of Chhaupadi (Graham 2016). Studies show about online campaign success is affected by access to rural digital platforms, alongside a lack of digital literacy and cultural tradition resistance (Khadka 2020). Social media movements demonstrate their proficiency in connecting with a mass people people, including remote locals who can use this area to challenge harmful practices (Bista and Shrestha 2017).

According to Maity and Saha (2020), social media activism stands in for Chhaupadi abolishment and gender aspects have reflected on improved knowledge in sharing and changing the societal attitudes. According to Shrestha (2021), the enhancement of digital advocacy occurs because younger generations show greater familiarity with social media platforms. According to Bista and Bhattarai (2022), the dissemination of online content featuring Chhaupadi's negative consequences through video and textual posts has started to question the traditional acceptance of this practice. Women broadcast their Chhaupadi experiences through social media platforms, which are accountable for developing a united opinion that refuses this harmful tradition. Testimonies of suffering women are enabling the social acceptance of menstruation discussions and breaking the taboo regarding period talk (Rai and Sharma 2021).

8 BARRIERS TO ENDING CHHAUPADI IN THE FAR-WESTERN PROVINCE OF NEPAL

There are various obstacles exist in eliminating Chhaupadi in the Far-Western Province of Nepal. Geographically, a remote region contains wide poverty, lack of road facilities and

schools, which result in less literacy and culture-based traditions, and limitations of social media uses due to deprived internet connections are the primary barriers in the region (Sharma and Tiwari 2020). Rural women are deprived of smartphones and the internet facilities, resulting in their less engagement in social media campaigns. The social structure and gender inequalities in families, and the rooted beliefs that Chhaupadi represents cultural identity, sustain this practice (Chhetri 2020).

9 CHALLENGES IN USING SOCIAL MEDIA FOR BEHAVIOR CHANGE

Thapa (2017) found that digital literacy for women living in rural areas of Nepal was low and impacted the delivery and potential impact of social media campaigns. Supporting this view, Khadka (2020) found that the low penetration rate of internet services in rural communities undermined the ability of online campaigns to raise awareness on Chhaupadi. In addition, the evidence shows that community-based interventions could reinforce and complement social media efforts by addressing cultural issues at the local level. For instance, Sapkota *et al.* (2019) found those in rural areas where some access to social media did exist, offline education programs combining traditional forms of cultural expression with contemporary health messaging were more successful than social media approaches.

10 CONCLUSION

The research study about the social media campaigns and the active participation of rural women to know how social media movements can educate rural women about the negative consequences of Chhaupadi practice and influence their attitudes towards discarding such harmful practices. However, immense use of social media content and creating advocacy through these platforms has the possibility to lessen and change these harmful beliefs over time. The research highlights the relationship between women in social media engagement, Chhaupadi awareness, behavioral change, and cultural resistance, aiming to understand how these elements can work together to foster social change. The findings suggest that as social media campaigns are broaden it may raise awareness, access to social platform and smartphones leads to the successful campaigns resulting into the digital literacy and empowered voice against illegality of Chhaupadi, it may mitigate the practice.

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Mothers, madness, and memory: A feminist reading of intergenerational trauma in Sue Monk Kidd's *The Mermaid Chair*

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ABSTRACT: The present paper offers a feminist study of intergenerational trauma and madness in Sue Monk Kidd's *The Mermaid Chair* (2005), examining the narrative and symbolic aspects of female psychological suffering. It draws upon the works of Cathy Caruth, Julia Kristeva, and Judith Herman to analyse the psychological fragmentation and repression associated with traumatic memory, maternal grief, and religious guilt. This paper interprets the repressed trauma and emotional detachment present in the character of Jessie, and her mother Nelle's descent into madness, utilizing Caruth's theory of belatedness, Kristeva's theory of abjection, and Herman's recovery model. By using these theories, this study illustrates Jessie's journey from silence to empowerment, and Nelle's self-mortification as a form of resistance against patriarchal religious structures. The present paper provides a critique of the cultural, religious institutions, that marginalize women's suffering, and portrays madness as a result of historical silencing and a site to reclaim spirituality. Kidd's novel foregrounds the gendered transmission of trauma and the possibility of transformation through memory and self-expression. This paper thus contributes to feminist literary criticism by reinterpreting madness as a symbolic form of resistance and exploring healing as an act of narrative and maternal reclamation.

Keywords: Trauma, Memory, Madness, Abjection, Identity

1 INTRODUCTION

Trauma is not merely a psychological rupture but a haunting inheritance that resurfaces across generations, particularly through the lens of women's experiences. In both psychological and psychoanalytic discourse, it is viewed not only as a singular event but as ongoing struggle of the mind to process intense experiences. Caruth (1996) defines trauma as "the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena" (p. 4). She emphasizes the contradictory nature of trauma as both an unspeakable rupture and a compulsive, unconscious recurrence. Herman (1992) further emphasizes that traumatic experiences "overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection, and meaning" (p. 33), destabilizing individual identity and relational connections, particularly within familial structures. Central to trauma theory is the understanding of memory as fragmented and deferred. Freud's (1961) concept of "Nachträglichkeit" (deferred action) suggests that trauma is not always fully registered at the time of its occurrence but is often revisited later under different psychological conditions (p. 13). Expanding on this, Laub (1992) argues that "trauma survivors live not with memories of the past, but with an event that could not be fully known and is therefore not fully owned" (p. 57). It suggests that trauma disrupts the narrative coherence and subjectivity. The concept of madness is closely associated with trauma and memory, particularly in

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relation to women. Throughout history, madness has been associated with gender and pathological condition, serving as a culturally accepted response to female resistance or nonconformity. Foucault (1988) traces the evolution of madness from a metaphysical affliction to a medical condition, noting that "madness was confined not because it was illness but because it was non-reason" (p. 38), a challenge to the rational order of society. Feminist theorists like Showalter (1987) have redefined the portrayal of female madness as symbolic acts of defiance. She argues, "the madwoman is not only a victim but also a figure of resistance" (p. 4), challenging patriarchal norms that suppress female agency, emotion, and desire.

Sue Monk Kidd is a contemporary Southern American author, known for her exploration of women's inner lives, especially their relationships with their mothers, their bodies, and the divine. Kidd, in *The Mermaid Chair* (2005), weaves female trauma, memory, madness, and healing through the overlapping experiences of the protagonist Jessie, and her mother, constructing an intensely personal narrative. The novel set on the Egret Island explores the psychological breakdown of Jessie's mother, Nelle, who is struggling between her suppressed grief and her religious duties. Jessie is a middle-aged woman who returns to Egret island after finding out that her mother has committed an act of self-harm. This act of self-harm is rooted in the strong religious beliefs of Nelle. After the return of Jessie to the island, she not only confronts her past but also her identity. The island transforms into a psychological landscape where Jessie is forced to confront her deeply buried trauma regarding the death of her father, the mental instability of her mother, and her own suppressed emotions. A comparable portrayal of inherited trauma and maternal heritage can be seen in Morrison's *Beloved*, where Sethe's struggle reflects generational wounds and the complexities of mother-daughter relationship (Morrison 2004, p. 251, 324). Additionally, Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* highlights the universal aspects of female psychological distress by providing a modernist perspective on madness, gendered silence, and internalized grief (Woolf 2005, p. 69-72). Through this analysis, the present paper reflects on how madness can be a consequence of trauma passed down through generations which are deeply rooted in gendered repression. It delves into the themes of psychological agony, familial silence, and religious shame, emphasizing the constant suffering of women and the importance of narrative and spirituality in the journey of healing.

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

(1) To examine how trauma is represented in *The Mermaid Chair* among generations through a feminist viewpoint, and reflect on how it is inherited, remembered, and experienced across maternal relationships.
(2) To examine the narrative and symbolic functions of female madness as a form of psychological suffering and resistance.
(3) To enhance feminist literary criticism by redefining madness not as deviance but as a gendered response to trauma, asserting the significance of narrative and spiritual expression in the healing process.
(4) To study the dynamics between maternal grief, spiritual alienation, and identity formation within Southern American women's literature.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative research method based on feminist literary criticism and trauma theory, to examine how intergenerational trauma, madness, and memory are represented in Kidd's *The Mermaid Chair*. The study focuses on close textual analysis, examining the

narrative, character development, symbolism, and imagery to portray the psychological struggles and spiritual conflicts in the novel. This analysis is supported by a multidisciplinary theoretical framework that includes trauma theory, psychoanalysis, and feminist thought. Cathy Caruth's trauma theory helps us understand the fragmented sense of time and emotional latency in the psychological experience of the characters, while Judith Herman's three-stage model of trauma recovery—safety, remembrance, and mourning—provides a structure for understanding the healing process depicted in the narrative. Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection allows us to interpret Nelle's acts of self-harm and spiritual despair as responses to theological repression and patriarchal control. The study also draws upon Freud's concept of deferred action and Elaine Showalter's feminist insights on female madness to place of women's psychological suffering in a historical and political context. Aligned with feminist literary criticism, this study examines the gendered dimensions of mental illness, religious guilt, and maternal silence, affect women's experiences. The study views madness and trauma as culturally inscribed instead of seeing them as purely pathological. The study incorporates insights from psychology, religion, and cultural studies to better understand how female trauma and spirituality intersect in the novel.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 *Madness and maternal grief*

Nelle's descent into madness is closely linked to the death of her husband, a loss for which she bears a spiritual responsibility. Her trauma becomes an intolerable psychic burden that cannot be integrated into the symbolic structure of her Catholic beliefs. Instead, it festers as unexpressed guilt and reveals itself through increasingly erratic behavior, religious delusions, and acts of self-mortification. In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva articulates the notion of "abjection" as the psychological process by which the self, defines itself through exclusion, especially of what is repressed, unclean, or is disturbing to the symbolic order. Kristeva emphasizes that the abject is not just what disgusts but also what disrupts identity, system, and order, "abjection preserves what existed in the archaism of pre-objectal relationship" (Kristeva 1982, p. 10). Nelle's body becomes a site of abjection as she harms her own hand by mutilating her finger as a form of spiritual atonement, a grotesque effort in to externalize and eliminate the internalized shame she struggles to express. This act positions the sacrifice of Nelle as an extreme yet deeply personal articulation of belief by challenging the perception of female religious disobedience as inherently passive. Kidd states the significance of this act with the declaration, "She'd offered up her finger. To God" (p. 5). This emotional and visceral moment not only propels Jessie forward on her quest of self-discovery but also serves as a broader commentary on the extent to which women assert their presence and agency within the traditions that have historically marginalised them. especially when faced with oppressive faiths. She becomes what Kristeva refers to as a "stranger to herself", unclassifiable, threatening, and disruptive to societal norms. Her madness challenges the patriarchal structures embedded in the religious institutions on Egret Island, where the sacred is defined by male-centered divinity and penance. Thus, Nelle's spiritual crisis is not only psychological but also theological; she personifies the "abject feminine", one who cannot be incorporated into the moral structure and must be silenced, institutionalized, or pathologized. The church becomes an emblem of this repression as it offers no solace, only judgment. Her mystical experiences are dismissed as hysteria instead of being recognised as a woman's autonomous spiritual experience, reflecting the historical merging of female mysticism and madness. Moreover, Nelle's abjection influences her relationship with her daughter Jessie, who both fears and internalizes her mother's instability. According to Kristeva (1982), the maternal bond is where abjection first occurs, as the child must reject the mother to establish individual identity (p. 13). Jessie's return to Egret Island forces her to confront Nelle's physical

presence and also the unprocessed trauma affecting her own psyche. Nelle functions as a reflection of Jessie's unconscious fears and the buried grief. By positioning Nelle as an abject figure, Kidd critiques how society tends to dismiss women's trauma-induced madness as irrational or deviant. Instead, the novel suggests that such madness arises from deep spiritual and emotional disruption, amplified by patriarchal and religious constraints.

4.2 *Repressed memory and trauma*

Nelle represents the overt madness of a woman broken by guilt and religious repression, while her daughter Jessie embodies a quieter, more insidious form of trauma, characterized by repression, disconnection, and a gradual disintegration of identity. Caruth (1996) posits that trauma is defined by its belatedness and resistance to narrative, "To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event" (p. 4). Jessie's emotional detachment and fragmented memories reflect this possession by a past that remains unremembered. Her return to Egret Island becomes the catalyst for her psychological awakening, wherein buried emotions rise to the surface, " ... my being on the island was about more than taking care of Mother; it was about the disquiet I'd felt all winter. It was about me ... " (p. 146). It is not simply the event itself that causes trauma, but the delayed return of the event in fragmented, haunting ways. Jessie is initially unaware of the depth of her own trauma but begins to uncover it as she faces the psychological remnants of her childhood and the ambiguous death of her father. The trauma that Jessie inherits remains unspoken and is absorbed. Jessie lacks the language and emotional skills to understand what occurred, being raised in the shadow of a mother who suffered a psychological breakdown after the death of her husband. Her memories of the event are vague, fragmented, and often emotionally detached. This is typical of what Caruth (1996) refers to as "traumatic latency", where the mind is unable to fully process the traumatic event until it resurfaces later in life (p. 17).

4.3 *Spiritual rebirth and healing*

Jessie's return to Egret Island, prompted by Nelle's renewed instability, acts as a catalyst for this resurfacing. The physical setting of the island and the symbolic space of the monastery, provokes the emergence of the repressed memories and unresolved grief. Her internal struggle is revealed through her fragmented thoughts, her creative paralysis, and the feeling of emotional numbness in her marriage (Kidd 2015, p. 85-88). Herman (1992) has outlined three stages of healing; safety, remembrance, and mourning. Jessie's journey aligns with this framework, being initially isolated and emotionally detached, she gradually confronts her past and reclaims her voice. Herman (1992) writes, "The core experiences of psychological trauma are disempowerment and disconnection from others," emphasizing that recovery requires empowerment and renewed connections (p. 133). This change is demonstrated in Jessie's transformation, from silently enduring trauma to actively creating meaning. The turning point in Jessie's healing journey occurs when she not only confronts her mother's past but also her own desires, anger, and guilt. She acknowledges her longing for autonomy and identifies the emotional inheritance that has influenced her understanding of love, grief, and self-worth. The trauma that Jessie inherits is not just personal but is tied to her family history and gender. Her psychological struggles arise from a long history of maternal suffering that the patriarchal systems have long silenced, spiritualized, or pathologized. Jessie presents a powerful reflection on the way trauma operates within families, resulting in the distortion of memory and desire, and the way healing requires confrontation of truth, and also the need for rewriting the narrative. Jessie's healing is portrayed as a restoration of her identity, rather than as an ultimate resolution or a return to normalcy. Her journey focuses on reclaiming her narrative, where she gives expression to her repressed memories, emotions, and the feminine spirituality that has been long suppressed by societal structures. Jessie does not emerge as a completely healed individual, instead, she transforms into an individual who

has discovered how to engage with her pain differently, rather than viewing it as a limitation. On the other hand, Nelle's journey of healing is not as straightforward as Jessie's as it develops through acts of spiritual resistance and physical expressions of grief. Her self-mutilation which was initially perceived as madness, emerges as a desperate attempt to express an inner suffering influenced by her unresolved guilt and spiritual repression. While As the island works as a space for Jessie to reclaim her narrative, for Nelle it turns into a vessel of spiritual reflection. When Nelle finally acknowledges her suffering as both sacred and silenced, she reclaims a fragment of agency, and asserts a feminine spirituality resisting the institutional erasure, aligned with Herman's (1992) assertion that healing from trauma requires both relational and symbolic reconnection, "recovery can take place only within the context of relationships; it cannot occur in isolation" (p. 133). This fragmented journey of Nelle suggests that healing, for women burdened by generational trauma and spiritual alienation, is not about withdrawal of pain but about reconstructing the self within that pain. The novel accommodates the complexity of surviving as a woman shaped by inherited grief, spiritual conflict, and unfulfilled desires.

5 CONCLUSION

Kidd's *The Mermaid Chair* presents a multi-layered narrative that explores the complexities of female trauma, the transmission of memory across generations, and the pursuit for both mental and spiritual completeness. Through the interconnected paths of Jessie and Nelle, the novel uncovers the unspoken struggles of grief, the overlooked facets of motherhood, and the gender-specific issues related to mental illness. Kidd situates mental illness within a larger context of patriarchal oppression, religious guilt, and cultural silence, in place of portraying it as an isolated or individual experience. Utilizing the abjection theory of Kristeva, the psychological collapse of Nelle is interpreted as a radical reaction to the deeply rooted spiritual trauma and the neglect of women's suffering by society. Caruth's (2016) theory of unassimilated trauma helps in understanding how the emotional numbness and the memory fragmentation of Jessie are a result of an unspoken past that demands acknowledgement. Meanwhile, Herman's (2015) trauma model outlines the way Jessie gradually reclaims her voice, redefines her past, and reintegrates into the world with a heightened sense of awareness. Through these perspectives, the paper examines how Kidd's fiction reclaims women's madness and memory as sites of resistance and restoration in the face of patriarchal erasure. Healing does not eliminate the past but instead weaves it to the present. The unspoken grief of Jessie around her father's death, the trauma from her mother's madness, and the years she spent suppressing her emotions, all of these combine to form a narrative written by herself. Ultimately, it shows that both narrative and spirituality can serve as forms of feminist resistance. Jessie explores her maternal lineage, redefines her spirituality, and eventually transitions from a state of silence to self-expression.

The analysis of Kidd's novel adds considerable literary value to the discourse surrounding trauma and mental health through its intricate portrayal of memory, madness, and healing. It adds to the feminist literary tradition by foregrounding the importance of memory, maternal bonds, and spiritual resistance in order to form the female identity. The present study has demonstrated how both recognition and rethinking of the way narratives about madness, motherhood, and mental health are conveyed in literature. It analyzed madness as a form of resistance, trauma as a shared legacy, and healing as a feminist act of narrative and spiritual reclamation. The theories of Caruth, Kristeva, and Herman, allow a deeper understanding of Jessie and Nelle's narratives, that trauma is not merely an individual affliction but a silence that is culturally embedded. The present paper visions a feminine recovery grounded in recollection instead of forgetting by reconstructing the absent, fragmented, and silenced aspects of female identity.

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The politics of representation: Pattachitrakatha, visual culture and nationalism construction of identity of Indian women

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ABSTRACT: This paper evaluates Pattachitrakatha, a traditional cloth-based art narrative from Bengal, as a folk media genre, constructing the identity of Indian women. Pattachitra originated over 2,500 years ago, combining visual storytelling with music and oral traditions, evolving through socio-cultural changes, globalization, and technological advancements. This paper looks into the inner and the outer spaces, the physical spaces and the psychic spaces of Indian women and how it is transformed and reconstructed by the choices of time through Pattachitrakatha, specifically during the nationalist movement. Moreover, the paper deals with the politics of feminising the bodies within the collective images of Indian women. The paper also studies the paradox of seeing an Indian woman and being an Indian woman in Indian folk-art form since and after the nationalist period, and tries to look critically into the transformation of the imaging and idealisation of Indian Women since visual text is a subtler signifier of sensibility.

Keywords: Pattachitrakatha, Folk art, Gendered Body, Identity Politics, Nationalism

1 INTRODUCTION

We live in an image-based culture, which considerably makes it a visual age. Images shape the international events and our understanding of them. Photographs, cinema and television psychologically and culturally influence how we view and approach life. The dynamics of visual politics reach in all directions and sometimes beyond traditional media outlets, and it proves that the omnipresence of images is political and changes fundamentally how we live and interact in today's world. As Christopher Prendergast insists, 'Everything is representable' (Prendergast,2000: 1), our understanding and experience of the world can only be second-hand, mediated through the systems of representation. The issue of representation is contested in this paper with the feminist questions of validity and significance by interrogating the ideologically loaded structures of the images of women in Pattachitrakatha.

Pauta Chitra or Patta Chitra is a general term used for traditional, cloth-based painting and storytelling media genre practised in the eastern Indian states of Bengal, Odisha and in parts of Bangladesh. Pattachitrakatha is an art narrative or sequential folk narrative form of Bengal, originally serving as a visual device displayed during the performance of a song or Pata Sangeet. Patua artists enact the performances as they unfurl the painting scroll of

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Pattachitra by singing the tales which are painted. As times changed, Patachitrakatha, as a genre of mass media and cultural communication, adopted global transformations with the expansion of the knowledge system, global outreach and technical support. Automatically, the transformation came into the intangible sector of its small tradition as folk media. The Pattachitra tales, with the help of intertextual connections of global concepts, themes, news and popular narratives, changed their mode and grew as new media. For the last twenty years, modern transformations have come into Patachitrakatha and story-songs within its representation of the 2500-year-old tradition in modern new Pop Media.

There are two forms of depiction: one is aesthetic depiction, as conveyed by the German term *darstellen*, which represents or portrays the subject; the second is political depiction, conveyed by the term *vertreten*. If one form is portrait, another is proxy. The relationship between the represented discourse of Patta and the method of depiction always involves a specific system of signification. Every sign and image in any depiction is programmed with a linguistic or coded iconic or non-coded iconic message. Thus, a Pattachitra text, which is performed multiple times, while painting, while narrating, while representing and while receiving, can be considered both as performance and folk media texts. In this tradition, the messages around are discursive constructions which are always based on cultural knowledge and belief systems about femininity. Pattachitras, for a long time, remained ritual-centric and connected the communities with their ideological representation of women. The diversity of women's representation and the range of accounts we can see in pattachitrakatha, with the sheer number of goddesses and mythical women, culturally major or minor, varied and based on the distinctive attributes and identities of them, till the colonial period. Now, as historians and anthropologists have denoted by refurbishing the meaning of 'myth' and 'ritual', both take significant roles in the legitimization, definition and maintenance of community life and specifically the identity of women. A narrative tradition like Pattachitrakatha iconizes women through ages, ranging from big tradition mother goddess, mythical women, small tradition local goddesses, witches, ghosts of women, urban courtesan, freedom fighters, domestic violence survivor, heroines from popular culture, political leaders, and twenty first century modern women to self-reflections by new generation women artists. The Sati (the one-man woman), Saddhwi (the saint), Rani (the queen), Kaulta (who destroys the honour of the family), Nauti (dancing girl), Veshya (prostitute), Dayen (witch), Devi (goddess), Badhu, Matrika (mother), Vortrika (who waits for her partner), all remained central characters in Pattachitras for years. Was it representation only? Or, the history of women in India? Detextualising the Pattachitra paintings definitely points out the classificatory category of classical and folk-art history and the role of women in India. Pattachitra as a media genre communicated religion by generating oral myths and local rituals by presenting a synthesis of physical and metaphysical experience for the receptors through the political representation of women.

Partha Chatterjee(1993) in his book "The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories" looks critically at the creative and the powerful results of the nationalist imagination and states, "Applying the inner/outer distinction to the matter of concrete day-to-day living separates the social special space into *ghar* and *bahir*, the home and the world. The world is external, the domain of the material; the home represents one's inner spiritual self, one's true identity. The world is a treacherous terrain of the pursuit of material interests, where practical considerations reign supreme. It is also typically a male domain. The home, in its essence, must remain unaffected by the profane activities of the material world, and woman is its representation. And, so one gets an identification of the social roles by gender to correspond with the separation of the social space into *ghar* and *bahir*".

Women, Gender or body: what is represented in Pattachitrakatha: The Significance of the Study and Research Gap

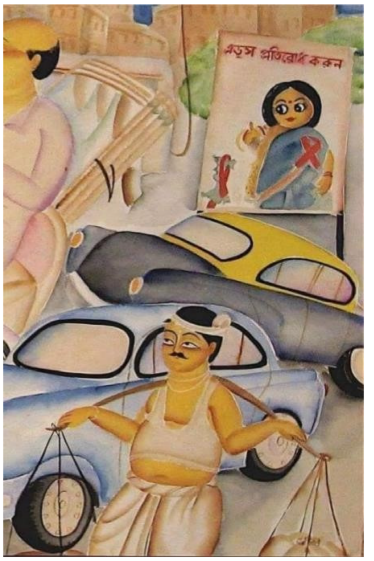


Figure 1. Patua. K. [*Untitled Pattachitra depicting an urban scene with Buladi, an AIDS awareness poster*] [Painting].

The Government of West Bengal created a mascot woman, Bula di, a cheery stuffed doll woman, with a red cross symbol on her saree in 2006 on behalf of the West Bengal State Aids Prevention and Control Society. The Pattachitra of Kalam Patua represents Bula di within a roadside government advertisement banner in Kolkata. The Pattachitra represents the time when Bula di, the sexually progressive, sexually educated, new woman, talked of using sexual protection to ensure women's safety in sexuality.

Oakley (1972) introduced the concept of gender into sociology in her book, "Sex, Gender and Society", stating that gender is a cultural issue that makes social classification of men and women as masculine and feminine. Now, gender is a multi-disciplinary area of our time. Art media always have the ability to undergo changes, which makes things possible for a great variety of different art forms to exist, for connecting and communicating with society in a better way, and for illuminating and constructing a belief system. In his book 'Ways of Seeing', Berger (1972) claimed that the body is one of the most important points about gender in art. The basic difference between sexual regime and sexed regime, sex and gender, the biological and cultural identity in Indian art and Pattachitrakatha art media needs constant and consistent engagement with the visual and textual material and praxis. The tradition is deeply sensitive and conscious of gender and sexuality. There are two technical processes to sexualize an art media production –one is engendering and the other is gazing. Engendering explains how models of masculinity and femininity, their idealized behaviours, and societal and ideological apparatus can be used to offer an alternate perspective to various source materials. The term 'male gaze', coined by Laura Mulvey (1975), actually signifies the fascination set by the pre-existing patriarchal patterns of cultural psychology about how to look at the sexed body or gendered body. Every single art medium, when it represents women, reveals, reflects, and plays the social interpretations of sexual difference, controlling the images and spectacles by functioning as a political weapon of the unconscious patriarchy. Pattachitra art media is no exception. It poses questions about the ways the folk unconscious belief system structures the ways of seeing things and pleasure. Seema Bawa (2013) writes in the part Historiography of Gender and Art in Ancient India, of her book 'Gods, Men and Women: Gender and Sexuality in Early Indian Art' that the writings on

representation of masculine and feminine figures are deeply gendered and informed by the ideological frameworks within which the art was viewed. This paper, through a multi-disciplinary approach, critically examines the Indian feminine in Pattachitrakatha with scepticism and even hostility. Any reading of Pattachitrakatha art media that sees the absolute absence of any gender issues should be subjected to critical interrogation.

The gendered aspect of the figure in art is also very ideological. We see the work of art as a relationship between an object and all the ways it has been perceived through history. The women figure in Pattachitra narratives are the objects represented with the aesthetic ideology of the artists. Contextual events determine the consumption of past, present and future history by the art form. So, it is also important to note how the contextual history of Bengal is narrated through the depiction of women and how the depiction of women narrates the history of the transformation of ideologies and concepts around women.

The research aims to find whether the big tradition creates any Indian feminine stereotype. If it already did, why did we need the folk identity to stand for us when the nationalist movement started? The analytical study of the transformation of cultural semiotics of Pattachitra in terms of the depiction of women, gender roles through the sexed images of bodies and dealt with identity politics also promises the future meaning-making system of the Indian cultural industry about women.

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The phenomenological understanding of the body is as deeply socialized as politicalized within the frame of Pattachitra art media texts. The paper urges to re-understand and rethink the ways in which we make sense of the reality of the gendered bodies represented in the genre. Are the female bodies really gendered in Pattachitra texts? How does the politics of identity take over the process of the representation of women? Why are there always so many women in Pattachitra texts? And, how did the Pattachitrakatha genre contribute to the construction of the identity of Indian women during the nationalist movement, and how politically did its popularity contribute to the birth of Indianness?

3 METHODOLOGY

The research design includes critical visual discourse analysis and visual methodologies, both in a qualitative approach to analyse the data. The cultural politics, gender studies, post-colonial studies and media studies worked together to set the critical analysis of the Pattachitra samples. A Historiography has been done on the Pattachitra texts.

Depiction of women in Indian visual art and the significance of body: **Research Problem**

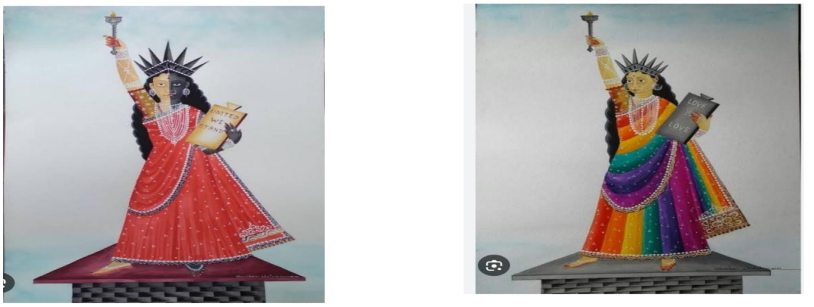


Figure 2. Statue of liberty, LGBTQ movement, Pop Art Pattachitra, Painter unknown.

A persistent theme in the artistic history of India is the sensuous feminine body or a biologically female figure, in an eye-catching, three-dimensional way, engaging the issues of spectatorship, agency and representation. To set the tone and accentuate the questions which are addressed in this research, some theoretical scholarship was needed in the area of art media history, but has long been avoided, and moreover, failed to deconstruct the subject of women in Indian art. Is it only the representation of the female body or Indian femininity? Identifying Indian women and Indian femininity always needs a critical review since it needs to locate the hierarchical position, nationalism, and aesthetic politics of the woman represented. The portrayal of women in art has been revisited again and again as a much-debated issue. The depiction of women is the most difficult and easiest task since it is imagistic. Indian paintings, ranging from cave paintings to modern Indian art, from ancient to pre- and post-colonial times, categorized into different genres, show the representation of women. In the different categories of the big tradition Indian paintings, from Bhimbetaka cave paintings from 33000 years ago, Fresco and murals from Ajanta, Buddhist and Jain manuscript tradition, Mughal miniature paintings, Rajasthani Painting, Pahari school of Painting, Raja Ravi Varma prototype, Amrita Shergil and Sunayani Devi's women centric self-narratives, Bengal School of Art up to the pre-colonial period, and even in the post-colonial age in the works of artists like M.F. Hussein, F.N Souza, Akbar Padamsee, depiction of women is the most common phenomena in Indian art. In the Mughal paintings, women were significantly and legitimately present in the narratives of festivity, celebration and ruling under the Parsi influence. Hereafter comes the Raj influence, and nationalist painting was born. If the art of *Bhadralok* or the upper gentleman class, upper caste has been through all these, Pattachitrakatha has always been the *other* or the counterpart of the live art streaming of history of the country, incorporating the women's centrism in Indian art, in a popular way.

Women's bodies, in India, from the beginning of the century, have been imagined as an ideal, carefully constructed form of ideology and ethics. We consider the period after the Mughal reign in India as the colonial period, and thereafter comes the Nationalist period. Ravi Verma's women have been a divine feminine stereotype in the colonial period, whereas in the nationalist period, women's bodies were portrayed differently. Indian women's personal aspirations, individuality, and fashion were all subsumed into the larger consideration for the country. It was the time when the archetypal Bharat Mata was painted in mainstream art by Abanindranath Tagore in 1905. The big tradition of Indian classical cultural knowledge propagates concepts of Indian women through the figures depicted in classical art and paintings. The nationwide image frame of women's identity under the influence of Gandhi, Sarojini Naidu and Madam Cama, focused on the ennobling qualities of motherhood, became the intellectual resource of the pre-independence practice of painting in Bengal. The significant result of the anti-colonial politics in high Indian art is Abanindranath Tagore's (1905) Bharat Mata. The saffron coloured Sanatani divine woman spoke enough of the divine Indian woman. The mother who holds the book, the sheaves of paddy, the rudraksh garland and a piece of white cloth, also ensured enough Indian femininity but may not be the common Indian femininity. Tagore-Nandalal dyad created a space for the 'other Indian women' in Indian art media as the counter identity, which powerfully communicated against colonialism and its influence on mainstream high Indian art, but the Indian nationalist art was formed with Jamini Roy and his use of Pattachitra. Was it in search of the common? Why did we need the agency of the mass artists and the mass art media? And how did Pattachitra play the powerful role in this?

Birth of nationalist art of India with Pattachitrakatha: Role of Jamini Roy and women's representation: Data analysis




Figure 3. Roy, J. *Mother and Child* [Painting]. *Nandalal-Yashoda.* [Painting].

Gurusaday Dutta, the father of the Indian Bratachari (folk sports) movement, challenged the pan Indian nationalism as it was the product of upper-class Brahmanical culture, outside the everyday history of rural India. Tagore also protested with the concept of identity politics against mainstream Indian art as well as oriental art. Ratnabali Chatterjee questions that when the modern Indian artist suddenly found himself catapulted into the world market as a producer, he had only two options open to him: either to acknowledge the entire Western tradition of 'great art' as his own, or to identify with nationalist art (Chatterjee, 1987). Now, how did in this nationalist art, Pattachitra take a powerful role?

Partha Mitter (2007), in his book *The Triumph of Modernism, India's artists and the avant-garde 1922-1947*, wrote that Jamini Roy has been called the father of the folk renaissance in Indian art, who created an alternative vision of Indian identity of Indian art. He raised the question about where the nation should centre, on the urban metropolis or in the country-side, within the art form of the marginalized people of the country or in the deliberate and systematic upper-class intelligentsia. He writes that we knew that from the 1920s, the definition of nationhood started by shifting the centralizing of the identity issue in art from the Pan Indian to the local and the folk. Why did Jamini Roy's art remain so important to the context of this research? Because critics found his art productions to be the most radical expression of the local identity in opposition to the Pan Indian historicism of the Bengal school (Mitter, 2007). Mitter (2007) also suggests that through the folk idiom, Jamini Roy sought to restore the collective function of art and thereby disavow artistic individualism and what Walter Benjamin calls the 'aura' of a work of art, the hallmarks of colonial art. In the process, he radically recast 'indigenism', the nationalist paradigm. Roy's primitivism, however, went beyond indigenism in an increasingly global era. Roy used the notion of the village community as a weapon of the resistance to colonial rule. The Pattachitra texts of Kalighat paintings generated excitement. In the mid-1920s, he started his epic journey to the Bengali countryside to collect Pattachitras and to learn the pattern from the folk painters. He was convinced that the form of Bengal's own Pattachitra pattern came from nowhere but from the very local Patua artists, and it was not influenced by any other invaders' culture. In the 1920s, Roy showed all his Pattachitras in an exhibition organized by Alfred Henry Watson, the English editor of the newspaper *Statesman.* This exhibition, held at the Indian Society of Oriental Art on 9th July 1930, marked a historical point when Jamini Roy set the identity of Indianness of the National folk art, giving us the first glimpse of Roy's conscious initiative to identify with the folk painters. He had worked with Patuas and also put finishing touches on the Pattachitras. Roy, in 1931, was politically ready to share his artistic ideology with the public as he also shared the Bengal school's concern with the artistic authenticity and the exhibition which was inaugurated by famous American art historian Stella Karrischat at his modest residence in North Calcutta was never less than a political manifesto of the time of Nationalist movement. In the construction of the anticolonial utopia

through Indian art and crafts, Jamini Roy used a formalist pictorial language of Pattachitra, which became iconic. The formal simplicity of this prehistoric art media genre, which possessed an honest, unselfconscious, everyday language, captured the essential form of Roy's paintings, without imitation. In discussing Jamini Roy's debt to the Pattachitrakatha, Rudi Von Leyden, (Von Leyden, 1947) explained that Roy set Pattachitra as an Indian art language by an extreme simplification and concentration on essentials. Every object in a Pattachitra achieved the significance of a symbol, easily recognizable, understandable, and, because almost unchanging, universally valid.

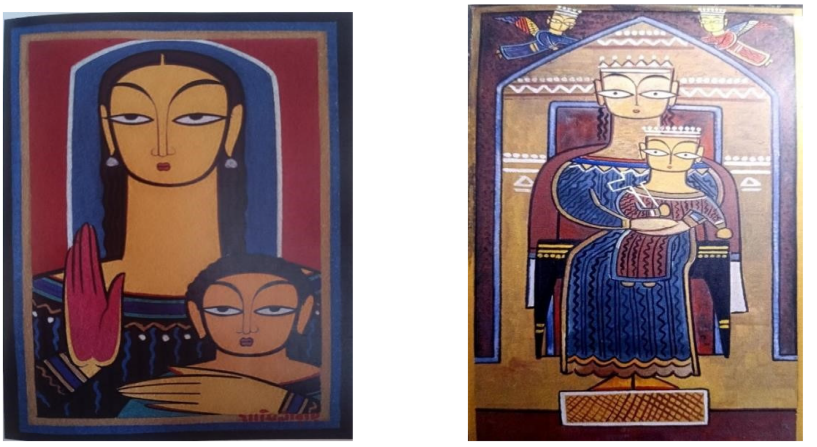


Figure 4. Roy, J. *Madonna and Child* [Painting].

So, Roy was also being impactful on the Europeans with the folk-art form, and it turned into a political stunt. It was a time when Pattachitra folk media, like the mainstream art practices, were in a continuous process of protecting the national identity of Indianness. From the time of Jamini Roy, there appeared a hybrid, nationalist and modern form of Pattachitras which opposed the social dialogue Patuas have been practising. He represented Mother Mary with Jesus on her lap, which from the audience's end could be correlated with Nandalala and Jashoda from Indian mythology. Pattachitra's political representation of women moved from quasi divine mythical women to higher-class Bibis and then to the general and folk women, and at the end, the women of Western identities in our cultural perspective.

4 CONCLUSION

> "The Indian woman is looked upon in turn with idealization, desire and alarm".
> Lannoy (1941).

The argument in this paper, therefore, relates the idea of Indian women within the frames of Pattachitrakatha with the idea of gender for feminising the body and setting the cultural ideology. As Rancière (2004) considers that politics indeed has its aesthetics, and aesthetics has its politics, but there is no formula for an appropriate correlation. And images work gradually across time and space, while signifying the politics of gender, in two ways generally: as performance and as representation. Chatterjee (1993), in the chapter 'The Nation and Its Women' in his book "The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories" writes, "In the world imitation of and adaptation to western norms was necessity; at home, they were tantamount to annihilation of one's very identity. Once we match the

new meaning of the home/ world dichotomy with the identification of social roles by gender, we get the ideological framework within which nationalism answered the women's question".

Kumkum Roy says, "The colonizers attempted to view the entire colonized civilization as feminine" (Roy ed. 1999:2). Interestingly, Beverly Nichols visited Jamini Roy's studio and concluded that Roy was the only modern Indian artist of consequence, "the perennial source of his inspiration is the folk art of Bengal, which is strong and gay and masculine." Pattachitrakatha, both as performance and folk media texts, needs newer theoretical frameworks as well as methods to analyse its political role in the nationalist movement for setting the Indianness of women. In Pattachitrakatha art media, the socio-cultural-political ideology matters the most in terms of representing women as an important part of art production. The texts, as Williams (1987) argues, are the "condensation of abstract ideology into representative form," combined with the "self-articulate vividness" of its images, which is true in this case. "The notion of 'representation' is one of the founding principles of media education. The media do not offer us a transparent 'window' on the world, but a mediated version of the world. They don't present reality, they re-present it" (Buckingham, 2003). Media can persuade anyone to do something or to think a certain way. Media construct versions of reality. Even the reality that media contains power with its own ideological and value messages is also created by media itself by setting the concept that 'they' can exercise power in the form of persuasion on 'us'. Pattachitra represents us to us in a folk realist way, and the conscious journey started in the nationalist period.

Spivak (1986) writes in "Imperialism and Sexual Difference" that feminist criticism can be a force in changing the discipline. It must recognize that it is complicitous with the institution within which it seeks its space. Within the discipline of Indian visual culture, the feminist and political understanding of Pattachitrakatha folk art media and the Indianness of the representation of women in it remains critically essential. This slow and small labour, as Spivak (1986) says, may turn the opposition into critique.

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Tess of the D'Urbervilles: A tragic symbol of social injustice and gender inequality

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ABSTRACT: This study examines the *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* by the writer Thomas Hardy as a potent indictment of sexism and inequality in the era of Victorian England. Tess DurbeyField heartbreaking life serves as an model of how Hardy draws awareness to the overbearing class structure of British culture as well as the poor management of women. Tess's melancholy stems from structural inequities caused by ethical sexual behavior, gendered opportunity and societal advantages in accumulation to her personal suffering. The book revelations the moral hypocrisy of society and reveals the inefficiency of women, only in regards to their own well-being and destiny. By examining momentous textual minutes, this study determines how Tess transmutes a symbolic character an innocent victim whose death highpoints the pressing need for social change and females' equality. Because of Hardy's portrayal of Tess, supporters are able to reconsider their suppositions about social comportment and develop empathy for individuals who are crushed under the burden of social denigration.

Keywords: Social injustice, Gender inequality, Feminist critique, Female oppression, Moral double standard

1 INTRODUCTION

Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* is considered one of the most persuasive and heartbreaking novels of the Victorian era. The book reconnoiters the complex association between gender, morality, and social perpendicular via the tragic story of Tess Durbeyfield, a young woman from a unassuming background, set against the environment of rural England in the final decades of the nineteenth century. [1] In addition to its representative representation of the Victorian age, Hardy's literature is commended for its critical investigation of the rigid honorable codes and societal organizations that ruled other people's lives, predominantly those of women. A classic of Victorian nonfiction, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* experiments fashionable notions of goodness, purity, and reasonableness while delivering a authoritative critique of the social and inequitable practices surrounded in the period's cultural fabric. The permanent significance of Tess's story remains to spark consultations on the ways in which class, gender, and morality are entangled in literature and society [2].

The novel comprehensively reconnoiters topics of class and gender discrimination, as Tess's life is shaped and eventually destroyed by Victorian England's rigid class classification and mannish ideals. Hardy calls attention to the harsh authenticities that women, specifically

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those from poorer socioeconomic backgrounds, face: moral binary standards and a lack of controller over their own lives. The novel revelations the widespread discriminations of the time by denouncing the domineering social structure that unjustly discipline and humiliate woman through Tess's traumatic experiences. [3]

Analyzing Tess as a tragic figure is crucial because her particular suffering mirrors the more significant organizational issues of sex inequality and social discrimination that were pervasive in Victorian society. According to Tess's understandings, people agonize much from rigid pyramids and social norms, specifically women who are immobilized under male-controlled and class-based institutions. [4] Focusing on Tess's tragedy elasticities readers insight into the calamitous impact of these disagreements and challenges them to unsympathetically examine the moral ideologies and social conventions that sustain such discrepancies. Thus, Tess's story is a commanding critique of an unjust society that surpasses human grief. Tess as a tragic character must be scrutinized in order to see how Hardy uses her individual grief to assessment more significant discriminations. [5] Tess is a shining example of the connection of gender and class judgment; rather than being the result of any characteristic flaws, her suffering is caused by an atmosphere that rejects her autonomy, kindheartedness, and dignity. Beyond personal tragedy, her story serves as a influential critique of Victorian society and a call for change and consideration. Even more than a century after its preliminary publication, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* endures to evoke strong emotions in present-day readers due to its steadfast portrayal of injustices and inequality. [6]

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To examine, using Tess Durbeyfield understandings, how Thomas Hardy depicts social unfairness in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*.
- To examine how gender injustice and macho norms affect Tess's life and statements..
- To look into how Tess might be used as a metaphor for the greater oppression of women and the lowest classes in society.
- To analyze how Victorian conceptions of gender and class are morally and socially disparaging throughout the novel.
- To evaluate Tess's tragedy's applicability in light of current debates over gender equality and social fairness.

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* has been scrutinized extensively due to its understanding examination of Victorian England's commercial standing and gender protagonists. Many scholars highpoint how Hardy represents socioeconomic status as a expectable force that regulates Tess's opportunities, limits her, and regulates her fate. Tess's lower-class childhood and tenuous claim to noble heritage exacerbate her defenselessness within a rigid class structure, permitting to critics like Barbara Hardy (1970). Similar to this, Elizabeth Ermarth (1992) highlights how Hardy unprotected the severe class peculiarities that degrade people additional on the basis of their situation and place of birth than their ability to merit.

Feminist understandings that highlight Tess's persecution under patriarchal norms and her compound use of agency have greatly value-added our understanding of the book. Elaine Showalter (1991) argues that Tess is a categorize of the female victim who faces the sexual twofold standards of society because she is reprimanded for her sexual placement while men are not. Linda Hughes (1994) analyzes Tess's constrained agency and establishes how

Victorian patriarchy gearshifts female bodies and fate. However, Tess is also given openings for self-assertion and confrontation due to Hardy's complex portrayal. In these readings, the novel's assessment of gender discrimination and women's lack of agency is accentuated.

4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses an investigative literary evaluation method to unsympathetically assess *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* by Thomas Hardy. The primary objective is to understand the book's language in order to determine and analyze the societal unfairness and sex inequality matters that are central to Tess's narrative.

4.1 *Data Collection*

The primary source is the full text of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. Secondary data includes intellectual publications that contextualize and encourage the study, including books, journal articles, literary criticism, and articles regarding feminist viewpoint, Victorian literature,

4.2 *Analytical framework*

4.2.1 *Thematic analysis*

The study systematically categorizes and examines intermittent themes and patterns in the text, such as persecution, morality, class strife, and the encouragement of patriarchy. A supplementary thorough empathetic of how Hardy employments Tess's traits to highlight more significant community issues is made conceivable by this approach.

4.2.2 *Feminist literary criticism*

This lens examines how genders cooperate throughout the book, specifically the systemic discrimination. Tess, as a woman, has to agreement with. The study examines how Hardy uses Tess's circumstances to critique Victorian-era England's patriarchal culture, bringing to light topics like victimization, female autonomy, and social injustice.

4.2.3 *Historical contextualization*

The investigation places the story in the late 19th-century socio-historical context of England in order to enhance the understanding. This entails looking into the strict gender norms, socioeconomic systems, and moral standards that influenced individual possibilities and lives in Hardy's day.

4.3 *Procedure*

4.3.1 *Close reading*

A thorough textual study is carried out, concentrating on significant dialogue, scenes, and storytelling tools that highlight Tess's terrible position in society.

4.3.2 *Literature review*

To place the main text within the context of current scholarly exchanges, pertinent academic papers on feminist philosophy, the society of Victorian times, and Hardy's literature are reviewed.

4.3.3 *Synthesis and interpretation*

To explain how Tess personifies the terrible results of injustice in society and disparities in gender, insights from feminist and theme studies are integrated with historical knowledge.

5 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

- A hierarchical and ethically hypocritical culture silences and shames subjugated women, like Tess.
- Hardy criticizes inflexible systems of class that dictate personal destiny, particularly for those from lower social classes.
- As Alec discharges punishment for her sexually history, Tess is punished, exposing gender bias.
- Tess's idiosyncrasy highlights the broader Victorian culture's aggravation of women.
- Hardy's explanation of Tess challenges social averages and solidifies his situation as an opponent of injustice.

5.1 *Social injustice in* Tess of the D'Urbervilles

Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* varieties a compelling case for 'Victorian England' strict roundtable system representing How class metamorphoses impeded local undertakings and lives. In the highly well-thought-out society given away in the story, a person's conclusion and social standing are single-minded by their background and perception, frequently at the expense of their own abilities or moral character. 'Through-Tess' Durbeyfield's engrossments, 'Hardy' deftly demonstrates how conventional socioeconomic shifts sustain unfairness and unfairness.

Tess's terrible path is significantly unbiased by her environment as an insolvent fatherland girl. Notwithstanding her family's remote claim to blue-blooded abstraction through the D'Urbervilles dominion, Tess nevertheless has to deal with monetarist insufficiency and societal disparagement as a result of this conclusion. Her depressing ambiances act as a reminder that her lack of wealth and economic means renders her organic-rank meaningless. Tess, without assistance or a social-safety net, is accidentally more susceptible to being occupied by the affluent 'Alec D'Urbervilles because of her heritage.

Hardy depicts many instances of racial discernment, which further embarrasses Tess. She is forced to look for work as a dairymaid, a job that encompasses hard hours and social cover-up, due to her family's commercial circumstances. Tess's denial of informative and economic openings that would have improved her situation establishes the fundamental complications that the lower class compulsion shocked. Tess also creates voracious behavior and disdain in her interactions with upper-class people, which disseminates society's larger indifference for the paid poor. Hardy challenges the social organizations that uphold unfairness and injustice through Tess's story. He paints a picture of a society in which the flush and powerful uphold their position at the expenditure of the oppressed, and social progression is either harmful or unbearable. The oppressive class system is the direct cause of Tess's death rather than a byproduct of a specific catastrophe. Because of Hardy's compassionate depiction of Tess, audiences are constrained to consider the ethics of a humanity in which the weak are foreordained while their pain is legitimate to continue.

5.2 *Gender inequality and patriarchy*

In *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Thomas Hardy uses Tess's conventional actions and events to illustrate the harsh genuineness of Victorian-era patriarchy and female inequality. The story portrays women as being susceptible to social response and mechanism, and their value is primarily based on their sexual purity and traditionalism to rigid moral standards. Tess's ability is a prime specimen of the challenges qualified by women who were unswervingly denied their freedom and positioned at risk of inequitable treatment.

In contrast to her male classmates, Tess is subjected to a sexual enhancement standard, which is one of the furthermost blatant specimens of gender abuse in the book. Alec

D'Urbervilles and other male-dominated settings have little or no principled concerns, whereas Tess is disparaged and openly eschewed because of her sexual antiquity. This disproportion reflects deeply embedded masculine assessments that reject or preserve male illegitimacy while sightseeing female sexuality. This incompatibility makes Tess's pain worse because she is referred to as a "fallen woman" but misses occasions to rediscover happiness and social acceptance.

Tess is the epitome of Victorian partiality against women since she lacks self-discipline over her own corporal appearance and life adoptions. From her poor statement with Alec to her harassment in a society that criticizes of women's free-spiritedness, Tess has very little encouragement. Patriarchal structures endure to thwart her efforts to newcomer herself, whether through her work, her yearning, or her defiance. The broader perspective of woman in that time that old-fashioned, who were gingerly and socially dependent on males and subject to strict statement regulation, is redirected in this lack of self-government.

Tess is a strong person who simultaneously contributes to her expiration and defies the values that keep her whole, in addition to being a victim of both factors. The structural challenges faced by women who are self-conscious of sexist norms are personalized by Hardy through the character of Tess. Hardy's tale challenges the moral hypocrisy of a culture that brutally subjugates women while marginalizing male privilege. The book tourist attractions these difference in an effort to stimulate a greater appreciative and fair approval of gender and conduct.

5.3 *Tess as a tragic symbol*

Tragic figures typically indicate the suffering of conventional people, and their distress draws attention to additional significant honorable or societal complications. A catastrophe is a type of literature that surveys a protagonist's death, which is often caused by a amalgamation of personal shortcomings, social limitations, and fate, in order to evoke strong excitements in the bibliophile, such as terror. Tess's rare mistreatment at the hands of authoritative societal forces demonstrates how society diminishes rather than elevates well-being and delicatene7ss. Tess 'Durbeyfield the character of *Tess of the 'D'Urbervilles,* is a heartbreaking figure who, through her life and career, creates the greater-educational biases and prejudices that affect women and were essential in Victorian-society. Her narrative goes beyond individual poverty to represent the pervasive special effects of strict-social norms and gender stereotypes on everyone, but specifically on women.

'Tess's- story' serves as a potent critique of the deceitful nature of society and highlights the very-bad imports of injustice and persecution. Hardy challenges the strict-morals and social mores that justify 'Tess's agony' since it is so wildly exaggerated. By vividly describing Tess's hardships and destitution, Hardy exposes a culture that disowns women who don't appropriate its nebulous-standards of subservience and purity. This engagement demonstrates the tenacity of people in the face of refinement and defies unimaginative tales of punishment. Crucially, the way 'Tess's abuse' is meticulously connected to her feistiness-emphasizes her suffering. 'Tess' never gives-up on-maintaining her moral-integrity and tolerance for many-cultures in spite of being harassed, disadvantaged, and shunned by society. 'Tess' is a truly tragic figure whose narrative has importance beyond her "Victorian" setting because she embodies the courage and brokenness of people-trapped in totalitarian-societal structures.

6 CONCLUSION

Tess's death emphasizes the value of systematic modification, which is based on the 'book's-disclosure' of how inflexible class and masculine standards restrict human-autonomy, primarily for women. Given that women are additional harshly-chastised than men, 'Tess's

stance' highlights the maltreatment that arises from social-hypocrisy and nice dishonesty. In 'Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, the unpleasant occurrence of Tristan-Durbeyfield deftly exemplifies the pervasive-social exile and refinement against women in 'Victorian-England'.'Tess's twin identities as a victim' and a strong woman allow 'Hardy' to challenge unfair social-systems and moral-beliefs that blame the defenseless while disparaging the rights of the powerful. 'Tess's experience serves' as the foundation for Hardy's unjust social criticism, which exacerbates empathy and tests strongly held, unoriginal wisdom on its own. His story promotes a more mindful and egalitarian atmosphere that acknowledges and opposes the chauvinisms experienced by the less fortunate.

They serve as a timeless reminder of the assessment of tenacity and social-change. The heartbreaking-story of 'Tess' stimulates ongoing thought about how society can interchange closer to equality and justice. Themes from *Tess' of the D'Urbervilles* are still appropriate today, even though it teaches gender and social-position. Hardy's writings touch on issues that are still relevant today, like gender-based enhancement, masculine-authority, and economical discrimination.

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Negotiating patriarchy through performance: A gendered analysis of Sohar songs among Magahi women in Bihar

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ABSTRACT: Folk songs are repositories of cultural heritage and social structures. In the field of Gender studies and sociology, many feminist studies have been done on folk songs. In the case of Magahi Folk Songs, there is a dearth of much research. Sohar songs are mostly about the women, by the women and for the women. There are underlying patriarchal frameworks in these songs that lead to the subordination of women. Yet, the Sohar songs also serve as an agency of subtle resistance. This is studied with the help of Deniz Kandiyoti's theory of Patriarchal Bargain, which conceptualises women's strategies to negotiate with patriarchy to better their position within the household. So, the women also try to bargain with men and other women to play the role of patriarch. The study shows that the gender norms and roles are propagated through Magahi Sohar songs. The patriarchal principles in these songs and patriarchal negotiations enable women be resilient and speak up. It concludes with the potential for further research in Magahi folk literature and other regions to better understand embedded cultural values and how we can sustainably improve women's lives.

Keywords: Magahi Folk Literature, Sohar Songs, Patriarchal Bargain, Negotiation, Gender Studies

1 INTRODUCTION

Sohar songs are performed in Magahi, Maithili, Bhojpuri, Angika, and other regional Janpads to commemorate births. These are propitious tunes, often prevalent in almost all Hindi-speaking areas. These originate from Sanskrit terms such as 'Shobham,' 'Shyam,' and 'Shobhana.' Eventually, they transformed into Sohar and Subhawan. The songs performed in commemoration of birth and wealth are imbued with emotional allure. The Sanskrit term "Shobhana," signifying beauty, embodies the sophisticated nature of Sohar songs. The major themes of these songs are festive, including ancestry, legacy, and blessings. They tell entertaining interactions between sisters-in-law and brothers-in-law, comical conversations between co-wives, anecdotes of marital conflicts and domestic life. They also include allusions to rituals, traditions, observances such as Shraddha, cleansing, bathing, ancestor sacrifices, and dietary prohibitions. The chronological sequence of events is elegantly organised.

These songs reflect the dominant patriarchal values and how women also contribute to the subordination of women. Women must consistently navigate the patriarchal components of their sociocultural environments to achieve greater and more flexible mobility between their

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private and public spheres of existence. The cultural environment, frequently patriarchal, strongly influences women's gender roles and expectations. Walby (1990) states that Patriarchy encapsulates the profundity, ubiquity, and interrelation of various dimensions of women's subordination within the domestic sphere, family and society.

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

(1) To analyse the depiction of gender roles in selected Magahi Folk Songs.
(2) To examine the strategies of women represented in the folk songs through Deniz Kandiyoti's theory of Patriarchal Bargain.
(3) To evaluate if the negotiation of patriarchal norms acts as agency for women and helps to better their social position.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study implements qualitative textual analysis of the selected Magahi folk songs from the primary text "Magahi Sanskar Geet" edited by Dr. Vishvanath Prasad. The selected Sohar songs are translated from Magahi to English. These songs are analysed with the concept of "Patriarchal Bargain" given by Deniz Kandiyoti in 1988. He defines it as the strategies of women "within a set of concrete constraints," different strategies to maximise security and optimise life options with varying potential for active or passive resistance in the face of oppression. (Kandiyoti, 1988),"

The analysis focuses on identifying elements of expressions of agency and latent resistance within the Sohar songs. The present paper employs songs as a cultural medium for women to either adhere to or challenge patriarchal gender roles.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Magahi Folk Songs have been studied to understand the patriarchal framework and the gendered norms in the society. Songs play a significant role in not just carrying forward the social and cultural values/ideals/expectations, but also condition the generations. Magahi Sohar songs provide a valuable context for analysing how women negotiate within patriarchal frameworks via cultural activities. Deniz Kandiyoti (1988) in his work "Bargaining with Patriarchy" discuss the "Patriarchal Bargain' as a difficult compromise. He says, "It is intended to indicate the existence of set rule scripts regulating gender relations, to which both genders accommodate and acquiesce yet which may nonetheless be contested, redefined, and renegotiated." Such negotiations amongst women against men and women against women. Reproduction is considered one of a woman's major utilities in a conjugal relationship. Sohar songs reflect varied forms of resistance by women and their attempt to take up patriarchal roles in the domestic sphere.

Sohar songs are sung after childbirth. Unfortunately, the birth of a son is usually celebrated, not that of a daughter. Moreover, the mother-in-law and sisters-in-law find it as an opportunity to taunt the to-be-mother/mother, that she should give birth to a son. The birth of a daughter would doom the life a woman, hence, the woman laments her situation, as she knows the importance of bearing a son for the family. Such a situation is visible in this Song:

(Transliteration from Magahi)

"Aath sanyam baajan, mora naihar baaje, Aath sanyam saasur he. Lalana, sorah sanyam bajar darwajwa, albela nahi jaagye he.

Katek neen sov hay tu saheb, Auru sir saheb he. Choori phenki maarli, nepur phenki, auro kangan phenki he. Sorho aabharan phenki maarli, albela nahi jaagal he.

Hum to janli Ramji beta detan, betiya janam lelek he. Lalana, seho suni saasu rissiyayal, auro gosiyyayal he. Saasuji, tarbo chattiya nahi dehalan, palang mor chhin lelan he.
Hum to janli Ramji beta detan, betiya jalam lelak he. Seho suni parbhu rissiyayal, muhon nahi bolal he. Nanadi mora gariyabe, Gotni dhudhukaway he.

Ek dagariniyan mor maay, je korr paisi baithal he.

Hum ta janli Ramji beta detan, betiya janam lelek. Seho suni sasur ji rosayal, aaur gosayal he. Sothwa hardiya na keen layalan, muhwa phulayal he (Prasad, 2005, p. 21).

Translation:
Early morning instruments are playing, my bridal home rejoices, my in-laws' home celebrates. But dear one, despite all this music at the door, my beloved hasn't awakened yet.

How many times have I thought of you, my dear lord, with such deep emotion. You've thrown away the bangles, discarded the necklace, and even flung away the wedding garlands. All ornaments have been cast away, and still, my beloved doesn't wake up.

I believed I would give birth to Lord Ram himself, but instead, I bore a daughter. Darling, my mother-in-law is angry, she's scolding harshly. She doesn't let me sit at the door, she even snatched away my bed.

I thought I'd bear Ram as my son, but gave birth to a daughter. That's why my in-laws are upset, and no one even speaks to me. My sister-in-law has vanished, and the women are whispering everywhere.

There's a mark of shame on my forehead, tied like a noose.

I believed I'd give birth to Ram himself, but instead had a daughter. Now even my father-in-law is angry, and the household is upset. My mother-in-law showed no compassion, dragged me away, my face is swollen from tears.

In this song, despite the wife's persistent efforts to rouse her husband during labour, he remains unresponsive. She delivers a daughter. Upon learning of her granddaughter's birth, the mother-in-law not only confiscates her bed but also denies her even a grass mat to rest upon. The lady is compelled to recline on the unadorned earth. Upon seeing his wife in such a deplorable state, the husband averted his gaze and, consumed by rage, departed. The sister-in-law starts to insult the new mother. The ladies in the neighbourhood mock her with sarcasm. The father-in-law gets so incensed that he refuses to procure even the fundamental postnatal essentials, like as turmeric, dried ginger, or other ceremonial goods. A solitary caring woman—a midwife—bestows upon her maternal kindness and provides a space on her lap. This song illustrates the apathy and emotional neglect shown by family members towards the wife, particularly after the birth of a daughter, and reflects the general insensitivity and utilitarian perspective of society on women. The woman is sad because it could have been a great opportunity for her to bargain power with her husband and other family members, had she given birth to a son. This would have also been a good strategy to maximise her security and optimise her life options (Kandiyoti, 1988).

The newlywed couples who have to celebrate their conjugal life also face challenges, while other women (mother and sister of the groom) wish to assert power over both. While discussing "Subservience and Manipulation" Kandiyoti (p.276, 1988), talks about how young newlywed brides were not only subordinate to all the men of the house but also to all the senior women, particularly their mother-in-law. He adds that the young bride joins her husband's household as a virtually dispossessed person who can secure her position in the patrilineage only via the production of male heirs. It would help her to transcend herself from a subservient position as a daughter-in-law to a patriarchal role where she would be the

mother-in-law, controlling and dominating her subservient daughter-in-law(s). Old women wish to ensure that their sons are loyal to them; hence, they fear that once married, their son might shift his allegiance to the young bride and they might lose control over him. So, older women, in an effort to evade such circumstances, try to suppress the romantic love of the newlyweds. A similar incidence happens in one of the Magahi Sohar songs:
(Transliteration from Magahi)

"Saasu je gelan daal dare he, nanad je gelan paani bhare. Humein prabhu chheklan deudhiya, ab dhani asagar he.

Saasu je prayatnan daal dar ke, nanad je ayalan paani bhar ke he! Bahua, kahe tor muhwa piyariyal, deh dubrayel he.

Laaj saram ke baat saasu kahlo na jaay, sunlo na jaay. Saasuji, tohar beta chhekalan deudhiya, ta bahiyan muruki gel he. (Prasad, 2005, p. 28).

Translation:

The mother-in-law is off to collect firewood, the sister-in-law is drawing water. The husband has left me behind, oh, the master has gone abroad.

The mother-in-law makes an effort to collect wood, the sister-in-law fetches water with effort. O daughter-in-law, why is your face so full of longing? Your body looks weary and worn.

Talks of shame and modesty — the mother-in-law doesn't understand, doesn't listen. Dear mother-in-law, your son has left me behind, and now my face is dark with sorrow.

As discussed earlier, this song depicts the misbehaviour of a mother-in-law and sister-in-law against the marital relationship. The husband's mother and sister put limitations on the pair to the extent that even a shared gaze between them seemed intolerable. One day, when the mother-in-law and sister-in-law were out on errands, the husband arrived home unexpectedly. As he attempted to reach his wife, she intercepted him in route. Consequently, the wife conceived. Upon seeing indications of pregnancy, the mother-in-law and sister-in-law were sceptical and questioned how it could occur, given their understanding that the husband had never approached her. To avoid disgrace and rumour, the wife audaciously revealed the truth. Upon discovering that his wife had disclosed their intimate experiences and his grievances against the limitations imposed by his mother and sister, he became incensed. He menaced her, stating: "Having circulated rumours about me, had this occurred in my youth, I would have sent you to your familial residence, allowed you to languish in desire, and taken my leave abroad." The wife's decision to reveal their intimate encounter, despite the risk of societal repercussions, represents a pivotal moment of expression—an affirmation that reestablishes narrative authority in a realm overshadowed by silence and stigma. This action undermines the presumption that rural women are simply passive recipients of power and demonstrates their ability for strategic opposition (Gilligan, 1982; Lamb, 2001).

This song reflects how, instead of valuing local traditions and the sanctity of married life, the husband tried to escape social pressure by blaming his wife. He paid no heed to the cruelty and undue restrictions imposed by his mother and sister and, instead, contemplated punishing his wife for it. This is a striking example of how women in traditional patriarchal societies suffer due to unjust control and the naïveté of husbands who fall prey to such control. On the other hand, the other women in the house are trying their best to alter the structure to their advantage by preventing the consummation of the marriage of the bride and groom. **Their obstructive behavior, while seemingly antagonistic, can be understood as a mechanism to retain status in the household.** As older women who have already endured their own forms of gendered subordination, they reproduce the same structures to maintain their centrality in family affairs (Nussbaum, 2000; Uberoi, 2006). The cycle thus becomes self-reinforcing: women absorb patriarchal values to survive, and in turn, they implement them to secure power.Also, the daughter-in-law participates in a subtle negotiation with

patriarchy—yielding to home authority, internalizing gender roles, and prioritizing childbirth as a means of achieving acceptance and security. Nevertheless, within this submission, she also explores avenues for statement. Her meticulous honesty is not an overt rebellion but a strategic endeavor to safeguard her dignity and assert her rightful position within the family.

According to Kandiyoti (1988), the "passive resistance takes the form of claiming their half of this particular patriarchal bargain— protection in exchange for submissiveness and propriety". The women in the above Sohar songs, especially the wives, seem to be subservient to their partners. They are also subjugated at the hands of the father-in-law, who might be the oldest male member of the family. The wives feel duty-bound to the house; that's why they are concerned about delivering a son. Moreover, the submissive behaviour of the daughter-in-law towards the mother-in-law also helps her to maintain her position balanced in the household, so that she can be prepared to inherit the authority as the senior woman in the future. The songs present not just a narrative of conflict but a complex depiction of women as both agents and subjects of patriarchal dominance. These songs also illustrate the manifestation of resilience in the daily decisions of rural women—decisions shaped by cultural limitations yet imbued with psychological and ethical significance. Thus, we can say that the songs reinforce patriarchal norms and also represent women in a position of negotiating patriarchy. These songs are their safe space and an agency for them to vent and evoke their resilience. The patriarchal bargain in Magahi society, as depicted in the Sohar songs, is dynamic; as the strategies of women keep on changing based on their life stage, family conditions and social expectations in the contemporary period. This intricate depiction frames folk tunes as both cultural manifestations and implicit critiques of moral conduct and gender dynamics. These Sohar songs demonstrate that women's responsibilities in patriarchal households are neither static nor wholly subordinate. Their techniques evolve over the life cycle, influenced by changing home responsibilities, age, fertility status, and societal expectations. Susan Lamb (2001) notes that these folk narratives function as vessels of memory and tools of nuanced resistance, allowing women to articulate, navigate, and occasionally challenge their lived experiences. Sohar songs serve as potent archives of feminine negotiation and cultural ethics through their multifaceted depiction.

5 CONCLUSION

Magahi Sohar songs render silent acceptance of patriarchy, and within which resistance is also subtly visible, wherein the strategies are employed by the women to place themselves in a position of control of some form. The selected Sohar songs justify the longing for the birth of a son, which is seen commonly in many other regions as well. The Kandiyoti's theory applied to these songs makes us understand the intricate nature of od patriarchal restrictions and resilience, which help women to temporarily emancipate themselves from their subordination. This study can be further extended to other forms of folk literature of Magahi society and other regions, as well. These songs are meant to carry forward the rich cultural heritage and exemplify voices of women, further empowering them to find other ways of negotiations with the existing patriarchy and better their position in the society.

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Between voice and silence: Feminist portrayals of modern Indian women in postcolonial literature

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ABSTRACT: The representation of modern Indian women in postcolonial literature has often oscillated between binary portrayals of silence and speech, victimhood and resistance. The study critically examines how selected Indian literary texts depict women's agency through nuanced portrayals that transcend these binaries. Grounded in feminist literary criticism and postcolonial theory, the research employs a qualitative interpretive methodology, focusing on close textual analysis of works by Mahasweta Devi, Kamala Das, Arundhati Roy, Bama, and others. Findings reveal that women in these narratives often express resistance through symbolic gestures, fragmented memories, autobiographical confessions, and internal monologues. These strategies allow female characters to inhabit liminal spaces—neither wholly submissive nor radically emancipated. Rather than privileging overt speech, the study highlights the political significance of silence, partial defiance, and embodied storytelling as critical forms of feminist expression. The research contributes to feminist and postcolonial scholarship by advocating for a more intersectional and decolonial approach to reading Indian literature. It calls for the inclusion of marginalized voices in the literary canon and recommends further exploration of regional and non-linear narratives. Future studies may extend this inquiry through interdisciplinary frameworks or comparative cultural contexts.

Keywords: Postcolonial Literature, Feminist Agency, Indian Women Writers, Silence and Voice, Subaltern Narratives

1 INTRODUCTION

The Indian postcolonial literature has been concerned with the legacy of colonialism, nationalism, and overlapping hierarchies of caste, gender, and class. It is against this background of the complex terrain that the figure of women and specifically the process of negotiation between silence and speech has become a major issue in feminist discourse of literature. The eternal question of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Can the subaltern speak? (Spivak, 2023) represents postcolonial feminist research. The women writers and fictional characters give a critical perspective in which the issues of voice, agency, and resistance are looked at.

The status of the Indian woman in the nationalist discourses has traditionally been ambivalent, being idealized as the morally pure domestic space but never being granted political agency. Chatterjee (2020) believed that the nationalist discourse left women with no access to the public-political space but only to the spiritual and domestic one. Sarkar (1984) also observed that women were involved in nationalist movements, but in most cases, their agency was used but not respected on its own. In this respect, literature has been a site of

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oppression and possible liberation. The anthologies *Women Writing in India* (Tharu and Lalita, 1991) and *Recasting Women* (Sangari and Vaid, 1990) show the women struggling with these contradictions in their many voices. Feminist scholars have also criticized postcolonial literature on the basis of supporting the elite, patriarchal discourse. Rajan (1998) criticizes the symbolic empowerment in literature, asking whether this empowers the actual agency. In the same manner, Thapan (1997) focuses on the embodied concept of identity, which criticizes the binary gender representations. These criticisms confirm that silence as well as a voice is a lived reality, which is contested, not just a device of literature.

Although feminist and postcolonial literary criticism has expanded significantly, portrayals of contemporary Indian women often remain confined to binaries—either as victims or radical revolutionaries. While powerful, these extremes limit understanding of how women navigate socio-cultural and political structures in more nuanced ways. Writers like Mahasweta Devi offer intense depictions of oppression and defiance (Ghosh, 2018), while others, like Arundhati Roy, present complex characters negotiating between resistance and complicity (Al-Quaderi and Islam, 2011). The nuanced space between voice and silence—where many women exercise everyday agency—remains underexplored. Additionally, the role of linguistic, regional, and caste-based diversity in shaping female subjectivities is often overlooked. Devika (2005) and Nair (2002) highlight how local languages, caste, and affective dislocations influence representation. Yet, these perspectives are fragmented and rarely synthesized into a cohesive framework. This research addresses that gap by focusing on the literary spectrum of women's voices in postcolonial Indian literature.

The study concentrates on a body of postcolonial Indian literary works, including novels, memoirs, and short stories written in or translated into English, between the late 20th century and the early 21st century. It takes a closer look at representations of women created by the most prominent authors, like Mahasweta Devi, Kamala Das, Anita Desai, Bama, and Arundhati Roy, whose writing interacts with issues of marginalization and female agency (Mittal and Enclave, 2016; Rana, n.d.; Ghosh and Chakrabortty, 2023). Even though the study focuses on intersectional issues like caste and religion, its main line of analysis is gender-based. Vernacular Indian literature not translated into English is out of the scope. This restriction takes into consideration the linguistic plurality of Indian literature, and at the same time, it is concerned with accessibility and interpretive coherence.

The proposed study will add to feminist postcolonial discourse by shifting away from binary notions of silence and voice in order to examine the disputed spaces between them. Nandy (1990) points to the psychological colonialism of colonialism on gendered identities, and Menon (2004) supports a feminist politics that is beyond the legal and identity-based boundaries. The study of female characters, who speak or are silent/silenced, further extends questions of authorship, narrative, and reception. Butalia (2017) demonstrates the fact that the trauma testimonies are usually manipulated or even eliminated within the mainstream discourse. The paper brings back such voices without romanticizing or essentializing them. It has been a timely contribution of feminist critique by taking into account both canonical and subaltern points of view, foregrounding complexity without making women subjects of ideology.

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To analyze how modern Indian women are portrayed in postcolonial literature across a spectrum of voice and silence
- To explore the role of feminist literary frameworks in interpreting subaltern agency, embodiment, and marginalization
- To evaluate how specific texts destabilize dominant patriarchal and nationalist tropes through complex female characters

3 METHODOLOGY

The section outlines the methodological framework adopted for the study, detailing the research design, data sources, analytical tools, and interpretive strategies used to address the research objectives.

4 RESEARCH DESIGN

The study employed a qualitative, interpretive research design grounded in feminist literary criticism and postcolonial theory. Literary texts were not treated as neutral artifacts but as discursive constructions that reflected, reinforced, or resisted dominant power structures. The analysis was hermeneutic, aiming to interpret how the narratives constructed gendered subjectivities, particularly within the symbolic spectrum of voice and silence (Spivak, 2023; Rajan, 1998).

4.1 *Data sources and text selection*

The primary data consisted of selected postcolonial Indian literary texts written in or translated into English. A purposive sampling strategy was adopted to include texts that were thematically and ideologically aligned with feminist portrayals of Indian women. Authors included Mahasweta Devi, Kamala Das, Arundhati Roy, Bama, and Anita Desai—each known for exploring female interiority, agency, and resistance (Ghosh, 2018; Rana, n.d.; Al-Quaderi and Islam, 2011; Ghosh and Chakrabortty, 2023; Mittal and Enclave, 2016).

Texts were selected based on three criteria:

- Relevance to feminist/postcolonial discourse,
- Representation of modern Indian women navigating societal constraints,
- Availability in English or a reliable translation for interpretive consistency.

4.2 *Analytical framework*

The analytical approach drew from feminist and postcolonial literary theory, employing close reading to dissect narrative structure, voice, characterization, and metaphor. Concepts such as subalternity (Spivak, 2023), embodiment (Thapan, 1997), marginalization (Devika, 2005; Butalia, 2017), and nationalist patriarchy (Chatterjee, 2020; Nandy, 1990) guided the textual analysis.

Attention was paid to:

- Language and silence as thematic devices,
- The use of myth, trauma, and memory as narrative strategies,
- Resistance through fragmented identities or narrative disobedience.

4.3 *Data interpretation strategy*

Interpretation was iterative and contextual. Texts were read alongside critical essays, cultural history, and feminist theory. Multiple readings were conducted to surface latent meanings and socio-political undercurrents. The analysis remained situated within the socio-cultural matrix of postcolonial India and attended to the intersectionality of caste, class, gender, and region.

4.4 *Ethical considerations*

The study did not include non-translated regional literature due to language constraints. It also focused solely on representations, not empirical realities. As Menon (2004) and Nair (2002) cautioned, literary criticism had to be wary of imposing fixed meanings on fluid identities. Reflexivity was maintained to avoid essentializing female experience.

5 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of selected postcolonial Indian literary texts reveals a spectrum of feminist portrayals of modern Indian women situated between silence and voice. Rather than existing at either extreme, women characters often inhabit complex spaces of negotiation, resilience, and introspection. Three dominant thematic categories emerged: silenced subalternity, negotiated resistance, and embodied identity.

5.1 *Silenced subalternity*

Many texts depict women whose voices are marginalized, overwritten, or denied, especially in the contexts of state violence, caste oppression, or patriarchal dominance. These women often do not speak in conventional ways but resist through gesture, silence, or symbolic defiance.

In *Draupadi*, the protagonist defying to cover her body turns out to be a political statement, which is beyond words. In *The Other Side of Silence*, accounts of survivors of the Partition reveal how trauma frequently makes the voice disjointed, but highly eloquent. These examples explain why silence may be either oppression or a tactic.

5.2 *Negotiated resistance*

Most of the female characters do not struggle against the social norms openly, but through implicit forms of resistance. Women in *The God of Small Things and Custody* are passive, but they protest by making emotional choices and staying silent at home. Such acts are not loud, but they break the patriarchal norms. The resistance is symbolic, emotional, and autobiographical, as shown in Table 1. The rebellion of Ammu leads to social marginalization, whereas Bama, through the use of Karukku, reinstates agency through a narrative that is rooted in the caste. These depictions emphasize that resistance does not necessarily have to be vocal and obvious, but it can be an internal and tactical process that happens in limited personal areas and disrupts the system by fighting it through conscious and strategic survival and independence efforts.

Table 1. Forms of female resistance across selected texts.

Text	Protagonist	Type of Resistance	Outcome
Draupadi	Draupadi	Symbolic, non-verbal	Public subversion of military power
The God of Small Things	Ammu	Personal, emotional, transgressive	Social ostracization
In Custody	Implied female figure	Domestic silence as resistance	Neglect and marginalization
Karukku	Bama	Autobiographical, caste-aware	Assertive self-definition

5.3 *Embodied identity and subjectivity*

The female bodies and inner spaces are repeated themes of power, vulnerability, and rewriting the narratives. Women in autobiographical writings such as *My Story and Karukku* employ personal narration in order to break the conventions of sexuality, caste, and religion. As the literary strategies described in Table 2 indicate, the embodied resistance can be expressed through such techniques as symbolism, internal monologue, and autobiographical narrative. Kamala Das puts sexual independence and emotional depth to the forefront, shattering the traditional mould of a woman. Bama considers Dalit Christian identity in embodied memories and makes her voice sound authentic. These stories deliberately do not make much sense, which is an indication of how female experience, particularly in moments such as Partition, can be silenced or even misrepresented. Loomba (1993) also laments about the way female subjectivity has been used historically by the colonial and postcolonial discourses to maintain the traditional norms.

Table 2. Literary techniques used to portray female agency.

Technique	Description	Representative Applications in Texts
Symbolism	Non-verbal acts, bodily gestures	Draupadi's disrobing, Ammu's exile
Internal Monologue	Stream of consciousness, confessional tone	*My Story*, *In Custody*
Autobiographical Narrative	Real-life accounts used to challenge dominant norms	*Karukku*, *Her-Self*
Fragmented Testimony	Incomplete, trauma-laden memories	*The Other Side of Silence*

The reading of the text indicates that the image of contemporary Indian women in the postcolonial writing occupies a rather ambivalent place between silence and voice, subordination and self-determination. Instead of using the explicit statements or outright silence, most of the female characters find the way to assert themselves by using indirect, symbolic, and emotionally-charged actions. This is consistent with Spivak's (2023) thesis that the subaltern does not necessarily conventionally express themselves, but rather takes control by remaining silent, by gesture, or by refusal. Resistance actions like that of Draupadi refusing to dress or that of Ammu being in an illicit relationship cannot be easily categorized into the conventional paradigms of empowerment. Rather, they are a non-verbal kind of protest that disorients socio-political power. These characters break the familial, national, and patriarchal norms by choosing to have individual autonomy at a considerable personal sacrifice. These depictions undermine the idea of a nationalist woman as restricted to the domestic, spiritual sphere, as it was suggested by Chatterjee (2020), showing the cracks in the very domestic ideals.

A story such as *My Story and Karukku* brings out the aspects of interiority and memory as literary means of resistance. The internal monologue employed by Kamala Das reveals repressed female sexuality, which questions the gendered system of morals. On the same note, the autobiographical voice of Bama highlights Dalit Christian identity, which combines caste and gender to oppose institutional oppression. This embodied subjectivity, in which the female lived experience lies at the center of the self-making and literary agency, is emphasized by Thapan (1997). These stories are a mixture of personal and political, and they employ the lived experience as a form of resistance. Such marginalized narratives, as Deshpande (2003) contends, are important in contesting the hegemonic literary spaces and claiming the subaltern subjectivities.

Descriptions of disjointed memory are also of great importance, especially when it comes to works addressing trauma, like the ones by Butalia (2017). Such stories are deliberately not coherent, which is an expression of the silencing and distortion of female experience, particularly in such instances as the Partition. It is reminiscent of Menon (2004), who has urged a feminist model that celebrates disruption and instability as opposed to legal or symbolic recognition.

In these different texts, there is a similar theme that occurs, which is that the cultural elevation of women is frequently symbolic of their marginality in real life. This symbolic feminism is criticized by Rajan (1998), who wonders whether the literary glorification is really a challenge to the patriarchal norms. The literature examined in the paper implies that the forms of resistance are not always in large-scale actions and movements but broken stories, individual acts of defiance, and re-imagined silences. Finally, these results confirm once again the importance of a feminist approach to postcolonial works of literature- an approach that recognizes the power not only of speech, but also of strategic silence, partial resistance, and embodied narration as valuable modes of agency.

6 CONCLUSION

The paper has discussed the feminist presentation of contemporary Indian women in postcolonial literature with regard to the characters striking a balance between voice and silence. A close reading of certain texts showed that women are not only victims or rebels but more sophisticated beings of negotiation, subversion, and embodied resistance. Silence, symbolic actions, inner dialogues, and autobiographical accounts became some of the most important literary techniques that undermine patriarchal, caste, and nationalist hierarchies. These findings have great implications for feminist literary criticism and postcolonial studies. They stress the necessity to get out of the binary definitions of empowerment and victimhood and focus on a more fluid concept of subjectivity. The paper also supports the relevance of intersectionality to explore the interaction of gender with caste, religion, and region to define the voices and experiences of women. Based on these understandings, scholars and educators have been advised to reconsider the literary canon with a focus on marginalized voices, especially Dalit, regional, and non-elite women writers. The appreciation of non-linear, fragmented, and emotionally based narratives can provide a more inclusive and deeper realization of Indian literature. Subsequent studies can build upon the work by adding untranslated local texts or adding reader reception and cross-cultural comparative views. Oral history, ethnography, or digital storytelling as interdisciplinary approaches may further our knowledge of how Indian women still speak, resist, and redefine their identities in literature and elsewhere.

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Gender and caste connotations of honour killing: A study

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ABSTRACT: Honour killing, a well-embedded social malaise in many parts of South Asia and mainly in India, is a grisly conjunction of gender, caste and patriarchy. This stain, in which people (mostly women) are murdered by family members due to claims of the victim having brought shame or dishonour to the family, is a symptom of caste supremacy and the control of women's sexuality by a caste and its patriarchy. This article analyses the social and cultural bases of honour killings, focusing specifically on the extent to which caste and gender identity are seen as legitimising acts of violence. Honour is closely linked to a woman's sexuality and marriage in the conventional Indian society. Women who marry outside their caste or religion or act contrary to established social expectations are often victims of honour killings. The family with the active support from panchayats (Khap Panchayats) view such reactions archaically as restoring family honour or mending collective status, which in their terms is still a violent act. In this paper, I analyze legal and sociological frameworks along with feminism to build a case around ideologies that enable such acts of violence called honour killings. I cite examples from various Indian states, namely Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan that are infamous for caste based honour killings. I further analyze how the patriarchal construction of caste subjugates womanhood by defining her socio-political body and circumscribing her mobility. The focus on systems of subjugation encompasses parallel stretches of the law, education, culture, and politically motivated constructions, which aid in the sustenance of honour violence. With performative affirmatives pointing toward dowry and ascribed birth importance, these systems collectively mark territory within human rights, gender and social justice alongside adding to the evolving discourse on India. The data along with my argument counts violence in the name of honour as layered interventions, counting beyond mere criminal terms.

Keywords: Honour Killing, Law, Khap Panchayat, Discrimination, Gender and Caste Connotations

1 INTRODUCTION

Honour killing refers to the murder of a family member—usually a woman—who is perceived to have brought dishonour upon the family. This dishonour may arise from acts such as inter-caste or inter-religious marriage, choosing one's partner, eloping, refusing an arranged marriage, or even dressing in ways deemed "inappropriate" by patriarchal norms. Though women are the primary victims, men can also be targeted, particularly when they belong to a lower caste or different religious community. The scope of honour killing thus includes caste, gender, religious, and social dimensions and calls for an intersectional analysis.

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2 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To explore the socio-cultural and legal frameworks surrounding honour killings in India.
- To analyze how gender and caste play interlinked roles in perpetuating honour-based violence.
- To examine the response of the legal system, civil society, and media in addressing and combating honour killings.
- To offer policy suggestions and grassroots solutions aimed at preventing such crimes and protecting individual autonomy.

3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

This research paper is guided by the following questions:

- What are the gendered and caste-based connotations of honour killing in India?
- How do traditional institutions such as *Khap Panchayats* influence and perpetuate this practice?
- What legal and social mechanisms currently exist to prevent honour killings, and how effective are they?
- What role can education, awareness, and media play in shifting public perception and preventing such violence?

4 METHODOLOGY

The study employs a qualitative research methodology, drawing from secondary data sources including academic journals, government reports, legal documents, newspaper articles, and case studies. Content analysis of landmark court judgments and regional case studies is used to understand both the prevalence and the legal-social responses to honour killings. The research also utilizes a feminist and sociological lens to unpack the deeper systemic issues contributing to this violent practice.

4.1 *Historical and cultural background*

Honour-based violence, including honour killings, has deep historical and cultural roots in patriarchal and caste-dominated societies, particularly in South Asia. The origins of such violence can be traced back to ancient and medieval times when social structures were rigidly defined by gender roles, family lineage, caste hierarchies, and community honour. In these traditional societies, a woman's body and sexuality were perceived as symbolic of family purity and social status. Any transgression—real or perceived—such as marrying outside the prescribed caste, religion, or without familial consent, was seen as a direct attack on the honour of the kinship group.

4.2 *Origins of honour-based violence*

Customary laws fuel societies both and rural and semi-urban areas through oral traditions, wherein honour killings based violence needed no codification. However, modern society uses law systems and documentation that mask lawless traditions based on socially enforced fear, shame, and violence. Because of the intertwining of personal dignity with community validation, such practices were seldom questioned.

4.3 *The honour in feminist society*

Tied directly with patriarchy is the Indian caste system, and it works the other way around as well. Pure vanity. Women are controlled in a way that their modesty becomes the central point, and guarded. Any kind of inter-caste or inter-religion matrimony is repurposed to do away with caste endogamy, all in a display of patriarchal dominance. These forms of Honour Killing are only possible in extreme sociocultural expectation challenging circumstances, with females in the primary attention. The amount of effort that goes to restrain women in 'their' realm of control demonstrates the extent to which patriarchal dictate is remnants of the caste-bases social order.

4.4 *Role of customary law and khap panchayats*

Khaps and similar institutions active in western Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, and Rajasthan comprise the groups acting as unofficial escorts to enforce Honour Norms through Customary Laws and the Khaps. These civil bodies function akin to vigilante courts, providing blames and meting out sentences for all deemed against social standards.

4.5 *Intersectionality of gender and caste*

To explain the issue of honour killing and solving it as a problem in case intersection of gender and caste has not been invoked is critical. The issue of patriarchy is often coupled with caste and deeply embedded social control systems revolving around women's sexuality, mobility are mastered at restraining women's freedoms.

5 REGIONAL CASE STUDIES

Honour killings are carried out in all India but particular places (with respect to traditional social structure) are much more common in honour killings.

5.1 *Haryana*

Honour killings have taken place in numerous cases in Haryana, where traditionally Khap Panchayats (Casting Councils for Traditional Castes) issue orders against marriages between people of different castes in the same gotra (clan), or across caste lines. Such cases have exposed the brutal enforcers of patriarchal caste norms and brought greater awareness in the public and scrutiny in the courts.

5.2 *Uttar Pradesh*

In Uttar Pradesh, especially in western regions, honour killings are linked to community prestige and familial dominance. Strong kinship networks and caste loyalties often result in public justifications for violence. The police and administration have at times been accused of being complicit, failing to protect couples or prosecute offenders effectively.

5.3 *Rajasthan*

Honour killings too are an endemic crime in Rajasthan, invariably linked to rural culture and feudal attitudes. Caste prejudice is predominant and female mobility and autonomy is severely restricted. Abrahamic village councils have further contributed to the regressive customs.

5.4 *Southern India*

Honour killings beyond the North: While honour killing is normally associated with the north, in some southern states such as Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, caste based killings have also been reported – Dalit men as well as upper caste women (such as those involved in the exodus of former Dalits to Kerala in the 1970s). More recently, there have also been documented cases of killings of upper caste women in Southern part of India.

6 LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND JUDICIAL RESPONSES

6.1 *Provisions of IPC on murder and killing honours*

Homage of killing is not defined separately under Indian law, but are prosecuted according to sections of the Indian Criminal Code (IPC) related to murder (section 302), establishment (Section 109) and Criminal Conspiracy (Section 120b). Although these laws allow the punishment of crimes honour, the lack of concrete recognition sometimes leads to indulgence in investigation and prosecution, especially if family members are involved.

6.2 *Calls in the area of law enforcement*

Despite judicial activism, the implementation remains weak due to social participation, police apathy and political pressure. Victims often hesitate to approach the authorities and worry about will. In many cases, the enforcement of the law agree with the perpetrators and considers the killing of honour to be "family affairs". In addition, many police staff lacks training on gender sensitivity, leading to insufficient reporting and blaming victims.

7 SOCIOLOGICAL AND FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES

7.1 *Structural violence and devaluation of gender*

sociologists describe the killing of honour as a form of structural violence built into patriarchal and caste. The normalization of control of female bodies and prioritization of family or community "honour" over individual rights creates a climate in which violence is justified and even celebrated.

7.2 *Honour of the community vs. Individual rights*

Housing killing is a deep conflict between collectivist values and modern individual rights. While the Indian Constitution guarantees freedom of choice in marriage (Article 21), community structures often suppress this right, especially in rural areas. Individual autonomy, especially women, is sacrificed on the altar of collective pride.

7.3 *Feministic criticism of cultural relativism*

Feminist scholars argue against cultural relativism that apologizes violence based on honour as a "cultural norm". They argue that such arguments mask the systemic patriarchate and justify the rejection of women's rights under the robes of tradition. Feminists emphasize the need to perceive the killing of honour not as isolated incidents, but as part of a wider continuum of violence based on sex. The role of media and civil society

7.4 *Representation of killing honour in the media*

the media play a double role. On the one hand, sensational reporting can trivialize the problem and focus on dramatic elements rather than structural causes. On the other hand, journalism has pointed to hidden cases and pushed the authorities to negotiate. Documents, digital campaigns and news exhibitions were decisive for public education and demanding silence.

7.5 *Campaigns of activism and awareness of non -governmental organizations*

Organization of civil society helpful in supporting victims, defending legal reforms and creating awareness. NGOs such as *Shakti Vahini,* Love Commandos and Breakthrough India offer advice, legal assistance and hiding for endangered couples. They also carry out field programs that challenge harmful social standards and support the marriage between castes as a progressive ideal.

8 RECOMMENDATIONS AND POLITICAL REFORMS

8.1 *Legal reforms and special legal regulations*

There is a growing demand for specific legal regulations. The reserved law would help to distinguish such crimes from ordinary murder and ensure a stricter punishment. For coercive bodies, clear instructions to deal with the killing of honour as hate crimes must also be determined.

8.2 *Involvement of community and education*

A change in social attitudes is crucial. Community leaders, educators and religious characters must be involved in supporting equality and tolerance values. Educational curriculum should include gender sensitization and capital to dismantle deep -rooted distortion from an early age.

8.3 *Protective mechanisms for endangered individuals*

For individuals with the risk of crimes of honour, robust framework of protection must be determined. These include help lines, legal assistance, police protection and safe houses. The authorities must also monitor the activities of KHAP Panchayats and take strict measures against extremely constitutional judgments.

9 CONCLUSION

The killing of honour remains one of the most brutal manifestations of violence -based violence in India, undermining the constitutional values of equality, freedom and human dignity. Honour, rooted in patriarchal ideologies and hierarchies of caste hierarchies, represent the killing of a social attempt to control the female agency and maintain the so -called honest community and family. Despite the legal framework, such as the Indian Criminal Code and the Territorial judgments of the Supreme Court, practice remains due to social participation, weak mechanisms of enforcement and the influence of extremely constitutional bodies, such as KHAP Panchayats. The penetration of gender and caste further complicates this problem. Women, especially those who resist the boundaries of the caste in love and marriage, become the goal of symbolic and literal violence. Social obsession of

endogamy reflects not only the desire to maintain the cleanliness of caste, but also strengthens the structural details of women.

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Queering the *Bildungsroman*: A journey from innocence to self-acceptance in Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy*

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ABSTRACT: This paper analyses Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* through the critical framework of the queer *Bildungsroman*, with an emphasis on the complex interactions between, body, gender performativity, queer identity and socio-pragmatic interpellation. It examines how subjectivity and sexual identity are socially formed, negotiated, and frequently rejected within the normative frameworks of power poloitics. The study further scrutinises how the body becomes a performative and politicised space where queerness is expressed and contested by focussing on the queer *bildung* of Arjie. The binary distinctions of male/female, heterosexual/homosexual, and Tamil/Sinhalese are used to frame Arjie's journey from self-doubt to queer self-acceptance, all of which he discreetly rejects. The paper emphasises Arjie's movement through his confrontation with rigid gender binaries, and his eventual acceptance of his identity acts as of both personal growth and political subversion. As a gay *Bildungsroman*, *Funny Boy* transcends the genre's conventional tropes by embedding queerness not as a transitional phase, but as a permanent, celebratory mode of being.

Keywords: Bildungsroman, Body, Gender, Queer, Self

1 INTRODUCTION

The synchronic and diachronic study of development and *bildung* of self has been a contentious and complex idea that is interpreted differently throughout centuries. It has historically been viewed as a portrayal of either socio-pragmatic or aesthetico-spiritual realities. In the former, the self can be seen within the periphery of the body, while in the latter the self transcends into the world of aesthetics. Historically, the human body has been conceptualised through a range of philosophical, theological, and cultural frameworks—as a medium for transcending the metaphysical realm of desire, as a locus of sensuality and pleasure, as a source of temptation and sin, as a symbol of mortality and decay, as an emblem of renewal and rebirth, and, ultimately, as a site of ontological ambiguity and epistemological uncertainty. Frequently regarded as a biological construct, a vessel for the soul, an instrument of artistic expression, and a corporeal encumbrance, the body has remained central to discourses across cultural, political, racial, and social domains. Though it still serves as a tool for dominance and control, it also serves as a means of self-expression. The body plays a significant role in discussions of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and identity in modern and postmodern cultures. The body becomes a crucial location for the creation of social and personal significance for members of the LGBTQ+ community, especially those who are figuring out 'who they are as queer?'. The body is not just a biological reality; it is deeply entwined with socio-cultural norms and societal expectations, influencing how one's identity—including sexual orientation—is perceived, communicated, and comprehended. The development of a queer self is based on this intricate relationship

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between identity and the body, where the body serves as a platform for self-expression as well as a site for empowerment, resistance, and negotiation of social acceptance.

Bringing sex and gender into the uncanny and unfathomable spectrum of the body have hitherto made the entire process of subjectivisation and interpellation far more complex and quizzical. The statement in Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949), "one is not born, rather becomes a woman" (p. 273), can be applied to the case of body, too. With the significant epistemological development, critics and philosophers have argued that the body, which has been imagined as ungendered and free, is enchained everywhere, "socially constructed, produced and reproduced" (p. 3) as Raewyn W. Connell explicates in *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics* (2013). Further, Michael Foucault in *Discipline and Punishment: The Birth of the Prison* (1977) explores the ways in which the body is disciplined and regulated by institutions of power, such as prisons and schools. He argues that this 'juridico-discursive' conception of power has its origin in institutions that use techniques of surveillance and control to shape the behavior and appearance of the body/self, creating obedient and docile subjects. He points out that the body is produced through the roleplay of power rather than what we call 'naturally formed' and bodies are controlled and subjugated through certain techniques in the mechanism of the society. The body of an infant, whether it is male, female, or queer while growing up undergoes several subtle societal mechanisms of behavioral control. This channels them to adopt certain sets of attributes following the rigid generalised norms produced by 'relations of power' to sync the body with the roles aligning to the code of conduct of the society. Foucault, in *History of Sexuality-An Introduction* (1978) talks about the politicising of sex and sexuality as societies have started to gain control over the life of individuals through the exercise of 'biopower', which he defines as "an explosion of numerous diverse techniques for achieving subjugations of bodies and the control of populations" (p. 140). He examines how the body is being controlled, used, and transformed by the utilitarian society, "the body is directly involved in the political field, power relations have an immediate hold upon it, they investigate it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs" (Foucault, 1978, p. 25). Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* (1990) argues that the body is not a fixed or natural entity, but rather a socially constructed and performative one, as Butler (1990) espouses, "the body is not a natural fact, but a social fiction" (p. 136). Through this, Butler is highlighting the way in which our understanding of the body is shaped by cultural and social factors, rather than by any inherent or objective biological reality. She argues that the body is constantly being regulated and disciplined by social norms and expectations, which serve to maintain gendered power relations. In *Bodies That Matters* (1996), Judith Butler emphasises the way in which power is embodied and enacted through the regulation and control of bodies. She argues that the body is a site of struggle and contestation, with power being perpetuated through the imposition of norms and expectations that regulate and discipline bodily behavior, "Power operates through the production of bodies, and bodies are the means by which power is perpetuated" (Butler, 1996, p. 5). Therefore, we can say that the analysis of the body together with gender and sexuality within the social arena can be seen as a product of social constraint and construction.

2 QUEER IDENTITY AND THE DISRUPTION OF NORMS

The conceptualisation and articulation of queer/homosexual identity have been profoundly influenced by socio-historical contexts, evolving discursive practices, and the interplay between dominant normative structures and marginalised expressions of sexuality. Despite the self-ascribed or socially imposed labels of individuals with homosexual identity, the fundamental idea has emerged primarily as a result of a prevailing binary structure for understanding sexual orientation as heterosexual *vis a vis* homosexual in the 1930s and 1940s. Interestingly, with time, as this binary between heterosexuality and homosexuality is

acknowledged by society, the queer identity begins to die out. Subsequently in the 1950s, the queer has appeared from the underground gay bars and subculture and later, gained popularity in the 60s and 70s. However, the post-World War II era has witnessed a gradual transition in the visibility and self-identification of homosexual persons. The term 'queer' is reclaimed, shifted, and reappropriated and thus a new term 'gay' comes into existence which reflects an urge for a more affirming label that can be embraced within a growing movement for social and political rights. By identifying themselves as gay, a new generation of men not only asserts their agency or claims their status as men but also rejects the 'effeminate' styles of the previous generation. The homosexual identity eventually replaces the 'gay' identity. The term 'gay' is utilised as an umbrella term in the early 1970s, incorporating transsexual and gender non-conforming individuals along with lesbian women, homosexual men, bisexual men, and women. It is worth noting that being gay or homosexual is not something that people have been open about, and that this changed over a period of time. As a consequence, the movement has brought evolution as men who initially identify as being quiet and reserved have begun to identify as homosexual, and finally to being referred to as gay. The term queer has undergone multiple revisions and appropriations by several queer activists and members of the Queer Nation in the late 1980s to define themselves and to evoke a response from the heterosexual or so-called 'straight world'.

As noted above, people whose sexuality fails to conform to the heteronormative role binary are derogatorily referred to as 'queer'. As the term 'funny' is employed in the text *Funny Boy*, similarly 'queer' is mainly employed to eliminate individuals from the realm of normalcy. In a *Bildungsroman*, same-sex intimacy is primarily depicted as an interim phase that plays an indomitable role in the protagonist's life. Arjie portrays his sexuality, his relationship with his partner, and his own arousal of desire. However, his narration does not provide a brief account in his life nor does it reflect self-loathing and suffering. Instead, during his coming-of-age phase, he comes to terms with his sexuality which lead him to accept his identity. Darryn Edwards in "A World into which they couldn't Follow me: Arjie's Un-Shameful Queer Awakening in Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy*" (2018), presents the text as a counter *Bildungsroman*, queering the male tradition of the coming-of-age novel. He rejects the idea of himself as a misfit and demonstrates that he can thrive because of his queerness and not in spite of it, even if that means living in a world that is self-made and in which his heteronormative odd family can't follow him. Further, Rahul K. Gairola in "Limp Wrists, Inflammatory Punches: Violence, Masculinity and Queer Sexuality in Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy*" (2014), reads the novel as a Counter *Bildungsroman*, making a bridge in between Radha aunty's violations and transgressions of feminist ideals together with Arjie's sexual awakening during the heteropatriarchal brutality of the 1983 riot in Colombo, Sri Lanka. But this paper in the context aims to portray Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* as a queer *Bildungsroman*, examining the intersection of personal identity and political instability during Sri Lanka's civil conflict. Through Arjie's coming-of-age and sexual self-awareness, the novel foregrounds the emotional and social marginalization of LGBTQ+ individuals. Selvadurai critiques conservative moral frameworks while challenging heteronormative binaries, ultimately proposing a more fluid and inclusive understanding of gender and sexuality.

3 AN ODYSSEY OF SELF-DOUBT TO QUEER SELF-ACCEPTANCE

Arjie's early divergence from traditional gender roles marks the beginning of his othered queer identity in *Funny Boy*. His preference for playing imaginative games like 'bride-bride' with girls, rather than engaging in conventional male activities like cricket, unsettles his family and leads to him being labeled a 'funny one'. On this Arjie ruminates, "For me, the primary attraction of the girls' territory was the potential for the free play of fantasy. Because of the force of my imagination, I was selected as leader" (Selvadurai, 1994, p. 3).

Arjie's desire to inhabit feminine roles, such as dressing in a saree, reveals both his creative agency and nonconformity. As Arjie later reflects on the space and freedom which these moments offered, he begins to understand the foundations of his sexual identity, which becomes more defined through his intimate relationship with Shehan. Arjie's early realisation of how different he is from the other boys is crucial to his understanding of his own queerness and his battle against the norms of society. He avers, "I wasn't like the other boys. I was different, and I had to make peace with that." (Selvadurai, 1994, p. 64). When Arjie begins his path towards sexual awakening, he admits to his desire for Shehan, which questions his former perspective on relationships. He realises, "I was aware of him in a way that I had never been aware of anyone else. I'd never considered a boy in this way before, but now that I did, I couldn't think about anything else" (Selvadurai, 1994, p. 138). The frutification of episteme structure, love and sexual relationships, rebellious tendency against the ideological state apparatuses has been incontrovertible. To this Linda W. Wagner in "Plath's The Bell Jar as Female Bildungsroman" (1986) espouses, "In the conventional *Bildungsroman*, sexual experience is but another step toward maturity" (p. 67). Arjie finds himself isolated as he becomes more aware of his own queerness. As the novel records, "It was as though something inside me had burst, and I was no longer the child I had been. The child who did not know that love and sex were meant to be between men and women" (Selvadurai, 1994, p. 213). He further expresses his dissatisfaction with gender stereotypes and urges to exist outside of the boundaries of traditional gender performativity and norms, stating, "I had never thought of myself as a boy. I had always thought of myself as someone who could play with dolls and wear my aunt's lipstick without being laughed at" (Selvadurai, 1994, p. 47). Arjie traverses several phases of maturation as he negotiates his identity, sexual orientation, and the conflicts between his personal aspirations and those of societal structures. His discomfort with conventional gender norms and his early sense of distinctiveness towards his sexuality can be seen when he wishes to wear a frock. The desire of living outside of the heteronormative paradigm is reflected in his statement, "I was a boy who wanted to wear a frock. I wanted to be like my aunt. I wanted to be her" (Selvadurai, 1994, p. 45). But, being a subject in the hands of society's gender structure, he feels the pressure to fit into the roles that do not align with his true self. It is conspicuously clear when he articulates in the novel, "But that's not what people do. They don't like you to be different. They want you to be like everyone else" (Selvadurai, 1994 p. 79). Further, Arjie experiences internal conflict as he realises that his desires are in contradiction with the heteronormative norms imposed upon him and desires for someone of the same gender. Portraying the same for Shehan, he delineates, "I wanted to kiss him. I wanted to touch him. I didn't know why, but I knew that I wanted it. I wanted him to touch me back" (Selvadurai, 1994, p. 135). In the process of his interpellation Arjie understands that he has the ability to shape his future and that his path to self-discovery is complicated but not unattainable. Being a *Bildungsheld* he takes charge of his own development and propounds, "I knew that the world was not as simple as I had been led to believe. That there was a great deal more to be learned, and that it was up to me to decide what kind of person I would become." (Selvadurai, 1994, p. 201). In addition, Arjie espouses, "I realized that my future would not be like anyone else's. I would have to make my own way, and I would have to find my own happiness." (Selvadurai, 1994, p. 245). In his journey further, marking his maturation and accepting his queerness he encapsulates, "I no longer cared if they thought I was funny, or if I was too different. I had to be who I was." (Selvadurai, 1994, p. 211)

Thus, *Funny Boy* delves into the intricate issues of sexual identity and ethnic diversity. Besides, the novel elucidates the enormous pain, unfathomable passion and ensuing pleasures of a homosexual boy. The story acquires a definite 'queer' perspective through its explication of internal and external conflict encountered by Arjie. The stark contrast of his inner delight and the societal derision or mockery which stems from his overt homosexual identity and behaviour ultimately leaves a lasting scar on his innocent adolescent psyche, profoundly jeopardising his emotional and psychological development. According to

Freudian theory, subjectivity in *Funny Boy* emerges not as innate but as shaped by early familial structures and the intersection of gender and sexual identification. While the novel foregrounds ethnic violence and communal hostility, it also centers the personal struggles of a queer protagonist navigating a deeply conservative environment. Arjie's home functions as a symbol of rigid normativity, where roles are strictly defined, desires repressed, and deviations quietly sanctioned. Within this space, Arjie grapples with the constraints imposed on him, seeking to assert a self that defies traditional expectations. He exhibits nonconformist tendencies and challenges his Amma's authoritative role within the family structure saying, "Why can't I play with the girls?' I replied. 'You can't, that's all'. But why?' She shifted uneasily. 'You're a big boy now. And big boys must play with other boys. 'That's stupid'. 'It does not matter,' she said, 'the world is full of stupid things and sometimes we just have to do them" (Selvadurai, 1994, p. 20). However, his mother wins the argument and compels him to play with the boys. Arjie's awareness of societal boundaries is first triggered when he is prohibited from associating with girls, revealing early conflicts between gender expectations and cultural norms. His later relationship with Shehan, a Sinhalese boy, deepens this complexity by merging personal desire with ethnic division. As the narrative unfolds, Arjie navigates these layered tensions, gradually constructing an identity shaped by the intersecting forces of sexuality and communal belonging. Arjie is biologically male but expresses himself in feminine ways and enjoys activities usually linked to girls. He doesn't fit into the usual idea that boys must be masculine and girls must be feminine. Instead, he follows his own path, challenging these fixed gender roles. He articulates:

> When I knew Amma was getting dressed for a special occasion, I always positioned myself outside her door. Once she had put on her underskirt and blouse, she would ring for our servant, Anula, to bring her sari, and then, while taking it from her, hold the door open so I could go in as well. Entering that room was, for me, a greater boon than that granted by any god to a mortal. (Selvadurai, 1994, p. 15)

In the process of his epistemological construction and sexual awakening, Arjie is extending into female space. The space here means where his mother is getting ready, and which has impressions of femininity. This queerness can be seen during 'spend- the day' and in Queen Victoria Academy. Delving into the female space, Arjie states:

> The first was the jewellery box which lay open on the dressing table. With a joy akin to ecstasy, I would lean over and gaze inside, the faint smell of perfume rising out of the box each time I picked up a piece of jewellery and held it against my nose or ears or throat. The second was the pleasure of watching Amma drape her sari, watching her shake open the yards of material, which, like a Chinese banner caught by the wind … and finally watching her drape the palu across her breasts and pin it into place with a brooch. (Selvadurai, 1994, p. 15–16)

4 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, as *Bildungsroman* typically centers on the protagonist's moral, psychological and ethical growth, tracing their progression from childhood to maturity. In this way, we found *Funny Boy* is an ideal fit for this genre since it follows Arjie's path from innocence as a child to the difficult realisations of her sexual identity. *Funny Boy* provides a nuanced and multifaceted examination of the genre of *Bildungsroman*, particularly in relation to sexual identity. Arjie's journey is characterised not by a straightforward trajectory toward self-acceptance, but by numerous challenges, contradictions, and complexities in a structured world. As a gay *Bildungsroman*, the novel addresses the intricate struggles of grappling with one's identity in a world that is frequently intolerant of differences. In addition to being a

tale of personal development, the plight of Arjie offers a more comprehensive analysis of the confluence of political, cultural, and sexual identities. A broader universal experience, one that speaks to the difficulties of loving and living truly in a society that frequently demands conformity is reflected in Arjie's struggles and his eventual acceptance of his sexuality.

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Digitized intimacies: Femtech, data extraction, and reproductive rights in Indian urbanity

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ABSTRACT: This article critically analyzes the emergence of Femtech in urban India, examining how data extraction on reproductive data interplays with privacy and rights. Based on 18 months of ethnographic fieldwork in Delhi and Mumbai from late 2023 to 2024, and 85 interviews with users, developers, and healthcare providers of Femtech, this research examines three case studies: the Aadhaar-linked Mother and Child Tracking System (MCTS), menstrual health apps, and PCOS websites. Based on feminist technoscience and India's privacy law tradition, specifically the Puttaswamy judgment, the study unfolds the ways in which data-driven care models scale up reproductive surveillance and differentially marginalize poor, caste-subordinate, and gender-nonconforming populations. The major findings are algorithmic exclusion in health recommendations, commodification of intimate data through state-corporate alliances, and attenuated bodily autonomy in legislation such as the PCPNDT Act. The research contends that Femtech, instead of promoting empowerment, mostly is compatible with surveillance capitalism, reinforcing existing power disparities. It ends by promoting inclusive and rights-centric data governance that takes privacy, dignity, and equitable access to digital healthcare as its priority.

Keywords: Femtech, Data extraction, Reproductive rights, Urban India, Surveillance capitalism

1 INTRODUCTION

The growth of Femtech in India, including period tracking, fertility apps, and pregnancy platforms, has reformed the delivery of reproductive health care in urban areas. With the market set to grow over $1.2 billion by 2025 [1], such growth is mostly spurred by growing smartphone penetration along with government-sponsored programs like the National Digital Health Mission [2]. But this quick digitization cuts across profound issues with data sovereignty, algorithmic exclusion, and reproductive justice, especially for socio-economically and structurally marginalized populations in India's urbanized world.

While the Global North has had academic discourse about Femtech, its application over India's highly stratified society, where surveillance systems like Aadhaar meet law like the

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Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PCPNDT) Act [3], remains a not-so-globally-explored terrain [4]. It is this lacuna that the present study bridges by shifting focus to the idea of reproductive health surveillance. Reproductive health surveillance [5] refers to a part of public health surveillance systems that allow for the identification, notification, measurement, and determination of reproductive health events for a given period at a specific geographical location.

As intimate health data i.e., periods, fertility signs, and sex becomes gathered and utilized by corporate or state actors in the name of care, reproductive surveillance is a developing issue with significant ethical and legal implications. Relying on Foucault's biopolitics [6] and extending feminist theory by authors such as Dorothy Roberts [7] and Shoshana Zuboff [8], the literature emphasizes how these technologies discipline the body without adequate responsibility or consent [9]. This analysis is an attempt to solve two fundamental contradictions. One, Femtech opens health for all but in so doing it also legitimates invasive data practices. Two, their impacts are felt most intensely by low-income, caste-subordinated, and gender-nonconforming subjects.

Drawing on feminist technoscience theory as well as India's developing privacy jurisprudence (Justice K. S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India, 2017) [10], this study is based on eighteen months of ethnographic fieldwork as well as stakeholder interviews in Delhi and Mumbai. Furthermore, by positioning these lived experiences at the forefront, research demands a re-imagining of Femtech as a space of negotiation between intersectional equity and digital innovation with reference to the reproductive rights.

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To analyze how Femtech platforms in urban India enable data extraction in the guise of access to healthcare, and its impact on the reproductive rights.
- To understand the contribution of state-corporate partnerships—especially Aadhaar-enabled systems—to the normalization of reproductive surveillance among urban women.
- To inquire into how gender, caste, and class relations affect exclusionary practices in Femtech ecosystems, with a specific focus on metropolitan cities like Delhi and Mumbai.
- To evaluate the sufficiency of India's privacy and reproductive rights law (particularly post-Puttaswamy) in dealing with the ethical issues raised by Femtech.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research takes a qualitative, empirical approach based on feminist technoscience to analyze Femtech's intersections with reproductive rights in India's urban spaces. Ethnographic fieldwork conducted over 18 months in Delhi and Mumbai coupled semi-structured interviews with 85 participants (70 Femtech users of different caste, class, and gender identity; 10 developers; and 5 healthcare workers) to gather lived experiences and institutional practices. Data collection consisted of participant observation at urban clinics and digital health events, along with critical examination of app privacy policies and legislations such as the PCPNDT Act. Interviews used open-ended protocols to ask questions on data extraction practices, privacy issues, and reproductive autonomy. Thematic analysis of field notes and transcripts employed inductive coding for the identification of patterns, with the assistance of NVivo for data handling. Case studies of Aadhaar-linked MCTS, menstrual apps, and PCOS platforms provided contextual depth. Triangulation of methodology ensured strength, with an indication of how Femtech

facilitates rights through data stewardship and algorithmic discrimination in India's urban health landscapes.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Ethnographic research in Mumbai and Delhi shows how Femtech is getting inscribed into urban reproductive health systems but reproduces exclusion through esoteric data practices, algorithmic bias, and structural inequalities. In both cities, users used apps to track menstruation, PCOS management, and fertility planning. Even the promise of personalized care was undermined by generalized algorithms and intrusive data collection measures.

76 percent of them in Delhi were uneasy with not knowing where or how their reproductive information was stored or sold. Poor women bemoaned being coerced into applying Aadhaar-based platforms like the Mother and Child Tracking System (MCTS) to receive public maternity benefits. Mumbai also reflected the same pattern where 61 percent reported the same apprehension, though some platforms reflected slightly more adaptability through greater venture-capital spending and accommodating user feedback.

The issue with algorithmic exclusion was also extreme. Delhi received 68 percent low-context health advice, often disregarding diseases like PCOS or food restrictions based on one's caste. Mumbai came in at 57 percent and was hardly better. Lower-class participants in both locations described Femtech as state surveillance, with 82 percent in Delhi and 74 percent in Mumbai connecting these platforms to data manipulation and a lack of agency.

Gender-nonconforming users were particularly impacted, emphasizing the risks of binary design for health apps and implications on access to welfare. Third-party data-sharing was evidenced in developer interviews, generally being justified in terms of enhancing user experience. Consent was however frequently broad-brush with users not knowing they were granting blanket uses of data. Developers in Mumbai showed more awareness of privacy concerns post-Puttaswamy, whereas their Delhi counterparts often cited vague state guidelines as limiting their accountability.

The legal environment compounds these exclusions. The PCPNDT Act, while designed to combat sex-selective practices, has become a tool for over-surveillance. Health workers reported digital monitoring of gynaecological visits, which could trigger suspicion without consent. These findings confirm that while Femtech offers digital access, it does so at the cost of autonomy, particularly for caste-subordinated, poor, and gender-diverse populations. Far from neutral, Femtech technologies embody the values and biases of the systems in which they operate.

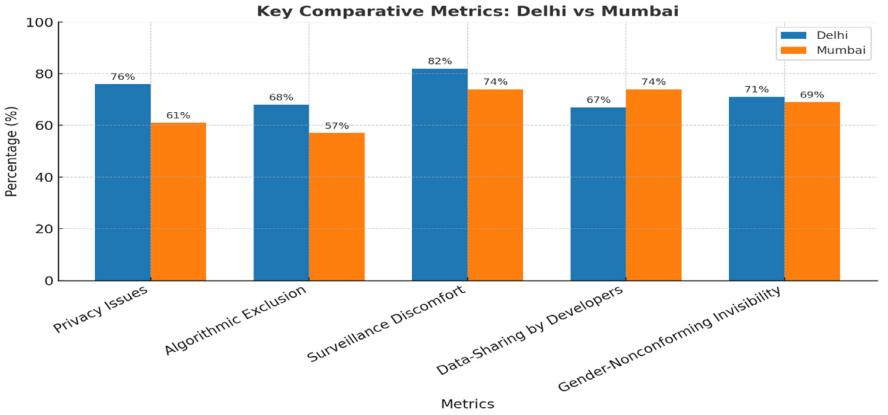


Figure 1. Key comparative metrics summary. Source: Author's primary data.

These comparative observations are not so much statistical indicators but rather indicative of the shape and contours of power and marginality inscribed into the digital health system. Whilst Mumbai is at best marginally improving on both user trust and algorithmic inclusivity, each city is presenting a structural synergy between state power and digital capital that is filtered through Femtech platforms.

Table 1. Key personal narratives of femtech users in Delhi.

S. No.	Demographic Info	User Experience (Narrative)	Awareness of Data Practices	Privacy Concerns	Impact on Reproductive Autonomy
1	28, Dalit, cis woman, garment worker	"At first, I thought it was just a period tracker. But then it started sending me messages about fertility boosters. I felt like someone was watching me, deciding what I should do with my body."	"I don't know much. I just press 'accept' so I can use the app quickly."	Feels her data is being used without her consent.	Felt pressured to think about pregnancy when she wasn't ready.
2	24, Transmasculine, graduate student	"There was no option for someone like me. I had to lie about my gender just to get basic tracking. It felt like the app was designed for someone I'm not."	Highly aware, avoids syncing with personal IDs.	App doesn't allow non-binary or trans options; erasure leads to misgendering.	Reinforced gender dysphoria and created barriers to accessing reproductive tracking tools.
3	32, upper caste, married, software engineer	"It suddenly recommended IVF clinics based on my age. I never searched for that. How does it even know?"	"I tried reading the policy, but it's pages of legal words."	Concerned about predictive profiling based on age and marital status.	Felt algorithmically nudged into fertility treatment decisions.
4	30, Muslim, homemaker	"My husband asked why I was getting messages about pregnancy. I couldn't explain it, and I felt scared."	Not aware of how data could be visible outside the app.	App notifications exposed her private use to her family.	Femtech use led to conflict and reduced autonomy in decision-making.
5	22, OBC, nursing trainee	"I trusted it because it felt like a doctor. I entered everything. Later, I read about data breaches and panicked."	Assumed app was medically vetted. No prior awareness.	Feels her health data could be sold or misused.	Started censoring what she enters, feels anxious about surveillance.

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Table 2. Key personal narratives of femtech users in Mumbai.

S. No.	Demographic Info	User Experience (Narrative)	Awareness of Data Practices	Privacy Concerns	Impact on Reproductive Autonomy
1	29, Christian, NGO worker	"I started seeing pregnancy ads after logging cramps. It made me feel like my body was being read by a stranger."	Started reading privacy settings after discomfort.	Uncomfortable with intimate predictions and targeted ads.	Created stress and a feeling of invasion.
2	34, SC, domestic worker	"I used it because my daughter showed me. But I got scared when it asked about my sex life. I stopped."	Not aware that her entries could be used beyond the app.	Feels the app crosses lines with intrusive questions.	Stopped using it altogether, felt judged and exposed.
3	27, queer woman, journalist	"I wanted to monitor hormonal issues, but the app pushed marriage and fertility tips. I'm not interested in either."	Reads terms, avoids apps linked to government IDs.	App assumes heterosexual, cisgender use cases.	Reinforced social pressures instead of supporting her choices.

(*continued*)

Table 2. Continued

S. No.	Demographic Info	User Experience (Narrative)	Awareness of Data Practices	Privacy Concerns	Impact on Reproductive Autonomy
4	31, Muslim, school teacher	"It was useful until it sent notifications during class, and my colleagues saw. It became embarrassing."	No deep awareness, assumed private use.	App notifications are intrusive in public/professional spaces.	Reduced trust in digital tools for reproductive health.
5	25, Dalit, BPO worker	"I thought it was like a diary. But then it showed me ovulation ads, even though I said I wasn't trying to get pregnant."	Didn't consider data usage until ad targeting began.	Feels her personal info is sold without her control.	Caused her to delete the app, feeling surveilled and manipulated.
6	33, upper-caste, entrepreneur	"The app syncs with my fitness tracker. I didn't realize it was collecting so much about me – sleep, sex, everything."	Became aware only after attending a digital rights session.	App collects multi-dimensional data without clear consent.	Feels algorithm-driven health narratives overwhelm her own intuition.
7	28, OBC, college lecturer	"It keeps reminding me about my 'fertile window.' I'm single. Why should that matter right now?"	Mild awareness; never explored settings.	Unwanted emphasis on fertility norms.	Felt her personal timeline was being dictated by tech.

Source: Prepared by the authors.

The ethnographic experiences of Mumbai and Delhi show that Femtech applications in urban India are deeply embedded within the overlapping structures of caste, class, gender, and identity. While most consumers used these apps first for tracking health or ease, their experiences then turned into ones of discomfort, exclusion, and surveillance. The participants told of unwarranted recommendations, normative nudges, and unclear data use, which cumulatively challenged their reproductive autonomy. These anxieties were specifically felt among queer and trans populations, Dalit and OBC women, and informal sector workers.

These lived realities show how otherwise seemingly inclusive Femtech reproduces structural hierarchies. Lower-caste users negotiating Aadhaar-linked sites were subjected to coercive modes of data provision in the guise of care, and gender-nonconforming users were erased from binary-coded app spaces. Design defaulted to assumptions of upper-caste, cis-heteronormative worlds and left little room for bodily or cultural variation. Therefore, instead of democratizing reproductive health, Femtech was a digital gatekeeper that perpetuated exclusionary norms.

These results take on added importance when placed in the context of India's constitutional privacy right as a fundamental right (Justice K. S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India, 2017). The confusion at the hands of the participants on how their data is being collected, stored, and shared points to a wide gap between statutory protection and ground reality. The research highlights important questions around the promise of digital empowerment based on mandatory disclosure of data and when legal and technical literacy are not symmetrical.

These tensions within structures are seen throughout the global context. For example, in Kenya, digital reproductive health initiatives introduced to help adolescent girls in urban informal settlements have tended to exacerbate underlying health inequalities. Uninformed consent and poor digital literacy among users have resulted in the harvesting of sensitive reproductive information without appropriate understanding or protection. [11] In Brazil, menstruation-tracking apps have been found to commodify personal body data, especially from Afro-Brazilian and poor women, perpetuating cycles of digital exploitation and gaining little for better access to healthcare or reproductive autonomy. [12] In the UK, the lack of overarching regulatory structures allows Femtech firms to function with large degrees of

latitude, which allows predictive profiling and targeted advertising capable of influencing reproductive choices indirectly under the cloak of personalized treatment [13].

These global parallels make evident the immediate necessity to rethink Femtech not as an impartial or universally empowering technology, but as a digitally mediatized sphere in which rights, equity, and bodily autonomy need to be consciously fought for. The Indian case studies discussed in this article also provide further evidence to support this argument. The Aadhaar-linked Mother and Child Tracking System ties public maternal health services access to biometric registration, which raises important questions regarding surveillance and conditional care. [14] Menstrual health applications often make use of binary gender assumptions and carry out behavioral data mining without clear consent procedures. Likewise, apps targeted at managing polycystic ovary syndrome regularly provide standardized recommendations with minimal medical supervision and monetize sensitive hormonal and lifestyle information. Collectively, these case studies bring into focus how Femtech, without regulation or by lacking intersectional sensitivity in design, tends to reproduce structural injustices in place of alleviating them.

5 CONCLUSION

The research brings to light the contradictory role played by Femtech in Indian cities, that of democratizing reproductive health while entrenching data colonialism and existing social hierarchies. A Delhi-Mumbai comparative analysis reveals major concerns related to privacy, algorithmic discrimination, and coercive data collection, especially among low-income and gender-nonconforming individuals. The two cities revealed Femtech's failure to reflect the range of bodily experiences and cultural contexts, rendering its inclusiveness a construct. While Delhi demonstrated greater unease from state surveillance, Mumbai demonstrated somewhat better responsiveness but remained impenetrable in data handling as well as algorithmic tailoring.

These findings have far-reaching implications for India's digital health governance. The intersection of state surveillance and private health technologies erodes reproductive rights, forcing users to exchange intimate body information for care. This is a critical issue of consent, autonomy, and justice.

To increase the scope of Femtech, it is necessary to venture beyond menstruation and PCOS tracking applications, including fertility planning applications, menopause tracking applications, and pregnancy tracking applications. These applications are exclusionary with privacy issues but are educative models. For example, Clue [15] adopts gender-inclusive design and open data policies [16], while Natural Cycles [17] is clinically validated, emphasizing the need for clinical validation. These instances illustrate ways in which inclusive design, proper use of data, and regulation can engender user trust. Indian policymakers and entrepreneurs can draw insights from these practices and develop Femtech systems that are socially just and innovative.

There is a need for future studies to examine Femtech's impacts through disability, caste, and rural health systems. Interdisciplinary collaboration; incorporating feminist legal theory, data ethics, and public health is necessary. To ensure that Femtech in India is strengthening reproductive justice and not dismantling it, a rights-based regulatory approach is the future. This involves establishing a National Data Protection Authority that will oversee the collection of reproductive data, applying data minimization principles to app development, and mandating developers to regular transparency and consent audits. These inclusive design strategies also need to be promoted; ensuring non-binary options, caste-aware algorithms, and culture-aware user interfaces. These actions can help propel Femtech from a surveillance tool to one of empowerment and parity care. Thus, recasting Femtech as an empowerment, not a control, tool is the imperative to achieve reproductive justice in the digital health arena.

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Black mirrors of self-esteem: A review of smartphone addiction and its effect on self-esteem among Indian college students

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ABSTRACT: **Objective:** Smartphones have become a ubiquitous part of college life for students, especially in India. Being on their devices 24/7 can have an impact on the mental health of the students. 'Black Mirror' refers to the black-coloured reflecting screen on mobile devices that portrays one's self-image and in extension, our self-esteem. This review particularly focuses on smartphone addiction on college students' self-esteem. This narrative review explores the complex relationship between smartphone usage and self-esteem among Indian college students. Drawing on existing empirical studies, this paper investigates the association between smartphone addiction and one's self-esteem. **Methods:** Narrative review of empirical studies from 2016 to 2025. The research articles are systematically examined from various scholarly databases like Google Scholar, PubMed and DOAJ. The key findings from the research are further analysed and reviewed. **Main Findings:** Most studies show a significant negative correlation between smartphone addiction or nomophobia and self-esteem among Indian college students. Higher addiction levels generally relate to lower self-esteem, especially with social media use. A few studies found no significant link, while academic use was associated with either neutral or positive effects on self-esteem. **Implications:** The findings can have an impact on psychological research, clinical practice, and policy-making by incorporating various stakeholders like college counsellors, parents, and educators into a multi-dimensional intervention at the college/university level for the digital hygiene of the students.

Keywords: smartphone addiction, narrative review, mental health, self-esteem, Indian college students

1 INTRODUCTION

In modern college life, smartphones have become an unavoidable appendage, especially among the Indian youth. Even though there are innumerable benefits to carrying smartphones, such as ready access to information at our fingertips, social connectedness, and academic support, but these are outweighed by the impact that these devices can have on one's psyche. One of the key areas of concern is self-esteem, which plays a vital role in shaping the mental health of the students and, of course, their self-concept. Although there are numerous iterations of what defines the concept of self-esteem, it generally refers to an individual's evaluation of their worth and is influenced by both cognitive and emotional experiences.

Smartphone use, in excess, especially when driven by social comparison or one's need for validation can severely erode one's self-esteem (Wang and Lei 2021). The continuous online feedback (Sezgin and Güler 2020), being exposed to highly curated online content

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(Marom 2017; Rogers 1961), and the peer pressure to have a digital persona (Xu e*t al.* 2023) can have a mixed effect on the sense of self-esteem in oneself.

India had over 1.12 billion mobile connections (DataReportal 2025) by early 2025, highlighting the widespread dependence on smartphones in the country. Even though these digital devices are indispensable, certain problems, including patterns of behaviour such as compulsively checking the device and hyper-dependence on their devices, can interfere with one's daily functioning. Moreover, this effect is becoming more common these days. Such behaviours reflect the typical characteristics of addictive behaviours such as compulsive usage, tolerance, withdrawal, and impairment in normal functioning.

One of the related phenomena that can be observed is nomophobia, which is an irrational fear of having to be without one's mobile device or internet connection. This phobia has been seen among the student population and can affect their self-esteem (Ozdemir, Cakir and Hussain 2018) as well as extremely anxious states.

The present review delves into the relationship between smartphone addiction and self-esteem among Indian college-age students. It particularly keeps in focus the exact effect that the addictive use of smartphones can have on self-perception and overall mental health of college students in India. Through this thorough review, it is aimed to produce novel insights into this case and thereby, offer practical intervention strategies both at the policy level as well as at the level of various educational institutions which can further mitigate the apparent negative impact that these devices are having on the psychological well-being of college students.

1.1 *Theoretical linkages between smartphone addiction and self-esteem of college students*

Self-Determination Theory explains how smartphone addiction can lower self-esteem by reducing autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Constant phone use disrupts self-control, hinders academic or personal growth, and weakens real-life social connections, all of which contribute to diminished psychological well-being and a lower sense of self-worth among college students.

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

(1) To critically examine existing empirical studies investigating the association between smartphone addiction and self-esteem among Indian college students.
(2) To synthesize key findings from quantitative, cross-sectional, and correlational research designs relevant to the Indian context.
(3) To identify prevailing research gaps, including methodological limitations and under-explored moderating variables such as gender, socio-economic status, and digital literacy.
(4) To outline recommendations for future research and discuss practical implications for mental health professionals, educational institutions, and policymakers.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This narrative review comprehensively searched the literature to investigate the association between smartphone addiction and self-esteem among Indian college students. Various research databases like Google Scholar, PubMed and ResearchGate were parsed to elicit

relevant research articles from peer-reviewed journals. The key terms, such as "smartphone addiction", "self-esteem", "Indian college students', and "nomophobia", were utilized as search terms. The literature search has been limited to studies published between 2016 and 2025 to better understand recent progress about the digital behavior of Indian college students.

3.1 *Paper selection criteria*

3.1.1 *Inclusion criteria*

(a) Studies exclusively focusing on Indian college student populations were reviewed.
(b) Only peer-reviewed, English-language articles were considered.
(c) Studies employing quantitative, cross-sectional, or correlational research designs.

3.1.2 *Exclusion criteria*

(a) Studies that focus on non-Indian college populations.
(b) Studies that discuss smartphone addiction without addressing the self-esteem of the college student sample.
(c) Non-empirical studies such as conceptual articles and opinion pieces.

3.2 *Study selection*

The selection process of the papers followed the 'Preferred Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) (Figure 1.) guidelines to ensure that it is reproducible and transparent. After initial screening and removal of duplicate research articles, 16 articles were included for the review process that met the inclusion criteria. These articles were reviewed by screening the title and full text to ascertain their scientific rigor and relevance to the current review process.

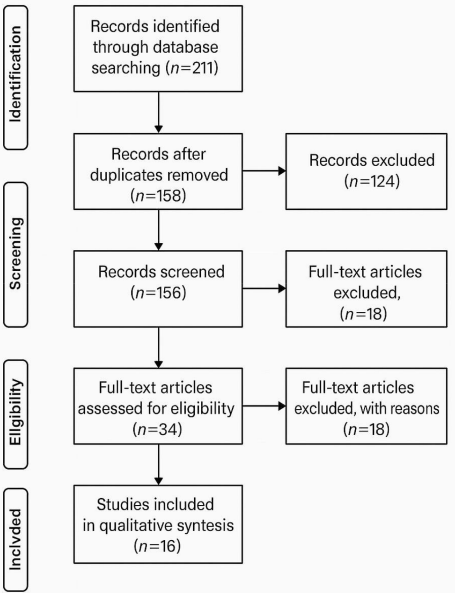


Figure 1. PRISMA flowchart outlining the entire review process.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Summary of reviewed studies on smartphone use and self-esteem among Indian college students.

Author(s)	Year	Title of Study	Sample Details	Methodology	Key Findings
Pundir et al.	2016	Association of problematic mobile phone use with psychological distress and self-esteem among college students in South India: a cross-sectional study	1108 college students	Cross-sectional study	Around 43.8% of the lower self-esteem categories were problematic users as compared to 24.2% of the high self-esteem category experiencing PMU.
Pawar and Shah	2019	The Relationship Between Social Media Addiction, Self-Esteem, Sensation Seeking and Boredom among College Students	105 college students	Quantitative correlation study	The results suggested a negative correlation between social media addiction and self-esteem, i.e., there is an increase in social media addiction with a decrease in self-esteem; people who spend more hours on social media showed lower self-esteem. Social Media Addiction was able to predict Self-esteem with significant accuracy ($R = 0.291$, $R2 = 0.085$, $F(1, 103) = 9.52$; $p < 0.001$).
Pathak and Mhaske	2019	Self-Esteem, Academic Performance, and Mobile Phone Addiction among College Students	441 college students	Correlational study	The findings showed that self-esteem was significantly negatively correlated with mobile phone addiction, and it could predict the 0.05 mobile phone addiction. Thus, it is revealed that those with high self-esteem are less likely to suffer from mobile phone addiction.
Bhatt and Gaur	2019	Psychological Risk Factors Associated with Internet and Smartphone Addiction among Students of an Indian Dental Institute	68 (21.3%) men and 252 (78.8%) women	Cross-sectional study	Higher smartphone addiction is associated with lower self-esteem
Nelliyanil and Anil	2020	Prevalence of Nomophobia and its Association with Loneliness, Self Happiness and Self Esteem among Undergraduate Medical Students of a Medical College in Coastal Karnataka.	228 undergraduate students	cross-sectional study	Nomophobia was found to have a significant, negative correlation with self-esteem.
Sabharwal and Sran	2021	Smartphone Addiction and Mental Health: A Cross-Sectional Comparative Study on Depression, Anxiety, Stress, Self-Esteem and Satisfaction with Life	120 undergraduate students	cross-sectional, comparative study	There is significant difference among students with low smartphone addiction and students with high smartphone addiction on self-esteem.

(*continued*)

Table 1. Continued

Author(s)	Year	Title of Study	Sample Details	Methodology	Key Findings
Dhamija et al.	2021	Prevalence of smartphone addiction and its relation with sleep disturbance and low self-esteem among medical college students	500 medical students	cross-sectional analytical study	There was no significant association between smartphone addiction and low self-esteem.
Thatkar et al.	2021	Assessment of Correlation between Smartphone Addiction, Social Anxiety, and Self-Esteem A Cross-Sectional Study	464 young college-going adults, 175 (37.71%) males and 289 (62.3%) females	cross-sectional quantitative study	A negative correlation was observed between self-esteem and smartphone addiction, which indicates that the lower the self-esteem, the higher the smartphone addiction.
Dey, Saha and Saha	2021	Prevalence and Predictors of Internet Addiction among Eastern Indian Undergraduate General College Students: An Institute-Based Study	216 undergraduate general degree college students, 119 (55.1%) females and 97 (44.9%) males	analytical cross-sectional study	26 participants (98.8%) with low self-esteem had internet addiction, whereas 114 participants (62.3%) with normal self-esteem had internet addiction.
Mokshada	2023	Nomophobia and Its Relation with Self-esteem among Young Adults	75 were male (36.8%) and 129 were female (63.2%)	exploratory study	There is a negative correlation between nomophobia and self-esteem.
Gijwani et al.	2024	Assessment of Phubbing, Smartphone Addiction and Related Psychological Variables among Dental Undergraduates: A Multicentric Study	1226 respondents, 67.5% female students and 32.5% male students	multi-centric, cross-sectional, pre-validated questionnaire-based study	Female dental students have more smartphone addiction but better self-esteem than male dental students.
Kaur	2024	Nomophobia, anxiety and self-esteem among young adults- a correlational study	152 individuals, which comprised 76 males and 76 females	Correlational study	There is a significant negative correlation between Nomophobia and Self-esteem among young adults.
Kaviarasu et al.	2024	An Analysis of Smartphone Addiction among College Students in Chennai	200 randomly selected college students	non-experimental descriptive study design	a link between high levels of smartphone addiction and low self-esteem
Mohapatra et al.	2025	A Descriptive Study To Assess The Correlation Between Nomophobia, Insomnia And Self–Esteem on Smartphone Addiction Among Students of Selected Nursing College in Cuttack, Odisha	N = 220, 86.4% female nursing students	structured e-survey	No significant correlation was found between smartphone addiction and self-esteem.
Baby et al.	2025	Lost in the Digital Void: The Interplay of Nomophobia, Loneliness, and Self-Esteem Among Medical Undergraduates of Central India	N = 316 162 (51.3%) females and 154 (48.7%) males	cross-sectional study	A statistically significant negative correlation (r=-0.32, p=0.05) was observed between nomophobia and self-esteem.
Snegha and Sudha	2025	Exploring the Adverse Impact of Smartphone Use on Young Individuals' Self-Esteem: A Structural Equation Modeling Approach based on Five Temperaments	376 participants	cross-sectional approach	Most of the participants had low self-esteem and were not very addicted to smartphones.

In Table 1, an analysis of empirical studies on smartphone use and self-esteem among Indian college students reveals a dominant negative correlation, particularly when use is driven by social comparison or fear of exclusion. Most studies used validated tools like the Smartphone Addiction Scale and Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, covering diverse student populations across India. Nomophobia also showed a consistent link with lower self-worth. However, some studies reported neutral or contradictory findings, suggesting moderating variables like gender, temperament, or academic background. Female students often reported higher addiction yet maintained higher self-esteem, possibly due to emotionally supportive phone use. Overall, problematic smartphone use is associated with diminished self-esteem, though not causally in all cases. These insights can guide mental health professionals and educators in developing digital detox strategies, CBT-based interventions, and psychoeducation. Policy implications include promoting digital hygiene through campus orientation modules and national-level well-being initiatives to foster healthier technology use among students.

5 CONCLUSION

This review highlights the urgent need to inform policymakers about the multifaceted impact of smartphone addiction on the self-esteem of Indian college students. While most studies show a negative correlation, some neutral findings and gender differences were noted. Limitations include reliance on cross-sectional, self-report studies, limited regional and language diversity, and lack of consideration for moderating variables like socio-economic status or digital literacy. Despite these gaps, the findings offer valuable insights for developing therapeutic strategies, preventive interventions, and institutional policies. More robust, longitudinal research is needed to fully understand the mental health effects of smartphone addiction in this population.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors report no conflict of interest pertaining to the present study.

USAGE OF AI DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The AI tool, ChatGPT 4.o has been utilized to summarise some portions of the study in order to adhere to the word limit, grammar corrections and remediate any language problems.

FUNDING STATEMENT

There were no funding sources for this study.

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The influence of locus of control on clothing preference indicators among young adults in Delhi-NCR

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ABSTRACT: The present study investigates how Locus of Control affects the various Indicators related to Clothing Preferences across Young Adults specifically in Delhi-NCR region in India, which surveyed hundred purposively sampled students from Delhi-NCR Institutions. Using Rotter's Locus of Control Scale and the Clothing Preference Scale, which measured four Clothing Preference Indicators: Appearance, Experiment, Identity, and Media. Pearson's Correlation and Linear Regression Analyses portrayed that Locus of Control was significantly positively associated with Media and Appearance, and significantly negatively associated with Experiment and Identity Indicators, respectively. Regression coefficients ranked Media as the strongest predictor of Locus of Control, followed in descending order by Experiment, Appearance, and, least significantly, Identity. These results indicate that young adults resembling External Locus of control are most strongly influenced by media driven style choices as they get easily lured by the social media platforms.

Keywords: Locus of Control, Clothing Preference Indicators, Young Adults, Delhi-NCR

1 INTRODUCTION

The word "adult" is derived from the past participle of the verb "adult," which means "to grow to full size or strength" or "to evolve." According to Hurlock (1981), the age at which a person is considered an adult or reaches legal maturity varies by culture. Gould (1975) stated that "the exact ages at which these changes occur depend on an individual's overall personality, lifestyle, and subculture." While the definition of "youth" is not universally accepted, young adults, as defined by the World Health Organization (WHO), are usually considered to be between the ages of 15 and 24. The primary thrust of young people's exploration for self-identity, they may attempt to be unique role models. Julian Rotter brought the notion of Locus of Control, which is a crucial psychological concept and personality pertinent to this stage of development. It speaks to how someone feels about how much control one has over the things that happen in their lives. Most prior work has focused either on general fashion consumption behavior or on broader personality dimensions,

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overlooking how internal versus external locus of control may shape self-expression through clothing styles. A background with a country like India, it remains marginalised in this area of research. This gap underscores the need for a basic investigation into how young adults' control over life outcomes affects their apparel style, as a part of self-representation. The study probes into how LoC influences the Clothing Preference Indicators among Young Adults, revealing underlying psychological drivers of self-expression through styling in India.

Multiple studies have explored the concept of locus of control (LoC) in connection with various psychological constructs among young adults. Variya, Parikh (2023), investigated the relationship between LoC and emotional intelligence between arts and science college-going students in Ahmedabad, resulting that there were no significant differences in academic streams. However, in both the constructs, gender differences were observed. Similarly, Jacob (2023), investigated the LoC and job satisfaction in private-sector employees aged between 20–30, concluding that there was an absence of a significant relationship between the two variables, and that job satisfaction did not show any difference across gender. In the field of adolescent psychology, Navya, Patel, Sharma (2023), explored the connection between self-esteem and LoC among school-going adolescents that aged between 14-17 across major cities in India, absence of significant correlation was found, suggesting that making a difference in self-esteem might not be able to influence the control beliefs in adolescents. Further examining emotional well-being, Sakthivel (2022), assessed the impact of LoC on depression and happiness among college-going students, concluding that internal LoC was related to higher happiness, while external LoC was linked with increased depression, representing the vitalness of perceived control in mental health outcomes. According to the academic context, Mahesh, Parashar (2022), investigated the influence of resilience, psychological well-being, and LoC on academic performance during the COVID-19 pandemic. They found a strong positive correlation between resilience, psychological well-being, and academic success but on the other hand, LoC indicated a weak negative relationship with academic performance, indicating that external control beliefs may hinder academic outcomes. Addressing impostor syndrome, Nanda (2021), found out a significant correlation between self-esteem, LoC, and impostor feelings in undergraduate students, focusing that those with lower self-esteem and an external LoC are more prone to impostor experiences. In the field of sports psychology, Tiwari (2021), reported that athletes with an external LoC exhibited higher levels of competitive anxiety, whereas no significant associations were found between internal LoC, intrinsic motivation, and anxiety. Procrastination behavior was studied by Jose and Vijayan (2021), they analysed a positive correlation between external LoC and procrastination in postgraduate students, resulting that individuals who perceive less personal control over their actions are more likely to delay tasks. Lastly, Madhani (2020), explored LoC and self-efficacy in the context of career decision-making among young adults, finding no significant relationship between the two, but underscoring the importance of structured career counseling in enhancing decision-making abilities regardless of an individual's control orientation.

A group of researchers investigated the multifaceted effects of clothing behavior and its psychological and socio-cultural correlates across diverse populations. Social media has also surfaced as a powerful influencer, as investigated by Ahadzadeh *et al.* (2017), who reported that university students' body perception, self-schema, satisfaction, and self-esteem are primarily shaped by social media exposure. The relationship between clothing behavior and self-perception is further elaborated by Tripathi *et al.* (2017), who proposed that clothing habits impact mental functioning and self-concept. Likewise, Khare and Sadachar (2017), found out a significant correlation between gender and clothing preferences among Indian youth aged between 18–24 years. Media influence has been critically examined by Shentow-Bewsh *et al.* (2016), who observed that exposure to anti-obesity messages could decrease the

state of self-esteem and body-esteem while swaying food intake, especially among women experiencing socio-cultural pressure to be thin or those with higher BMIs. Additionally, Yadav (2016), found a significantly positive attitude towards clothing among college students, with professional course students differing markedly from those in basic courses in their clothing habits. Aligning with this, Mantyi and Lanwenya (2014), noted that adolescents often express their desire to belong to specific peer groups through clothing, with deviations from peer norms potentially leading to social isolation. Monetary factors play a crucial role; Pant (2014), featured that individuals who prioritize their economic value over social value in clothing decision strategies. Handa and Khare (2013), emphasized the significant role of gender in clothing behavior, revealing that female respondents exhibited higher levels of clothing involvement and habits compared to their male counterparts. Age and body mass index (BMI) have also been accentuated as crucial variables; Mak *et al.* (2013), revealed a significant interaction between gender, age and BMI in influencing apparel preferences in the youth of Hong Kong. Collectively, these studies underscore the complex interplay in shaping clothing behavior and its psychological results.

2 RESEARCH PROBLEM

With a major and rapid drift in the fashion industry, it is very likely to pursue the perspective of young generations because they play a very complex and vital role in the revolution of fashion era as they are continuously trying to evolve with their clothing styles prior to their body types, colour codes and comfortability.

2.1 *Aim*

To assess the Influence of Locus of Control on Clothing Preference Indicators among Young Adults in Delhi-NCR.

3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

To address the research, the mentioned objectives were fabricated as:

- To find out the correlation between LoC and Appearance among Young Adults in Delhi-NCR.
- To explore the correlation between LoC and Experiment among Young Adults in Delhi-NCR.
- To investigate the correlation between LoC and Identity among Young Adults in Delhi-NCR.
- To assess the correlation between LoC and Media among Young Adults in Delhi-NCR.
- To examine the predictive influence of LoC on Clothing Preference Indicators among Young Adults in Delhi-NCR.

4 HYPOTHESES

- There will be no correlation between LoC and Appearance among Young Adults in Delhi-NCR.
- There will be no correlation between LoC and Experiment among Young Adults in Delhi-NCR.
- There will be no correlation between LoC and Identity among Young Adults in Delhi-NCR.

- There will be no correlation between LoC and Media among Young Adults in Delhi-NCR.
- There will be no significant effect of LoC on the Clothing Preference Indicators among Young Adults in Delhi-NCR.

5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1 *Research design*

The study will employ a Correlational Research Design, a non-experimental technique to investigate the relationship between two or more variables without manipulating any variables present in the study.

5.2 *Sample*

The sample was collected using purposive sampling method and was comprised of 100 UG students of Delhi-NCR Institutions, out of which 50 were female and 50 were male. The age range of the participants was 18-24 years.

5.3 *Variables*

Predictive Variable
(1) Locus of Control

Criterion Variables

(1) Appearance
(2) Experiment
(3) Identity
(4) Media

5.4 *Tool/Measure used*

(1) The Rotter's Locus of Control Scale by Julian B. Rotter (1966), it is a forced choice instrument which consists of 29 pairs of statements, 23 of which are scored and 6 items are fillers; *Reliability and validity*: The split half reliability of the scale is between 0.65 and 0.79. Estimates for reliability via the split half method correlated by Spearman Brown formula are equal to 0.73. The test reported good discriminant validity; *Scoring*: This scale is a forced choice instrument, which consists of 29 pairs of statements, 23 of which are scored. There are 6 filler items (Item No 1, 8, 14, 19, 24, 27) which are not scored. The maximum possible score on LOC scale is 23 and minimum score is 0. Score one point for each of the following: 2. a, 3.b, 4.b, 5.b, 6.a, 7.a, 9.a, 10.b, 11.b, 12.b, 13.b, 15.b, 16.a, 17.a, 18.a, 20.a, 21. a, 22.b, 23.a, 25.a, 26.b, 28.b, 29.a.

Scores Interpretation:

Scores	Interpretation
$\leq$ 12 (Low Score)	Internal Locus of Control
$\geq$ 13 (High Score)	External Locus of Control

(2) Clothing Preference Dr. Payal Kanwar Chandel and Dr. Yogita Sharma (2021), created and standardized this 21-item survey. The four main dimensions of the scale are

Appearance, Experimenting, Identity, and Media. There are five options for each item on the CPS: 5 = Always, 4 = Many Times, 3 = Sometimes, 2 = Rarely, and 1 = Very Rarely; *Reliability and Validity:* The reliability of the scale was reported .87. The inter-factorial validity of the scale reported to be ranging from .66 to .81; *Scoring:* The scoring is simply adding up the individual scores of respective items on the dimensions. The score of each item contributes to only one factor total.

Sub-Scales	Items
Appearance	4, 10, 14, 18
Experimenting	3, 9, 13, 17
Identity	2, 6, 8, 12, 16, 20
Media	1, 5, 7, 11, 15, 19, 21

5.5 *Statistical analysis*

Descriptive statistics were employed to compute the mean and standard deviation of the summated scores for both scales across 100 respondents. Pearson's Correlation Analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between the variables and Linear Regression Analysis was used to identify the predictive influence of Locus of Control on Clothing Preference Indicators among Young Adults in Delhi-NCR.

6 RESULT

Table 1. Showing Mean and Standard Deviation of LoC and Clothing Preference Indicators

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
LoC	100	11.63	2.82
Appearance	100	14.19	3.14
Experiment	100	13.35	3.39
Identity	100	20.59	4.06
Media	100	21.28	4.53

Table 1. Represents the Descriptive Statistics of the sample (N=100). For LoC mean is 11.63 (S.D = 2.82) indicates that maximum students have Internal LoC ($\leq$ 12 = Internal LoC; $\geq$ 13 = External LoC), for Appearance mean is 14.19 (S.D = 3.14), for Experiment mean is 13.35 (S.D = 3.39), for Identity mean is 20.59 (S.D = 4.06), for Media mean is 21.28 (S.D = 4.53).

Table 2. Showing correlation between loc and clothing preference indicators.

Variables	LoC	Appearance	Experiment	Identity	Media
LoC	1				
Appearance	.389**	1			
Experiment	-.509**	-.116	1		
Identity	-.334**	-.044	.055	1	
Media	.809**	.295**	-.483**	-.183	1

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2. Represents the Pearson Correlation Coefficient. There is a significant positive correlation between LoC and the Indicators - Appearance and Media; a significant negative correlation between LoC and the Indicators - Experiment and Identity.

Table 3. Showing regression analysis between loc and clothing preference indicators.

Independent Variable (Constant)	Dependent Variables	R	Adjusted R Square	Unstandardised Coefficients β	F	T	Sig.
LoC	Appearance	.389	.142	9.163 .432	17.42	4.17	.00
LoC	Experiment	.509	.251	20.449 -.610	34.24	-5.85	.00
LoC	Identity	.334	.103	26.177 -.480	12.33	-3.51	.00
LoC	Media	.809	.651	6.195 1.297	185.59	13.62	.00

Table 3. Represents the findings of Linear Regression Analysis. Findings shows that Media is strongly correlated with LoC with 65.1% variance among Clothing Preference Indicators with, $F(1,98) = 185.59$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .65$. The overall Regression model was significant ($p < .001$).

7 DISCUSSION

The topical study dwells into the "The Influence of Locus of Control on Clothing Preference Indicators among Young Adults in Delhi-NCR". For the study a sample size of 100 UG students were selected from Delhi-NCR Institutions through purposive sampling.

The very first objective of the study was to find out the correlation between LoC and Appearance among young adults to which a null hypothesis was established that there will be no correlation between LoC and Appearance among young adults. The findings suggested that there is a significant positive correlation between LoC and Appearance as students having low scores (Internal LoC) on LoC showed low scores on appearance indicator which indicates that students having Internal LoC gets very less affected by the appearance through styling themselves compared to the students having high scores (External LoC) on LoC.

The second objective of the research was to explore the correlation between LoC and Experiment among young adults in response to which a null hypothesis was fabricated that there will be no correlation between LoC and Experiment among young adults to which the results indicated that there is a significant negative correlation between them which highlights those students having low scores (Internal LoC) on LoC showed more interest in experimenting with their clothing while students having high scores (External LoC) on LoC showed least interest in taking risk of experimentation with their style.

The third Objective states to investigate the correlation between LoC and Identity among young adults on the basis of which a null hypothesis was created that there will be no correlation between LoC and Identity among young adults for which the outcomes indicated a significant negative correlation between them as students with low scores (Internal LoC) were more focussed on their style which portrays their identity whereas students with high scores (External LoC) gave more attention towards the trending patterns which helps them to blend in the fashion curriculum. Tripathi *et al.* (2017) further emphasized the connection between clothing behavior and self-perception.

The fourth objective defined to assess the correlation between LoC and Media among young adults, to which a null hypothesis was put forth, that there will be no correlation between LoC and Media among young adults. The results established a significant positive correlation between LoC and Media which highlighted that the students inhibiting low scores (Internal LoC) were less affected by the media than students having high scores (External LoC) on LoC. Social media has bloomed as a major influencing factor, as mentioned in the study by Ahadzadeh *et al.* (2017).

The latter objective of the study inspects to examine the predictive influence of LoC on Clothing Preference Indicators among Young Adults in response to which, a null hypothesis was established that there will be no significant effect of LoC on the Clothing Preference Indicators among Young Adults in Delhi-NCR. The result was drawn from responding each Clothing Preference Indicator thoroughly with LoC, which indicated that "Media" was the highly affected Clothing Preference Indicator by LoC, followed by the "Experiment", then "Appearance" and the least affected was "Identity" among all the indicators. Thus, it reflects that present generation are more affected by the media-driven style and care less about how they portray their true self and identity.

8 CONCLUSION

The present study concludes a wholesome part of the psychological and a self-expressive factor through the medium of styling as it puts forth the perspective of the young adults of how they are trying to fit in the contemporary world of continuous shifting fashion and social life. Through psychological viewpoint it is indicated that students having low LoC (Internal LoC), gets very less affected by the appearance through styling themselves than compared to the students having higher LoC (External LoC) whereas students with high LoC (External LoC), showed least interest in experimenting with their style as they avoid going out of style and moreover try to blend in ongoing trend as they think they will be disliked by their peer and society. One's identity plays a vital role in representation of their culture and perspective and thus young adults with low scores (Internal LoC) on LoC have portrayed a higher score on Identity Indicator as they are more inclusive towards self and they try to represent their original identity through clothing. In this media-driven world, students with higher LoC (External LoC) are easily lured by the trends on social media and it impacts them with greater intensity than compared with the students having lower LoC (Internal LoC).

The current research improves the vital role of LoC in driving young adults' approach towards styling and self-expression. It suggests that individuals with a low LoC (Internal LoC) are more likely to express their identity authentically through clothing, focusing on self-representation rather than running behind trends whereas those with a higher LoC (External LoC) tend to conform to social trends and media-driven fashion society, fearing social rejection for deviating from the norms. The findings stress over the importance of fostering internal LoC in young adults' psyche to encourage individualism and reduce the pressure to conform to external influences, especially in a media-saturated world. These insights can be applied to mental health interventions, educational programs encouraging individuals to embrace their identity while navigating the nexus of social media.

The contemporary study can be reproduced on a larger scale of population with diversified culture, demographics, gender, socio-economic class and including other various indicators which can affect the psyche filtration and styling sense with a greater cause. Present study is only stressed on the population of Young Adults of Delhi-NCR Institutions with a limited age range, area, gender and region, thus making it very compact research and unable to generalise over a large span of population. Further research can expand across various regions in India, including different psychological constructs like personality, conformity, which can further enhance the perspective of clothing styles.

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Mental health discourse on Instagram: A content analysis of Indian origin social media influencers

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ABSTRACT: The study evaluates how Indian origin social media influencers (SMIs) on Instagram construct mental health discourse. Through qualitative content analysis of primary data, posts on Instagram by Indian origin social media influencers (SMIs), the research identifies common themes, the nature of mental health concerns discussed, and the presence of support structures like inspirational messages, personal anecdotes, and expert advice. The SMIs considered for the study are Jay Shetty, Ranveer Allahbadia, Divija Bhasin and Nimisha Vermaa. Posts between 5th October and 5th December 2024 were analysed through Chang's typology of support framework. The results indicate humor, vulnerability, and storytelling as the most common tools used to create rapport and dismantle stigma. The research revealed that motivational content and supportive messages were prevalent, but engagement with professional mental health practices was strongly varied. But few SMIs promote therapy directly or counteract misinformation, highlighting both the strength and the weakness of SMIs' role in increasing mental health awareness in India. Though the messages are strong, they are different in depth and the validity of material. It is recommended that the future studies explore the credibility of the SMIs and depth of mental health advocacy.

Keywords: Social Media Influencers, Mental Health, Instagram, India

1 INTRODUCTION

Mental health is psychological well being. Mental health affects us both psychologically and physically. Mental well-being is crucial for human beings to function and fulfill their potential. "In the WHO South-East Asia, approximately 260 million people, i.e. one in seven suffer from mental health conditions (WHO 2022)."

1.1 *Indian mental health scenario*

Discussing mental health is still considered a taboo in Indian society and contacting a mental health professional is seen negatively. Indians often find it difficult to disclose their mental health struggles, resulting in mental illnesses being not diagnosed and treated. "India is experiencing a increase in mental health disorders. More than 197 million Indians suffer from depression, anxiety and substance abuse. A major concern for young Indians aged 10 to 24 is the mental health, contributing to 45 percent of health problems (McGorry *et al.* 2024)." "National Mental Health Survey (NMHS) of 2021 indicates that 10.6 percent of Indian adults over the age of 18 have a mental condition (Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Govt of India 2023)."

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1.2 *Mental health discourse on instagram and the role of SMIs*

The age group of 10 to 24 years is significantly affected by mental health issues and this is where the role of social media comes into play. "As of October 2024, there were 392,65,000 Instagram users in India and the largest user group was of the age group 18 to 24 with 172,600,000 users" (Instagram Users in India - October 2024 2024).

The extensive usage of Instagram by Indian youth allows SMIs to leverage their following and contribute to increase in mental health literacy. SMIs are playing a vital role in carving out new perceptions on mental health in India. With consistent creatives, SMIs are engaging in the broader discourse on mental health, placing SMIs in a unique position to bring mental health into the forefront. "Social media influencers act as micro-celebrities who share their opinions, values and information with their followers and impact the decisions (Senft 2008)." The posts by SMIs contribute towards changing gears of the societal discourse. "Content on mental health posted by SMIs enables discussions of mental health issues, by contributing to a conducive environment where in sociocultural circulation of representations of mental well-being and problems happen. Additionally, this fosters norms of wellbeing and healthy living (Lupton 2018)."

Various studies have explored the role of SMIs in shaping narratives on mental health. Wickström and Lind (2024) studied the mental health talk by female social media influencers on YouTube and its impact on teenage girls in Sweden. The authors found that the advice by SMIs includes calls to self-improvement; work on the body; and seeking help. This is supported by Lind and Wickström's (2023), points at the presence of positive psychology's characteristics in messages. In a descriptive analysis of TikTok videos on mental health, Basch *et al.* (2022) found nearly fifty percent of the videos report mental health concerns and the coping techniques were found in about ten percent of the videos.

Koinig (2022) found motivational quotes to be the most favourable mental health content format, where as comics was the least favourable. Koinig concludes that the individuals search for content that boosts their self esteem and offers a human touch with the message. Zou *et al.* (2020) studied health influencers' posts on Sina Weibo and found that the influencers used low fear appeal and high efficacy messages and relied heavily on narrative evidence, but the messages with efficacy information had less chances of being liked.

SMIs also share their own personal experiences and struggles of mental health, portraying them in a vulnerable position, providing a raw but real picture to their followers. Sharing personal experiences of SMIs' mental health struggles can promote mental health awareness and decrease the stigma (Evans-Lacko *et al.* 2014). The lack of localized studies on Indian origin SMIs underscores the need to explore and analyse the Instagram content of the Indian origin SMIs on mental health and this study addresses the to find out how these SMIs contribute towards the representation of mental health issues in India.

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

(1) To analyse the nature of mental health posts by Indian origin SMIs
(2) To find out the different formats of content on mental health issues
(3) To identify the types of support provided by the Indian origin SMIs' posts

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This is social media based study, employing qualitative content analysis of Instagram posts by the top Indian origin SMIs. Purposive sampling was used to select Indian origin SMIs on the basis of content posted and follower count and the list released by IGYgrow (Top Social

Media Influencers in India -2024). The SMIs are Jay Shetty, Ranveer Allahbadia, Divija Bhasin and Nimisha Vermaa. By using method of census, posts were manually coded for the content on mental health between 5th October and 5th December 2024 were analysed in terms of their format, and the type of mental health issues discussed. Each post/story/reel is considered as the unit of analysis.

The present study borrows from the classification of support (Chang 2009):

(1) Informational support - providing information on symptoms, treatment and such.
(2) Esteem support - encouragement etc.
(3) Emotional support - empathizing, expressing support etc.
(4) Network support - share personal experiences

3.1 *Theoretical perspective*

"Opinion leaders" in the two-step flow theory by Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet (1948) can be applied to SMIs. Influencers can be seen as opinion leaders in the society, wielding immense power to influence and addressing mental health in India. SMIs can set the agenda (Agenda Setting Theory, McCombs and Shaw 1968) for taking care of one's mental health and propagate the message that mental wellbeing is crucial. As per Transportation Theory (Green and Brock 2000), "a crucial mediator of effective persuasion is the transportation produced by captivating storytelling (Zou *et al.* 2020)." SMIs on Instagram are crucial to persuade their audience to take the step towards mental wellbeing.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Demographic details of the Indian origin SMIs.

Sl. No.	Name	Instagram handle	Followers	Gender
1	Jay Shetty	@jayshetty	15.8 million	Male
2	Ranveer Allahbadia	@beerbiceps	4.4 million	Male
3	Divija Bhasin	@awkwardgoat3	268 thousand	Female
4	Nimisha Vermaa	@nimishvermaa	88.6 thousand	Female

Table 1 provides demographic information of the four Indian origin social media influencers (SMIs) selected for the study. The SMIs were selected on the basis of availability of mental health-related posts on their Instagram accounts and number of followers, indicating their influence and reach. The sample consists of two male and two female SMIs, thus providing a gender-balanced view.

Table 2. Mental health related posts by the Indian origin SMIs.

Sl. No.	Name	No of mental health related posts	Total no of posts	Percentage
1	Jay Shetty	37	128	28.9%
2	Ranveer Allahbadia	20	20	100%
3	Divija Bhasin	28	52	53.8%
4	Nimisha Vermaa	11	90	12.2%
	Total	**96**	**290**	**33.1%**

Table 2 reports mental health-related content shared by four Indian origin Instagram social media influencers. Jay Shetty, has highest number of posts, only used 28.9% of his posts for mental health. Ranveer Allahbadia shared only (100%) mental health-related content throughout the study period. Divija Bhasin had 53.8% posts on mental health, reflecting high commitment towards the subject. On the other hand, Nimisha Vermaa, posting almost everyday, had only 12.2% of her posts related to mental health.

4.1 *Qualitative analysis*

(1) ***Jay Shetty (@jayshetty)*** describes himself as a life coach and posts mostly motivational videos and quotes. Out of the 128 posts, 37 were directly related to mental health and wellbeing. "Don't be so hard on yourself", "It is ok to let go", "The one after the toxic one will always be a challenge" and "Keep going, keep rising, keep believing", these words of encouragement have more traction. @jayshetty hosts a podcast "On Purpose" and shares snippets of videos with prominent guests including Tom Hanks (Hollywood actor), Cynthia Erivo (British actor) and more with messages like "This too shall pass" (Hanks) and "You are good enough. Full stop" (Erivo).

Shetty shares quotes such as "Take that moment every now and then to acknowledge how far you've come" , "Lets navigate the darkness together", encouraging people to share their thoughts in comments, placing him as one among his followers, reducing the stigma attached to disclosing mental health struggles. "Disclosure of SMIs' personal mental health have been argued to significantly reduce stigma (Evans-Lacko *et al.* 2014)." He uploads daily reminders with motivational quotes, videos with coping mechanisms, habits to increase confidence and ways to reduce stress. The posts fulfill all four support systems; Informational support (resources on health care providers, encouragement for therapy), Esteem support, Emotional support and Network support.

(2) ***Ranveer Allahbadia (@beerbiceps)***, in contrast to other SMIs being studied, had 20 posts, all photos of himself with inspirational words. The only exception was a post with updates on his mental health during his journey as an SMI, ending with "You are doing great my friend", encouraging his audience to never give up. The content seems to only fulfill the Esteem support. His approach resonates with the findings of Altendorfer, (2019), youth appreciated the SMIs who share their personal mental health experiences online and see these posts a a valuable resource for information and social support.

(3) ***Divija Bhasin (@awkwardgoat3)*** is the only professional psychologist in the study. Out of 52 videos during the study, 28 deal with mental health and engages with the audience. In every video she establishes herself as "I am a psychologist, let me explain" contributing to the recurring humourous theme and rises mental health awareness. She encourages fact check and to believe in doctors and science not random influencers who give advice without any credentials. She debunks stereotypes and misconceptions. Her videos emphasize empathy and benefits of therapy. Her posts fulfill Informational, Esteem, Emotional and Network support.

(4) ***Nimisha Vermaa (@nimishavermaa)*** describes herself as a Celebrity mindset coach. Out of 90 posts by her, 11 are on mental health and wellbeing. @nimishavermaa runs a regular retreat called @reclaimyourpower, coaching for women to "reclaim their inner feminine power." Most of the content is motivational quotes and relationship advice. One can find tickets on sale to her retreat and testimonials of participants, making this account stand out in its approach to mental health issues. She writes "Sharing circles are the most integral part of healing", offering encouragement. She talks about being too harsh on herself and her own difficult experience in dealing with grief. "The inclusion of details portraying herself as one among the others, as someone who is susceptible, suffering and inability to control the environment can be seen as risk-taking" (Lind and Wickström 2023). "For the same exact reason, personal mental health confessions are considered as signs of authenticity (Lee *et al.* 2021)."

Positive write ups on motherhood are present, possibility of both positive and negative interpretation, reinforcing patriarchal notions and triggering to some. She questions "why men don't take therapy? If they are handling everything in their head, why no change is ever seen?". This highlights the predominating notion in India, that therapy is not seen as a masculine solution to mental health issues for men. "Deeply ingrained in the customs, cultural standards frequently prohibit males from discussing their emotional difficulties in public and promote a society in which showing vulnerability is seen as weakness. Men are therefore less likely to seek professional assistance for psychiatric problems, frequently postponing or avoiding therapy entirely." (Yamini and Yamini 2024). Few posts ends with a note from her asking her audience to schedule individual sessions to cope with stress and to "reclaim your power". Recently, posts sharing messages from her followers seeking help or telling their stories, sharing photos of sessions without blurring the face of the participants, raises the question of consent. The SMI is portrayed as an opinion leader but has no specific training, is under no expectations as per editorial quality, and is bound by no institutionalized ethics guidelines (Enke and Borchers 2019). Her posts fulfill Esteem support (encouragement), Emotional support (empathizing) and Network support (share follower's mental health struggles and share personal experiences).

5 CONCLUSION

The analysis of the four Indian origin SMIs points towards to the strong presence of support in terms encouraging words, motivational quotes, personal experiences and coping methods. Though personal experiences offer a more authentic narrative, none of the four SMIs were forthcoming in sharing their personal experiences. Except for @awkwardgoat3 no one else debunks and provides access to professional resources. The most used and liked format was found to be posts with motivational quotes. This is also supported by Koinig's (2022) study. The way SMIs talk about their experiences, manage mental health, provides a platform for the audience who suffer similar problems to connect and express and also acts as a source of information. The audience may find comfort posts by SMIs disclosure of their own struggles, making them feel potentially less lonely; the content will be seen in the light of prevalent mental health discourses.

The present research is limited to a short time period and only four influencers and may not be indicative of overall trends. Future studies might increase the size of the sample, include non-local influencers, and use mixed methods to measure audience interaction and the real effectiveness of mental health messages on followers' attitudes. This research can be part of an extended study, which can employ 'ethnography for the internet', requiring the study of both content on the internet and users' perception and interpretations of it, as explained by Hine (2015). The study can further include multiple SMIs and a comparative study of Mental Health Influencers on multiple platforms, including long form content on YouTube. Another interesting extension of this study would be the potential benefits of using SMIs and their mental health content in therapeutic procedures like therapy. There is also potential in studying the economic angle to the kind of content shared by the SMIs.

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Restorative benefits of campus landscapes in a semi-arid Indian university

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ABSTRACT: University landscapes can either aggravate or alleviate rising student stress, yet few studies quantify how individual campus spaces contribute to psychological restoration in hot semi-arid contexts. This pilot study assessed perceived restoration across the five most frequented outdoor and semi-outdoor settings at Manipal University Jaipur. Thirty undergraduates (70 percent female; mean age = 20.7 years) completed the 26-item Perceived Restoration Scale (PRS) for every site they had visited in the previous two weeks. Six reverse-worded items were recoded, and component and Overall PRS scores were computed. Results show outdoor, vegetation-rich environments consistently elicited stronger feelings of fascination, being-away, extent, and compatibility than the indoor reference space, regardless of how often or why students visited. Shaded microclimates, visual contact with greenery, and reduced ambient noise emerged as common restorative cues. These insights underline the importance of integrating canopy cover, diverse planting, and acoustically buffered niches into campus planning, especially in water-stressed climates where outdoor comfort is easily compromised. The findings add context-specific evidence to Attention Restoration Theory and offer design recommendations for biophilic, mental-health–supportive campuses in arid and semi-arid settings.

Keywords: Attention Restoration Theory, Campus landscape design, Indian university, Perceived Restoration Scale, student mental health

1 INTRODUCTION

University students are reporting record levels of psychological distress, with recent surveys indicating that more than half experience clinically relevant anxiety or depression during the academic year (World Health Organization, 2022). Although counselling services and curricular reforms can mitigate some of this burden, scholars increasingly point to the campus environment itself as an underused lever for supporting mental health. Research in environmental psychology shows that contact with nature improves mood, restores depleted attention, and lowers physiological markers of stress (Berman *et al.* 2008; Hartig *et al.* 1997).

Attention Restoration Theory (ART) offers a widely cited explanation for these benefits. According to R. Kaplan and Kaplan (1989), environments that evoke a sense of being away, effortless fascination, spatial coherence, and personal compatibility allow the cognitive

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system to recover from sustained effort. Experimental work confirms that natural settings rich in vegetation, water, and wildlife typically satisfy these four qualities, whereas built interiors often do not (Berto 2014; Ulrich *et al.* 1991). Universities, with their mix of lawns, courtyards, and circulation corridors, therefore, provide a valuable real-life laboratory for applying ART in everyday student life.

Empirical studies on Western campuses support this premise. Tree-canopied quads (Felsten 2008), shaded promenades (Hipp *et al.* 2015; Han 2017) and biodiverse courtyards (Gulwadi *et al.* 2019) in North America, Europe and Australia have all been associated with higher Perceived Restoration Scale (PRS) scores, lower salivary cortisol and improved academic outcomes. Recent studies deepen this picture by identifying thermal comfort as a partial mediator of restorative experience in humid-subtropical university settings (Huang *et al.* 2024), while demonstrating that the interplay of shade and planting diversity predicts perceived restoration in courtyard spaces (Alnusairat *et al.* 2022).

However, two limitations remain. First, most investigations treat the campus outdoors as a single green backdrop rather than comparing specific sites. Second, the evidence base is geographically narrow, focusing largely on temperate regions in North America and Europe. Climatic context can shape both the usability and the restorative potential of outdoor spaces. For example, shade and microclimate may be decisive in hot semi-arid locations such as Jaipur, where daytime temperatures often exceed 40 °C. Yet, to date, no published work has examined how individual landscapes within an Indian university contribute to student restoration.

Building an evidence base for Indian campuses is important for two reasons. From a theoretical standpoint, extending ART research to a new climatic and cultural context tests the generality of its claims. From a practical standpoint, many Indian universities are investing heavily in campus infrastructure, but design decisions often proceed without empirical guidance on mental-health outcomes. Understanding which spaces students find most restorative can inform priorities for planting, shading, and seating and can guide the retrofitting of less effective areas. The present study addresses this gap by quantifying students' perceived restoration in the five most frequented outdoor and semi-outdoor settings at Manipal University Jaipur. Using the 26-item PRS, the study asks a single research question: Which of these five campus landscapes provides the greatest restorative benefit to students? The objective is to provide a data-driven ranking of restorative quality that can inform evidence-based campus design and maintenance. By linking student experience to specific physical settings, the study contributes to both the theoretical literature on restorative environments and the practical field of campus planning.

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Rooted in ART, environments rich in natural elements are known to restore directed attention by eliciting effortless fascination and a sense of being-away. International campus studies across North America, Europe and Australia corroborate these benefits, yet their applicability to India's hot semi-arid universities remains untested. The objective of the study is as follows:

(1) To identify the most frequently visited outdoor and semi-outdoor campus landscapes.
(2) To compare the perceived restorative quality of these landscapes using the PRS.
(3) To examine whether visit frequency and primary visit motivation moderate perceived restorative quality.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 *Study design and setting*

The study followed a two-phase, cross-sectional design conducted on the Manipal University Jaipur campus during March 2025, the mid-semester period of the even academic term. Phase 1 was an exploratory interview designed to identify the campus landscapes most frequently visited by students. Phase 2 was a questionnaire survey that measured perceived restoration in the five landscapes revealed by Phase 1. A simple random sample of undergraduates was drawn from the registrar's e-mail list. Thirty students consented to take part in each phase. In the survey phase, participants were 30 undergraduates aged 17 to 25 years ($M = 20.7$, $SD = 1.6$); 70 percent ($n = 21$) identified as female. The age distribution was six students aged 17–19 years, 21 students aged 20–22 years, and three students aged 23–25 years. No exclusion criteria were applied other than willingness to provide informed consent.

3.2 *Phase 1: Landscape identification interview*

Each Phase 1 participant completed a brief, face-to-face interview lasting about five minutes. Using a campus map, students named the outdoor or semi-outdoor places they visited most often and rated their visit frequency on an open numeric scale (visits per week). A tally of responses revealed five high-frequency landscapes: [1] Courtyard; [2] Food court Indoor Seating area; [3] Food court lawns; [4] Sports ground; [5] Walkway seating area. These five sites were selected for the survey phase.

3.3 *Phase 2: Survey measures*

After the Phase 1 interviews, a survey link was distributed by e-mail to a new random sample of 30 undergraduates drawn from the same population. Students could complete the form on a smartphone or computer and were instructed to respond separately for every landscape they had visited at least once in the previous two weeks. On average, the questionnaire required about ten minutes to be completed. Participation was voluntary and anonymous; no incentives were offered. Students were asked if they visited a particular landscape site, if answered yes, frequency of visit and motivation for their visit were asked. The 26-item PRS (Hartig *et al.* 1997) was administered for each site a student reported visiting. Items are rated on a 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree Likert scale. Six negatively worded items (11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17) were reverse-scored before analysis. Four component scores- Being Away, Fascination, Coherence, and Compatibility- were computed as item means, and an Overall PRS score was computed as the mean of the four components.

4 RESULTS

Table 1 summarizes means and standard deviations for each PRS component and the Overall score across the five landscape types. Courtyard, Walkway, and Sports Ground yielded the highest Overall-PRS means (4.84–4.96), whereas Food-court Indoor averaged 3.26, indicating a markedly lower restorative quality.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics by landscape (N = 79 site-visits).

Sl. No	Landscape Site	N(No. of students visiting)	Being Away (Mean ± SD)	Fascination (Mean ± SD)	Coherence (Mean ± SD)	Compatibility (Mean ± SD)	Total PRS Score (Mean ± SD)
1	Courtyard	22	4.84 ± 1.02	5.03 ± 0.97	4.75 ± 1.34	4.73 ± 1.02	4.84 ± 0.92
2	Food court Indoor Seating	18	4.07 ± 1.12	4.32 ± 0.97	4.88 ± 0.89	3.90 ± 1.20	4.29 ± 0.79

(*continued*)

Table 1. Continued

Sl. No	Landscape Site	N(No. of students visiting)	Being Away (Mean ± SD)	Fascination (Mean ± SD)	Coherence (Mean ± SD)	Compatibility (Mean ± SD)	Total PRS Score (Mean ± SD)
3	Food court lawns	8	3.61 ± 1.56	3.15 ± 1.17	2.78 ± 1.22	3.51 ± 1.20	3.26 ± 1.04
4	Sports ground	7	5.43 ± 0.45	4.24 ± 0.82	5.14 ± 0.87	5.03 ± 0.69	4.96 ± 0.46
5	Walkway seating	24	5.10 ± 0.98	4.68 ± 1.22	5.07 ± 0.92	4.66 ± 0.95	4.88 ± 0.92

A linear mixed-effects model with random intercepts for participants revealed a significant main effect of Landscape on Overall PRS, $F(4, 75.1) = 10.55$, $p < .001$ (Table 2). Using Courtyard as the reference category, Food-court Indoor was associated with a 1.45-point decrease in Overall PRS ($\beta = -1.45 \pm 0.26$, $z = -5.60$, $p < .001$). Estimates for Walkway, Sports Ground, and FC Outdoor did not differ significantly from Courtyard (all $|z| \leq 1.67$, $p \geq .10$).

Table 2. Linear mixed-effects model predicting Overall PRS.

Fixed effect	β	SE	*z*	*p*
Intercept (Courtyard)	4.84	0.16	30.77	<.001
Walkway seating	0.12	0.18	0.67	0.503
Sports ground	0.06	0.21	0.28	0.781
Food court lawns	-0.22	0.19	-1.18	0.240
Food court indoor seating	-1.45	0.26	-5.60	<.001

Note. Random effects: Participant (intercept) $\sigma^2 = 0.41$, residual $\sigma^2 = 0.63$.
Model fit: AIC = 193.2. Courtyard is the reference category.

Holm-adjusted pairwise comparisons (Table 3) demonstrated that every significant difference involved Food-court Indoor. Walkway, Courtyard, and Sports Ground each exceeded Food-court Indoor by approximately 1.5 points (all adjusted $ps < .001$, $|d| \geq 1.48$). No contrasts among the four outdoor settings reached significance after adjustment.

Table 3: Holm-adjusted post-hoc contrasts (significant only)

Comparison	Mean Diff	p_*adj*	*d*
Courtyard vs. Food court indoor seating	1.45	<.001	1.48
Food court lawns vs. Food court indoor seating	1.02	.037	1.04
Sports ground vs. Food court indoor seating	1.55	<.001	1.67
Walkway seating vs. Food court indoor seating	1.53	<.001	1.58

Figure 1 displays a raincloud plot of Overall PRS by landscape. The three natural outdoor settings exhibit narrow, high-centred score distributions, whereas Food-court Indoor shows a wider, lower-centred distribution with several low outliers, visually reinforcing the statistical findings.

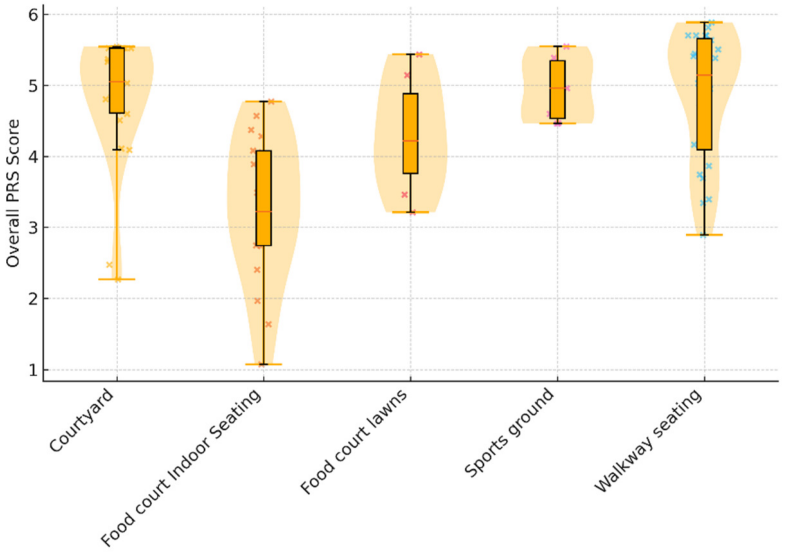


Figure 1. Raincloud plot of Overall PRS by landscape

To explore whether use patterns influenced restoration, Visit Frequency (numeric) and Motivation (five-level categorical code) were added to the mixed model. The extended model did not improve fit relative to the baseline (ΔAIC = +2.1). Visit Frequency showed only a marginal trend, $\beta = 0.09 \pm 0.04$, $z = 1.95$, $p = .052$, and no Motivation category differed from the reference level (all $|z| < 0.35$, $p > .70$). Thus perceived restoration was primarily driven by landscape type, not by how often or why students visited the sites.

5 DISCUSSION

This pilot study investigated how distinct campus landscapes at Manipal University Jaipur support students' perceived restoration. Consistent with ART (R. Kaplan and Kaplan 1989), three vegetated, open-air settings—the Courtyard, Walkway seating, and Sports ground—produced the highest PRS scores, whereas the Food-court Indoor Seating area produced the lowest. All statistically significant post-hoc contrasts involved the indoor dining space, with very large effect sizes ($|d| \approx 1.0$–1.7). Importantly, neither visit frequency nor self-reported visit motivation moderated restoration, underscoring the primacy of landscape characteristics over use patterns.

5.1 *Linking landscape features to restorative components*

The Walkway seating corridor offered the strongest restorative profile. Shaded by mature *Dalbergia sissoo* (shisham) and punctuated by flowering vines such as *Bougainvillea* and *Allamanda*, the path delivered abundant "soft fascination", the effortless sensory engagement that ART identifies as a key precursor to recovery (R. Kaplan and Kaplan 1989). Frequent sightings of birds and squirrels further reinforced fascination, while the orderly, linear layout provided high Coherence. Proximity to a small café allowed students to rest or socialise without crowding, thereby satisfying Compatibility with common campus routines.

The Sports ground ranked next. Its expansive cricket and football fields furnished a powerful sense of spatial Extent, another ART criterion, and the peripheral jogging track

and shaded seating enhanced compatibility for both active and passive users. Ready access to drinking water and clear wayfinding cues made the setting easy to navigate and encouraged longer stays. Occasional cheering during matches may have reduced tranquillity, yet the overall balance of openness, movement, and moderate shelter still produced high PRS scores.

Located near academic blocks, the Courtyard combined a three-tier vegetation structure, neem canopy, fruiting mango trees, and understory snake plants, with abundant birdlife. These ecological layers supplied multi-sensory stimulation and "being away" from built interiors, even though sporadic noise from adjacent kiosks occasionally intruded. The mix of indoor and outdoor seating further bolstered compatibility, explaining its parity with the Walkway on most PRS sub-scales.

The Food-court lawns illustrated how a single missing ingredient, i.e., shade, can compromise restoration. Although the area offered a small fountain (water is widely linked to stress reduction; White *et al.* 2010) and tiered seating conducive to social interaction, direct sun exposure in Jaipur's climate likely undermined thermal comfort and, consequently, the Being-Away and Compatibility dimensions. Its mid-range PRS score reflects this trade-off.

Finally, the Food-court Indoor Seating space exhibited the lowest restoration. Despite two open walls that afforded views of nearby vegetation, crowded tables, reverberant acoustics, and pervasive food odours created sensory overload - conditions known to diminish restorative experience (Fei *et al.* 2025). These detractors disrupted Fascination and Coherence, producing a pronounced 1.5-point deficit in Overall PRS relative to every outdoor setting.

Together, these site-level narratives demonstrate that shaded vegetation, wildlife presence, and moderate social density consistently support the four ART components, whereas noise, heat load, and visual clutter work in the opposite direction.

6 CONCLUSION

Findings replicate broader evidence that campus green infrastructure enhances cognitive and affective outcomes. Comparable PRS differentials between tree-rich courtyards and food courts were observed at Texas A&M (Felsten 2009) and an Australian regional university (Han 2017). Ulrich's Stress Reduction Theory posits that vegetated settings quickly dampen physiological arousal (Ulrich *et al.* 1991); meta-analyses show that even brief exposure to biodiverse environments improves mood and directed-attention tasks (Berto 2014). Our data extend these results to an Indian higher-education context, which has been under-represented in the literature.

The nonsignificant influence of visit frequency mirrors Herzog *et al.* (2002)'s conclusion that quality trumps quantity: a single ten-minute break in a high-quality green space can offset hours spent in non-restorative interiors. Likewise, students' stated motivations (e.g., socialising vs studying) did not alter restoration, aligning with Gulwadi et al.'s (2019) finding that intrinsic landscape qualities overshadow activity type.

Naturalistic, biodiverse, and shaded landscapes on the Manipal University Jaipur campus demonstrably enhance students' perceived restoration, independent of how frequently or why they are used. These findings reinforce global calls for biophilic campus design and provide locally grounded guidance for Indian universities seeking to foster student well-being. Despite these contributions, the study has several limitations that point to fruitful directions for future research.

6.1 *Limitations and future directions*

This pilot study is limited by a small sample (30 students; 79 site visits) and its reliance on self-reported data, limiting statistical power and generalisability. All data were self-reported;

subsequent studies should pair PRS with objective markers such as heart-rate variability or Stroop performance (Berman *et al.* 2008). Longitudinal or ecological momentary assessment designs could capture temporal fluctuations and causal ordering. Finally, microclimatic variables (temperature, humidity) were not measured and may interact with shade availability.

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Exploring the relationship between nomophobia and psychological distress in Indian young adults

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ABSTRACT: ***Background****:* Nomophobia, the anxiety experienced when one is not able to use their smartphones or is separated from it. This condition is rapidly increasingly among the current generation due to the growing dependency on mobile phones. Additionally, nomophobia is linked to several psychological distress such as stress, depression, anxiety etc.

Aim: Exploring the frequency of nomophobia and connection with psychological distress among Indian young adults

Methods: The study involved a sample of N=200 graduate/ undergraduate students and working adults of Delhi NCR. The Nomophobia Scale, created by Yildrim and Correia,2015, NEO Five-Factor Inventory- 3 by McCrae and Costa, 2005 and short version of the Personality Assessment Inventory developed by Leslie Morey, in 1991 were utilized. The research employed SPSS-26, a quantitative analysis tool, and used descriptive statistics along with Pearson Product Moment correlation.

Results: Findings showed that moderate to severe level of nomophobia observed more frequent among the participants and also demonstrated a notable significant and positive correlation at $p < 0.01$ between elevated nomophobia levels and heightened psychological symptoms especially related to neurotic spectrum such as (DEP) depression, (ANX) anxiety and (SOM) somatic complaints. Further, nomophobics also have a positive correlation with neurotic personality traits. These results highlight the increasing mental health concerns associated with excessive smartphone reliance.

Keywords: Nomophobia, neuroticism, depression, somatic symptoms, anxiety, young adults

1 INTRODUCTION

The advancement of modern information and communication technology (ICT) has significantly enhanced rapid communication and internet connectivity, establishing the internet as the greatest communication web in this new media age. The widespread utilization of ICTs has raised concerns regarding the potential for addiction due to excessive or inappropriate use (De-Sola Gutiérrez 2016). The incompetency to use smartphone, which adversely impacts everyday life of an individual, and it is recognized as problematic smartphone use (Billieux 2012). Empirical data shows that the rapid increase in the amount of smartphone usage may have contributed to the development of a condition known as

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nomophobia (Aboujaoude 2019; Bartwal and Nath 2020; Basu S 2018; Gonçalves *et al.* 2020; Tams S 2018). Nomophobia, a contemporary disorder referred to as No-Mobile Phone-Phobia, manifests as discomfort, impatience, anxiety, nervousness, or complex mental and physical distress when a mobile phone is inaccessible (Durak 2019; Yildrim 2014). Nomophobia and the psychological conditions of smartphone addiction are frequently perceived as interrelated (Buctot *et al.* 2020). Youth report that while smartphones have accelerated ease, relaxation, and safety in their lives, but they also acknowledge that over use has negatively impacted their overall health and wellbeing, yielding fatigue, stress, headaches, and attention issues (Lenhart *et al.* 2014; Soderqvist *et al.* 2008) .A survey conducted by YouGov for the United Kingdom Post Office revealed that approximately half of British mobile phone users perceived anxiety when misplace their phones, battery of mobile phones exhausted, and encounter network issues (Secur Envoy 2012). According to Shambare *et al.* (2012), smartphone use is "likely to be the largest non-drug-related addiction of the 21st century." This indicates that young adults have become heavily reliant on phones, which is detrimental to their overall wellbeing. This stands as nomophobia is a growing technological health threat, and if not addressed promptly, it could have devastating effects on the lives of younger generations. There are also disadvantages associated with this communication technology, as nomophobia adversely affects individuals' physical, social, and psychological well-being. The issue of whether the increasing use of mobile phones exposes individuals to radio frequency radiation, thereby causing a risk to the physical health, such as headaches, fatigue, sleep disturbance, impaired concentration, dizziness and frustration, also in children these mobile radiation increases the risk of seizure with known epilepsy, neurogenic cancers, and hypertension (Khan M 2008). Smartphones have modernized our methods of communication, learning, and entertainment. While advance technology plays a prominent role in regular schedule, outcome of immoderate smartphone use can precede in psychological problems (Rugai, J. *et al.*,2016).

1.1 *Nomophobia and psychopathology in Indian context*

The invention of smartphone brought a new energy into our lives but gradually due to its omnipresent nature we have become entirely dependent on it. As a result, it has given rise to numerous physical and mental health issues. This phenomenon has sparked an outbreak of research, presented these issues in shade of addiction, antisocial behavior, and danger. As smartphones become as basic part to our lives as the oxygen we need to breathe, it becomes essential to explore the limitations of their use. This dependency can give birth to nomophobia, a condition marked by a storm of anxiety when individuals are parted from their digital companions, along with its ripple effects. A particular worry is the normalization of excessive smartphone use, often slipping under the radar as a problem, especially among young adults.

According to Pavithra *et al.* (2015), conducted a cross sectional study in Bangalore medical college to find out a rising trend in nomophobia and dependency on mobile phone dependency. The results indicated an increasing prevalence of nomophobia among the younger generation. The researchers recommended further multi-center studies to thoroughly explore the psychological aspects and potential interventions for nomophobia. The researchers suggested more multi-center study to fully examine nomophobia's psychological components and possible treatments. Another investigation examined the connection amongst issues like sleep disturbance and sleep disturbances and nomophobia of medical college students in Telangana. The study pointed the menacing nature of nomophobia, underscoring to reduce its harmful circumstances and develop other impactful strategies which require human inter communication (Veerapu *et al.*,2019). Additionally, Sharma M *et al.* (2019) done a transverse study on 1386 students to explore the association of overall quality of life, anxiety and depression, with nomophobia among high school students (14-17 years). Results revealed that mild, moderate, and severe level of nomophobia were seen in

students and female was found to be nomophobic than male. Higher nomophobia score showed a notable robust correlation with, anxiety, depression and defective quality of life. A review by Sharma and Singh (2023) identified nomophobia as an evolving psychopathology, renders a detailed outline of nomophobia its reason and impacts. This review study was analyzed literature from a decade (2010 to 2021). These studies concluded that nomophobia is a rising concern, particularly among youth as it showed positive association with depression, anxiety, stress, sleep disturbances, reduced academic and occupational performance. Recent research inquired the connection between psychological variables namely loneliness, aggression with nomophobia among the students of Shaheed Nand Kumar Patel University Raigarh (Chhattisgarh), India., conducted a cross-sectional study from January 2024 to June 2024. The findings revealed that students having nomophobia experienced higher degree of anxiety, aggression, and loneliness compared to those without nomophobia. Additionally, there were gender-based differences in the psychological variables of anxiety, aggression, and loneliness (Ghoghre Sharda 2024).

Current research reveals a dearth of studies addressing this issue in India. Contemporary findings suggest that young adults direct the digital empire without recognizing the skulking psychopathological issues and their relationship to nomophobia. This study illuminates the impact of nomophobia and its dimension on personality traits and psychopathological symptoms, such as anxiety, depression, and somatic complaints. Ultimately, the findings of the research will enhance the apprehension level of nomophobia among young adults and its association to neurotic spectrum of personality and psychopathology.

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study investigates the extent of nomophobia degree and its relationship with fundamental psychological symptoms. For this purpose, the following objectives of this study have been formulated

(1) To evaluate the level of nomophobia among Indian young adults
(2) To explore the association between nomophobia, personality traits and psychopathological symptoms, such as somatic complaints, depression, and anxiety among Indian young adults.

3 HYPOTHESIS

The current study proposes the following hypotheses:

H: 1: There will be a significant tendency of nomophobia among Indian young adults.

H: 2: There will be a significant positive association between nomophobia measures and neurotic personality

H:3: There will be a significant positive correlation between higher level of nomophobia and psychopathology among Indian youth.

4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research design: Current research engaged with correlational design to investigate the interrelationships among the variables.

Sample: A sample N= 200 consisted both Male (N= 97) and Female (N=103) students enrolled in college / universities and working adults from Delhi NCR. The age of the respondents varied from 18 to 25, having an average age of 21.5.

Tools to be used:

Nomophobia questionnaire (NMP-Q) (Yildrim and Correia 2015): It comprises 20 items and is self-administered by the participants. Participants were classified according to their overall scores as: mild nomophobia category have 21–59 score, moderate nomophobia category scores 60–99, severe nomophobia category have 100–140 scores, and no nomophobics score 20 or less.

NEO Five-Factor Inventory- 3 (NEO-FFI- 3) by McCrae and Costa 2005: It is a short version of 60-item of The NEO-PI measures the five personality domains of Agreeableness, Extraversion, Openness to experience, Consciousness and Neuroticism in a rapid reliable and efficient manner.

The Personality Assessment Inventory (PAI; Morey 1991): This is a self-report inventory developed by Laslie Morey, 1991.This tool comprises 344 items, with 5 treatment scales, 2 interpersonal scales, 4 validity scales, and 11 clinical scales. In this study clinical scales used which have neurotic spectrum.

Statistical Analysis:

In the current study 200 students and working adults enrolled college or universities Delhi NCR were participated and for the statistical analysis of data SPSS software 26.0 v was utilized. Descriptive statistics were employed to summarize the research population's baseline traits. Pearson product correlation were computed to analyses the association between neurotic spectrum of psychopathology and personality traits with nomophobia and its four dimensions. These tests were non directional or two-tailed, $P < 0.05$ or $P < 0.01$ level defined as statistically significant.

5 RESULT ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Table showing the level of Nomophobia.

Level of Nomophobia	Frequency	Percent
No Nomophobia	2	1.3 %
Mild Nomophobia	26	12.8 %
Moderate Nomophobia	134	67.0 %
Severe Nomophobia	38	19.0 %
Total	200	100.0 %

Table 1 showed that a total 200 young adults within the age varied from 18 to 25 years get involved in the current study. According to research depicting the chronicity level of nomophobia 67% and 19% of those in the sample had moderate level and severe level of nomophobia, respectively, whereas 12.8 % of the sample had mild nomophobia.

Table 2. Showing the relationship between nomophobia and personality traits.

	Nomophobia	Neuroticism	Extraversion	Openness to experience	Agreeableness	conscientiousness
Nomophobia	**1**	**.73****	**-.56****	**.31****	**-.51****	**-.37****
Neuroticism		1	-.51**	.34**	-.39**	-.26**

(*continued*)

Table 2. Continued

	Nomophobia	Neuroticism	Extraversion	Openness to experience	Agreeableness	conscientiousness
Extraversion			1	-0.14	.51**	.49**
Openness to experience				1	0.05	0.15
Agreeableness					1	.65**
conscientiousness						1

*Significant at the 0.05 level.
** Significant at the 0.01 level.

Table 2 illustrates a significant and robust positive correlation amongst nomophobia and neuroticism, with r = .73, $p < .01$. This indicates that Indian youth holding higher neuroticism levels are predisposed towards anxiety, fear, and emotional instability due to nomophobia as smartphones often provide a sense of security by enabling continuous communication, offering quick access to information, and acting as an emotional safety net. Extraversion r = -.56, greeableness r = -.51 and conscientiousness r= -.37 negative but significantly predicts nomophobia among young adults of Delhi NCR. Some researchers also showed high correlation between personality traits and Nomophobia. (Ehrenberg 2008; Argumosa-Villar 2017).

Table 3. Showing the relationship with nomophobia, its dimensions and dimension of neurotic spectrum of psychopathology.

	Nomophobia	SOM	ANX	DEP
Nomophobia	1	.112**	.194**	.375**
Not being able to communicate	.815**	.115*	.168**	.321**
Losing connectedness	.905**	.105*	.237**	.179**
Not being able to access information	.926**	.0.082	.166**	.203**
Giving up convenience	.895**	.125*	.135**	.184**

** Significant at the 0.01 level.
* Significant at the 0.05 level.

The above Table 3 showed a positive association between dimensions of nomophobia and various psychopathological variables which have neurotic spectrum i.e., somatic complaints, anxiety and depression (SOM, ANX, DEP) demonstrated correlation value r =.112, r=.194, r= .375 ($p < 0.01$) respectively suggesting that as nomophobia increases, so do symptoms of anxiety, depression, and somatic complaints. Similar to the studies conducted by Sharma *et al.* (2019), Kuscu *et al.* (2023); Sharma M. *et al.* (2023), Gnardellis *et al.* (2023).

Table 4. Showing the correlation between nomophobia and subscales of somatic complaints and anxiety.

	Nomophobia	SOM-C	SOM-S	SOM-H	ANX-C	ANX-A	ANX-A
Nomophobia	1	.163**	.225**	.183**	.103*	.120*	.148**
SOM-C		1	.172**	.260**	.284**	.209**	.162**

(*continued*)

Table 4. Continued

	Nomophobia	SOM-C	SOM-S	SOM-H	ANX-C	ANX-A	ANX-A
SOM-S			1	.157**	.108*	.089	.417**
SOM-H				1	.125**	.138**	.312**
ANX-C					1	.276**	.146**
ANX-A						1	.153**
ANX-A							1

**Conrelation is significant at the 0.01 level (2 tailled).
*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 levell (2-tailed).

Table 4 indicates a strong positive and notable association amongst nomophobia and subscales of somatic complaints (SOM) which are SOM- Conversion (SOM-C) r= .163, $p < 0.01$, SOM- Somatization (SOM-) r= .225, $p < 0.01$, and SOM- Health concerns (SOM-H) r= .183, $p < 0.01$, suggesting nomophobia expresses concerns about physical functioning and related issues. Further, for the Anxiety (ANX) and its subscales i.e., ANX- Affective (ANX-A), ANX-Cognitive (ANX-C), and ANX- physiological (ANX-P) also showed positive and significant relationship r=.103($p < 0.05$), r=.120($p < 0.05$) and r= .148($p < 0.01$) respectively encompasses various aspects of anxiety cognitive(thoughts) affective (emotions and mood) and physiological (physical health) are highly correlated with higher level of nomophobia

6 CONCLUSION

To sum up, Nomophobia which is anxiety in absences of one's mobile phones, alarming across the world. Smartphones are a big part of life and especially for young people. The outcomes of this study imply that nomophobia adversely affects the psychological health especially neurotic spectrum of young adults, leading to anxiety, depression, and somatic symptoms. The primary factors of nomophobia are restricted availability of information and loss of connection, underscoring a substantial reliance on mobile devices for both social involvement and for hands on application. These findings add to the advancing sphere of cyberpsychology and provide vision to generate some preventive strategies.

To authenticate these results, it is pivotal to conduct more research, especially longitudinal studies with randomized controlled trials. Limitation of particular study is it relies on self-assessed data, that might not be accurate. It also focuses on a specific age group and region, which limits how widely the findings can be applied. To better understand nomophobia, future research should include long-term studies and explore people's experiences in depth and also to explore the effects of nomophobia on both younger generation and working adults suggested to develop treatment or prevention strategies that consider personality traits of the individual.

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Sensitivity towards women difficulties: Awareness and effectiveness of women empowerment in India

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ABSTRACT: *Introduction:* In the context of India, social issues are never ending. This research paper focuses the women's difficulties. It focuses on the awareness and effectiveness of women empowerment schemes.

Purpose: The study aims to understand women awareness about various empowerment initiatives. The paper examines their beliefs about the potential impact of these programs.

Methodology: Present research is a descriptive study. The sample frame is women from both rural and urban areas of the Lucknow district in Uttar Pradesh, India. Sample size is 500. The study addresses two major aspects. Firstly, reach of the women empowerment schemes implemented by the government. Second, paper seeks the effectiveness of these schemes in fostering women's empowerment.

Paper Type: Research Article

Findings: The findings show that women are well aware of the government's women's empowerment scheme. Moreover, they strongly believe that these schemes can positively affect their empowerment. The research highlights the importance of these programs in shaping women's lives. Paper also suggests effectiveness of awareness campaigns.

Originality/Value: The research suggests the potential of these schemes to bring about social and economic changes. This paper describes the broader impact of women's empowerment initiatives in India.

Keywords: Women empowerment, Government schemes effectiveness, Gender Sensitivity, Social Awareness, Gender Equality, Women's Rights and Challenges

1 INTRODUCTION

Differences are a part of nature. Species differ in their capacities and skills. Few animals are terrestrial, few aquatic, few are xerophytes and few are hydrophytes. Similar differences are there in our species. We humans are also different from others and also different among each other humans. The differences also increase when genetic differences are mixed with social differences. Indian society experiences a wide range of differences. It may be by caste, class, religion, geography, and education. These differences are somewhere justified and somewhere unjustified. A very unjust discrimination is based upon the gender. Not understanding the needs of a gender and imposing limitations on them is unjust (Gagnon, N. *et al.* 2020).

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So, it becomes important to understand the needs and sensitivity towards women difficulties (Gupta, S. 2023). These differences significantly impact their access to resources, opportunities, and rights. A women living in urban areas may benefit from education and employment. Those in the rural or marginalized communities often face compounded challenges. Rural women are restricted for mobility, lack of health services, and economic dependence (Kulkarni, L., and Ghosh, A. 2021). Additionally, social norms and patriarchal structures continue to limit women's growth. Recognizing and addressing these intersecting difficulties is essential. It will help us for achieving real and inclusive empowerment.

1.1 *Understanding the difficulties among women*

Women issues can be understood with an empathetic, holistic, and intersectional perspective (Hong T., Sabharwal, M. 2023). We have to acknowledge their biological, psychological, and social realities. In different societies women have to work under different expectations and limitations (Siddiqi, N. 2021). In a recent case women have faced discriminatory suspension based upon these issues. Two judges from Madhya Pradesh were let off from duty. Supreme Court of India has ruled that "We hold that the termination was in the form of punishment. The termination was stigmatic in nature. Thus, orders of full court, administrative report and government order are set aside." Judges are s a top-level government job. Reaching up to that job is not common for everyone. Lots of hard work and commitment can lead you there. But even at these positions women have to take their 'fight for right' to Supreme Court.

Another dimension of gender-based difficulty lies in the transitional nature of marriage. When a woman gets married, her life often changes in ways that go far beyond just a new relationship status (Chaudhry, S. 2021). The emotional pain is higher for suddenly having to reshape one's identity. She needs to suit a new family and it can be heavy and deeply isolating. Things become even more complicated for women who are working. They may be pursuing careers and managing professional goals. Yet they're still expected to handle household, elders and children. These expectations reflect how deeply gender roles are wired into our culture. Where women are often the ones asked to adjust and prove themselves over and over (Patel, V. 2022). This goes same at home, at work, and in society.

Physical safety and security are another issue for women. Women remain conscious about their surroundings. It reduces their focus and leads them to distraction. On the other hand, men can walk through the world without thinking twice. Women are constantly aware of their surroundings (Borker, G. 2021). Another issue is the social stereotypes that hold women growth. Social stereotypes consider them too emotional for leadership. These stereotypes shape how women are seen and treated (Košir, S., and Lakshminarayanan, R. 2023). They're often pressured into certain roles. Women are expected being the caretaker at home. For women from marginalized groups, these challenges only intensify. Dalit women, for example, face both caste and gender-based discrimination (Sharma, B., and Geetha, K. A. 2021). It makes them more vulnerable to violence and exploitation. They face additional layers of exclusion and limited access to opportunities. Women with disabilities, too, are often left out of mainstream discussions. Their struggles are rarely addressed in policies or welfare schemes.

1.2 *Sensitivity towards women difficulties*

The civilized society exists only if remained civilized. Ignoring the concerns of women is neither possible nor society does it. Lot of legal and social provisions existed to safeguard the concerns of women. Over the years, the government of India has made significant strides. Maternity leave is one such area where the government has shown its sensitivity (Goel, M., and Ravishankar, N. 2022). In recognition of the importance of maternal health maternity leave policies were introduced. Is helps in the need for women to recover physically and

emotionally post-childbirth. Similarly, various female child support programs have been launched. to promote the well-being of young girls. The Beti Bachao Beti Padhao scheme, for instance, aims to combat gender-based discrimination. It ensures equal opportunities for girls (Kumar, G. 2023).

1.3 *Remedial spaces for women issues*

The One-Stop Centre (OSC) is an initiative that reflects the government's sensitivity. It is for women's safety and well-being. OSCs provide integrated support services for women affected by violence. It offers medical, legal, and psychological assistance. The initiative aims to ensure that women safety (Meshram, L. U. 2022). Shakti Sadan and Mahila Shakti Kendra are two additional initiatives. They are aimed at women's empowerment. Shakti Sadan offers shelter and rehabilitation for women who are in crisis. Mahila Shakti Kendra focuses on providing community-level support to rural women. They help through skill-building, training, and leadership development.

1.4 *Awareness about rights and platforms for resolving issues*

Raising awareness about women's rights is very important. Women must know the platforms available for resolving issues is very crucial. It will be empowering women and ensuring that they can seek justice and support when needed. India has made progress in legal protections and social services. Many women still remain unaware of the rights and services available to them. This lack of awareness can often leave women vulnerable to exploitation. The government has created several platforms to address such challenges. National Commission for Women 1091 assistance, and legal aid services are created for women. Additionally, initiatives like the One Stop Centres (OSC) provide integrated services for women. Many women, especially in rural or marginalized communities, lack knowledge of such services. Due to limited outreach, cultural barriers, and social stigma they remain unaware (S., Sapna. 2021).

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Jbui Mundhe (2021) found that women issues still exist. They face challenges despite the efforts of the Indian government. The gender gap in political participation is also notable. Improving access to education and employment can act as catalysts for change. Singh and Joarder (2021) examined the effectiveness of constitutional women rights. Women in rural areas remain uneducated and unaware of their rights. It is leaving them vulnerable to male dominance. The paper stresses the importance of women's empowerment in rural areas. Khatri and Raina (2021) focused on the perceptions of school-going students. The research is regarding gender and equality. It is analyzing gender equality. Venugopalan, Bastian, and Viswanathan (2021) explored the multi-level engagements in women's development. Their research examined the Kudumbashree program. It will ensure the economic and social inclusion of women and marginalized groups. Bhat (2022) explores the challenges women face in their empowerment journey in terms of access to information. Radio and television are the primary sources of information for many rural women. The media has to promote the positive aspects of women's empowerment. It ensures that these narratives are highlighted. Dar and Shairgojri (2022) examined the role of ICT in gender equality. It has changed the ways in which people work, interact, and access services. ICT (Information and Communication Technology) plays a crucial role in expanding opportunities. Balabantaray (2023) found that women often experience the negative effects of environmental degradation. They tend to be highly motivated to participate in improving living conditions. Wani, I. U., Haseen, S., and Khanday, I. N. (2024) has worked on the gender inequalities and economic

growth issues. Mahato, R. K., Das, A., and Reddy A, B. (2025) has worked upon gender inequalities and land ownership.

3 RESEARCH GAP

The researchers have found that there are several studies related with gender inequality. But the impact and awareness of government scheme needs to be measure. It makes it relevant to conduct a study on the level of awareness and perception about women empowerment schemes effectiveness.

4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 *Objectives*

(1) To study the Government's Schemes on Women Empowerment, development, progress and provision for equality through the Constitution.
(2) To assess the impact of pilot projects like OSC, Shakti Sadan, Mahila Shakti Kendra, etc. on women's development.

4.2 *Hypothesis*

$H_0$1: There is no significant difference about the awareness level among the women about the women empowerment schemes
$H_0$2: There is no significant difference about the believe about the effectiveness among the women about the women empowerment schemes

4.3 *Research design*

A Descriptive research has been selected for the study. Researcher has used a closed ended, 05 point scale for the survey to collect the data.

The research tool has been tested for reliability and validity. (Cronbach's alpha and EFA). Sample of 180 resulted in KMO 0.699. The final sample size is of 500.

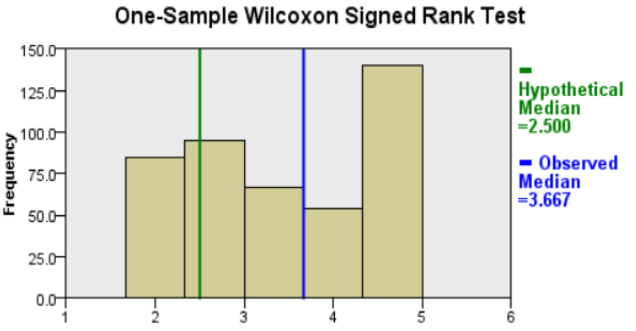
4.4 *Population And Sample*

A research about women empowerment will consider all women of the state as populations. Each woman will come under the effect of these empowerment efforts. The research sample is non parametric sample from Uttar Pradesh, Lucknow. Women at random places have been selected for survey. It has been considered that a mix of rural and urban area should be covered.

5 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

$H_0$1: There is no significant difference about the awareness level among the women about the women empowerment schemes

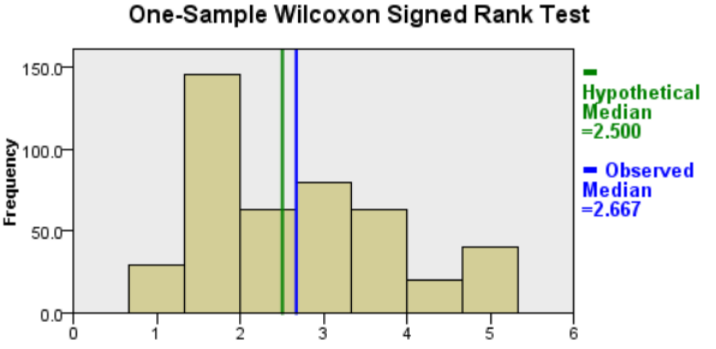
The Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test result revealed a statistically significant difference in awareness levels ($p < 0.05$), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. This indicates that the difference in awareness is not due to random chance.



Furthermore, the direction and distribution of the responses suggest that women demonstrate a good level of awareness regarding various empowerment schemes. The data indicates that such awareness is widespread and positively skewed, reflecting growing consciousness and engagement among women with the available government initiatives aimed at their upliftment.

$H_0$2: There is no significant difference about the believe about the effectiveness among the women about the women empowerment schemes

The Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test was applied to assess whether the median response differs significantly from a neutral or baseline value, indicating a belief in the schemes' effectiveness. After performing the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test, the results indicated a statistically significant difference at the 5% significance level ($p < 0.05$).



The rejection of the null hypothesis suggests that there is a significant deviation in responses, implying that women, on average, believe in the effectiveness of the government-run women empowerment schemes. The direction and magnitude of the signed ranks further indicate that this belief leans positively — reflecting that most women perceive these schemes as beneficial and impactful in their lives.

6 DISCUSSION

After conducting the research, it was found that out of 500 distributed questionnaires, 441 valid responses were received. The data collected from both rural areas—such as Chinhat,

Balaganj, Maura, and Itaunja—and urban locations including Gomti Nagar and Aliganj, revealed a common trend: a significant number of women across these regions expressed belief in the effectiveness of the welfare schemes targeted at their empowerment.

The responses reflect that women across these locations are not only familiar with the names of key initiatives but also possess a basic understanding of their objectives and benefits. This widespread awareness suggests the growing reach of informational campaigns and community-level discussions around women's rights and welfare programs, highlighting a positive trend in policy dissemination and community engagement.

Despite differences in geographical and socio-economic backgrounds, the respondents largely acknowledged the positive role of government initiatives in improving their access to education, healthcare, financial support, and protection services. This widespread agreement among women from diverse settings highlights not only their growing awareness but also a general sense of trust in the potential of these schemes to bring about real and meaningful change in their lives.

7 CONCLUSION

The research findings clearly indicate that women are not only aware of various women-centric schemes but also believe in their potential to bring meaningful change. This reflects a growing consciousness among women regarding their rights and the support structures available to them. The positive perception towards schemes such as Mahila Shakti Kendra, One Stop Centre, and Shakti Sadan suggests that government efforts are being recognized at the grassroots level. More importantly, the belief in the effectiveness of these initiatives highlights a hopeful shift in women's attitudes toward institutional mechanisms for empowerment. While awareness and belief are strong foundations, the findings also emphasize the need for consistent and effective implementation to translate this optimism into tangible improvements in women's lives. In conclusion, the study underscores that sensitivity towards women's difficulties is present both in policy and public sentiment. Going forward, the challenge lies not in initiating schemes, but in ensuring that they reach, uplift, and empower women across all segments of society.

7.1 *Implication*

The present study can be used as an indicator of women empowerment efforts. It also shows that scheme effectiveness if also dependent on the reach of the scheme. Highly communicated schemes can be more effective.

7.2 *Limitations*

The present study kept 02 dimensions for the study. But women empowerment is multivariate concept. The study guided the researchers that the perception related with awareness and effectiveness is associated with the exposure to information. This dimension can be included in future studies.

7.3 *Suggestions*

The researchers have found that awareness of a program can lead to its objective attainment. The researchers have found that a good marketing effort can help to spread awareness about the women empowerment schemes. Role of marketing in social causes has been already established in Polio eradication campaign in India. Government endorsed a well known celebrity Mr.Amitabh Bacchan. It increases the reach and effectiveness. Researchers propose that good marketing and holistic communication of women empowerment efforts can lead

to change. The researchers have tried to establish the contemporary situation of women empowerment schemes and its effectiveness in Indian context. The paper seems to achieve its objectives.

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Balancing innovation and ethics: Generative AI's role in the future of education

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ABSTRACT: Generative artificial intelligence depicts a burgeoning field surrounded by artificial intelligence, characterized by its capacity to independently produce novel content by leveraging existing data. This technology is promising for fostering tailored learning experiences, generating content, and driving educational advancements. It has the potential to remould pedagogy with the ability to elevate swotting outcomes, broaden educational accessibility, enhance educational quality, and provide valuable support to educators, students, and researchers. Generative artificial intelligence presents various valuable opportunities, including the creation of research frameworks, the development of case summaries, the generation of online notes, and content analysis. However, ethical considerations surrounding the use of GAI, such as the creation of misinformation, fabrication of citations, copyright infringement, and concerns regarding data privacy, warrant careful attention. Moreover, the successful integration of generative AI tools necessitates substantial investments in infrastructure, training, and ongoing support, posing hurdles for educational institutions, particularly those with limited resources. The Methodology employed in this paper is an extensive review of the literature that comprises a wide range of academic approaches, case studies, and practical implementation of the AI tools in the system. This literature helps to provide multi-faceted opportunities and challenges analogous to AI tools in pedagogy.

This paper attempts to explore the positive impact and obstacle stemming from the escalating ubiquity of generative Machine Learning in education, and how its incorporation can enhance the current educational panorama and elevate educational standards, the paper underscores the significance of steady research, and career Progression initiatives to facilitate the effective integration of AI tools in Pedagogy milieu for better integration Artificial intelligence with the growing technology-based education system.

Keywords: Generative Artificial Intelligence, Education, Data Privacy, Digital Divide

1 INTRODUCTION

The swift expansion of Machine Learning Tools in the current period has significantly influenced the education system in India. Generative artificial intelligence delineates a distinct field within the palatinate of machine learning, characterized by its ability to generate novel content and undertake innumerable engagement such as writing, perusal, and coding. These systems operate by leveraging input data to produce outputs. Prominent examples of generative AI tools include ChatGPT, Bard, and BING. The ability to analyze, summarize, and produce new set of information of Generative AI aims to accelerate its advancement in academia. Generative AI tokens hold a unique role in the analysis and construction of decision-making in the 21st century. The education system has included GAI in teaching, learning, and knowledge interaction used by teachers, students, and researchers. However, Generative AI is also disrupting the education system as academic experts are increasingly relying on these techniques.

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Generative AI technologies are utilized in academia for tasks including research, coding, assignments, thesis writing, and accessing specific information and material. Generative AI methods were utilized to organize the study by identifying certain patterns, styles, and training data. Defining "generative AI" may appear unnecessary due to its rapid and widespread use. The topic of general artificial intelligence (GAI) presents issues due to its broad application and rapid growth, particularly regarding the training and behaviour of the models supporting these tools. It is essential to clearly outline the scope and functionality of this article. This paper aims to explore research on AI tools and its relevance for the learning process. The paper examined the academic system and how these GAI create opportunities in academia. It suggested strategies for institutional researchers and students to use artificial intelligence in education with a positive factor approach. This mixed methodology is been used to conduct this study, utilizing Doctrinal research to comprehend the postulations and operation of GAI and to investigate the opportunities and challenges associated with it. Additionally, an exploratory study was conducted on AI tools such as ChatGPT 3.5, ChatGPT 4, Bard AI, and Co-pilot AI to gauge their efficacy in an educational milieu from different perspectives of teachers, students, and researchers. For the selection of research papers, the researchers utilized the Scopus database to gather relevant literature on the subject. The paper was sourced using the keywords "generative artificial intelligence" and "Education," resulting in a total of 246 documents published between 2021 and 2024. Among these, the year 2023 had the highest number of research papers, as illustrated in Figure 1. Subsequently, the papers were refined using a language filter, leading to the selection of 237 documents for review in this research.

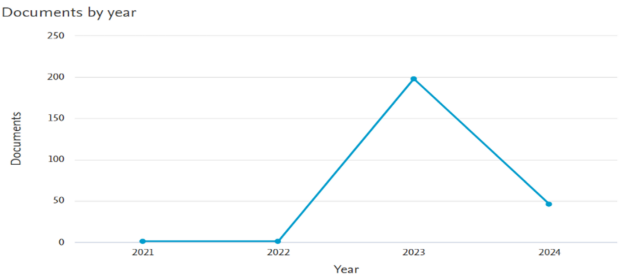


Figure 1.

Moreover, the paper is not refined to a particular education domain the whole set is been taken for this research as shown in Figure 2 which determines the scope of relevance of the paper in understanding the extensive impact of General Artificial Intelligence (GAI) across various educational domains.

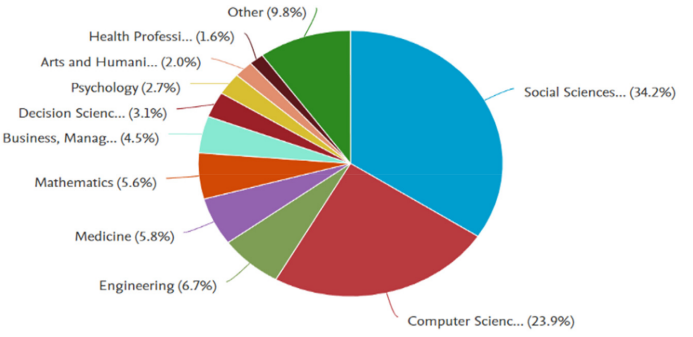


Figure 2.

2 OBJECTIVE

(1) To explore the opportunities presented by the unification of (GAI) in education, including personalized swotting, enhanced teaching tools, and data-driven insights.
(2) To analyze the challenges associated with the exert of GAI in pedagogy, such as immaculate considerations, algorithmic bias, and the impact on traditional teaching methods.
(3) To investigate the potential societal implications of GAI in education, including its effects on employment in the education sector and variance in ingress to AI-driven academic amenities.
(4) To propose an outline and guidelines for the responsible implementation of GAI in educational environments.
(5) To provide educators, policymakers, and stakeholders in the education sector with a comprehensive understanding of the opportunities and challenges posed by GAI, enabling informed decision-making and policy development.

3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

While the potential of GAI in education is immense, it is accompanied by a set of obstacles that must be convey. These embrace ethical scrutiny, such as misinformation, citation fabrication, and copyright infringement, as well as practical issues related to the integration of GAI tools, such as the need for significant investments in infrastructure and training.

4 SIGNIFICANCE O THE STUDY

This study is significant because it highlighted a critical aperture in the existing literature by scrutinizing the dual aspects of GAI in education—its probable advantages and the impediments that must be overcome for its successful integration. The findings of this study are intended to facilitate educators, policymakers, and researchers in making informed decisions regarding the adoption of GAI in educational settings.

5 OPPORTUNITIES CREATED BY GENERATIVE AI FOR EDUCATION

Generative artificial intelligence presents several opportunities for educators, students, and researchers. Various researchers have discussed the possible advantages of generative artificial intelligence. *(Mohammad Hmoud, Hadeel Swaity, Nardin Hamad, Omar Karramand Wajeeh Daher)* [1] Research findings have demonstrated that the utilization of Generative AI tools is poised to have a beneficial influence on the education sector. Specifically, the integration of GAI is expected to enhance student motivation, leading to increased engagement and enjoyment in task performance the implementation of GAI is anticipated to streamline the completion of tasks, thereby saving time and effort and facilitating self-assessment to enable individuals to make informed judgments. *(Binh Nguyen Thanh, Diem Thi Hong Vo, Minh Nguyen Nhat, Thi Thu Tra Pham, Hieu Thai Trung, Son Ha Xuan)* [2] discussed that Generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools demonstrate significant efficacy in the application, analysis, and evaluation of content. The capacity of General Artificial Intelligence (GAI) to create content is expected to facilitate the generation and interpretation of graphs to support high-level educational objectives and the advancements in data analysis and interpretation enabled by AI have the potential to benefit educational institutions, educators, students, and researchers by facilitating data analysis and report generation.

(Dr, AS George) [3] find out that the GAI model was noted to enhance learning capabilities and have a beneficial influence on education. It can generate automated written material, ensure proper punctuation, and provide content summaries, thereby facilitating increased efficiency and productivity for researchers and students. *(Carl Preiksaitis and Christian Rose)* [4] The discussion highlighted the advantages of utilizing Generative Adversarial Intelligence (GAI) for medical researchers in developing personalized learning strategies through AI writing functionalities. This approach enables the synthesis of cutting-edge medical research findings, thereby enhancing originality rather than replicating existing sources. *(D. Gabriska, K. Pribil ova* [5]) indicates that generative artificial intelligence (AI) is well-suited for processing substantial amounts of data in real-time and generating novel outcomes which facilitate the customization of technology for developing novel tasks, analyzing data, and leveraging AI as a supportive tool.

After the analysis of the research related to the benefits created by the GAI in educational settings, the following potential opportunities of GAI for the educational setting are drawn

5.1 *Brainstorming and briefing preparation*

The extensive knowledge for educators, learners, and scholars through the creation of notes using generative artificial intelligence it aids in stimulating discussions on various subjects and themes, thereby fostering the generation of novel ideas and improving the quality of education.

5.2 *Assessment creation*

Integrating Generative AI (GAI) into academic assessments provides educators with a unique opportunity to use sophisticated teaching techniques. Educators may utilize GAI to enhance the development of crucial assessments, which can lead to a more profound comprehension and enhancement of the assessment procedure. The Generative AI systems may help you include material with the use of different teaching methods based on students' preferences, to improve learning.

5.3 *Generation of lesson plan*

The Generative AI tools may assist the academicians in developing of lesson plan as per the learning goals and curricular design. The AI helps to save the time and effort of the educators while formulating the lesson plan design as per the objectives and pedagogical principles.

5.4 *Creation of research outline*

It helps in creation of Structure for Research like objectives, methods, design and other relevant points. It may provide the better guideline to the researcher for their notions to formulate in their elements of study.

5.5 *Translation of language*

AI-driven Translations help automatically translate the cross-cultural language in an accessible way through employing text, Audio and video for better understanding. This feature allows instructors to connect with a wider international audience of students and researchers, promoting diversity in education.

5.6 *Enhanced accessibility and inclusivity*

Generative AI technologies, such as text-to-speech and speech recognition, can improve accessibility for students with disabilities by allowing them to participate more fully in educational activities and access learning materials tailored to their requirements. This progress fosters diversity and guarantees that all students have a fair opportunity for academic achievement.

6 CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH GENERATIVE AI IN EDUCATION

The GAI has facilitated academic work and content creation, but research has also highlighted the limitations and constraints linked to its application. (NaYoung Song) [6] pointed out that the exert of AI has increased plagiarism and cheating. The lack of ethical research standards in university settings is a major barrier. *(Farrelly, Tom Baker, Nick)* [7] deliberated on the need for AI literacy, emphasizing the necessity for ethical AI use and the framework required to enhance research and education to fully utilize General Artificial Intelligence (GAI). *(Junaid Qadir)* [8] pointed out that GAI is not flawless and completely reliable. This system is trained on past data and may provide disinformation and false citations and information. *(Habib, Sabrina, Vogel, Thomas Anli, Xiao Thorne, Evelyn)* [9] deliberated on the potential of General Artificial Intelligence (GAI) to provide new ideas and conduct analysis. However, they expressed concern that over-reliance on GAI might stifle human innovation and have a detrimental influence. The study analysis shows a correlation between the number of problems and the General Academic Index (GAI), prompting questions about academic pursuits. Traditional academic criteria, especially those that emphasize the exert of numerous machine learning techniques in academic environments.

6.1 *Ethical considerations*

The emergence of generative artificial intelligence (GAI) has sparked worries about undermining the genuineness of originality in written content, facing challenges due to AI-generated materials. Institutions of higher learning have varied attitudes toward AI, from outright bans to attempts to responsibly incorporate technology into academic activity. Nevertheless, the incorporation and optimal methods for utilizing AI are deficient in the educational realm. OpenAI and Turnitin have developed tools to detect AI-generated material in response to requests from the education industry. Research indicates that the effectiveness of GAI detection techniques has established that accurately recognizing AI-generated information, especially if altered, is now unachievable. Originality.ai, although claiming high success rates, recommends against using their products in academic disciplinary processes. Students are faced with a dilemma in this case. Although technology alone may not be a dependable method for identifying AI-generated writing, students might nonetheless face accusations of academic dishonesty stemming from these systems. Additionally, reliance in proprietary plagiarism detection software within institutions may be unfounded, as studies have shown its ineffectiveness in identifying AI-generated material. Khali and Er's analysis found that Turnitin's similarity-checking technologies often classify AI-generated work as original since they do not compare it to existing text. When asked if the writing was self-generated, the GAI accurately recognized its work in most cases. However, ChatGPT's capacity is not completely reliable, since it may incorrectly claim originality for extracts from well-known literature. This technology may create hurdles for people belonging to marginalised groups to get a better education. The use of these technological tools is still unclear. The proper reliance on technology without doing its proper

assessment may create a risk to student treatment as well as the core strength of academic honesty.

6.2 *Fabrication and misinformation*

The next issue talks about how, sometimes, GAI may provide misinformation and fabricated information in education. This may create a challenge for the academician and learner to differentiate between original and Fabricated work. It may easily spread false or deceptive instructional material created by the tools of AI. This can make academics handicapped by reducing analytical thinking and research ability, for a better academic environment. The main concern is for the learner, as they highly relying on the misinformation spread through the internet and other platforms. The extensive distribution of fake content on social media may create misleading material as a result of undermines the public trust in the information ecosystem. Several kinds of platforms are used for educational purposes, but they create fake academic credentials, fabricated research reports, or misleading educational materials. To deal with such fabrication in academics, there is a need to incorporate media literacy skills into the education system to check the credibility of educational material. Educators should enable the pupil to excess certain information with verified tools to deal with such a complex digital environment.

6.3 *Challenge on creativity*

The main and important discussion on generative artificial intelligence is complicated, acknowledging its credibility to enhance research capabilities by way of introducing novel ideas and viewpoints that may be difficult to create by people. The main concern was the negative impact of GAI on creativity within its recognition. This problem includes stabilizing the exert of Generative AI's features with support and development of human creativity, which can be essential for the promotion of its innovation and originality.

6.4 *AI education and development*

The more important task is to develop AI education among the learners. They must be well aware of the potential of GAI and its limits of GAI. The new AI tools can be used more effectively in many activities, such as grading, content creation, and proper implementation, to avoid and protect against the decline of critical thinking abilities. Their incorporation in academics again creates issues like honesty and plagiarism. The educator must teach the students and learners how much they depend on the GAI. The generative AI should be incorporated in the academic courses, training should be given to learners on how to easily access and create innovative ideas without tempering its originality. The professional educators provide and promoting ethical usage of AI in the education System. This approach may aim to improve educational results, minimize the dangers, and ensure fair access to learning opportunities for all students.

7 SUGGESTIONS

In light of the results, the following suggestions are as follows-

- ***Ethical Guidelines***: Educational institutions should develop and implement ethical guidelines for using GAI to prevent the spread of misinformation and protect data privacy.
- ***Infrastructure Investments***: Policymakers should prioritize investments in the Framework required to facilitate the merger of GAI in education.

- ***Ongoing Training***: Professional development programs should be established to ensure that educators are equipped to use GAI tools effectively.

8 CONCLUSION

The study concluded that the integration of innovative GAI in academic contexts is likely to improve efficiency. GAI offers unique capabilities that are not readily accessible to educators, including advanced data analysis through technology, rapid generation of summaries and briefings, efficient curriculum planning, and other related functions. The Generative Artificial Intelligence serves as a valuable tool for academics and researcher to enhance the use of project execution, skill development, and better research. However, research indicates that GAI also presents certain limitations and challenges. These challenges include the potential for generating misinformation and fabricating data, which may lead to wrong information and fake information in the education setting, the researcher also finds that full reliance on GAI tools will negatively impact the creativity of students. GAI operates based on existing data, posing difficulties in distinguishing fabricated information and necessitating technical expertise or data cross-verification of the data created by such tools. Presently, GAI primarily functions as a tool for writing, summarizing, curriculum planning, information provision, briefing preparation, and note creation in educational settings. Its full potential in education remains uncertain due to insufficient AI literacy, particularly in fields such as law and medicine that demand a deeper understanding of AI applications. Consequently, there is a pressing need to enhance AI literacy among educators and students, emphasizing ethical AI use and the establishment of institutional policies governing the application of GAI. These measures are crucial for maximizing the efficiency of AI in educational contexts and fostering knowledge expansion beyond human creativity.

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Evolving government initiatives in children protection: Impact of Covid-19 and the road to sustainability

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ABSTRACT: Unfortunately, the Covid-19 spread has badly impacted the everyday routine of the children. During its surging stage with e-learning practice, an initiative was taken by the Indian government to keep them engaged during this pandemic. This shows that ICT has played a remarkable role in the education sector. Although there have been certain children due to the absence of technical support, who couldn't join online classes. With the "PM CARES for Children Scheme," an attempt has been made to support those who have lost their both parents. In this scheme, rehabilitation and education assistance for these children have been the prime focus of the government. This article would demarcate the significant Indian government initiatives which have been taken for children's protection during and after this pandemic. With e-platforms, educators and learners are guided to maintain discipline to have a smooth process. To overcome mental health issues and financial instability the children are provided governmental support through the "PM CARES for Children Scheme" for their protection to attain sustainability. This reflects that only proper implementation of government schemes can improve their survival conditions through resilience and capacity building initiatives.

Keywords: Children, Covid-19, E-learning, PM CARES, Protection

1 INTRODUCTION

With active participation in the "new normal practices," many people saved their lives. Engaging the population to work from home and learners to use online mode to attend their schools and universities has been a successful initiative that was taken by the Indian government. To maintain social distancing, the classes took place online mode only to break the spreading chain of Covid-19 (Singh *et al.* 2021). With the wide variety of courses available participation of the enrolled students has jumped and their engagement has been improved as many have collaborated with well-known institutions such as IIMs, IITs, etc (Gohain 2021). During the lockdown period, it has been the best platform to keep learners and educators engaged and safe. The Central government initiated different e-learning platforms to continue educational activities during the lockdown (Jena 2020). These platforms have been recognized by UNESCO and World Bank during that time (UNESCO 2020).

The Central government has focused on supporting those children who have lost their family support. The "PM Cares for Children Scheme" aim has been to make these children emotionally and financially strong in the absence of their parents (Ministry of Women and Child Development). To safeguard the child from any form of exploitation and abuse while

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there is no legal, natural or adoptive parent then the child will be under the care of the Central government with the support of the State authorities to execute the guidelines of this scheme in reality (Ministry of Women and Child Development). This paper will focus on the importance of the "PM CARES for Children Scheme" in the digital stage during and after the COVID-19 tenure while enhancing the improvement of e-learning practice in India.

2 WELCOMING E-LEARNING

During this pandemic, ICT has been beneficial in promoting education through online mode. CLASS known as the "Computer Literacy and Social on Schools" project was launched in 1984 by the Indian government to make computer literacy a compulsory project for classes XI and XII. Many schools started computer literacy in the seventh five-year plan and eighth five-year plans respectively (Singh *et al.* 2021). India has been having its own "EDUSAT". This is a satellite that is focused on the education sector and was launched in 2004. It has been a remarkable contribution that has provided education to many people. It has provided information in many local languages and it has promoted long-distance learning practice in India. After the wide spread of Covid-19 by encouraging "new normal practice," e-learning participation has surged. Platforms like "SWAYAM" have been a great contributor to educating people while being at home during this pandemic. Although pre-covid in India there has been various portal that has engaged people in this practice. It included virtual classrooms, online education broadcasts, etc to keep the learning process interesting (Singh *et al.* 2021).

For public safety, educational institutions and schools were closed. This resulted in encouraging learners' involvement with the support of e-platforms. The government encouraged this practice and resulted in introducing more alternative means for teaching and learning, especially during the lockdown. The first initiative has been the active usage of "DIKSHA" (Singh *et al.* 2021). Platforms like "VidyaDaan" has been a great support for the learners. Moreover, "PM eVidya" has been beneficial in providing education through digital, online, and on-air modes. This has been a great opportunity for learners to have multi-mode access to education. Practices such as open schools and pre-service education, educational lessons on the radio, and the availability of e-textbooks have been welcomed. The NROER has been beneficial for the students (Singh *et al.* 2021). Also, radio broadcasting has been helpful for children in remote areas. There are almost two hundred and eighty-nine community radio stations that broadcasted NIOS for teaching students of classes IX to XII. There has been the active involvement of the "Shiksha Vani Podcast" with four hundred and thirty audio content which was run by CBSE for delivering the classes of grades I to XII Moreover, "One Direct-to-Home Channel" is meant for hearing-impaired students. The study materials in sign language have been beneficial for visually and hearing-impaired students which were prepared by a digitally accessible information system. With the availability of reading material online through YouTube and the NIOS website has guided learners in the right direction in this pandemic. NROER has been provided e-content of the NCER and training and other collaborative partners were accessible for the school and university readers. It includes reading materials on many subjects for school readers (Singh *et al.* 2021). Interestingly, the Delhi government has initiated training for teachers and faculty to learn how to make the best use of the e-learning process. In Andhra Pradesh through the "Abhvasa App" for teachers and students, toll-free voice and video call the doubts of the students have been heard. This shows that the use of technology with a reasonable check has been a great support during this pandemic and even after it (Singh *et al.* 2021). Unfortunately, there has been various challenges while implementing e-learning practices in rural places. Sadly, forty three percent of students faced challenges accessing smartphones at the start of the lockdown, but with proper guidelines and awareness, their participation improved, and later, in 2021, it reached sixty seven percent (Annual Status of Education Report Rural 2021). This shows the government's need to promote investment in e-learning practices to properly utilize the sources.

3 PM CARES FOR CHILDREN SCHEME

The "PM CARES for Children Scheme" was launched by the Indian Prime Minister for supporting children who have lost their parental or guardian support during the Covid-19 pandemic (PM CARES for Children 2021). Unfortunately, many adoptive, legal, and natural parents have passed away due to this pandemic since the beginning of 11th March 2020. This scheme has focused on these children and their protection. It is an initiative that has been made by the authorities to empower these children by providing them with opportunities. This is beneficial for their professional growth where there is an urgent need to focus on their empowerment and provide them financial assistance while they attain the age of twenty-three. For instance, the government will be providing financial support of ten lakhs for them. Emphasis has been made on providing them with boarding and lodging. (PM CARES for Children 2021). In the higher educational aspect, the government will provide them with loans. The aim has been to ensure that these children have a bright future without any financial and health disturbance. Unfortunately, many people died which has made the government act more responsibly to provide health insurance of five lakhs rupees to each of them. Over twenty thousand students are awarded a scholarship. The government has allowed almost four thousand three hundred and forty-five children to avail themselves of this scheme. Among them, there were thirty-one States applicants and five hundred and fifty-seven applicants from Districts (PM CARES for Children 2021).

This scheme provides them monthly financial assistance to those who are eighteen-year-old. This fund is under a registered public charitable trust which aims in providing relief to children who are in a distressing stage (PM CARES for Children 2021). It will be in process until that child attains the age of twenty-three years. These children shouldn't be eighteen years at the time when their parents pass away. Under this scheme, it is the responsibility of the District Magistrate to work along with the Child Welfare Committee. In this, they need to explore the various way in which these children can be rehabilitated after losing their family support due to this pandemic. Providing them rehabilitation in their own comfort through their extended family and relatives has been the prime focus of the boarding facility. In such an absence, the child will be sent to foster care and will be under the guidelines of juvenile law. Also, if the child is between four and ten years or above when this child is not comfortable with the arrangement then the child will be taken care of under the juvenile law. But if there is no such settlement then the matter will be considered before the childcare institution (PM CARES for Children 2021).

The children who are above ten years they could register in "Netaji Subhash Chand Bose Awasiya Vidyalaya" or any residential school which is specified by the Magistrate under this scheme. The focus has been made to encourage the practice of keeping siblings together. When there is service provided by non-institutional care then financial assistance will be provided under the Child Protection Services Scheme to the child when it is under its guardian's care. Children who are below six years would receive support from the Anganwadi service. Under this, they could provide these children their nutritious supplementary. They would focus on their pre-education, health check-up, and other concerns (PM CARES for Children 2021). Those who are below ten years would be given education in the school near their area. If they are availing education under government school two sets of their school uniform will be given to them. This is the result of the support provided by "Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan". If the child is studying in a private school their tuition fee will be exempted. This will be followed as per the Right to Education Act (Right of Children to free and Compulsory Education Act 2009). Despite this, if the child is not able to access this benefit the "PM CARES for Children Scheme" will contribute to it. Under this scheme, the children would be given books and uniforms (PM CARES for Children 2021).

Interestingly, when the child is belonging to eleven and eighteen years and is residing with the extended family then school admission will take place near that locality which has to be a day scholar and has to be ensured by the Magistrate (PM CARES for Children 2021). Under

this, the child can be enrolled in a specified kind of school which is mentioned under this scheme. For instance, among them, Sainik School, and Eklavya Model Schools are included. It has been the responsibility of the Magistrate to find an alternative for accommodating these children during holiday time. This service is provided by Child Care Institutions or any place that the authority feels appropriate for the children. If the child is not able to avail of the above support, then the "PM CARES for Children Scheme" will be providing the benefits and fees. This will cover their books and uniform too. They would be given loans for pursuing higher education. The education loan will be paid under this scheme if the child is not able to get interest exemption under the Central and State government scheme. This shows the beneficiaries are provided scholarships which are under various ministries. They are assisted with the "National Scholarship Portal" to get these entitlements. These scholarships are awarded to the beneficiaries and they are updated on the "PM CARES for Children Portal" (PM CARES for Children 2021).

Concerning their health insurance, the children are enrolled under the "Ayushman Bharat Scheme" which covered their health insurance for the amount of five lakhs. It is the responsibility to make sure that these children get this assistance (PM CARES for Children 2021). A pro-rata amount would be credited upfront in the account of each identified beneficiary such that the "corpus" for each beneficiary becomes ten lakhs at the time of attaining the age of eighteen years. Children would receive a monthly stipend once they attain the age of eighteen, by investing the corpus of ten lakhs. The beneficiary would receive a stipend till they attain twenty-three. They would receive ten lakhs on attaining twenty-three years (PM CARES for Children 2021).

4 FUTURE

The Indian government needs to ensure there is the use of virtual learning tools. In the future, these devices must have the latest software and antivirus programs. This effort would be beneficial in maintaining the security of their personal data. It would prevent involvement in hacking activities (Jena 2020). To maintain the privacy and safety of these children while attending their classes online educational institutions should follow the guidelines which are provided by UNICEF. The child's parents are suggested to keep their devices updated to avoid any illegal activity. They should act as a mentor in guiding their children on how to use electronic devices for their academic purpose (Jena 2020). There is a need to indulge in those activities which are beneficial in creating awareness about cyber security. The children are required to be protected from getting themselves involved in illegal activities such as child trafficking, sexual harassment, and pornography which can be tackled only if the parent, educator, and police officers monitor the activities of the online child user (Housing and Land Rights Network 2021). The government and the school authorities should focus on children's overall development (Jena 2020). The children require a protective shelter with basic facilities for their survival (Housing and Land Rights Network 2021). Currently, Maharashtra has the highest number of approved beneficiaries, followed by Madhya Pradesh with eight hundred and fifty-six and four hundred and thirty-five approved beneficiaries of this scheme. In total, there have been four thousand five hundred and forty-three approved applications under this scheme, which is the responsible outcome. (Ministry of Women and Child Development 2023).

5 CONCLUSION

The "PM CARES for Children Scheme" highlights on safeguarding the interest of the beneficiaries. This portal focuses on providing an online platform for facilitating their mental and financial stability. With proper registration and validation, they can avail of

funds provided by the government under this scheme (PM CARES for Children 2021). Moreover, e-learning has been beneficial in improving the country's financial growth too. By engaging in the learning process all the learners have been dedicated to their work. With ministerial support through e-learning modules, the government has been focused on training the stakeholders (PM CARES for Children 2021). This pandemic has shown due to a lack of basic skills the educator wasn't able to deliver the online class in some areas. Adequate monitoring and supervision should be duly performed by the authorities regularly (Singh 2021). Till now, thirty-one States have implemented this scheme which reflects children require benefits at a national level with social protection systems that could provide affordable facilities to them for safeguarding their human rights and attaining nation's sustainability (Sharma 2023). This shows there is need have updated laws to fight back against the new challenges to promote well-being (Ministry of Women and Child Development 2024). For safeguarding the future generation the government under this scheme is providing free coaching to the beneficiaries to prepare for competitive examinations (2025). To attain sustainable human growth this scheme focuses on financial security, access to healthcare, quality education, and equal opportunity to the children (United Nations 2015).

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Construction and standardization of parenting style scale

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ABSTRACT: This paper introduces a parenting style assessment tool designed precisely for elementary school students in the Indian context. Grounded in Baumrind's (1971) well-known classification of parenting styles "authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and uninvolved" the tool also draws on the two key dimensions of parenting: responsiveness and control, as described by "Maccoby and Martin" (1983). What makes this tool unique is its focus on the real-life experiences of children and families in Haryana, with items developed to reflect the cultural, educational, and social environment of today's Indian family. The structure of the tool is based on control and response. The tool tested for its reliability and validity, proving it a useful resource for educators, parents, counsellors and researchers who want to better understand the influence of parenting on young children's development.

Keywords: Parenting Styles, authoritarian, uninvolved, authoritative, permissive

1 INTRODUCTION

In today's growing world, it is important to understand parenting style, as children must navigate both traditional beliefs and contemporary influences as they grow up, especially for parents of elementary school-aged children. Childhood is an important stage of life that is followed by adolescent or pre-adulthood. At this stage, they face the rapid changes in their physical appearance, thoughts, and behaviour and this stage is characterised by its dynamic nature (Santrock 2004). Generally, this is when they start developing. The sense of self, encounter the outside world without supervision, and acquire and cultivate autonomous ideas about it. At that time, they also want to be welcomed into their peer groups and want freedom from their parents' authority and control (Santrock and Yussen 1984).

The idea of parenting style is one of the most researched methods for comprehending how parents affect human development (Baumrind 1967). His well-known framework, which divides parenting into four categories "permissive, authoritarian, authoritative, and uninvolved" remains a solid basis. However, many widely used parenting assessment instruments, such as Robinson *et al.*'s Parenting Styles and Dimensions Questionnaire (1995) and Buri's Parental Authority Questionnaire (1991), were created in Western cultural contexts. Even though some Indian academics have attempted to change these methods (Sharma and Kaur 2016), they frequently fail to capture the difficulties that modern Indian parents confront, like managing shifting family dynamics, internet exposure, and academic expectations. A modern, culturally based parenting style tool that takes into consider Indian families and promotes children's healthy development throughout their early school years is becoming increasingly needed. To construct the parenting style scale, the items related to the perceived parenting style of twelve to sixteen years were prepared.

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2 REVIEW LITERATURE

The following Parenting style tools were reviewed from existing literature.

Table 1. Review related to parenting styles scale.

Name of Scale	Author(s) & Year	Dimensions Assessed	Sample	Reliability and Validity of Scale	Remarks
"Parental Authority Questionnaire" (PAQ)	Buri (1991)	Authoritative, Authoritarian, Permissive	Adolescents (Western context)	Test-retest reliability-0.86 Cronbach's alpha 0.74 to 0.87 Good construct validity	Comprehensively used for assessing perceived parenting style in adolescents. It Doesn't talk about uninvolved style.
"Parenting Styles and Dimensions Questionnaire" (PSDQ)	Robinson *et al.* (1995)	Authoritative, Authoritarian, Permissive	Parents of preschool & school-age children (USA)	Cronbach's alpha 0.70 have good construct validity	Offers both self-report and observer forms; widely adapted. But lacks contextual fit in Indian settings.
"Alabama Parenting Questionnaire "(APQ)	Frick (1991)	It consists Positive Parenting, Deprived Monitoring, Corporal Punishment and inconsistent discipline	Adolescents Parents (clinical and general settings)	Cronbach's alpha 0.67 to 0.80 Calculated Criterion validity	Focuses more on behavioral aspects than classic Baumrind styles. Useful for identifying risk behaviors.
"Parenting Style Inventory-II" (PSI-II)	Darling and Toyokawa (1997)	Authoritative, Authoritarian, Permissive	Adolescents (USA)	Cronbach's alpha-0.74, internal construct validity	It Measures parenting style and includes behavior-specific practices; less commonly used in South Asian research.
"Parenting Style Scale" (Indian Adaptation)	Sharma and Kaur (2016)	Authoritative, Authoritarian, Permissive, Negligent	Indian adolescents (Punjab, India)	Test-retest reliability 0.76–0.85 Content validity	Attempts contextual adaptation of Baumrind's model; less psychometric reporting and lacks broader regional validation.
"Parenting Style Inventory" (Indian Version)	Pathak and Kaur (2001)	Authoritative, Authoritarian, Permissive, Negligent	Indian adolescents (school context)	Test-retest reliability 0.75 Criterion validity	Incorporates Indian family structures; limited in national-level application and cultural diversity.
Construction and Validation of Scale of Parenting Style	Kunnathodi and Abidha (2014)	Authoritative, Authoritarian, Permissive, Negligent	Indian adolescents	Test-retest reliability for response 0.81 for control 0.83 Construct and criterion validity found.	Indian families control and response

3 RATIONALE

Since most of the available scales are based on Western norms and do not satisfactorily reflect the distinctive dynamics of Indian context, there is an increasing demand for a culturally appropriate instrument to evaluate parenting styles among Indian elementary pupils. Parenting styles are changing quickly because to shifting social roles, academic demands, and use of internet. Teachers, counsellors, psychologists, and parents can better comprehend these changes and assist children's overall development with the assistance of a specific tool.

4 METHOD

4.1 *Item construction*

The investigator reviewed cited books, journals, encyclopedias, websites, research papers, and other available literature to construct the items about the parenting style of the children. The items were selected based on 4 types of parenting styles given by Baumrind (1967, 1973) and Maccoby and Martin (1983). The two aspects

* demandingness (control)
* responsiveness (warmth)

are considered for parenting style. When these aspects are considered then there are 4 types of parenting styles namely, authoritative (Au PA), authoritarian (AUthPA), permissive (PPA), and uninvolved (UPA) items are formed by the investigator.

4.2 *Item format*

A 5-point scale of parenting style was prepared. Respondents are asked to answer each statement by choosing one of five options: "always, often, sometimes, rarely, and never". These items were scored as "4, 3,2,1,0" respectively.

4.3 *Expert views of blueprint*

Initially, 17-20 items were formed for each parenting style. The first draft of 76 items was sent to experts for their opinion about the appropriateness, relevancy, ambiguity, and language of the items. Keeping in view the recommendations given by expert's items were modified to make the items more easily identifiable. The total 61 items were retained with unanimity among the experts for the second draft.

4.4 *First try out*

The initial version of the scale, which had 76 items, was tried out with 20 students to see to check its language and to check any confusing items. Based on their feedback, minor changes were made to the second draft.

4.5 *Second try out*

The second try-out was done to prepare the final draft of the scale. The number of respondents in the second try-out was raised to 120. To find the homogeneity of the items, it was administered to a randomly selected 120 students of elementary classes of Haryana. Students were requested to respond to each item voluntarily and their results was kept confidential, and purpose of study was well informed. They were communicated that responses of the items were expressed in terms of the following five points: always, often, sometimes, rarely, and never. These items were scored as '4', '3', '2', '1' and '0'respectively.

5 SCORING PROCEDURE

The parenting style scale is a Likert-type scale with 5 alternatives.

5.1 *Item analysis and item selection*

The item analysis was carried out by Kelley's method (1939). All response sheets were sorted by total score to begin the item analysis procedure, with the highest-scoring respondents at the top and the lowest at the bottom. The top 27 percent (32 sheets) and the bottom 27 percent (32 sheets) were selected for an extensive analysis that corresponds with the established process for assessing internal consistency.76 items were examined using statistical metrics and inadequate discriminating power were discarded, items that presented a significant difference between the high and low scoring groups, as indicated by significant t-values were included for the final tool.

6 FINAL VERSION OF THE PARENTING STYLE SCALE

The significant t-value at either the 0.05 or 0.01 level were kept in final version. In total, 61 items proved this criterion. The distribution of final items is given in Table 2.

Table 2. Distribution of items based on types of parenting style.

S. No.	Types of Parenting Style	Item No.	Total Items
1	**(Au PA)**	1,4,13,16,19,21,25,29,32,36,39,43,47,51,55,59,60	17
2	**AUthPA**	2,8,9,11,14,17,22,26,33,37,40,44,48,52,56	15
3	**PPA**	5,6,10,15,18,23,27,34,38,42,45,49,53,57	14
4	**UPA**	3,7,12,20,24,28,30,31,35,41,46,50,54,58,61	15
		Total	**61**

7 STANDARDIZATION OF THE SCALE

To standardize the parenting style scale, it was given to a randomly selected group of 700 students-both boys and girls from government and private elementary schools in the Gurgaon and Faridabad districts.

8 STATISTICAL RESULTS

Based on collected sample (700), the following statistical results were found and have been presented in the below Table 3

Table 3. Statistical results (N=700).

S. NO.	TYPES OF PARENTING STYLE	MEAN	S.D
1	**(Au PA)**	50.373	9.589
2	**AUthPA**	39.876	8.021
3	**PPA**	42.734	7.872
4	**UPA**	41.816	8.889
	Overall	174.799	28.279

9 RELIABILITY OF THE PARENTING STYLE SCALE

The reliability of the scale was 0.903 (Cronbach's alpha,) which came out to an excellent level of internal consistency. The reliability for each type of parenting style was also found

Table 4. Reliability of each type of parenting style.

S. No.	Type of parenting Style	Cronbach's Alpha	Standardized Cronbach's alpha
1	(Au PA)	0.793	0.801
2	AUthPA	0.674	0.675
3	PPA	0.767	0.776
4	UPA	0.736	0.744

10 VALIDITY

Validity refers to the extent to which an empirical measure "adequately reflects the real meaning of the concept under consideration" (Babbie 1989). The validity of the Parenting Style Scale was tested based on face validity and content validity.

10.1 *Content validity*

"Content validity is the degree to which an instrument has an appropriate sample of items to construct being measured" (Polit and Beck 2004). After establishing the conceptual framework, the scale was validated against the criterion of content validity. 6 experts independently rated the relevance of each item of parenting style using a 4-point Likert scale; appears to be in frequent use advocated by (Davis 1992).

10.2 *Criterion validity*

The criterion validity refers to the extent to which test scores are systematically related to one or more outcome criterion. It's determined through a type of concurrent validity. Both tests were administered to students at the same time and the correlation between the scores of Parenting Style Scale "Dr. Madhu Gupta & Dimple Mehtani" and Parenting Style Scale (developed by investigator) was calculated. The coefficient of correlation (r) value obtained 0.792 is positive, which was significant. The test has its concurrent validity therefore it is valid.

10.3 *Construct validity*

To assess construct validity, inter-correlations among various parenting styles were measured, with correlation coefficients ranging from 0.569 to 0.859 and it shows the scale has high construct validity. The results of the computation of inter-correlation is presented in the Table 5

Table 5. Inter correlation among the different types of parenting style.

*Types of Parenting Style	(Au PA)	AUthPA	PPA	UPA
Au PA	. . . . .			
AUthPA	0.569	. . . . .		
PPA	0.822	0.579	. . . . .	
UPA	0.618	0.559	0.633	. . . . .
Total	0.867	0.690	0.864	0.859

** Correlation at the 0.01 level

11 NORMS

z-scores were computed for each type of parenting styles based on statistical results.

11.1 *Norms for interpretation of parenting style*

The type of parenting style with the highest grade is considered as leading parenting style. The norms for interpretation of the parenting style are represented by the Table 6

Table 6. Norms for interpretation of parenting style.

S. No.	(Au PA)	AUthPA	PPA	UPA	z-score range	Grade	Level of Parenting Style
1	63 & above	50 & above	52 & above	53 & above	+1.26& above	A	Very High
2	56 to 62	44 to 49	47 to 51	47 to 52	+0.51 to +1.25	B	High
3	46 to 55	36 to 43	39 to 46	38 to 46	-0.50to +0.50	C	Average
4	39 to 45	30 to 35	33 to 38	30 to 37	-1.25 to -0.51	D	Low
5	38 & less	29 & less	32 & below	30 & below	-1.26 & below	E	Very Low

12 CONCLUSION

The present paper was intended at developing and validating a parenting style tool to assess perceived parenting styles among elementary school students in the Indian context. Since most of the tools are based on western norms and did not consider social and cultural items. The analysis of items, along with the estimation of validity and test-retest reliability, suggests that the tool is both psychometrically sound and practically useful. It effectively distinguishes between the 4 widely recognized parenting styles authoritative (Au PA), authoritarian (AUthPA), permissive (PPA), and uninvolved (UPA) Baumrind (1971) and further refined by Maccoby and Martin (1983). This tool will help stakeholders and researchers.

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"Role of AI in achieving divergent thinking" among school students: A theoretical perspective

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ABSTRACT: Divergent thinking involves considering multiple solutions to any problem, incorporating elements such as fluency, flexibility, originality, and elaboration. Artificial intelligence supports students in developing creative, divergent thinking skills by providing valuable tools that enhance both problem-solving and innovation. This analysis reviews several studies and provides pertinent findings. Using search terms like "AI in achieving Divergent Thinking" and "AI in Education," various papers were found. The findings suggest that tools such as ChatGPT, Google Bard, and mind-mapping apps effectively aid students in generating diverse ideas.

Keywords: Divergent thinking, artificial intelligence, AI tools

1 INTRODUCTION

Artificial Intelligence agents or assistants offer incredible capabilities, allowing instantaneous replies to queries, while Generative AI technology, such as Chat GPT, has seen increased use across different disciplines, including education, business, science, and even to entertain. (Habib, S *et al.* 2024). The term "divergent thinking" describes the creation of a new idea for finding a solution to a particular problem. With the use of Anghel *et al.* (2025) evidence, Gen AI can assist in creative activities far beyond the initial scope of ideas. The purpose of this research is to analyze the role of AI in enhancing divergent thinking skills and

Table 1. Divergent thinking components and AI tool.

Component	Definition	Example AI Tool	Educational Use Case
Fluency	Generating many ideas	ChatGPT	Idea storming multiple story endings
Flexibility	Shifting between ideas	Google Bard	Exploring topics from various subject lenses
Originality	Producing novel ideas	DALL·E, Canva AI	Creating unique visual prompts for storytelling
Elaboration	Expanding on ideas	Grammarly AI	Enhancing student writing through contextual suggestions

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the different AI tools available to aid in the creation and innovation processes. Facilitating newer forms of content creation is the role of AI Technology, which also helps in the assessment and refinement of ideas by providing helpful information during the decision-making phase of creation. The role of AI extends to aiding the thinking process, able to enhance creativity, analysis, critique, and problem-solving skills (Benvenuti *et al.* 2023).

The purpose of the study is to highlight the importance of AI that is used in the education field to prepare a child for the future to become more competitive, productive, and creative (Kumar 2024).

1.1 *Research objectives*

(1) To investigate the utility of artificial intelligence in promoting divergent thinking among students.
(2) To analyze the application of diverse divergent thinking models within the educational setting to facilitate learning.
(3) To examine a range of AI tools and their respective advantages for both students and educators.

2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

"Creativity as a concept relies on divergent thinking, and it implies that an individual considers different ways to solve a single problem, and the outcomes can be creative (Benvenuti *et al.* 2023). Artificial Intelligence in education is a potential opportunity and a dilemma to cultivate this valuable cognitive skill in schoolchildren (Habib *et al.* 2023). The capacity of AI to automate, make meaning of extensive data, and develop new hypotheses introduces a different dimension of teaching, learning, and practicing critical thinking into the education process, which improves the learning experience (Darwin *et al.* 2023). The core of the AI potential in education is that it can individualize the learning process, tailor the content to the needs of students, and provide immediate feedback that is the key to developing divergent thinking (Lampou 2023). Educational experiences should be developed that will exploit the computational power of AI, yet will not remove the human aspect of teaching and learning that involves critical thinking, collaboration, and creativity (Gligorea *et al.* 2023). Such AI tools as adaptive learning systems and automated grading software become more and more common in the academic setting (Phua *et al.* 2025). Nevertheless, there are risks associated with the use of AI in evaluative tasks since evaluation is one of the primary pedagogical activities with significant learning implications, and overreliance on AI in this domain may amount to standardization and reduced pedagogical criticality (Mahmoud *et al.* 2024). In addition, the implementation of AI must follow the changing needs of students, and continuous improvements must be brought about by continuous feedback and enhancements (Chan and Tsi 2023). The educational AI, which implies creating educational content through AI, including grading essays automatically or creating content, poses the question of authenticity, intellectual property, and the worth of human contribution to educational processes (Al-Zahrani 2024). The impact of AI on the motivation, engagement, and well-being of students is also important to consider since it may substantially affect their overall experience in the educational process. The critical point is to apply AI in the way that promotes the independence of students and their critical thinking instead of the passive information reception (Wang *et al.* 2016)".

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research mainly focuses on the emergence of divergent thinking among students using the AI agents and tools that are readily available. A qualitative method has been adopted in the

study, and secondary data analysis has been performed. The base of this analysis is an in-depth overview of policy documents on education, scientific literature, and in-depth research studies published over the period of 2015-2025. The sources were obtained from the well-established academic databases, such as ERIC, Google Scholar, and PubMed. A thematic coding approach was used in order to make the large amount of material meaningful. This entailed categorizing the findings based on the kind of AI tools under discussion, the particular cognitive skills that they were expected to facilitate, and the age/ education level of the students concerned.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Following the thorough study of the literature published between 2015 and 2025 by different sources, the chosen papers are arranged in several patterns according to the thematic coding. Generally, qualitative analysis has been used to explain the findings.

4.1 *Mapping AI to divergent thinking*

"The application of modern artificial intelligence tools is increasingly becoming an influential factor in the cognitive development of students, especially in relation to the concept of divergent thinking. The four main components of this type of thinking are originality, fluency, flexibility, and elaboration, which are essential in the development of creativity. With the introduction of innovative language models like ChatGPT, Bard, and Midjourney, students currently have a more active and interactive interaction with technology.

Table 2. Trends in AI and divergent thinking (2015–2025).

AI Tool	Functionality	Fluency Output	Use in the Classroom	Source
ChatGPT	Generates multiple responses from a single prompt	Students produce many ideas quickly	Creative writing, debate preparation	Habib, S *et al.*, (2024), Na *et al.*, (2021)
Google Bard	Offers variant answers and interpretations	Stimulates multiple solution paths	Brainstorming science project ideas	Kumar (2024)
QuillBot	Rephrasing and synonym suggestions	Increases verbal ideation and paraphrasing	Vocabulary building and essay expansion	Lin *et al.* (2023)

Table 2 reflects the use of AI tools like ChatGPT, Google Bard, and QuillBot towards the organization and enhancement of the fluency of students. Such platforms give learners the power to express an idea in various ways, and they have the freedom to play with words and structure.

Table 3. AI and flexibility – perspective shifting.

AI Tool	Functionality	Flexibility Output	Use in Classroom	Source
Socratic by Google	Presents multiple viewpoints and media-based answers	Helps students explore different cognitive frameworks	Inquiry-based learning	Na *et al.* (2021)
Perplexity AI	Answers from various sources and perspectives	Encourages rethinking and synthesis	Comparative essays and debates	Zhang *et al.*, (2023)
Bing Chat AI	Offers interpretive variation in response styles	Allows cross-disciplinary learning	Literature interpretation and historical analysis	Sharma *et al.* (2022)

Table 3 shows the positive role of AI agents like Socratic by Google, Perplexity AI, and Bing Chat in the formation of cognitive versatility in students. These tools are useful because they provide students with a multi-dimensional view of issues and can rely on different disciplinary perspectives.

Table 4. AI and originality – novel idea creation.

AI Tool	Functionality	Originality Output	Use in Classroom	Source
Midjourney	AI-based image generation from text prompts	Enables unique visual idea creation	Visual storytelling, digital art	Habib, S *et al.*, (2024) Sharma *et al.*,(2022)
DALL·E	Transforms concepts into novel image-based outputs	Helps create original digital representations	Science posters, book cover designs	Mahmoud *et al.*, (2024)
Soundraw AI	AI-generated music composition	Supports original musical and rhythmic pattern development	Music composition exercises	Aggarwal (2024)

Table 4 demonstrates how artificial intelligence applications like Soundraw AI, DALL·E, and Midjourney are changing the learning environment of students regarding creativity. Such sites allow students to make abstract concepts real through creating their own music, creating creative images, or creating original digital material, all with a simple prompt.

Table 5. AI and elaboration – idea refinement.

AI Tool	Functionality	Elaboration Output	Use in Classroom	Source
Grammarly AI	Suggests detailed grammatical and contextual revisions	Refines and builds on students' original text	Essay improvement and writing feedback	Dorfman *et al.*, (2020)
WriteSonic	Helps expand thoughts and generate content outlines	Encourages extended explanation and structured detailing	Project write-ups and descriptive essays	Park *et al.* (2022)
ScribeSense	AI-assisted assignment feedback	Supports deeper reflection through iterative improvement	Revision-based assignments	Thompson *et al.* (2020)

Table 5 shows how students can improve their thinking and maximize their learning results using the help of digital tools such as Grammarly AI, WriteSonic, and ScribeSense. These sites are useful in assisting the students to structure their thoughts, develop incomplete ideas, and get immediate and specific feedback. In this regard, AI does not replace anything but serves as a learning companion, helping to be a critical thinker and actively participate in classroom tasks (Phua *et al.* 2025). The problem is that educators should find a way to create classrooms where curiosity and innovation can be nurtured, and AI can be used as an assistant rather than a crutch (Phua *et al.* 2025).

4.2 *Comparative models of divergent thinking*

Divergent thinking is an essential mental process that forms the basis of creativity and involves the capability to generate a lot of different and novel ideas. It consists of four broad dimensions such as fluency, flexibility, originality, and elaboration.

Table 6. Comparative summary table.

Model	Focus	Key Classroom Practice	Strengths	Limitations
Guilford	Core traits of divergent thinking	Idea listing, object re-use tasks	Simple, foundational framework	Lacks emotional or motivational components
Torrance	Structured creativity assessment	TTCT tasks, story completion, drawing prompts	Widely adopted in schools	Culturally biased assessments in some cases
Runco	Ideation + evaluation	Self-assessment, peer reviews	Balances divergent and convergent thinking	Requires higher cognitive maturity
Cropley	Emotional-cognitive synergy	Emotional scaffolding, motivation for idea risk-taking	Integrates social-emotional learning (SEL)	Less measurable, more context-sensitive
AI-Integrated Models	Co-creation with technology	Using AI for fluency/originality, reflective critique	Scalable, real-world applications	Risks of over-reliance and loss of human agency

The information and analysis that is offered in each Model can be applied in any classroom. To provide an example, Runco and Cropley focus on the value of intrinsic motivation and the importance of critical thinking as an aspect that encourages creativity. On the other hand, other underlying models that have been proposed by Guilford and Torrance have been the basis of understanding and assessing divergent thinking through design tools and measurable aspects.

4.3 *Tools and stakeholder benefits*

The aim of the analysis is to explore the contribution of these tools in the development of divergent thinking and, simultaneously, the possibility of making the process of learning more effective and the approach to teaching more innovative. In assessing the roles of such technologies in the provision of instructions in addition to the involvement of the students, the section shows how these technologies can transform the traditional learning environment to an interactive one that is more conducive to creativity, flexibility, and better cognitive development.

Table 7. AI tools, educational functions, and stakeholder benefits.

AI Tool	Functionality	Benefits for Students	Benefits for Teachers
ChatGPT	Text generation, brainstorming, and creative writing assistance	Enhances fluency and flexibility in idea expression	Automates question banks, assists in content development
Google Bard	Conversational research, topic analysis	Enables critical and multi-perspective thinking	Provides alternative explanations for classroom discussion
DALL·E	Image generation from textual prompts	Stimulates visual creativity and originality	Supports visual teaching aids and custom educational material
Grammarly AI	Writing feedback and elaboration enhancement	Improves sentence structure, coherence, and elaboration	Facilitates formative writing assessment and reduces grading load

(*continued*)

Table 7. Continued

AI Tool	Functionality	Benefits for Students	Benefits for Teachers
Socratic AI	Step-by-step problem explanation in math, science, and history	Encourages self-directed learning and deeper understanding	Reinforces concept clarity and provides tutoring assistance
Write Sonic	Content generation and elaboration tools	Develops written elaboration and idea refinement	Assists in report generation and feedback letter writing
Canva AI	Design automation and visual storytelling	Promotes originality through aesthetic expression	Speeds up content design for presentations and worksheets
Perplexity AI	Evidence-based question answering from multiple sources	Encourages inquiry-based and open-minded thinking	Supports cross-disciplinary knowledge integration

4.4 *Benefits of AI on teachers*

The democratization of education by reducing the obstacles to education according to the cost, geographical position, and accessibility to education resources has helped learners of various backgrounds gain access to high-quality education opportunities. Such tools as ChatGPT are used as virtual tutors in the online course environment, subjecting students to a variety of opinions and promoting critical discussion (Ruiz-Rojas *et al.*,2024).

5 CONCLUSION

The current study analyses the connection between divergent thinking and artificial intelligence applications in an educational context of a school using a theoretical framework based on secondary data analysis. Divergent thinking, which includes fluency, flexibility, originality, and elaboration, is widely recognized as a cornerstone of student creativity. The primary objective of this research was to explore how AI facilitates and enhances divergent thinking among students. Thematic analysis of existing literature revealed that generative AI tools significantly boost fluency and originality, particularly in tasks requiring language production and visual creativity. The second aim of the study involved a comparative evaluation of prominent models of divergent thinking, including those proposed by Guilford, Torrance, Runco, and Cropley. A third key objective was to identify specific AI tools currently used in education and assess their benefits for both teachers and students. Findings indicate that AI technologies serve as powerful educational supports. They foster curiosity, promote divergent thinking, and personalize the learning experience. For educators, these tools aid in differentiated instruction, streamline content delivery, and reduce administrative workload, allowing more time for meaningful student engagement.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTION

Teachers can help develop creativity in the classroom through understanding how they may want to use or offer AI options like ChatGPT, DALL·E, and Socratic AI, either in assignments that encourage fluency, originality, and flexibility. It may be most effective to provide some degree of structure to encourage students to be actively thinking through the learning rather than passively outsourcing their thinking. Teachers must also certainly guide students when considering ethical use, including the accuracy of data, originality,

and as part of ongoing professional learning will be important given the new pedagogy using AI. For future research, it may be important to look at the long-term effects of AI on divergent thinking and, if at all, whether AI could differ from one curriculum area to another, while also considering how the use of AI might adapt to inclusive education. It will also be an important consideration how prepared teachers feel for AI-assisted learning, if students are depending on AI over their own thinking, and if privacy will impact digital data. It is likely that the newer and improved assessment tools that will be developed will be better suited for AI-assisted learning and better measure creativity. All of these considerations are important if we are to responsibly engage AI to effectively support innovative and reflective learners.

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STEM meets STEAM: Training B.Ed. students in arts-integrated pedagogies for transformative learning

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ABSTRACT: This research aimed to explore the integration of Arts into Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) education, i.e., STEAM approach for training the pre-service teachers with transformational and innovative teaching-learning practices. Aligned with the current Educational Policy recommendations and socio-cultural constructivist approach, this study focussed to evaluate how training pre-service teachers in STEAM pedagogy can enhance their abilities to teach, particularly for diverse and multilingual classrooms (Hughes *et al.* 2022). Drawing from the empirical data collected from pre-service teachers, this paper demonstrates how arts-based approaches such as role play, forum theatre, and storytelling foster pedagogical confidence, improve conceptual clarity, and promote equitable, multimodal learning.

Keywords: STEM, STEAM, Constructivist learning

1 INTRODUCTION

STEM and STEAM has always been a debatable approach and has gained impetus in recent years, as the disciplines become increasingly connected, interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary, STEM has emerged as a crucial focus for educators (Henrikson, 2014). Incorporating art to create a more comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach, STEAM has emerged as an evolution of STEM. With advancements in the academia, there is larger need to revamp the training for pre-service teachers as well. Preparing pre-service teachers to address the diverse and complex demands of present-day classrooms requires innovative and inclusive pedagogical strategies. One such promising approach is the integration of Arts into STEM education shifting the paradigm to STEAM (Jain, A. 2024). This integration emphasizes not only technical competencies but also creativity, collaboration, and multi-modal expression. For bilingual learners and students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, traditional language-heavy methods often limit participation and understanding (Ibid, 2024). The pre-service teachers need to be well equipped to handle such challenges and roadblocks for the learners. STEAM offers a framework to bridge this gap through embodied, experiential, and expressive learning. This study accounts the pedagogical intervention implemented in a B.Ed. program aimed at equipping pre-service teachers with practical strategies for arts-integrated teaching. Drawing inspiration from Hughes *et al.* (2022), who found that leading with STEAM improves learning outcomes and equity for students in elementary settings, this intervention adapted similar principles to teacher education. The goal was to cultivate reflective, confident, and inclusive educators capable of integrating role play, forum theatre, and storytelling into their teaching practice (Hughes *et al.* 2022).

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2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To create a symbiotic relation between arts and education, recently the academic community has begun to show interest in encouraging and closely articulating the humanities with sciences and technologies as a key to development, this integration can lead to well-rounded education along with the social, economic and cultural nuances of human behaviour (Hartley, 2017), Vygotsky's (1978) notion that learning is mediated through social interaction and cultural tools. The integration of Arts into STEM across disciplines aligns well with this perspective, as it can help in fostering holistic learning experiences that are socially curated (Vygotsky, 1978). STEAM, as a pedagogical approach, enhances engagement, facilitates conceptual understanding, and supports the diverse cognitive needs of learners in multidisciplinary contexts (Henriksen, 2014). The intervention also drew on Paulo Freire's (1970) ideas of transformative education, where pedagogical strategies such as forum theatre and storytelling empower both teachers and learners to co-construct knowledge and reflect critically on content (Freire, 1970).

Additionally, by keeping in perspective students' native languages in learning, this study focussed on the linguistic inclusivity of instruction through multilingual storytelling, which reinforces Cummins' (2000) interdependence hypothesis. Yakman's (2008) STEAM framework, which sees arts integration as essential to creating meaning across subject areas rather than as decorative, also has an impact on the methodology. The study captures both the quantifiable increases in teaching confidence and the complex reflections of pre-service teachers by using a mixed-methods lens (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). The role of emotional engagement and empathy in arts-integrated pedagogies is further supported by Eisner (2002), who emphasized that aesthetic experience is essential for holistic learning (Eisner, 2002). The concept of teacher identity and its formation through arts-based reflection also draws on Conway's (2001) view that narrative and performative practices are central to professional growth. Additionally, STEAM training interventions that centre on pre-service teacher creativity align with Robinson's (2011) call for educational systems to foster creativity as a fundamental skill rather than a peripheral add-on. The learning theory supports the integration of drama and role-play in education by emphasizing the connection between physical action and cognitive processing (Robinson, 2011). According to Wilson (2002), cognition is not just brain-bound but deeply influenced by bodily experience, making arts-based practices in STEAM particularly effective for conceptual understanding. The experiences show that STEAM makes children more active and capable of taking initiatives with their own knowledge and increases their self-confidence (Wahyuningsih *et al.* 2020).

3 STEAM IN TEACHER EDUCATION: RATIONALE

STEAM i.e., Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics into education has emerged as an innovative and transformational pedagogical approach that can enhance both cognitive and affective learning outcomes for the learners (Bequette *et al.*, 2012). STEAM education emphasizes interdisciplinary learning and creativity, fostering students' ability to solve real-world problems by integrating artistic design processes with scientific inquiry (Bequette & Bequette, 2012). This holistic approach has shown to increase students' engagement in learning while also supporting language development, particularly when artistic modes such as storytelling, drama, and visual arts are embedded into instruction (Wahyuningsih *et al.*, 2020; Lee *et al.*, 2019).

Existing research done in the recent past largely focusses on the impact of STEAM on K-12 learners however, significantly less attention has been paid to how pre-service teachers are prepared to adopt and implement STEAM methodologies in their future classrooms, which became an impetus to pursue this research study (Quigly & Herro, 2016). The success of STEAM approach in schools ultimately depends on teacher readiness, pedagogical

understanding, and confidence in designing interdisciplinary lessons. According to Herro and Quigley (2016), teacher education programs must go beyond content knowledge and provide experiential opportunities for pre-service teachers to collaboratively plan, reflect, and implement STEAM instruction. Yet, despite such recommendations, teacher education curricula often remain compartmentalized along disciplinary lines, offering few models of integrated practice (Quigley, 2016).

This study tried to respond to this gap by examining B.Ed. classrooms where pre-service teachers were specifically trained to integrate arts into their teaching. The focus on art-integration is rooted in research that supports the art as powerful mediators for concept acquisition, critical thinking, and emotional connection in learning (Henriksen, 2014). Through guided workshops and reflective teaching cycles, the participating pre-service teachers were encouraged to design, test, and refine lessons across disciplines that incorporated elements such as theatre, visual art, and storytelling. Findings from the study suggested that training not only enhanced the participants' pedagogical creativity but also deepened their understanding of academic content through multiple modalities. Moreover, the STEAM approach aligns well with constructivist and socio-cultural theories of learning, which advocate for learner-centred, experiential, and culturally responsive teaching methods (ISF, 2024). By integrating the arts, pre-service teachers can make content more accessible and meaningful for diverse learners, including those from linguistically and culturally varied backgrounds. This is especially relevant in the Indian context, where linguistic diversity and varied levels of literacy necessitate pedagogical flexibility and innovation.

4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To assess the impact of STEAM-based training on B.Ed. students‘ pedagogical confidence and conceptual clarity.
- To explore the possibility of using role play, forum theatre, and storytelling influence teaching-learning practices.
- To explore the scope of STEAM for inclusive and multilingual education.

5 METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted on 30 pre-service teachers who participated in a 4-week training program as part of their course. The training involved demonstration lessons, microteaching, peer feedback, and reflective writing. Data was collected through observation during lesson plan delivery in simulated teaching environment and focus group discussions with the trainee teachers on how they will engage with STEAM pedagogy in their future vocation. The cohort of 30 pre-service teachers were selected randomly as the study was conducted during the course of their simulated teaching practices.

Three primary arts-based strategies were used:

- Role Play
- Forum Theatre
- Storytelling

6 FINDINGS

The study conducted on the training and intervention with pre-service teachers indicated an enhancement in a multidisciplinary aspect through various STEAM-based strategies such as Role Play, Forum Theatre, and Storytelling. Each strategy targeted specific areas such as

vocabulary development, discourse skills, and narrative structure. The findings showed that, integration of arts with linguistic objectives fosters deeper engagement by connecting language with science, social studies, and creative expression. It was also evident that, Improvisational elements such as spontaneous dialogue, role adaptation, audience interaction, and metaphorical narration are central to these approaches, encouraging active participation and contextual learning. This highlighted the transformative potential of performance-based pedagogy in language acquisition across disciplines. The strategies used under integration of STEAM Approach can be intertwined with the core courses being taught or can also be used as a practical strategy during the internship period for pre-service teachers. For ensuring linguistic inclusivity, regional languages can be used during conduct of activities, which will help in better understanding and addressing the linguistic diversity in classrooms.

The strategies used in integration of STEAM doesn't require any additional infrastructural changes, extra time or resources, activities such as storytelling, role plays, and forum theatre can be used a pedagogical approach to teach the selected topics. It not only makes the classroom interactive but also ensures that students be interested throughout the course of learning. It can serve as an excellent approach to inculcated 21st century skills as well considering the strength of students in classrooms across India, teachers can implement these activities as a group task, which can enhance collaboration, communication and creativity among students.

Table 1. Pedagogical competency gains in STEAM training sessions.

STEAM Strategy Trained	Target Language Concept	Multidisciplinary Aspect	Improvisational Element
Role Play	Vocabulary in Context, Dialogues	Language learning through theatre, social interaction	Embodied expression, situational speaking, role shifts
Forum Theatre	Persuasive and Environmental Discourse	Integration of language, civics, and performing arts	Audience-driven dialogue, thematic improvisation
Storytelling	Narrative Structure, Scientific Terminology	Language and other subjects through creative expression	Spontaneous narration, metaphor use, voice modulation

The discussions conducted with pre-service teachers and their reflections revealed several themes following their exposure to STEAM-based instructional strategies. The reflections underscored significant shifts in pedagogical understanding and practices across various disciplines. The pre-service teachers noted that their conceptual clarity improved, and they shared that methods like role-playing and skits enhanced their comprehension of the material. They also observed an uptick in their teaching confidence, particularly when dealing with complex or abstract subjects. Additionally, they highlighted the importance of bilingual and multimodal approaches, noting that integrating languages such as Hindi along with storytelling methods enriched their ability to convey ideas. The incorporation of creativity, such as combining dance with academic concepts, broadened their view of teaching possibilities. Finally, there was a visible shift toward a learner-centred approach, with educators acknowledging how STEAM promotes student-driven exploration and expression. The focus group discussions identified five key themes from the reflective narratives, as illustrated in the table below.

Table 2. Reflective themes from pre-service teachers' experience with steam pedagogy.

Emergent Theme	Pre–service Teachers' Reflection	Frequency of Participants (n=)
Clarity of concepts via STEAM	"Role play helped me understand how concepmal clarity can be enhanced."	12
Teaching confidence	"After forum theatre. I feel confident teaching tough topics like climate change."	9
Bilingual and multimodal engagement	"Using Hindi in storytelling made science easier to explain."	8 1
Creativity in teaching	"I never thought of linking dance with science—but it worked!"	10
Learner-centric approach	"STEAM makes the class more about students and their ideas."	11

7 DISCUSSION

The integration of STEAM strategies within teacher education genuinely marks a significant transformation toward more inclusive, expressive, and holistic learning. This study found that STEAM methods, particularly role play, forum theatre, and storytelling enable pre-service teachers to bridge content knowledge with practical context, theory with real world, and academic language with lived experience. Reflections from participants indicated that engaging with drama and storytelling deepened their conceptual understanding, both in language learning and other subjects. This correlates well with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which emphasizes constructing knowledge through meaningful, socially mediated activities.

It also helped in improving the teaching confidence, especially after sessions involving forum theatre. Participants reported feeling more equipped to handle complex topics. Such confidence is especially crucial in multilingual and multicultural classrooms, where the teacher must continuously adapt pedagogy to diverse learner needs. This aligns with the recommendations from Education Policy, that the teacher must play a role of co-learner and cultural negotiator, a role that arts-based training prepares educators to fulfil effectively. One of the most profound insights from the study was the role of bilingual storytelling in demystifying conceptual vocabulary and encouraging learner participation. The use of Hindi, regional dialects, and local metaphors made academic content more relatable and easier to comprehend for students from diverse linguistic backgrounds. This supports Cummins' (2000) Interdependence Hypothesis, which advocates for leveraging learners' first languages to support second language and content learning. Furthermore, Wahyuningsih *et al.* (2020) and Lee *et al.* (2019) have emphasized how integrating the arts especially narrative and performance into academic instruction enhances both comprehension and cultural relevance. The findings support these claims, showing that when teachers are empowered to use bilingual, visual, and oral tools, they are more likely to foster equitable participation in the classroom. The STEAM intervention encouraged pre-service teachers to reconceptualize teaching as an imaginative, interdisciplinary practice. Activities such as linking dance with the respiratory system or using analogies in storytelling shifted the teacher's role from provider of facts to that of a creative designer of learning experiences. This supports Conway's (2001) argument that professional identity in teaching is constructed not only through academic mastery but also through narrative, reflection, and aesthetic practice. Robinson (2011) warned against the compartmentalization of creativity in education, advocating instead for a curriculum where creative thinking is central to all disciplines. The teacher reflections in this study, particularly the surprise and delight in discovering that "dance could explain a concept," exemplify how STEAM training fosters such cross-disciplinary innovation.

Participants enumerated that STEAM strategies helped them make their classrooms more participatory, responsive, and student driven. For example, forum theatre involved students in creating collaboratively and resolving socio-scientific issues, while storytelling invited personal

and cultural connections to scientific content. By inviting multiple modes of expression—visual, oral, kinesthetics-STEAM democratizes learning, allowing diverse learners to access and demonstrate understanding in ways that transcend traditional linguistic or cognitive barriers. Moreover, STEAM teaching can foster collaborative learning and problem-solving, which are essential for addressing real-world challenges. This is particularly relevant in the Indian context, where classroom population is often large sized and under-resourced, yet rich in cultural and linguistic diversity. Equipping teachers with STEAM tools can prepare them to create inclusive spaces that honour students' varied ways of knowing and holistic development.

8 CONCLUSION

Preparing pre-service teachers in STEAM approach can equip them with practical strategies to create inclusive, interactive, and effective learning environments. Integrating role play, forum theatre, and storytelling serves not only to deepen conceptual understanding but also to bolster participants' confidence and engagement through a variety of learning modes. When these approaches are embedded systemically, classrooms are transformed, shifting toward spaces where equity, imaginative thinking, and scientific exploration flourish (Aguilera & Revilla, 2021).

This study highlighted the transformative impact of employing STEAM pedagogy within teacher preparation, particularly in contexts marked by linguistic and cultural diversity. Training pre-service teachers in arts-integrated methods such as role play, forum theatre, and narrative work promotes not simply clearer conceptual understanding and enhanced teaching confidence, but also fosters creativity, inclusiveness, and a stronger learner-centred approach. Reflections from participants revealed an increasing recognition of teaching as an adaptive, interdisciplinary, and compassionate profession.

The findings make a compelling case that STEAM should not be considered a peripheral or supplementary curricular element. Rather, it emerges as a core pedagogical framework vital to comprehensive teacher training. By emphasizing embodied learning, narrative strategies, and multilingual engagement, STEAM education better prepares future educators to teach with both innovative approaches and a greater sense of cultural sensitivity and transformative purpose.

8.1 *A way forward with STEAM*

STEAM can help in fostering deeper conceptual understanding through experiential learning and teaching. It builds the confidence not only among teachers but also the set of students they teach through this approach, especially in addressing complex and abstract topics. It can also be instrumental in encouraging inclusive and culturally responsive pedagogy by usage of local or regional languages and integration of different art forms. It promotes a shift from teacher centred environment to a learner centred environment where the students can explore, express and create knowledge.

Integration STEAM based pedagogy systematically in teacher training programs can equip the future educators with tools for interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary teaching. It can also encourage the use of different art forms, languages and indigenous resources in classrooms to enhance accessibility and engagement.

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Dalit oppression and exclusion on educational campus: A postcolonial study of the story "Shodh Prabandh"

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ABSTRACT: Caste-based discrimination is a common occurrence in Indian universities. In India, Dalits have been historically deprived of the right to education as per Indian caste division into four categories. Therefore, low castes in India have been constitutionally given reservations in education institutions to bring them at par with the upper caste society. The central research questions guiding this study are: Whether casteism exists as dominantly on educational campus as in society? Are the upper caste teachers free from casteist mindset? Does caste discrimination affect the level of learning of Dalit students? To seek answers to these questions, the short-story "Shodh Prabandh" by Sheoraj Singh Bechain has been selected for study. The story will be analysed from postcolonial perspective. The paper explores how Dalit students are discriminated, oppressed and exploited on educational campus and how efforts are made to ensure their exclusion in universities and colleges. It investigates the effect of reservation on Dalits in higher education and the behaviour of upper caste teachers towards Dalits. The study reveals that caste discrimination exists in academia in a significant way. It badly affects the learning of Dalit students.

Keywords: Higher Education, Exploitation in research, Brahmanism on campus

1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Dalits have to suffer a lot in various ways in educational institutions due to caste identity and reservation. Pathania and Tierney (2018) contend, "Dalits are doubly stigmatized for their caste identity and as a recipient of state provision in the form of affirmative action" (p. 10). Reservation has been provided to "promote educational and economic interests of SC and ST, and other weaker sections" and to protect them from social injustices and all forms of exploitations" (Thorat 2016, p. 61). It provides "protection against discrimination in the spheres of employment, education, and legislature to ensure a fair share and to bring about an improvement in their economic and educational status" (Thorat 2016, p. 61). But unfortunately, Dalits have to face exploitation and exclusion on campuses. In the Prologue of her autobiography, *Coming Out as Dalit*, Yashica Dutt (2019) writes, "Discrimination, humiliation, and oppression are all penalties for not being upper caste or simply for being Dalit" (p. xi).

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The following objectives have been set:

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(1) To investigate the treatment meted out to Dalit students in higher education.
(2) To examine the effect of reservation on Dalits in higher education.
(3) To explore the behavior of upper caste teachers towards Dalit students.

3 RESEARCH GAP

While there has been considerable research on Dalit literature, a significant gap still exists. Most of the studies have focused either on oppression, exploitation and exclusion of Dalits in socio-cultural, political and economic spheres of life or on Dalit aesthetics. No adequate research has been conducted on the representation of Dalits in the sphere of higher education. This study seeks to fill this gap by undertaking research on the exclusion od Dalits in higher education by selecting the story "Shodh Prabandh".

4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present research is based on the close textual analysis of the short-story "Shodh Prabandh". The analysis of the story will be done from postcolonial perspective. The researcher will also adopt interdisciplinary perspective to draw insights from literature, cultural studies, education theory and postcolonial and postmodern studies as secondary resources to provide a comprehensive analysis. APA 7th edition will be used for the purpose of documentation and formatting.

5 TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

In the story "Shodh Prabandh", Sheoraj Singh Bechain exposed the caste-based oppression and exploitation prevalent in the educational institutions of post-independence India and the conservative mindset of the upper caste professors. The writer narrates the story of a Dalit research scholar who is caught in the snare of his research guide Professor Pratap Singh in Delhi university. Bechain raises the issue that, though Dalit students enter the portals of university but they have to face oppression, molestation and sexual harassment at the hands of professors. Bechain lashes out the anti-reservation stance of upper caste highly educated professors. The story mocks at the all-inclusiveness characteristic of education as exclusion of certain castes can be seen on various campuses. In the story, the central character Reena belongs to Chamar caste. She leaves aside her inclination to join the administrative service and makes up her mind to contribute in the field of literature. She selects 'Dalit Emancipation with Reference to Gandhi-Ambedkar' as the topic of her Ph.D. research. But in interview, the chairperson Pandit Dharam Chand Sharma misguides her by showing himself the well-wisher of Dalits. He advises her to change her research topic by arguing that Ambedkar and Gandhi are political figures and she should delve deeper into literature. Professor Pratap Singh is suggested as a competent and capable guide because he is progressive. Yashica Dutt (2019) rightly remarks that in the colleges of Delhi University, like several universities across the country, the identification of students "as lower caste because of reservation makes them particularly vulnerable to discrimination and abuse from college authorities" (p. 70).

Bechain reveals how a Dalit girl scholar is harassed and ensnared in the name of research by her supervisor. When Reena meets Professor Pratap Singh for the first time, he agrees to get her work done but he expresses 'but … ' also which innocent Reena fails to understand. He forces her to come to his bungalow with the outline of her research work. But when she reaches his bungalow, he appears before her in a half-naked state. And it is the first sign of his plan which she fails to understand because she sees in him the image of his own father.

On the pretext of checking her chapters, he often forces her to visit his house and keeps her busy with work till late night. In the chamber, he often cuts off her written material by calling it irrelevant. But at home, he himself writes the chapter of her thesis. He entices her by getting literary articles published in her name and taking her to literary seminars and conferences. He promises Reena to make her famous in the world of literature and she gets trapped in his sweet words. Many times, he places his hand on her shoulder but she ignores everything keeping in view their sacred student-teacher relation and his seniority.

In the story, Prof. Pratap forces Reena to get abortion. He argues that there are very few highly educated girls in her caste. So, any officer will marry her. He offers to gift ten-twenty thousand rupees as dowery in her marriage. When Reena tells Archana that Prof. Singh molested her, Archana comments on the state of affairs in higher education that Dalit students have special problems in higher education because not only Dalit students but teachers also are in minority. No one from upper caste comes forward to support Dalits. In this regard Suraj Yengde (2019) argues, "One hardly notices dominant-caste students advocating for social change and becoming the banner holder of the annihilation of caste movement. Sensitization of Dalit lives and problems relating to caste is not in the purview of the university administration and neither in the student groups" (p. 94). In this story, Reena decides to fight and teach a lesson to Pratap. She resolves to go from Women's Commission to S.C.-S.T. Commission. She reports the matter to the chairperson. But the chairperson, who is a Brahmin, brings the issue of reservation and remarks, "Now there is going to be reservation in universities also. So, the merit holders are going to leave your path. What are you worried about now?" (Bechain 2023, p. 147). He presents himself to be a great supporter of Dalits and tries to convince Reena to drop this case. He compels her to give written statement that it was done by mistake and by choice. But Reena does not succumb to his tricks. He makes a strategy to dispose of this case as it can be a case of Harijan oppression and can spoil the image of the entire department. He is very angry with Pratap Singh. But Prof. Pratap reminds him that he was following the advice of the chairperson himself. As he remembers:

> Sir, but you yourself used to say that reservation is a great wrath on us. It has swallowed up our social privilege, and our monopoly is also in danger. Sir, once you called us at home to say not to complete the reservation. Even if you find a suitable candidate, say, 'not found suitable'. If they are present, say, they are not worthy. Because till you manage to stop them from studying and writing, only then you will be able to take advantage of their unavailability in jobs and declare your loved ones as advanced, experienced and then make them permanent. (Bechain 2023, p. 149)

6 DISCUSSION

The analysis of the story clearly shows how the upper caste people restrict the entry of Dalit students in higher education. They are not allowed to come to forefront in the university because they will challenge the hegemony of upper caste students. In this context, Kancha Ilaiah (2019) rightly observers that despite the egalitarian ideologies of upper caste Hindu, they cannot see lower castes entering higher educational institutions. "Most of them considered us as 'undeserving' and felt that our coming into higher educational institutions would only lead to the deterioration of standards. In the opinion of some Hindu teachers, we did not deserve a place in the university" (Ilaiah, p. 56). Similarly, quoting Thorat, Pathania and Tierney (2018) comment that Dalits are looked down upon by classmates, faculty and even the administration because they have come to university through reservation. They further argue, "As a result, the Dalit student often develops an inferiority complex and becomes an introvert. Thus, in the arena of higher education, reservation and caste are so entangled that it is not easy to see them as separate entities" (p. 9). In this story, Professor

Pratap is famous for keeping only female students under his supervision. He not only exploited but consumed every S.C. S.T. girl. Reena also becomes the victim of his lust. When she reveals that she is pregnant, Prof. Pratap refuses to take the responsibility of it. He tries to reason her out that she should take it as a fun of student life. But Reena insists on marriage. She insists on staying at his house. She even proposes to do his domestic work. But Prof. Pratap takes the opportunity to belittle her: "If you were to become a nurse, then, why did you come for higher studies? The government has already given all kinds of reservations for you. Even the most deserving and capable Brahmins roam around unemployed and the third-class Dalit get respectable jobs easily" (Bechain 2023, p. 131).

The point of the chairperson in the story that Dalits get jobs easily, cannot be taken as true and valid. On the contrary, Dalits have to face difficulty in getting jobs. It can be easily understood by the lived experience of Kumud Pawde who could not get a job because of her being a Mahar or Dalit. In "The Story of My 'Sanskrit'", She recounts how she had to bear the sting of humiliation, exclusion, and rejection in the arena of higher education. Despite being the first Dalit woman to get distinction in M.A., she remained unemployed for a long time. But as soon as she got married in inter-caste, she got an Assistant Lectureship in a government college. She succeeds in getting a job only after the change of her surname from Kumud Somkumar to Kumud Pawde. She writes about the harsh reactions of upper caste people in a government college in Maharashtra, "It's all over! Kaliyuga has dawned. After all, they're the government's favorite sons-in-law! We have to accept it all" (Pawde 2020, p. 111). Similarly in the novel, *No Onions Nor Garlic,* professor Ram and other Brahmins professors of English Department of Chennai University maintain Brahminic hegemony and strategically hinders the path of Dalits in the university.

In his autobiography, Balbir Madhopuri (2023) states that upper caste people are always in search of opportunity to taunt Dalits. As the upper caste Bhujjar said, "All the Chambers have started studying and are growing swollen headed? If they all get jobs, who will work in our fields? Bhaiyas? They are all rushing to this area!" (Madhopuri, p. 163). In this story, the chairperson remarks that the foolish ministers of our country send any Tom, Dick and Harry to colleges and universities by way of reservation without thinking of its consequences. In this context, G.N. Devy (2017) advocates the need to carefully scrutinize the statement that "the quality of research suffers in the process of providing the marginalized access to higher education on considerations that they are seen as extraneous to academic activity" (p. 23). If marginalized have born in a particular caste or geographical location, it "has nothing to do with their intelligence and research ability" (Devy 2017, p. 23). After listening to Professor Singh, Mrs. Gupta also remembers the instructions given to her by the chairperson. As she recalls:

> If you have to take any S.C. student for research, then take the weak one rather than the smart one so that our ancient establishments come forward under the pretext of that. If there is a girl, give her priority. Then seduce her in such a way that she may not be able to return back to her society with respect . . . . Overall, keep all S.C./S.T. in fifth grade. (Bechain 2023, p.149)

In this context, Laxman Yadav (2024) rightly remarks, "When the children of Dalit, backward, tribal Pasmanda and deprived-exploited sections have started accessing higher education for the first time, they are being ruined by a conspiracy. (p. 09). In the end, Reena comes to meet Pratap Singh. She takes out the child from her lap and places it in his lap saying, "Here is your thesis" (Bechain 2023, p. 150). She slaps him hard on his cheek. This is also a sharp humanist slap on the face of blatant casteism in the university which strategically hinder the paths of Dalit Students to higher education. Pathania and Tierney (2018) assert, "The educational institution plays a role in highlighting caste identity. There is no mechanism to cope with such humiliation and prejudice, in general, and in postsecondary education in particular . . . Caste is seen as a part of culture and not a structural shortcoming" (p. 10-11). Doodh Nath Singh (2021) comments, "Brahminism itself is a hindrance

in the progress of the country. This is a different kind of colonialism that people have to fight. No independence will be complete until Brahminist colonialism (Acharya ji called it parallel imperialism) is not ended" (p. 194). He advocates to "launch a campaign against caste system to free people from its fraud, deception, and from the tricks of those people who oppress and take advantage in the name of caste" (Singh 2021, p. 194).

7 CONCLUSION

The story "Shodh Prabandh" presents a clear image of the caste-based discrimination, exclusion, oppression and injustice meted out to Dalit Students in higher education. G.N. Devy (2017) averts that it is not adequate to provide reservation or quota to Dalits rather "their life experience and their dreams, and aspirations must be made the substance of education. It is not enough to educate them; it is necessary to be educated about them" (105). Bechain lashes out the conservative behavior and casteist mentality of those upper caste professors who exploit and oppress Dalit students. It is evident that reservation which is a weapon to fight against inequality and injustice becomes the cause of torture, abuse and inhuman treatment for Dalit students. Dalits try to get education so that they can gain dignity and respect in society but in educational institutions they are oppressed and humiliated, which has damaging impact on their learning. The study will contribute to the ongoing discourse on higher education and offer insights into the conditions of Dalits in the institutions of higher learning in postmodern era. It serves a tool for the policy makers and administration in higher education to frame policies to ensure equal treatment of Dalits in colleges and universities. Institutions should develop and apply ample measures to eliminate discrimination on campus. A special Anti-Caste-Based Discrimination Cell should be set up in each educational institution which reports directly to Anti-Discrimination Statutory Body which should be established at state and national level. Strict disciplinary action should be taken against the erring faculty members. The future researchers may investigate the position of Dalit students in the institutions of higher education in the field of science and technology.

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Vocational education and sustainability: NEP 2020 role in shaping environmentally conscious careers

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ABSTRACT: This research explores the interrelationship between vocational education and sustainability with special emphasis on how the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 shapes career development with respect to the environment. Skilled professionals who can make a substantial impact in diverse sectors on sustainable practices are critically required with a global focus on doing something about the environmental issues. The NEP 2020, which is part of the holistic education reforms put forth by the Government of India, has served as a very useful transformational instrument which ensures the inclusion of environmental consciousness and responsibility within vocational education effortlessly along with means and methods for its implementation. This study proves that after all the strategies and policies for integration of sustainability in vocational education it still needs immediate attention for achieving the goal.

Keywords: National Education Policy 2020, environmentally conscious careers, environmental education, transformative education, industry collaboration

1 INTRODUCTION

The integration of vocational education and training (VET) with academic knowledge connects theoretical learning with the practical demands of defined occupations. In the contemporary global context, vocational education is gaining prominence in refining technical skills and building environmental awareness to address escalating concerns about the ecology. NEP (2020) undertakes a landmark policy shift in the educational landscape of India and aims to expand scope intentionally designed for eco-sustainable formative frameworks.

In this regard, there is a dire need of realistic changes in vocational education with regard to sustainability which can be met only with interdisciplinary approaches (UNESCO 2020). The Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change (IPCC) also underscores that education is the only key for sustainable development along with appropriate human capital that can make a significant contribution to contest the effects of climate change (IPCC 2014). Focusing on this take, NEP 2020 emerges as a central policy document that endeavours radically to change whole education system in India by incorporating sustainability as a core element in the across disciplines not only vocational education.

It tries to craft an educational framework which balances the emotional, intellectual development along with the practicality being in focus as per its vision stated. Taking into consideration, the policy document traces out the gap between the current state of human affairs and the environment. The policy unmistakably emphasises that sustainability centring in environmental

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education will be an integral part of learning programme (Govt of India 2020). Likewise, it shifts vocational learning from skills towards environmental and sustainability awareness.

2 AIMS/OBJECTIVES

It investigates the recommendation of provisions regarding sustainability based education in NEP 2020 and the inclusivity of environmental awareness in the vocations programmes. This research has two central objectives which include studying the effects of NEP 2020 on the development of environmentally conscious careers and estimating potential outcomes in the future. Further, it explores how vocational education through sustainability affects the future workforce while providing insights about both subjects' relationship.

3 MATERIAL AND METHODS

To accomplish this study, National Education Policy 2020 has been chosen primarily as a source for analysis. This is an analytical study which has different sections and perspectives that provide clarity for its feasibility. The investigation uses these dual research methods to study policy intentions and outcomes regarding environmentally sustainable career pathway development. This policy analysis dissects the elements of NEP 2020 and evaluates how it positions vocational education at the pinnacle of sustainable education endeavours.

4 RESULTS

The curriculum framed on the basis of NEP 2020 integrates eco-sustainablity as a necessary component of vocational education. Sustainable practices and environmental responsibility are now being included in vocational programmes under NEP 2020. Among the difficulties, educators face mainly the absence of standardised methods to integrate sustainability with respect to environment in vocational programmes. To realise it, collaborations with the business community are essential map the outcomes of sustainability concepts in job training and employment.

5 DISCUSSION

The research findings highlight a more complex relationship between sustainability, vocational education, and the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. The following conversation summarises the main conclusions and places them in the context of previous research. Further, it discusses the implications for future study, practice, and policy.

5.1 *Alignment with global sustainable development agendas*

Under NEP 2020, vocational education strongly emphasises sustainability, consistent with international initiatives like the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UN 2015). The worldwide call to prepare a workforce capable of contributing to sustainable development is echoed by the inclusion of environmental consciousness in vocational curricula (Dhunpath 2019).

5.2 *Educational policy and implementation challenges*

Even though NEP 2020 presents a progressive strategy for educational sustainability, difficulties still need to be resolved in converting policy intentions into practical applications

(UNESCO 2021). The analysis confirms the worries expressed in the literature about the discrepancy between the creation of policies and their actual implementation (Fullan 2014). It emphasises the necessity of focused approaches to address issues, including curriculum modification, faculty training, and resource allocation (Dinham 2018).

5.3 *Understanding and increasing the capacity of educators*

Educational institutions need to enhance their staff members' competencies in addition to comprehending their abilities. The qualitative investigation shows that vocational education requires sustainability integration to achieve its goals. Educators must develop both knowledge and capability about this matter. Educators' role in moulding environmental care attitudes stands proven according to existing environmental care research (Sterling 2011). The implementation of such programmes must be funded through professional development initiatives that centre on pedagogy and sustainability development so that teachers can apply these ideas correctly (Barratt Hacking *et al.* 2020).

5.4 *Institutional and industry collaboration*

There is an urgent need of the partnership between vocational training institutions and industries to apply the sustainability principles in practice. Such kind of partnership programmes help to develop competencies that may end up the essential sustainability setback (Lozano *et al.* 2017). Such collaborative initiatives provide trainees with real world leaning opportunities which lastly end up in preparing them for the job focused on eco-awareness.

5.5 *Educators and students' career pathways*

Integration of sustainability is essential for forming the view points of students regarding career pathways. Holford *et al*, (2018) states that level of interest of the students regarding environmental career increases based on the content in their academic programme they study. The findings of the study demonstrate that educators have a indelible influence on the mind of the students regarding their career choice in future. The unremitting expansion in the workforce depends largely on the vocational education strategise for the future.

5.6 *An interdisciplinary approach*

Sustainability is not a mono-disciplinary area rather an interdisciplinary one which is why teaching sustainability needs multidisciplinary elements and approaches. In this regard, Jucker *et al.* (2017) highlights in his article that environmental education, vocational education and educational philosophy all require an inclusive approach. Interdisciplinary pedagogy to teach sustainability helps students achieve an understanding on ecological affairs.

5.7 *Sustainability and social justice*

Inclusion and teaching of sustainability in vocational education result in social justice and inclusion. Sustainable development, as noted by Leal Filho *et al.* (2020), encompasses rectifying social injustices along with equitable resource distribution. In this regard, vocational education provides pathways to responsible employment opportunities when inclusively designed.

With regards to green jobs under vocational programmes, NEP 2020 being well-informed by environmental justice theories is well-positioned to fill gaps in the environmental impacts and access to green employment (Agyeman *et al.* 2016). This highlights the need for comprehensive policy frameworks that incorporate all levels of the student's social background to truly benefit the community.

5.8 *Life-long learning and adaptability*

Moreover, there is a dire need to deepen the culture of lifelong learning in vocational education. According to Davie's (2019), the need for flexibility and long-term adaptability to new challenges requires equipping students with skills in sustainable practices during throughout career span. NEP 2020's emphasis on varied pathways supports the need to learn advanced sustainable techniques during one's career through various professional development programmes.

Wals and Jickling (2002) indicate that including pathways for continuous professional development and upskilling in vocational programmes ensures that graduates can respond to the changing requirements of sustainable practices within their industries. This aligns with the increasingly global shift towards a knowledge-based flexible workforce.

5.9 *Cultural context and indigenous knowledge*

Achieving the effective integration of sustainability into vocational education requires consideration of the cultural context within which it takes place. To advance environmental sustainability, NEP 2020 recommends the inclusion of indigenous perspectives and knowledge (Battiste 2013). Vocational education programmes are guaranteed relevance due to the intersection between sustainability and culture and are therefore culturally responsive. Whyte (2017) asserts that the incorporation of indigenous perspectives facilitates education and helps in the preservation of customary ecological knowledge which is often vital in sustainable practices.

5.10 *Global cross-border competence and collaboration*

Under NEP 2020, vocational education needs to instil global citizenship perspective among the students in a cohesive world. Understanding global sustainability challenges, encouraging cross-border collaboration for tackling global issues is vital (Reimers and Chung 2016). With various perspectives and approaches freely available to students, NEP 2020 recommends global cooperation, which the students are simultaneously exposed to.

Another dimension of global cross border employability refers to preparing graduates for careers which enables the candidate to cross borders especially in fields that require worldwide collaborative action due to environmental sustainment (Orr 2004). It is expected that graduates of vocational programs come equipped with the required skills and a collaborative spirit towards achieving global sustainability.

5.11 *Sustainability and digital literacy*

NEP 2020 sees vocational education to include sustainability along with technology, digital literacy, and their intertwining. As companies become more environmentally responsible, vocational programs must teach advanced technologies that emphasise sustainable practices. Experience with such technology is critical in today's job market. In this regard, NEP 2020 seems accelerate integrating digital literacy skills into vocational programs and educational career paradigms to ensure graduates know how to use technology for sustainable objectives.

Also, industry associates can virtually connect with learners and vocational education bodies on digital forums, forming a global ecosystem for sustainable collaborative learning and information exchange. This aligns with technology's potential to enhance sustainable development through an innovative problem-solving ethos.

5.12 *Evaluation strategies for competencies in sustainability*

Vocational education requires appropriate assessment methods for integrating sustainability. NEP 2020 requires educational institutions to create advanced assessment methods which

extend conventional evaluation frameworks to measure technical abilities and sustainability competencies as described in Lozano *et al.* (2013). Performance assessments combined with practical investigations and real-life projects enable evaluators to assess a person's sustainable practice skills.

International movements dedicated to education system and change for better social issue management stand in alignment with evaluation methods that emphasise sustainability (Wiek *et al.* 2011). NEP 2020 will create proficient environmental impact through its inclusion of sustainability competencies in vocational education outcomes.

5.13 *Adaptability of the policy and evaluation reinforcement*

The dynamic aspects of sustainability issues require policies to be reviewed and changed constantly. There must be a participative response evaluation and continuous improvement cycles based on the feedback from diverse stakeholders i.e. students, teachers and industry participants. Flexible approach is crucial for vocational education centring on the contemporary sustainability issues and industry needs (Rasche *et al.* 2013). Incessant refinement and self improvement processes make NEP2020 stride towards set goals for educational policies aimed at International sustainability (Khosrow-Pour 2018). It helps cooperation and motivations towards innovation in vocational education and institution.

5.14 *Policy and practice recommendations*

Based on the discussion, it is suggested that governments chart out objectives for which they make targeted investments in faculty development for establishing sustainment for which they nurture ties between scholarly institutions and the industrial world. However, actionable strategies must be designed to address the challenges and leverage the opportunities in the NEP 2020 for enhanced impact on environment-sensitive skill development.

6 CONCLUSION

To sum up, with an emphasis on connection among sustainability and vocational education, NEP 2020 is set to reshape vocational education through influencing eco-conscious career options. The study stresses upon the need for an integrated approach that encompasses technological advancements, evaluation methods, policy rigidity, global cooperation, and multifaceted sustainable development to cross international boundaries for sustainable practices.

Through NEP 2020, vocational education embraces equitable social participation together with social justice which helps to ensure sustainable development. The policy acts as a solution to create equal social opportunities for environmentally sensitive work which results in eliminating social and ecological inequities. NEP 2020 strengthens vocational education by understanding cultural-sustainability relations which leads to better workplace which is responsive for sustainable learner and a successful ones in international diversified settings.

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Diversity, equity, and inclusion in educational institutions

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ABSTRACT: The objective of this study was to investigate the situation of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) policies in educational institutions and explore strategies for improvement. Employing a mixed method approach, both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered through survey and structured interviews along with evaluation of existing policies and practices. The findings revealed that opposing DEI initiatives, partial policies and practices, poor management of resources, poor training employee training and non-inclusive curricula are barriers to the implementation of DEI. Enlightenment of the society about the need for DEI, review of existing policies, proper management of available resources, continuous employee training and inclusive curricula were recommended as strategies for improving DEI in educational institutions.

Keywords: Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Inclusive Educational Programs and Policymakers

1 INTRODUCTION

People should feel accepted in educational institutions irrespective of their race, culture, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status etc. Which would enable them to exchange ideas, unlearn and learn new things. Education is much more than just the teaching and learning, it develops the individual socially, morally, psychologically etc., equipping students to socialise with diverse groups. Diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) initiatives are important for building a balanced educational environment. Prioritizing of DEI, makes the classroom to reflect the richness of the world; students learn to drop their fears, face their challenges, learn to socialise despite their differences and their innovative and creative sides are harnessed. Research has shown that a diverse educational environment improves creativity and problem-solving skills and benefits all students.

Apart from academic success, a strong DEI framework creates a culture of belonging, which is a fundamental component of student success. Students who feel invisible, unacknowledged, or disrespected are disengaged, academically avoidant, and rarely meet their potential. Furthermore, institutions that are inclusive are proposing actionable solutions to create schools and universities where every student can flourish regardless of the diversity.

Diversity means differences. In an educational setting, diversity means the coming together of people with distinct characteristics. This could be in terms of way of life, beliefs, family background, psychological experiences, tribes, financial status etc. The activities of the colonialists who merged minor and major ethnic groups to form countries is one of the

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major contributors to the many diversities that exist in societies today. Childhood experiences, including relationship with parents and parent's socio-economic status are also part of the reasons for the many diversities that exist in our society. Being able to manage the educational setting involves understanding the areas of diversity that make up a society and the effect of diversity on the educational system and closing the gap that diversity creates in the educational setting. The areas of diversity in the educational setting include students, staff and faculty and educational programs.

- **Diversity Program for students:** This is the integration of various perspectives, cultures, historical contexts, and interdisciplinary knowledge to design and develop educational programs that meet the needs of the community, thereby fostering a sense of belonging, enhancing academic achievement, and equipping students for a dynamic future.
- **Student diversity:** Refers to variation in the characteristics of students. In society they will be rich and poor; male and female; people with different ways of living, and who speak different languages, and practice different religions and have different strengths and weaknesses and abilities and disabilities. And these are the people that converge at an educational institution.
- **Faculty and staff diversity:** In educational institutions there are educators who are culturally, disciplinarily, racially, ethnically, and academically diverse and also have their strengths, weaknesses, and beliefs. For educational institutions diversity in faculty members may provide an opportunity for them to be role models, and provide diverse perspectives to maturing education and an inclusive learning environment, and mentoring to their students.

Equity means employing impartiality and fairness. Equity involves making effort to incorporate the distinct characteristics of people and their individual needs in the distribution of resources and opportunities. In this way, people get a sense of belonging and fairness is upheld. A good example of equity is a situation where extra efforts are made to make resources and opportunities available to students, faculty and staff living with disabilities so that they feel included.

There are certain points which need to be part: -

- **Non-discriminatory access to available educational resources and opportunities:** Individual features of students, faculty members and staff are recognised, and actions are taken to see that they are factored in, in the distribution of resources and opportunities. For example, quota system can be introduced for school admissions, employment, and other areas of resource distribution where it is considered necessary to ensure equity. In some nations or educational institutions, there are different admission criteria for students from educationally advantaged areas compared to those from educationally disadvantaged areas. This helps to encourage those from educationally disadvantaged areas to get education. This is also seen in hiring processes where there is quota for each part of the society especially in federal jobs. Equity also includes open access to academic programs, assistance for students, faculty and staff living with disabilities, bursaries, and scholarships for deserving students.
- **Terminating the disparity in academic performances**: There is usually differences in academic performances due to intelligence level, race, beliefs, family income, level of exposure, dominant language proficiency level, disability status etc. that needs to be treated. Equity in educational institutions involves addressing the unfair sharing of resources and opportunities among students, faculty and staff, partialities in established system of guidelines and practices, ways of life, language differences and low socio-economic status, that widen the disparity in academic outcomes among students in order to improve their academic performances, prepare them for the society and create a better image for the institutions.
- **Examining the impacts of partiality and discrimination on students' outcomes:** some subconscious partialities, prejudices or established system of guidelines can be

unconsciously meted out on students, faculty, and staff from a disadvantaged group, making them feel excluded and unwanted. For example, cold attitude or negative remarks against one's culture, ethnicity or race by administrators or fellow students, denial of employment or admissions to qualified people based on religion or race can create a feeling of exclusion and rejection in educational institutions. Equity ensures that the effects of these partialities or discrimination on students' performances are evaluated and these partialities or discrimination are discouraged to promote inclusivity.

Inclusion means to add something. In educational setting, inclusion means creating an environment where every student, faculty and staff feels accepted and free to contribute, learn and grow. Inclusion involves accepting students, staff and faculty diversity, fostering justice and fairness in opportunities and giving each individual a sense of belonging in order to encourage participation and achieve better academic outcomes. The major focus of inclusion in educational institutions is:

- Creating a sense of belonging in the students, staff, and faculty members by ensuring a safe and accessible learning environment and opportunities for all. There is need to equip staff and faculty members with knowledge and resources that would enable them to aid students of various characteristics, encourage involvements and ensure that all resources and opportunities are accessible to all.
- Supporting the diverse needs of students, faculty and staff through counselling or people-centred and mentoring programs etc.
- Working together with the institution's immediate society to understand their needs and create educational programs that would meet the demands of the local areas and lead to feelings of inclusion for the members of the society.

2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The differences in our society have created the need for diversity, equity and inclusion in all areas of life, especially in education where there are students, staff and faculty members of different races, gender, socio-economic status etc. which has a high tendency to lead to oppression and marginalisation. This need for DEI has made educational institutions work towards turning disunity to unity and recognising people without gender, socio-economic, ethnic, racial, cultural or religious tags. However, it has been observed that many students, faculty, and staff face gender-based, racial, ethnic, socio-economic status etc. discrimination. Some educational institutions lack diverse representation, and some students, faculty, and staff are hostile to the diversity in others. It appears that DEI initiatives are not properly implemented in these institutions. There is therefore a need for research that focuses on examining the existing condition of diversity, equity, and inclusion in educational institutions, identifies the problems of fostering DEI in educational institutions, and suggest ways of promoting a more diverse, just, and inclusive learning environment.

3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study would be beneficial to educational institutions, educators, researchers, and the society.

The findings of the study would help educational institutions understand the need to create a conducive learning environment, inclusive educational programs, and use teaching methods that take cognisance of students' backgrounds and experiences. Its findings would help educators to understand that their behaviours in and out of the learning environment impact students' academic success. Furthermore, the findings would serve as a

documentation of facts for future records in the society Similarly, the findings would serve as a source of literature for future research work in the related field of study.

4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study has been designed with the following objectives:

(1) To examine the educational institutional (DEI) practices and their initiatives.
(2) To analyse the DEI implementation barriers in the education system.
(3) To access the inclusive frameworks to foster inclusivity within the education ecosystem.

5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is built upon a comprehensive review of available literature regarding equity and diversity in education. This study does not conduct surveys; rather, it reviews published researches, institutional publications, and policy frameworks to understand the prevailing practices and challenges regarding DEI. Through cross case comparison, the study systematically constructs gaps in the applied DEI frameworks and puts forward applicable suggestions. All findings are cross validated against credible sources to ensure that the recommendations provided are sound and actionable.

6 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study showed:

(1) **Existing condition of Diversity, Equity and inclusion**: The study revealed that many educational institutions have little strategy intended to improve the situation of diversity, equity and inclusion in the institutions and this has resulted in underrepresentation or lack of assistance for disadvantaged groups.
(2) **Problems**: The study identified problems such as: Opposition of adjustments designed to improve DEI in educational institutions by staff, faculty members, and students. Insufficient resources to foster DEI by institutions and students. Some established system of guidelines and practices, such as requirements for admission, recruitment processes, promotion standards, entrenched ideas or partialities, etc., by educational administrators affect decision-making and discourage DEI. Some staff and faculty lack the required training to handle subconscious partialities they have, which can influence their behaviour in the learning environment. Some educational programs are not tailored to meet the demands of the local area, so they stand as obstacles to DEI.
(3) **Ways of Encouragement:-** This study presents a number of possibilities to advance (DEI) in educational settings. First, it is crucial for administrators to elevate societal understanding of DEI and work collaboratively with diverse stakeholders to address existing systemic challenges. Second, addressing transparent and equitable allocation of resources is critical; disadvantaged students should be prioritized with a targeted plan, followed by equitable admissions and hiring processes that reflect to various segments of society. Third, systemically review institutional policies and practices to eliminate barriers to DEI. Additionally, requiring faculty and staff to undergo training; not only for compliance with DEI, but also to understand that everyone is prone to unconscious bias that may unintentionally shape practice in the classroom or workplace. Finally, curricula must be oriented in relation to local community awareness needs; this would provide culturally relevant modifications and a stronger sense of belonging to DEI practitioners. If the aforementioned are instituted, the educational landscape has potential to be more inclusive.

7 INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

The finding that many educational institutions have little strategy intended to improve the situation of DEI in the institutions and it has resulted in underrepresentation or lack of assistance for disadvantaged groups is in agreement with the findings by the National Centre for Education Studies (NCES) (2020), which shows that there is lack of student, faculty and staff diversity in educational institutions and this impacts the level of assistance given to students living with disabilities, students from minority groups, those from economically and educationally disadvantaged backgrounds etc.

The problems of DEI in educational institutions identified in this study such as opposition to adjustments, insufficient resources, established guidelines and practices, lack of required training and non-inclusive educational programs further prove the findings of earlier studies. For example, Shuman *et al.* (2022), Knowles *et al.* (2022), and Goldenberg *et al.* (2020) investigated opposition to adjustments designed to improve DEI and found that seeing DEI initiatives as a threat to an organization's status, feeling that DEI initiatives could attribute one's success to a group rather than personal result and feeling that acceptance of DEI initiatives will conflict with their belief cause opposition to DEI changes. Also, Tellez (2020) and Stanley (2018) found that insufficient resources are a barrier to DEI initiatives. It shifts the focus from diversity, equity, and inclusion to utilisation of the available resources for the achievement of possible goals.

Similarly, Anbar *et al.* (2022) emphasised the need for recognition of bias attitude in educational institutions and recommended government interventions, random section of institutions, uniform policies for high and low achievers and motivation for low achievers as a way to mitigate the influence of bias educational policies of private educational institutions towards high and low achievers. Additionally, Gino and Coffman (2021) found that training focused on unconscious biases, teaches people to manage their biases by understanding other people's behaviour, changing their behaviour and tracking progress and is therefore effective in tackling biases among employees. Furthermore, Bhatia (2025) recognises instructional barriers to inclusive education. The findings include that rigid curriculum and non-inclusive instructional materials are barriers to inclusive education in the education system. The ways of fostering DEI highlighted in this study such as enlightenment of the society on the necessity of DEI, effective control of the available resources, reviewing existing policies and practices and developing inclusive curricula are in agreement with recommendations from past studies. For example, Adebayo (2023) stressed the need for education to be inclusive and recommends ways of promoting DEI in educational institutions.

8 IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The findings of this study highlight important areas for improvement in promoting DEI in educational institutions

First, there is need for institutions to build a stronger relationship with the society, identify their needs, and create awareness about DEI initiatives.

Second, continuous employee training is important in order to eliminate subconscious partialities. Every employee should participate in the training in order to eliminate subconscious partialities.

Third, curricula should be reviewed continuously to reflect the needs of the immediate environment and the changing world in order to equip students to be able to connect meaningfully to the external world and while contributing relevantly to their local communities.

Lastly, educational institutions must evaluate their guidelines and practices to identify subconscious partialities relating to things like admissions, recruitment, promotions etc.

By addressing these areas, educational institutions can work towards a welcome and inclusive learning environment where all students feel accepted and excel. .

9 CONCLUSION

The study investigated the situation of DEI in educational institutions, identified the barriers to DEI implementation and recommended ways to improve DEI in educational institutions. The findings revealed that opposing DEI initiatives, partial policies and practices, poor management of resources, poor training employee training to handle subconscious partialities and non-inclusive curricula are barriers to the implementation of DEI. To address these problems, enlightenment of the society about the need for DEI, review of existing policies, proper management of available resources, continuous employee training and inclusive curricula were recommended as strategies for improving DEI in educational institutions and creating an inclusive learning environment. Implementation of these strategies would help educational institutions to be able to achieve a diverse, equitable and inclusive learning environment and achieve their set goals.

10 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES

- Studying how continuous unconscious bias training can impact the creation of an inclusive learning environment over time.
- Examining how creation of awareness can impact the achievement of DEI within the educational system.
- Evaluating the impact of inclusively designed educational policies aimed at reducing stereotyping and hidden biases among learners.

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The dual burden of inflation and healthcare expenditure: Examining financial strain on families below the poverty line through updated socioeconomic scales in India

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ABSTRACT: Rising prices put a lot of strain on below-poverty-line (BPL) families, often aggravating their financial distress even as income levels remain static. This paper employs freshly revised forms of the Modified B.G. Prasad and Modified Kuppuswamy socio-economic status (SES) gradations, normalized according to the Consumer Price Index for Industrial Workers (CPI-IW), in an attempt to describe how inflationary patterns affect the financial security of economically underprivileged Indian homes. Special focus is given to out-of-pocket healthcare spending, which represents an important economic burden on BPL families and is likely to compromise healthcare system effectiveness. Using careful inflation adjustment methods, we examine changes in income cutoffs and assess overall implications for healthcare utilization and access to vulnerable populations. Our results show that families with fixed incomes have witnessed a 43.2% loss of purchasing power between 2016 and 2025 while, at the same time, suffering from catastrophic healthcare spending averaging 27% of yearly household spending. Such dual burden compels unfavorable healthcare choices with long-term implications for the health outcomes of individuals as well as the sustainability of healthcare systems, highlighting the need for inflation-sensitive social protection and healthcare financing reforms.

Keywords: Inflation, Catastrophic Health Spending, Poverty, CPI-IW, Socioeconomic Status

1 INTRODUCTION

Socioeconomic status (SES) is an important predictor of health status, educational level, and access to basic services among populations (Adler and Newman, 2002). There are two scales traditionally used in India for SES gradation: the Modified B.G. Prasad scale and the Modified Kuppuswamy scale, which both need to be revised periodically in order to remain valid against changing economic situations (Singh *et al.*, 2017). Both the scales use income as a significant parameter, and therefore they are very susceptible to changes in purchasing power by virtue of inflation. Raising the cost—expressed in terms of the Consumer Price Index for Industrial Workers (CPI-IW)—can hugely affect the effective household income, with proportionally adverse effects on those below the poverty line

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(BPL) (Patnaik, 2019). The loss of this impacts not just aggregate household living standards but also erodes the capacity to buy healthcare and possess nutritional adequacy and overall health directly. In spite of government efforts toward poverty reduction, inflation is a major hindrance that can actually deter progress in poverty reduction efforts (Himanshu, 2019). The health aspect of this loss is especially important. Health spending in India is mostly financed by out-of-pocket (OOP) payments, which represent about 62.6% of the entire health spending, significantly higher than the international average of 18.2% (World Health Organization, 2024). For BPL families, these prices frequently exceed catastrophic levels, which are set at more than 40% of household non-subsistence expenditure (Xu et al., 2003). Recent studies indicate that 30-40% of BPL families hospitalized make catastrophic health expenditure even when government protection mechanisms are in place (Kumar et al., 2021).

While India has seen vast economic progress in the recent decades, the growth has been tainted by long-term inequality, inflation, and weak financial protection against health expenditure (Chancel and Piketty, 2019). The COVID-19 shock and recovery have merely hastened these problems further, given that supply chain failure and economic stimulus efforts have fueled inflationary impulses (Reserve Bank of India, 2023) and, at the same time, increased the demand for health care as well as the cost of health care (Pandey et al., 2022). It is important to understand how inflation impacts BPL families, i.e., in terms of the ability to pay healthcare expenditure. It is essential to successful poverty alleviation efforts and enhanced healthcare finance systems. Measuring income threshold change, purchasing power, and affordability of healthcare aids to shed insight on the intricate relationship between economic vulnerability and health care access for India's most economically vulnerable households.

Expenditure on health care by Below Poverty Line (BPL) families in India is a turning point where poverty, inflation, and health challenge intersect. Out-of-pocket expenditure (OOPEs) dominate India's healthcare spending of 62.6% of the aggregate health expenditure, much above the global average of 18.2% (World Health Organization, 2024), with medical expenditure pushing another 39 million into poverty and growing poverty headcount by 3.5 percentage points (Garg and Karan, 2009). BPL households incur hospitalization expenses that comprise 27-34% of an average household expenditure (Pandey et al., 2022), with out-of-pocket spends on prescription medicines alone making up 63-70% of all OOPEs (Selvaraj et al., 2018), in many instances compelling distress financing through asset disposal and high-interest debt. This is exacerbated by medical inflation being 1.5-2.5 percentage points higher than overall inflation annually (Kastor and Mohanty, 2018), having an effect wherein reduced purchasing power as a result of overall inflation (Cardoso, 1992; Himanshu, 2019) happens simultaneously with disproportionately rising healthcare prices. This intersection creates an impoverishment cycle (Berman *et al.*, 2010) characterized by health care avoidance behaviors (Ghosh, 2011; Selvaraj and Karan, 2009), informal provider dependency (Gautham et al., 2014), and delayed care leading to more expensive interventions, with inflation-high periods also being associated with decreased use of preventive care among economically poor segments (Sharma et al., 2020). These processes underscore the need for inflation-adjusted socio-economic gradings like the B.G. Prasad and Kuppuswamy gradings (Prasad, 1961; Kuppuswamy, 1981; Sharma *et al.*, 2014; Pandey *et al.*, 2019) and social protection policies particularly to address the intersection of healthcare access, inflation impact, and poverty among the vulnerable.

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The paper seeks to demonstrate the impact of inflation on BPL families through study of recent CPI-IW data and revised SES scales for 2025 with a focus on healthcare expenditure implications.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Our analytical framework employed multiple robust data sources and methodological approaches to examine healthcare expenditure impacts on BPL families through inflation-adjusted socioeconomic scales. We utilized Consumer Price Index for Industrial Workers (CPI-IW) data from the Labour Bureau, Ministry of Labour and Employment, covering the period from 2016 (base year, index = 100) to January 2025 (index = 143.2) to capture major economic events including demonetization, GST implementation, COVID-19 pandemic, and subsequent recovery (Labour Bureau, 2024). Healthcare expenditure data were sourced from the National Sample Survey 78th Round (2022-2023) (NSSO, 2023) and state-level health expenditure surveys (2021-2024), supplemented by household consumption patterns from NSSO's 79th Round (2023-2024) (NSSO, 2024). Scale adjustment methodology involved calculating multiplication factors (Current CPI-IW/Base CPI-IW = 143.2/100 = 1.432) to update income thresholds while retaining the original five-class classification structure for both B.G. Prasad and Kuppuswamy scales (Jabeen, R., et al., 2025). Healthcare expenditure analysis encompassed catastrophic health expenditure estimation using WHO guidelines (>40% of household capacity to pay) (Xu et al., 2003), impoverishment analysis measuring households driven below poverty lines due to healthcare costs, healthcare spending elasticity calculations (% change in healthcare spending/% change in income), and comprehensive measurement of healthcare avoidance behaviors including treatment cessation, medication non-adherence, care avoidance, and provider switching from formal to informal care systems.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 *Updated socioeconomic scales: Modified B.G. Prasad scale*

Table 1 presents the updated B.G. Prasad socioeconomic classification based on per capita monthly income, comparing 2016 and 2025 thresholds (Jabeen, R., et al., 2025):

Table 1. Modified B.G. Prasad Socioeconomic Classification (2016 vs. 2025) Socioeconomic Class.

	2016 Per Capita Monthly Income(₹)	2025 Updated Per Capita Monthly Income(₹)
Class I (Upper)	$\geq$ 6,000	$\geq$ 8,592
Class II (Upper Middle)	3,000-5,999	4,296-8,591
Class III (Middle)	1,800-2,999	2,578-4,295
Class IV (LowerMiddle)	900-1,799	1,289-2,577
Class V (Lower)	$<$ 900	$<$ 1,289

4.2 *Impact of inflation on BPL families*

Our research determined significant economic consequences for families under the poverty line, with purchasing power declining 43.2% by 2025 for households maintaining stagnant monthly salaries of ₹900 per capita since 2016, effectively reducing their real wage to ₹629 in 2016 terms. The updated B.G. Prasad scale poverty line cut-off increased from ₹900 in 2016 to ₹1,289 in 2025, meaning households with static nominal incomes between ₹900-₹1,288 per capita now fall below the poverty threshold despite previously being classified above it.

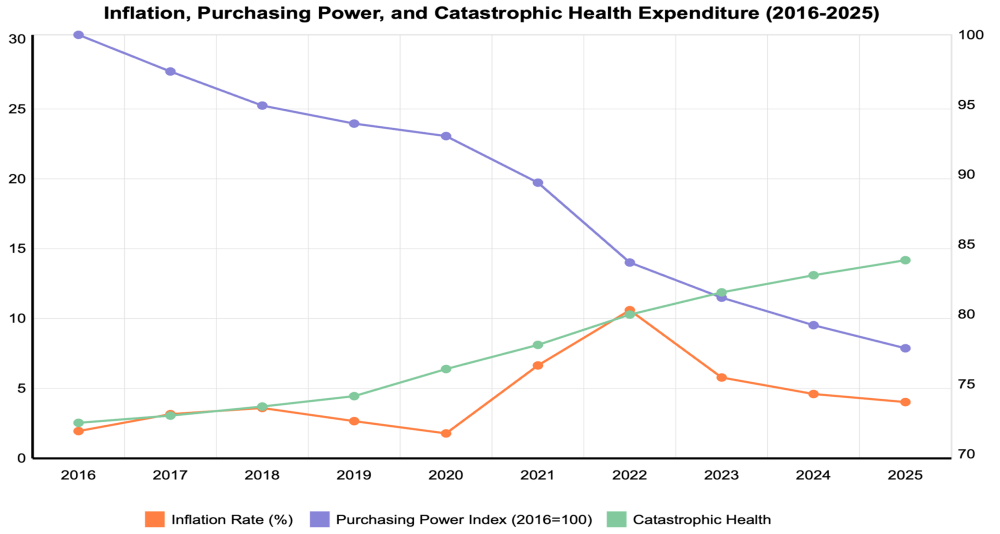


Figure 1. Trends in inflation, purchasing power, and catastrophic health expenditure among BPL families

4.3 *Healthcare expenditure among BPL families*

Our analysis revealed alarming healthcare expenditure trends among BPL families, with medical expenses consuming 27.3% of annual family income compared to 11.8% for wealthier quintiles, representing an increase from 21.4% in 2016. Catastrophic health expenditure affecting BPL families rose from 24.7% to 31.6% between 2016-2025, showing strong correlation with inflation rates ($r=0.76$, $p<0.01$), while healthcare expenses comprised primarily medicines (63.7%), diagnostic tests (12.4%), consultations (9.8%), hospitalization (8.6%),

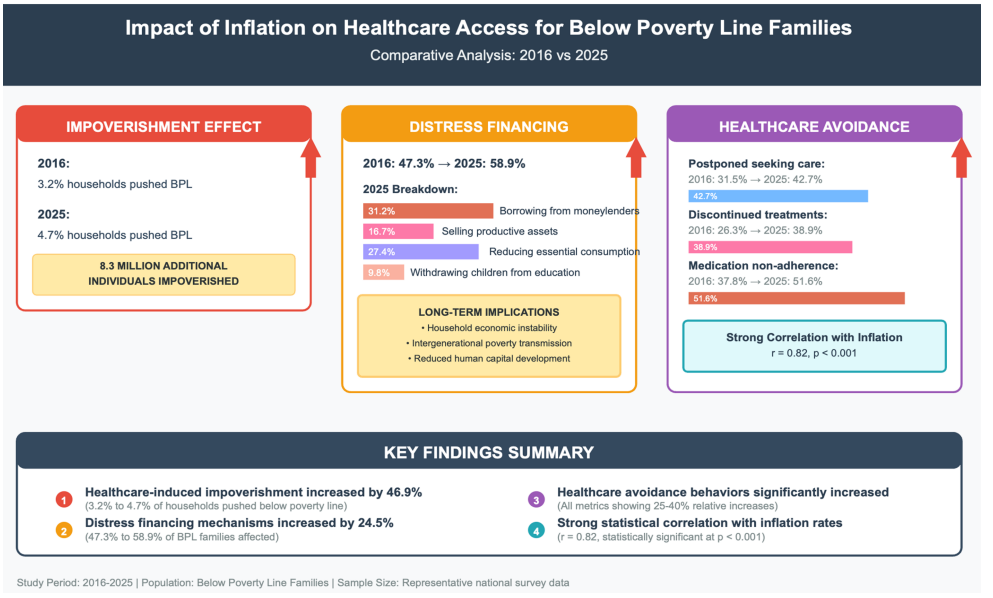


Figure 2. Impact on healthcare access by BPL families.

and conveyance (5.5%). Healthcare utilization patterns shifted dramatically with preventive care declining 32.8%, outpatient visits dropping 28.4%, emergency department use increasing 19.7%, and informal provider reliance rising 23.2%. Healthcare expenditures alone pushed an additional 4.7% of households below the poverty line in 2025 versus 3.2% in 2016, affecting approximately 8.3 million individuals, while distress financing mechanisms increased from 47.3% to 58.9%, including borrowing from moneylenders (31.2%), asset sales (16.7%), reduced consumption (27.4%), and educational withdrawal (9.8%). Healthcare avoidance behaviors intensified with 42.7% postponing care (from 31.5% in 2016), 38.9% discontinuing treatments (from 26.3%), and 51.6% reporting medication non-adherence (from 37.8%), showing strong correlation with inflation rates ($r=0.82$, $p<0.001$). The 43.2% purchasing power decline from 2016-2025 reduced effective monthly per capita income from ₹900 to ₹629, creating classification changes where families with static nominal incomes experienced downward socioeconomic mobility, consistent with literature demonstrating inflation's disproportionate impact on poor households regarding food security (Patnaik, 2019; Meenakshi, 2016), healthcare access (Berman *et al.*, 2010), educational investments (Kingdon, 2007), and poverty exacerbation (Himanshu, 2019).

4.4 *Policy implications*

Our results have a number of implications for policy formulation and implementation:

Inflation-Responsive Social security: In order to maintain its real value and effectiveness in eliminating poverty, social security schemes such as the Public Distribution System (PDS) and pension schemes must incorporate automatic inflation hikes (Drèze and Khera, 2017). To benefit those most affected by price hikes, subsidies for essential commodities ought to be effectively targeted, considering the differential impacts of inflation across different income groups (Ramaswami and Balakrishnan, 2002).

4.5 *Limitations of the study*

Income Reporting: Due to recall bias, informal employment, and seasonality, self-reported income information—upon which socioeconomic classification is based—is often erroneous (Deaton, 1997).

Geographic Differences: Regional differences in inflation rates, which could be considerable in a heterogeneous country such as India, are not considered in our study (Deaton and Tarozzi, 2000)

5 CONCLUSION

Poor households are directly and often unnoticedly impacted by inflation, which can put at risk a decrease in purchasing power to alleviate poverty. We have demonstrated, applying revised SES scales as per CPI-IW, that households with wages that are lower or stagnant have experienced a remarkable drop in purchasing power from 2016 to 2025, which could have brought more households below the poverty line or into even deeper poverty.

Our findings illustrate how important it is to regularly revise socioeconomic categorization frameworks so that they remain aligned with changing economic circumstances. They also highlight the importance of complex approaches of poverty measurement beyond income indicators and inflation-sensitive social protection mechanisms. More comprehensive methods of revising socioeconomic scales that include consideration of regional variations in prices and consumption levels should be researched in future research. Longitudinal analyses that track the way inflation impacts household well-being over time would also be extremely useful for designing and evaluating policies. Summing up, addressing the burden of inflation for BPL families requires coordinated action in several domains, including

livelihood enhancement, social protection, and targeted subsidies. Policymakers can develop more effective policies for protecting and promoting the well-being of India's poorest inhabitants if they recognize the silent erosion of purchasing power for vulnerable households.

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Nil

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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CONCLUSION

Summarize the key findings, their relevance, and potential future research directions.

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Multilingualism: An intercultural competence for a science classroom

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ABSTRACT: Our classrooms are reflecting the effects of globalization. We may find students of different cultures speaking in a variety of languages in the same classroom, which creates a challenging situation for a teacher. The issues are further enhanced when it is a science classroom, as they have to understand different scientific terms, and to make them understand, a teacher cannot depend on a single language. The policy document says that we should look towards multilingualism as a resource. In turn, it will enhance the intercultural competence of the students because they will recognize the cultural difference and be comfortable with it. Hence, they will develop empathy as a soft skill, develop cognitive skills, enhance academic performance, foster community integration, and provide better job prospects. A literature review is conducted in this paper to investigate the significance of multilingualism in supporting science education while also fostering intercultural competence. Research has shown that the use of the 5E model, inquiry-based learning, cultural modality, intertextual analysis, the utilization of multimodal elements, visual representation, supporting the home language, and hands-on approach are some of the strategies to build science knowledge and intercultural competence of the multilingual students.These strategies will better prepare the students for their future roles in their personal and professional lives.

Keywords: Intercultural Competence, Language, Multilingualism, Science Education

1 INTRODUCTION

Today we are living in a globalised world where culture and international relations form the basis of a well-organized nation. Living in this globalised era requires diverse competencies and a vast educational system for an effective teaching and learning process. The emphasis should be on developing the abilities required to grasp the demands of this ever-changing environment, as well as the ability to communicate across divides. In addition, the rapidly intensified globalisation of the world economy, growing numbers of people on the move in human migration during the twenty-first century, and rapid development of science and technology have all made it necessary for people in every field to enhance their intercultural communicative competence and to gain a better understanding of and appreciation for such diverse cultures and languages (Huang 2014). Teachers are the critical levers of support to develop these competencies and dispositions in our globalised, transnational, multilingual classrooms. (Gibbons 2003).

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2 SCIENCE EDUCATION AND LANGUAGE

Language is important to develop understanding towards the concepts of science. Oral language proficiency is very important when the classroom discussion is required for learning comprehension. Not only the language of a teacher but the language of students are equally important as language development is closely linked with the conceptual development. Certain difficuties are being identified in the science classroom's language like they find it difficult to understand the scientific terms. An experimental study was conducted with an assumption that students will understand the scientific concept if taught through everyday terms as compared to being taught through scientific language .The result reflected that the actually 'concept-first' approach improved the understanding of the students as compared to the conventional method(Brown and Ryoo 2008).Another issue was the difference between scientific language and their Mother Tongue. In this case dialogue method and better presentation from educators will improve the condition (Langenhoven 2010).

3 MULTILINGUALISM

Multilingualism helps an individual understand language as a system to represent meaning in the world. A strong foundation in language will help them understand the world and make the world understand themselves. Okal (2014) has identified some benefits of multilingualism in education.

3.1 *Develops a sense of empathy*

The students will realise the importance of being different, and even if they are considered equal, that does not mean they should be the same. They will develop empathy as a soft skill. That will help them deal with diversity in their lives.

3.2 *Develop cognitive skills*

Bilingual individuals have better cognitive skills as compared to monolinguals (Shook 2012). Learning multiple languages early in life makes your brain engage more intensively during those vital developmental years, leading to increased intelligence. Children who are bilingual and multilingual will gain advantages from this throughout their lives. Children who are bilingual are more inclined to become innovators of language and various meaning-making systems as they develop a deeper comprehension of how language functions. They've also been shown to possess longer attention spans due to their increased experience in focusing on aspects such as choosing which language to utilize or interpret. Children who are introduced to two or more languages early in life exhibit improved executive functioning abilities and increased cognitive efficiency, and studies show that these advantages persist for students even after they complete their education. This approach establishes the foundation for authentic cross-cultural comprehension and dialogue.

3.3 *Better academic performance*

The effect of Multilingualism on student academic achievement in the classroom is detrimental. A class with diverse languages fosters greater collaboration and inter-activity. The most successful problem solvers and critical thinkers are those who speak more than one language. This is because they've been trained to see things in another light, so they can think more critically about situations and find good solutions to their problems

3.4 *Fosters community interaction*

Children who speak a second language improve in that language. A child who speaks Spanish, for example, will do better at English over time if they are permitted to tap into their native language in your classroom. By having a classroom environment that embraces language diversity, that enables code switching, and even supports active learning of an additional language, you help your kids keep that connection to their home language and community.

3.5 *Better job prospects*

Communicating in more than one language enables a child to find a job straight away after completing school. This is applicable even if he or she knows just one extra language. It is also likely that they will be placed in higher social status occupations and roles than monolinguals and will be paid more from the start. This happens due to the fact that multilingual speakers are not only more intelligent and thus able to perform general tasks better (on average), but also, they have the advantage of a bigger job market. As it turns out, acquiring a few languages can make students become cleverer, more understanding, and even more appreciative of the culture of their own. Multilingual education is a great way if you want to enhance communication and language learning skills, but the learning experiences supporting this one would be more tailored and enjoyable. Multilingualism practices developed a greater ability to be intellectual and creative. Current studies suggest that if one grows up in an early-linguistic supportive environment speaking more than one language, children have an increased perceptual and intellectual flexibility (King 2007; Kroll and Dussias 2017).

4 CHALLENGES IN A MULTILINGUAL CLASSROOM

Promoting multilingualism in the classroom can be a successful teaching tactic that enhances students‘ social and emotional development in addition to their academic achievement. On the path to “language of instruction only,” it is imperative to treat all students’ languages as assets rather than unneeded baggage. This can be done passively by letting students speak in their native tongue or more actively by introducing teaching and learning strategies that incorporate multiple languages (“translanguaging” is one such pedagogy). Little pedagogical actions, such as respecting and showing interest in students‘ linguistic and cultural resources, can make a great difference. When working on group projects, encourage pupils to speak in their native tongues. Students will be able to apply previously acquired knowledge that would otherwise be undetectable, for instance. These methods can offer efficient scaffolding for knowledge development and language competency as well as inclusive chances for in-depth learning. The term “subordinate” refers to the tendency for one of the two official languages to always take precedence over the other (Kamwangamalu 2000). Due to regionalism, many nations and unions want to conduct their operations using a common language in addition to their original tongues (Okala 2014).

5 INTERCULTURALITY THROUGH MULTILINGUALISM

According to Michael Byram (1997), intercultural competence is the capacity to successfully engage in meaningful and fruitful interactions with people from different cultural backgrounds in one’s native tongue, as well as to operate effectively both within and outside of one’s own culture. The ability to interact and communicate with pupils who are culturally and linguistically different from the instructor in an effective and responsible manner is

known as intercultural competence, according to educators. Teachers must continuously develop this essential skill in both themselves and their students if they genuinely wish to create a classroom environment that values and supports each student's identities and experiences (Sinicrope, Norris, and Watanabe 2007). Green (2012, p. 1) proposes 10 reasons for curricular internationalisation that highlight the advantages of an intercultural practice in order to meet the demands of the globalised world in higher education:

5.1 *To prepare students for 'global citizenship*

When a person is fluent in both the official language and the indigenous languages, he or she can synthesise knowledge and express it appropriately. In order to reap the benefits of synthesising and clearly expressing knowledge, indigenous languages must be included in education.

5.2 *To prepare students for the global workforce*

Because of the world's growing population, the number of bilinguals may soon double. This increased number of speakers is most likely due to the regionalism and internationalism principles that many countries are now embracing, particularly in the fields of trade and commerce, innovation, and technological advancements. These principles require speakers to be fluent in working languages in order to communicate effectively. (Okala 2014)

5.3 *To enhance the quality of teaching and research*

Recent research on bilingualism conducted by the University of London Institute of Education (ULIE) demonstrated that speaking two languages improves academic performance (Mwololo 2008).

5.4 *To strengthen institutional capacity*

Mwololo claims that this fact of unity is emphasised by citing the words of Dr. Ayman Al Asar, an Egyptian lecturer who claimed that, if taken seriously, Kiswahili can play a significant role in bringing the 42 tribes of Kenya together, particularly in the wake of the disputed general elections that led to the post-election violence in 2007 and 2008. Politicians and other decision-makers can employ multilingualism by promoting a national language as a practical guide for fostering unity and growth among all citizens.

5.5 *To enhance prestige and visibility*

A multilingual person becomes cosmopolitan in nature since multilingualism offers an awareness of other cultures and experiences. (Barasa 2005)

5.6 *To generate revenue*

Being multilingual is another example of human capital. This is due to the expense involved in developing multilingual skills (time of the person, teachers and parents in enhancing the language skills, purchasing inputs and other school supplies) (Chiswick and Miller 2007)

5.7 *To contribute to local or regional economic development*

In the work market of today, multilingualism offers a competitive advantage. Employers increasingly look for language proficiency as an added benefit in addition to academic and professional credentials. Hence, in our century, having multiple languages is a benefit for

everyone looking for work. Multilingualism must be ingrained in the educational curriculum for this to be realised. According to a thorough poll conducted by the American Council on Education (ACE), learning a second language is necessary to succeed in the global economy. (Barasa 2005).

5.8 *To contribute to knowledge production on global issues*

Many kids who are proficient in multiple languages have better lateral thinking skills, are more socially adaptable, have better thinking and reasoning skills, and have higher cognitive powers. (King 2007).

6 TEACHING STRATEGIES FOR BUILDING SCIENCE KNOWLEDGE AND INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE OF MULTILINGUAL STUDENTS

Today, science instruction should follow the 5E paradigm so that teachers may improve each step of a 5E science lesson for students who speak different languages. This strategy enhances the richness of the sense-making experience for all students in the class by assisting in the exploration of the linguistic resources and potential language needs of the multilingual students.

A typical blind spot in teachers' practises is the need to promote discourse and develop students' intercultural competency (Lan and de Oliveira 2019). In the end, this could jeopardise the achievement of multilingual kids by impeding attempts to create environments that are safe and encouraging for all students studying STEM (Sinicrope *et al.* 2007). This narrative inquiry, which is a part of a bigger study, examines the phenomena of the growth of intercultural competence via the experiences of a science teacher at a Midwestern high school. It focuses more on how one teacher encourages and supports the growth of intercultural competency in her multilingual science classroom.

(1) Engage
Students that are more engaged may progress through language learning more quickly. According to studies, kids will participate more actively in class activities if they feel free to communicate in their mother tongue. Each student will eventually learn the vocabulary and grammar of the other student's native language through contact with other students.

(2) Explore
Encourage your kids to express themselves in both language and non-linguistic ways. Students will use their mother tongue as a foundation to grasp other languages. They will gain a better understanding of other languages and how they compare to one's native tongue in this way.

(3) Explain
Clearly state the role that language plays in the interpretation of scientific data. A person with strong language abilities may describe any scientific issue in an efficient and straightforward manner. To help someone feel connected to and at ease with the subject, one may base their explanation and communication on their cultural background.

(4) Elaborate
Provide students the chance to discuss in small groups before class discussions. Being multilingual enables us to interact with a wide range of people in both personal and professional settings. This is because certain languages are frequently the only efficient means of accessing the massive quantity of knowledge that people possess. (Webb 2000.)

(5) Evaluate
Allow students to use both content-specific and everyday experience to express their ideas. Use of everyday language to explain any scientific topic helps the students to improve their understanding towards any scientific topic.

Many studies and instructional recommendations have been conducted about teaching science to multilingual students (Janzen 2008). Science learning that is *based on inquiries,* is one of the most effective teaching methods. The National Science Education Standards serve as the foundation for the inquiry learning idea (NSES). The NSES requirements state that students should engage in practical tasks to acquire scientific habits such as questioning, obtaining information, and weighing evidence (Hampton and Rodriguez 2001). Elaine Hampton and Rosaisela Rodriguez (2001) found evidence of improving academic success over time when elementary school pupils received at least some teaching in both English and Spanish in their study, "Inquiry science in bilingual classrooms."

Several tactics and methods are suggested by Eva Reid (2015) and other academics for the development of intercultural, sociolinguistic, sociocultural, and pragmatic competences. She employs the following methods: Short videos are used in the following methods: (a) comparison; (b) cultural assimilation; (c) cultural capsule; (d) cultural island technique; examples of critical incidents that might be misunderstood are given, such as non-verbal greetings like cheek-kissing; and (e) cultural capsule where customs that differ in different cultures are shown, such as main meal of the day and eating habits; (f) reformulation, in which a learner tells a story to a partner in his or her own words while observing or focusing on certain characteristics; (g) Total Physical Response (TPR), a technique for teaching language or vocabulary that involves having pupils play out songs, stories, skits, and even employ non-verbal cues like the thumbs-up sign, a handshake, or head nodding in response to spoken words. (Jackson 2014); (h) prediction, where pupils participate actively by concluding (predicting) a story that hasn't quite been told or guessing what a topic will be based on a little amount of information. According to Loukia Sarroub (2007), teaching intertextuality as a literacy event to ELL students is a very successful strategy to let teachers know about their earlier experiences with formal education and literacy. This helps to foster a shared perspective of the value of reading and writing training. The importance of inquiry-based, hands-on activities is stressed by excellent science instructors, according to Lee and Buxton (2013). Although this method gives all students the chance to gain an understanding of science and practise inquiry, it is particularly useful for ELLs for a number of reasons. First off, hands-on activities lessen the linguistic burden on ELLs because they don't need formal mastery of the language of instruction.

Hands-on activities support language learning in the context of genuine discourse about scientific practise and knowledge, in addition to Byram's sociolinguistic competency model. Finally, inquiry-based science promotes ELL students' use of a range of communication methods, including gestural, oral, pictorial, graphic, and textual [like Reid's (2015) research method and McGinnis's (2007) multimodal elements]. Last but not least, process skills and inquiry-based science promote the development of academic language functions. Thus, we think that all three elements and five values of Byram's (1997) model of intercultural competence are present in the inquiry-based activities. Consequently, the overall results of the literature show that multilingual students have the capacity to exhibit high levels of intercultural competence and achieve academic success in science provided teachers encourage, mould, and develop this crucial skill.

7 CONCLUSION

Globalization is the need of the hour and is a phenomenon we may not deny. So there is a need to handle it in a constructive way so that we may help individuals as well as grow the nation. And for the development of our country, we are depending on science education to develop a scientific temperament in our students and come up with sustainable solutions. Multilingualism improves individuals' intercultural competence by preparing them for global citizenship, a global workforce, improving teaching and research, strengthening institutional capacity, generating revenue, contributing to economic development, and resolving

global issues through peace promotion. The 5E approach, learning based on inquiry, cultural innovations, intertextual analysis, the employment of multimodal components, visual representations, support of the home language, and hands-on experience—are some of the strategies for building science knowledge and intercultural competence in multilingual students.

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Transforming education: The promise and pitfalls of AI-driven personalized learning

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ABSTRACT: Personalized digital learning systems can achieve far better educational results than are customary approaches since they instruct and customize instruction to each student's own understanding and learning style preference. These platforms employ AI techniques within. Individual abilities of students are matched to content through the utilization of the techniques. Through four primary questions, this research investigates the requirements and obstacles in implementing adaptive e-learning because it identifies personalization components, reviews research progress, uses AI benefits, and establishes future research directions. The paper stresses on the developing of frameworks that can address the technical implementation for AI applications. These frameworks should address too the ethical dimensions. Researchers, education practitioners, and policymakers are helped by this evaluation since it stresses their joint initiation of AI technologies that support sustainable, ethical, and inclusive learning approaches. For teachers plus for educational institutions, AI-improved learning platforms remain powerful resources. These systems effectively use information students generate so they can assess as well as give responsive feedback as learners learn, which eases individualized solutions and feedback systems for learners.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Personalized Learning, Adaptive Technologies, Digital Education, Ethical Challenges

1 INTRODUCTION

The educational field has indeed experienced deep changes throughout its history, and it progressed from some verbal traditions to some structured classroom environments and now to some digital learning spaces (Jain *et al.* 2021). Education's AI integration is a potentially important change. This transformation is like the revolutionary impact that printing technology has had (Holmes *et al.* 2019). The theoretical beginnings of AI in education were in the 1970s with early smart tutoring programs, also the recent decade saw outstanding technological capabilities advance and implementation breadth increase (Zawacki-Richter *et al.* 2019). This evolves as society goes through transitions which are broad as well as digitizing increasingly across sectors.

AI-improved personalized education is something that means teaching approaches use artificial intelligence technologies. These approaches continuously modify content, rhythm, together with teaching methods on students' individual characteristics, preferences, and performance trends (Walkington and Bernacki 2020). Learning is viewed by these platforms as an individualized process separate from standardized approaches that cognitive, social, plus emotional student factors do affect. Established educational research shapes the theoretical foundation because personalized instruction yields improved results over standardized methods.

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Digital learning systems are now adopted worldwide, so the educational technology market expanded from $89.49 billion in 2020 to a projected $404.1 billion by 2025 because it grew at 16.3% annually. The COVID-19 pandemic did greatly accelerate the development of this trajectory disrupting customary education across the globe (Belpaeme and Tanaka 2021). AI-improved educational technology growth appears in corporate training and higher education especially (Maurya *et al.* 2025). Yet, K-12 settings show uneven implementation. Important disparities exist within high-income and low-income educational contexts (Holstein *et al.* 2019).

Regarding important components, this research addresses four linked questions: What elements are sufficient for effective customized learning systems? What is it that is the history of research? How has this field changed since then? How many teachers use AI's advantages to curb ethical use, privacy, and fairness threats? Some promising directions for emergence exist through current knowledge synthesis. In the future, scholarly investigation will benefit from these directions. Because these questions happen to be important even beyond simple academic discussion, they then inform implementation decisions that have deep implications in terms of educational equity and effectiveness. As Selwyn (2019) contends, when it comes to technology innovating in education, it is never neutral but rather represents specific values, priorities, and assumptions regarding learning.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The framework for AI-improved personalized education needs a strong theoretical foundation, and this foundation integrates perceptions from educational sciences, computing, and cognitive psychology (Gandotra and Jain 2023). In this paper the Adaptive Learning Ecosystem Framework (ALEF), an integrated theoretical model, is introduced. The model combines three theoretical approaches that are complementary so we can have a thorough comprehension of the detailed relationship that exists between technical capabilities plus teaching methodologies plus learning processes within educational settings that are AI-improved.

The main theoretical basis of ALEF employs sociocultural learning theory, particularly Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) concept. This concept describes that cognitive space from a student's independent capability to what they can achieve with appropriate guidance. AI-driven customized learning platforms effectively implement this concept via continuously evaluating learner abilities then dynamically adjusting challenge levels for maintaining optimal cognitive engagement. Technology can function as a scaffolding mechanism supporting learners as they operate near their ZPD's upper boundaries according to Luckin and Cukurova (2019).

Self-regulated learning theory includes the second theoretical dimension. It stresses upon the metacognitive, motivational, and behavioral processes that then allow students to actively direct all their learning experiences. As metacognitive collaborators AI-improved environments in the ALEF model are conceived because they offer calculated feedback on learning processes not merely outcomes. This viewpoint aligns with Wise and Jung's (2019) situated model regarding instructional decision-making, which stresses that instructors accurately monitor control processes for learning effectively.

The third theoretical element now draws directly from knowledge space theory (Siemens 2004) which then represents all knowledge domains as well-organized networks with connected concepts. The ALEF model includes this view by framing learning as navigation through knowledge networks not linear progression through content. This integration offers meaningful new perceptions when it regards AI-driven customized learning for it adapts in response to student needs within their developing zone of proximal development while balancing system-directed adaptation alongside student agency and self-regulation (Holstein *et al.* 2019).

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

AI integration in education has changed across various stages since the 1970s. Early clever tutoring systems, as exemplified in Anderson's (2013) ACT* theory-based tutors, used rule-based expert systems in order to model domain knowledge yet modern systems are much more flexible. Due to computational advancements that evolved educational technology, they enabled even more customized learning experiences.

Important progress occurs within education. It is the natural language processing. Chen *et al.* (2022) evaluated 142 educational chatbots and such evaluation revealed that transformer-based models achieved accuracy that was superior in understanding student queries in comparison to rule-based systems. Despite these advances, difficulties remain when explaining technical vocabulary. Techniques for deeper questioning are also difficult for one to ease.

Systems for knowledge representation serve as the cognitive foundation for applications of educational AI. They model domain knowledge as well as learner characteristics, and this guides instruction. With these structures integrated with machine learning, advanced learner modelling capabilities that capture both domain knowledge and metacognitive strategies were enabled (Holstein *et al.* 2019).

Predictive analytics is rapidly expanding now. Statistical methods are applied for recognition of trends in educational data. Early warning systems, Prinsloo and Slade (2016) show us, are able to identify at-risk students in an accurate way. However, these models often reflect existing biases for they raise important questions about algorithmic fairness and educational equity.

Adaptive learning platforms modify content and teaching approaches systematically upon learner characteristics. Walkington and Bernacki (2020) make a distinction between macro-adaptive systems in which parameters get adjusted at the curriculum level and micro-adaptive systems in which immediate adjustments occur during learning activities, and their effectiveness varies across contexts.

AI adoption patterns show variations in global perspectives. European approaches stress ethical frameworks with human-centred design. Rather, Chinese initiatives focus on implementation that is large-scale (Zawacki-Richter *et al.* 2019). Narratives of techno-optimism can meet with perspectives in critical counterpoint. Selwyn (2019) suggests AI in education often represents neoliberal values when it stresses efficiency, also this may weaken broader educational goals. Reflective development approaches in alignment with thorough educational values are advocated, not outright rejections of educational AI.

4 METHODOLOGY

This study uses a mixed-methods approach examining AI integration in educational environments combining qualitative case studies and systematic literature review thoroughly. The methodological foundation exists in critical realism (Wise and Jung 2019) because it recognizes objective reality for technical systems and social construction for educational practices. Computational processes and human interpretations shape this perspective. Examining AI-driven customized learning is possible as technical as well as social phenomena.

For methodological rigor and transparency, the systematic literature analysis followed under the PRISMA protocol. Queries that are structured in a related way for ethics, personalization, education, and artificial intelligence were used. Researchers did conduct database searches across the ACM Digital Library, ERIC, IEEE Xplore, Web of Science, and also Scopus. After a multi-stage screening process, the search found 1,873 possible sources yielding 287 articles for careful analysis. Both deductive and inductive approaches were used for the coding process that we conducted. The preliminary analysis (Holstein *et al.* 2019) guided the derivation of initial coding categories from within the theoretical framework.

In varied educational contexts, the case study component examined five distinct implementations of AI-driven customized learning systems: a K-12 public school district, a private university, an online learning platform, a corporate training program, and a non-formal educational initiative. Semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders (n=27) offered data from technology developers, instructional designers, educators, and administrators. This data was collected by the research team. Additional data sources were system documentation, usage analytics, and observational field notes from platform demonstrations (Prinsloo and Slade 2016).

Several limitations deserve acknowledgment. It was possible that generalizability was limited because diverse contexts had been prioritized during the case selection process instead of perfect representativeness. Important aspects for learner experiences may have been overlooked in stakeholder interviews capturing system implementers' perspectives rather than end-users'. The research design, with its cross-sectional nature, also limits perceptions into the AI-driven customized learning systems' evolutionary trajectories and longitudinal effects. Longitudinal designs, tracking implementation processes as well as outcomes across extended timeframes, would benefit future research efforts (Selwyn 2019).

4.1 *Key applications and implementation*

AI-driven customized learning appears across various of the educational applications that do each uniquely benefit and challenge implementation. Clever tutoring systems can represent more established applications. These systems offer feedback and instruction on performance by students. The algorithms trace knowledge to update models for student mastery within knowledge components, and focused actions addressing learning gaps are enabled (Holmes *et al.* 2019). How effectively teachers orchestrate technical change rather than are subjects to it affects outcomes. That implementation's context is something upon which successful deployments depend.

Automated assessment systems transformed evaluation practices across educational levels as they extended beyond grading for they provide formative feedback, which supports learning. These systems use natural language processing in order to evaluate structural stylistic and also grammatical aspects with student work. More consistent with timely feedback is thereby enabled. Yet upon its implementation, people found issues for algorithmic bias marked language features within non-standard English versions as errors (Baker and Hawn 2022). For these issues, experts must collaboratively develop linguistic diversity, and mechanisms must detect bias, then implement corrections of potential algorithmic prejudice.

Conversational agents are user interfaces that have gained importance within customized learning support because they provide quick responses to student questions and they develop learning skills. These agents employ natural language processing capabilities to engage students in meaningful dialogue with advanced implementations achieving response accuracy rates that make them indistinguishable from human instructors in specific domains (Kasneci *et al.* 2023). When implementing, challenges arise such as when managing student expectations and when integrating these agents within course workflows to complement human instruction instead of its replacement (Jain *et al.* 2025).

Predictive analytics tools transformed early intervention approaches. This is in particular true for the higher education sphere, where at-risk students are able to be identified prior to problems appearing within customary performance indicators. Specific interventions are triggered as these systems analyse data points that are multiple. Retention and success rates may rise from these interventions (Prinsloo and Slade 2016). To address surveillance concerns and to ensure algorithmic recommendations improve professional judgment rather than replace it are requirements for its effective implementation.

Educational AI implementation models range from bottom-up approaches stressing faculty autonomy along with course-level innovation to top-down strategies establishing institutional priorities plus infrastructure before anyone widely deploys it. For successful

implementation, it requires that standardization is balanced with customization, equity considerations are fully addressed, and new technologies are integrated into existing educational frameworks (Luckin and Cukurova 2019). Effective implementations recognize the sociotechnical nature of educational systems since they acknowledge that technical changes interact with various dimensions of educational institutions.

4.2 *Ethical considerations*

The deployment of AI-driven customized learning systems raises deep ethical questions beyond technical effectiveness, also it addresses fundamental concepts of privacy, fairness, and educational values. Because of privacy concerns with the sensitivity of education data, they become acute when minors are considered a vulnerable population. Educational data includes academic performance, behavioural patterns, cognitive processes, and emotional states which is what Drachsler and Greller (2016) name "cognitive privacy." Data collection is very detailed in adaptive educational environments therefore thorough profiles get created and could follow students through their education, so questions arise regarding lasting effects upon personal autonomy.

Their architecture contains the data, values, and assumptions AI systems reflect. Recognizing this, issues about algorithmic bias and fairness arise. When educational data that contains historical advantages as well as disadvantages enters algorithmic systems with no scrutiny, existing inequalities may perpetuate. Baker and Hawn (2022) cited possible support resource misallocation upon documenting that predictive models of student success showed lower accuracy for underrepresented students. A lack of representative training data plus feature selection which favours majority experiences with a failure lead to these disparities. Models do not account for all contextual factors, and these factors do influence educational performance.

AI-mediated educational environments can present the concept of autonomy. As a result, agency and self-determination are brought into question. As Biesta (2020) contends, educational technologies structuring learning experiences excessively risk reducing opportunities for students to develop into autonomous agents capable of making meaningful educational choices. Because personalization and agency exist in tension, system design needs to think about ensuring AI supports rather than it replaces student decisions.

AI regulatory frameworks for education stay disjointed. Furthermore, these frameworks are often of inadequate quality. Prinsloo and Slade (2016) advocate that an ethics of care approach should centre on student wellbeing and student agency when data governance decisions are in fact made, and they stress transparent communication about data practices and stakeholders should meaningfully give their input. Emerging governance approaches stress institutional accountability plus diverse participation instead of relying only on regulatory compliance because AI ethics in education needs active dialogue about technology aligning with wider goals and educational values.

4.3 *Future directions*

The future of AI-driven customized learning toward important development will see educational practices integrate maturing technologies. Language models stand as a truly transformative advancement now. They do make possible pedagogical interactions which are more subtle than what was previously possible. LLMs create explanations relevant to context that are tailored to personal learner needs unlike rule-based systems with set pathways (Kasneci *et al.* 2023). Another key frontier is multimodal learning systems then these combine visual, auditory, interactive elements supporting disciplines where physical skills develop since they analyse inputs more diverse than text. Extended reality technologies that include virtual, augmented, and mixed reality are converging with AI so that they can create

engaging personalized educational environments that enable experiential learning in otherwise inaccessible contexts (Holmes *et al.* 2019).

For research priorities, focus on developing guardrails and alignment techniques because they ensure these powerful models represent sound pedagogical principles rather than merely optimizing for engagement. Ethics review processes for AI systems like those used for human subjects research are implementation recommendations because algorithmic interventions require careful ethical consideration. Luckin and Cukurova (2019) propose the idea that AI is something that should complement human intelligence for the sake of effective implementation. They also propose we design toward teacher-AI collaboration instead of automating teaching functions. To create improved educational environments, this approach leverages AI along with human complementary strengths.

5 CONCLUSION

This exploration of the multidimensional landscape of AI-driven customized learning shows successful implementations combine institutional support together with sound pedagogical approaches plus technical capabilities. The findings indicate that for responsible implementation, stakeholders must attend to technical robustness, pedagogical soundness, ethical alignment, and institutional readiness (Holstein *et al.* 2019). The stakeholders must be involved in the designing and the developing of systems that are for effective practice. These systems must use privacy-by-design strategies to reduce data collection and maximize educational value (Drachsler and Greller 2016). Selwyn (2019) contends that the future for artificial intelligence in education depends not only on technical capabilities but also on how these technologies align with educational values that prioritize equity, critical thinking, and human flourishing (Jain and Mohanan 2023).

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Adapting to crisis: Understanding climate vulnerability in Delhi's informal settlements

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ABSTRACT: Delhi's' informal settlements – raging from slums and unauthorised colonies to pavement dwellings – face heightened risks due to climate change and their illegal status. This study examines how urban informality, the climate crisis, and socio-political marginalisation intersects in the Delhi NCR, using qualitative analysis of select settlements. It investigates how heatwaves, erratic rainfall, and lack of infrastructure worsen vulnerabilities among marginalised groups. Thematic analysis reveals how residents navigate daily risks with minimal state support, exposing gaps in urban governance. Despite schemes like PM-UDAY and the JJ Rehabilitation Policy, informal dwellers remain excluded from legal recognition and infrastructure planning. The study calls for urgent policy reform to integrate informal settlements into climate adaption, aligning with SDG 11 to ensure inclusive and resilient urban-development.

Keywords: Informal settlements, climate vulnerability, urban resilience, Delhi, Right to the City

1 INTRODUCTION

Delhi's rapid urbanization, driven by economic and population growth, has strained infrastructure, resources, and planning. This burden is most viable in informal settlements – home to over 1.7 million people (Economic Survey of Delhi 2019-20). Informal settlements or the "informal city," encompass notified slums, unauthorised colonies, resettlement areas, *jhuggi bastis*, and pavement dwellings (Economic Survey of Delhi 2022). These areas often lie in flood-prone or ecologically sensitive green belts, or adjacent to railway tracks, and low-lying lands operating outside formal planning norms. They are marked by poor housing, no or limited access to sanitation and water, erratic electricity, and absent waste management systems. They also face frequent threat of demolition or eviction due to legal precarity (Ishtiyaq and Kumar 2010).

This study examines the social, economic, spatial, and policy aspects of climate vulnerability in Delhi's informal settlements, highlighting institutional support gaps. It underscores the urgent need for targeted policy action and climate-resilient urban planning to correct systemic housing inequalities. The core issue is that these settlements are increasingly vulnerable to climate change due to their physical conditions and legal exclusion from services. The study explores how this informality – defined by both legal status and infrastructure – amplifies their climate risks.

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The research focuses on how environmental stressors – like flooding along the Yamuna, heatwaves, deforestation, and water insecurity – intersect with urban poverty, marginalisation and neglect. It highlights the disconnect between urban planning and the lived experiences of the urban poor. The exclusion of informal settlements from climate action, infrastructure, and disaster planning increases their vulnerability and denies them the "Right to the City" – equitable access to services and representation (World Charter on the Right to the City). Framing the issue through SDG 11 and the UN's Right to Development, the study situates Delhi's crisis within global urban justice and human rights debates, critiquing the limited enforceability of international rights frameworks.

Updated empirical data on policy implementation in Delhi is lacking. The Delhi Economic Survey reports from 2019 to 2023, present identical figures for unplanned dwellings and proposed housing units. Similarly, Delhi Disaster Management Authority's 2024-2025 Action Plan, aimed at heat alerts and illness prevention, used data only up to 2022, despite Delhi experiencing record summer heat in 2024. This data gap stems largely from the postponed 2021 census, now scheduled for 2025 with results due in 2026 ("Central Govt. to begin," 2024).

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The research investigates how climate-induced hazards impact informal settlements by systematically reviewing academic literature, government documents, and NGO reports. The central research questions are:

- How do climate risks affect human settlements?
- What vulnerabilities do informal settlements face?
- To what extent do climate hazard exacerbate vulnerabilities in Delhi's informal settlements?

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research uses a qualitative, secondary-data approach with thematic analysis across informal settlements like Gadia Lohar, Khadar Slum, Rajendra Nagar, Nigambodh Ghat etc. Drawing from policy documents, government data, and academic literature to examine how residents adapt to climate challenges such as heatwaves, erratic rainfall, and worsening air quality. According to DDA, Delhi's unauthorised colonies accommodate around 40 lakhs residents, who are constantly vulnerable to unsafe structures, unhygienic conditions, and lack of social infrastructure and basic amenities (PM UDAY Scheme).

This study contextualises informality within South Asian urbanism, highlighting legal ambiguities and socio-political marginalisation. It discusses typology of informal settlements unique to Delhi – slum-designated areas, unauthorised colonies, *jhuggi jhopri* resettlement colonies, urban villages, etc. As per the Unauthorised Colonies Cell, settlements on forest land, ASI land, or obstructing infrastructure etc. are ineligible for regularisation; land cost and penalties apply to those on government land. Furthermore, this paper argues that true development must move beyond tokenistic interventions, as short-term aid cannot ensure long-term resilience. Without addressing structural inequalities, climate adaptation will remain unjust, incomplete and perpetuate cycle of precarity.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 *Typology and distribution of informal settlements*

Delhi, since its genesis in 1911, has experienced multiple waves of migration driven by socio-political and economic factors, leading to unplanned growth, slums, and haphazard construction. This was worsened after the Partition of India and intensified post-COVID, with rapid migration and the spread of informal settlements. Combined with population growth, this chaotic urbanisation has strained resources, leaving unplanned areas especially vulnerable to climate change. Rising temperaures, water shortages, and erratic rainfall have increased flooding. In this context, the aims of UN SDG 11 – to make cities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable – remain distant, as Delhi-NCR's informal settlements face both environmental and socio-economic crisis.

Urban governance in Delhi formally recognised eight categories of residential settlements, of which seven are 'unplanned' and only one is 'planned.' Planned colonies are built on approved land demarcated as 'development area' in the Delhi Master Plan (DMP); they are 'approved' colonies with 33.08 lakh people residing in them. In contrast, unplanned settlements are often built without permission on the 'public land,' referred to as 'encroachments.' These unplanned areas are home to the majority of city residents, cutting across economic divisions.

These settlements range from dense, vulnerable *jhuggi-jhopri* (JJ) clusters and slum-designated areas to relatively more stable, yet irregular, unauthorised colonies and urban villages. Some of these categories like JJ resettlement colonies, have emerged because of repeated evictions over decades. Other, such as unauthorised and regularised-unauthorised colonies, inhabit a legal grey area, having been developed without formal approval but later granted varying degrees of legitimacy. Meanwhile, rural and urban villages reflect Delhi's transition from agrarian periphery to urban conurbation. ("Categorisation of Settlement," 2015).

The classification of these settlements was first systematised in the DUEIIP, a joint effort by the GNCTD Planning Department and the Ministry of Environment and Forests with World Bank's support. Aimed at improving Delhi's urban infrastructure and environment by 2021, the DUEIIP found that under 10% of Delhi's population lived in 'planned colonies' ("Categorisation of Settlement," 2015).

Table 1. Types of settlements in Delhi; Source: Adapted from ("Categorisation of Settlement," 2015).

Type of colonies	Definition	Population
Planned	Approved colonies, designated as development areas in the DMP, follow planning norms and have basic amenities.	33.08 lakhs
Slum Designated Areas (SDAs)	Slums, notified under the 1956 Slums Areas (Improvement and Clearance) Act, have basic amenities and require eviction notices. No new SDAs have been added after 1994.	10 lakhs
Jhuggi Jhopri clusters	Non-notified slums, classified by GNCTD as JJ Clusters, are squatter settlements typically on public land (DDA, MCD, CPWD, Railway etc.)	30.41 lakhs
JJ resettlement	They faced evictions in the 1960s (resettlement colonies were established), 1970s (emergency), and 2010 (Commonwealth Games). JJ resettlement colonies include Savda Ghevra, Bawana, Holambi Kalan, Papan Kalan, Rohini, and Narela.	17.76 lakhs
Unauthorized	These colonies violate DMP and are illegally subdivided into plots. Buyers may hold GPA documents, giving them semi-legal status and potential for regularization.	7.40 lakhs

(*continued*)

Table 1. Continued

Type of colonies	Definition	Population
Regularised-Unauthorised	1960s and 1970s hundreds of unauthorized colonies were regularized on resolutions of DDA or by a standing committee of MCD. Yet they do not fall under the category of planned city.	17.76 lakhs
Rural Villages	Unplanned settlements on Delhi's periphery are classified as "rural" in DMP, either agricultural or non-agricultural. *Lal Dora* (red thread) refers to the non-agricultural land known as *Abadi* from 1908-1950s, due to population growth in 1952, its boundary was extended to form *Phirni*, with the area in between designated by GNCTD as ELD (Extended Lal Dora areas).	7.40 lakhs
Urban Villages	Rural settlements notified under Section 507 of the DMC Act, 1957, are designated as "urban villages." Once part of an urban area, their land can be notified under Section 22 (1) of the Delhi Development Act.	8.88 lakhs

Delhi's urban landscape is shaped by historical migrations, policy decisions, and economic disparities. Despite formal efforts to manage it, much of the population lives in informal settlements – outside the regulatory frameworks and marked by infrastructural deficits, legal ambiguities, and chronic lack of basic services.

4.2 *Vulnerabilities to climate risks*

The uneven pattern of urban development becomes especially critical when viewed through the lens of climate vulnerability. Delhi's urban development is highly uneven, making informal settlements – like slums, JJ clusters and squatter settlements – especially vulnerable to climate change. These areas face compounded risks due to socio-economic marginalisation, poor coping mechanism, limited awareness, lack of measures for protection and non-existent institutional support. Additionally, inferior quality of housing, lack of water, health services, and sanitation, multiply their vulnerability. Vulnerable group within them – women, children, the elderly, and the disabled – are worst affected due to fewer adaptive capacities and are ill equipped to respond or recover. The climate-related challenges of 2024 – such as record-breaking heatwaves, air pollution, and urban floods highlighted these disparities. For instance, the 2023 Yamuna food displaced thousands in Khadar's slum, while formal houses were also left waterlogged in Yamuna Bazar and Shastri Park (Dutta 2023).

Delhi's summer temperature often exceeds 45ºC, reaching up to 52.9ºC in 2024 (Kumar 2024). Extreme heatwaves severely affect residents of informal settlements, like Aasha from Gadia Lohar in Chirag Delhi, reported worsened health and lack of drinking water due to heat exposure (Bhakar *et al.* 2024). Urbanisation and desertification further deplete portable water sources ("Good Sense Deserted Us," 2024). In the Aravali region, deforestation has caused hot winds and deteriorated air quality intensified due to ozone depletion and particulate pollution (Delhi Heat Action Plan 2024).

Delhi also faces frequent flooding. In July 2023, 153 mm of rainfall – the highest since 1982 – caused historic Yamuna floods, displacing 27,000 low-income residents in floodplain settlements. Researchers cite encroachments as a key factor for restricting water flow and increasing siltation, thereby intensifying flood impacts ("Delhi Rain," 2023). The adverse effect of this urban dysfunction was seen in the Rajendra Nagar's flooding, which tragically killed three students, highlighting urban planning flaws in mixed-use areas. In mixed use building approved for residential use are often used for commercial purposes leading to urban planning failure. Rajendra Nagar is west of North Ridge, thus, lies along the natural

drainage path to Najafgarh Nalla – the construction of flyovers and a metro station on Pusa Road blocks the water flow disrupting the natural drainage and causing waterlogging in Karol Bagh. Delhi's topography is bowl-shaped which funnels water towards Barapullah and then Yamuna, so any obstruction triggers flooding. Similar public-place submergence and tress loss have also been reported in Gurugram and Noida (Kaul 2024).

Similarly, the sudden downpour in Delhi in early May 2025 exposed the severe infrastructure gaps, especially in informal settlements. Street vendors, daily wage workers, and small shop owners saw their homes and workplaces flooded, goods destroyed, and income lost. Limited access to emergency aid worsened their situation (Gupta 2024). Slums and JJ clusters in Nizamuddin, Jangpura, Ahola, and Nigambodh Ghat – areas infamous for annual flooding – were hit hard. Recovery for low-income groups often takes months. As Santosh, a local shopkeeper near Nigambodh Ghat, noted, the unannounced rains left no time to safeguard belongings (Gupta 2024). The recurring waterlogging underscores the urgent need for improved infrastructure and targeted support for vulnerable communities.

4.3 *Structural inequality and institutional gaps*

The IPCC (United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) recommends that governments should build risk-reducing infrastructure (piped water, surface drainage etc.) and provide essential services – like healthcare, rule of law, and emergency response – to adapt to climate change (Satterthwaite, Archer, *et al.* 2020). However, informal settlements, often outside legal frameworks, are frequently excluded from such development. This leaves them highly vulnerable to climate disasters (floods, landslides, earthquakes, heatwaves, etc.) due to inadequate infrastructure. The "Right to the City" advocates equitable access to services for all, especially vulnerable populations (World Charter on the Right to the City). These groups have a right to special measures for protection and integration, and to be provided with basic services through affirmative action policies. Yet, the illegality of informal settlements denies residents this right, as urban and climate plans often exclude them. Strengthening state-citizen relations is essential to ensure inclusive and rights based urban development.

4.4 *Rights-based urban development*

A mere increase in food production, building housing for poor in town, or providing aid to village committees does not ensure respect for third-generation human rights or long-term security for the vulnerable. Sustainable human development must include democracy, peace, and justice as integral and core elements of human rights (Uvin 2005). In the 1970s, countries used their UN majority to push for a New International Economic Order, aiming to establish a legal and ethical basis for the right to development. Building on this, the UN General Assembly adopted the 1986 Declaration on the Right to Development, affirming it as an inalienable right. It states that all people are entitled to participate in and benefit from economic, social, cultural, and political development – encompassing all human rights and freedoms (Uvin 2005).

In a recent judgement, the Bombay High Court affirmed that slum dwellers have an equal right to dignity, safety, and basic living standards, protected by India's Constitution which is regarded as a 'living framework.' The Court upheld Regulation 17(3)(D)(2) of the Development Control and Promotion Regulations (DCPR) 2034, which allows reserved open spaces over 500 sq. meters – like parks or playgrounds – to be used for slum rehabilitation, provided 35% of the ground remains vacant for designated public reservation (Sirohi 2025).

5 CONCLUSION

The vulnerabilities of Delhi's informal settlement dwellers remain multifaceted. Increasing climate crises, along with shortage of essentials and limited disaster aid, compound their

ostracization. As the city expands, so does it informal sprawl, often excluded from governmental benefits due to its unregulated status. While policies like PM UDAY and 2015 Slum Rehabilitation Policy, along with bodies like RWAs and the DDA, aim to address urban challenges, their support and effectiveness in reaching unauthorised areas remains uncertain. The need for a reimagining of governance frameworks still exists, that would prioritize the inclusion of marginalized populations in Delhi-NCR, aligning with global SDG 11 objectives to address the unique vulnerabilities of informal settlements in the face of an escalating climate crisis. True climate resilience demands a state-citizen relationship rooted in trust, inclusion, and rights-based development which recognizes their rights to climate protection, infrastructure, and urban belonging. An inclusive, climate-sensitive urban policy approach is required which moves beyond recognising the informal areas as encroachments and instead prioritises their integration into the formal planning framework to bridge the gap between policy and ground realities.

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Artificial intelligence and electronic waste management in Uttarakhand: An analysis

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ABSTRACT: This research paper investigates a diversity of traditions in e-waste supervision and informs alternates and solutions comprising management and further instructions and principles to be observed. It is a comparative analysis of the legal frameworks of Uttarakhand and other cities of India. E-waste intended at the end users level has progressed vastly in our daily natural life. Conformist methods have experienced momentous alternative, ensuing in an operative trade seizure. Selling, storing, disposal, recycle, assortment outlines have all been replaced due to the exponential progression in demand and end product. Researcher has put a prominence on posing all-inclusive data which could be obliging to the governing actions in responsibility of surplus managing or the creating of altered automated stratagems, and the procedure fabricators. Efficient recycling practices and responsible disposal mechanisms are crucial for minimizing environmental damage and resource depletion. This paper also highlights how improved disposal protocols can ensure sustainable electronic waste handling. Automated equipment stumbled headed for end supervisors has increased. Predictable styles devise fundamental changes, developing operational conducts for handling electronic waste besides suggesting cures similar to reconditioning supervision, its guidelines, and laws to be observed.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, E-waste Management, Recycling, Disposal

1 INTRODUCTION

These days, "e-waste," has turn out to be a momentous environmental concern. Since the manufacturing of outdated electronic equipment has increased due to the quick pace of technological development, actual e-waste supervision is essential to an ecological prospect. These days Artificial intelligence (AI) is the most noteworthy advancements in the discussed area, revolutionising outmoded reusing means and boosting output. To illustrate the substantial impact of AI on e-waste management, this article will look at key applications, technological advancements, and advantageous innovations in recycling methods.

Research problem: Exponential increase in the use of automated machines has directed to a substantial upsurge in e-waste, posing serious challenges in its management, particularly in terms of disposal, recycling, and legal regulation. Despite existing frameworks, there is a lack of uniformity, enforcement, and effectiveness in electronic waste management practices across Uttarakhand

Significance of the study: This study provides valuable insights into the legal and practical challenges of using AI in electronic waste management in India, with a focus on Uttarakhand. It aims to support industry stakeholders in developing more effective, sustainable, and legally sound strategies for e-waste recycling and disposal through Artificial Intelligence.

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Research gap: Despite the growing concern of using AI over electronic waste in India, there is limited comparative analysis of state-wise practical implementation strategies, particularly between Uttarakhand and other regions. Existing studies often overlook localized challenges, enforcement issues, and the integration of recycling and disposal practices within policy execution, creating a need for targeted research in this area.

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To promote the use of AI and best practices for environmentally sound recycling and disposal among end users and industry stakeholders in Uttarakhand.
- To examine the evolution of electronic tools and their impact on daily life and waste generation in Uttarakhand.
- To analyse current practices of electronic waste management, including sales, storage, recycling, disposal, and destruction in the state of Uttarakhand.
- To assess the respondents' environmental concerns regarding their usage, consumption, and attitudes towards e-waste as well as their underlying disposal and consumption patterns.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Doctrinal and Empirical research by comparing the integration of Artificial Intelligence in E- waste controlling in Uttarakhand state (special focus on the valley of Dehradun) and other states of India. Empirical research will also be conducted at the Micro level in the state of Uttarakhand to understand the implementation of E-Waste regulations in the area.

3.1 *Research design*

Proportional and evocative research design will be used to scrutinize electronic waste management practices and legal frameworks in Uttarakhand and selected cities of India. It involves both **qualitative and quantitative methods by reviewing existing institutional mechanisms related to e-waste** and Collection and interpretation of records on e-waste production, reusing rates, dumping procedures, plus enforcement efficiency across regions. Analysis of understanding of the recyclers about Artificial Intelligence and its usage in the recycling unit was done through **E-Waste Management Questionnaire for Recyclers with a population of around 140 recycling units in Uttarakhand** out of which, simple random sampling was used as the sampling technique and the data analysis was done on 8 recycling units near the city of Dehradun and the technique was IBM SPSS Version 20.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Growing urbanisation, internet acceptance, and the use of electronic products are making it harder to discipline electronic waste, or "e-waste," in Uttarakhand, a state known for its biodiversity and unchanged natural environment. As India switches to sustainable waste management procedures, Uttarakhand has a practical prospect to improve waste organizing, monitoring, and recycling developments through the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in e-waste management. This study explores how AI might assist Uttarakhand with its e-waste issues, concentrating on possible applications, ongoing platforms, challenges, and suggestions for future integration. The administration started a number of programs to address the electronic waste in the main Uttarakhand cities, including Nainital, Haridwar, Tehri, Haridwar, Rishikesh, and Dehradun. These projects are currently in various stages of completion.

4.1 *Current status*

More than 60% of the state's e-waste is held and treated in the huge mainstream of urban slum areas, where inexperienced labourers execute hazardous tasks without personal protective equipment, jeopardising both the atmosphere and their well-being. Their lives are damaged for such a tiny sum. These workers should be given the necessary information about personal protection and safe e-waste processing. There are several technical explanations for managing e-waste, but beforehand they can be put into operation in the administration system, certain requirements involving laws, collecting techniques, logistics, and employees must be ready. Assessment studies and operating examinations might be required for this.

To regulate what features might reassure applicants to recycle e-waste more regularly, it was established towards evaluating the E-Waste Reutilizing Motivations of Dehradun Recyclers in Uttarakhand. Additionally, asking them if they would be willing to take part in upcoming e-waste reprocessing programs willingly or with inducements, prizes, and impulses to convert "behavioural tendencies" regarding accountable e-waste handling at the singular and domestic levels.

5 ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND ITS IMPACT ON E-WASTE MANAGEMENT

To appreciate the magnitude of AI in e-waste management, one must have a thorough knowledge of the problem. The coefficient flow of abandoned gadgets influences to ecological dilapidation, medical risks, and exhaustion of resources. Conservative reusing procedures cannot sufficiently handle the capacity and complication of e-waste.

5.1 *Applications of AI in E-Waste management*

5.1.1 *Automatic segregation and sorting*

Arranging and allocating electronic gears is one of the principal uses of artificial intelligence in e-waste management. While conventional methods are sometimes tough and susceptible to miscalculations, AI-enabled devices can rapidly and precisely classify and divide diverse constituents.

5.1.2 *Predictive maintenance*

AI is essential to ensuring that recycling equipment performs at its peak effectiveness. By predicting when equipment may break by using real-time measuring device data. This positive approach increases the complete efficacy of e-waste recycling, establishes, reduces conservation costs, and diminishes downtime.

5.1.3 *Smart disassembly system*

Disassembling electronic machines is a crucial step in recycling e-waste, regardless of it being demanding and long-winded method. Artificial intelligence (AI)-based methods can decompose automated machines mechanically and extract treasured parts for reconditioning. It enhances the reutilizing progression and guarantees the efficient resurgence of valuable resources.

5.1.4 *Material recovery and reuse*

Artificial Intelligence is indispensable for advancing the retrieval of e-waste materials. Machine learning algorithms can be used to precisely categorize and excerpt prized metals and elements from electric machines. This decreases the ecological effect of rare material withdrawal plus advances an additional circular economy by means of assisting the reprocess of retrieved supplies in new electrical goods.

5.2 *Artificial intelligence and technological advancements*

Data-driven algorithms are at the vanguard of its impression on e-waste administration. They constantly expand their precision as well as efficacy through observing trends in the information. This malleability is fundamental for managing the diverse and ever-developing types of electronic waste.

5.3 *Evolving solutions to E-waste issues*

- *Reusing Speed Rates Increased*: AI-based mechanisation has suggestively raised the haste and precision of e-waste managing, resulting in advanced recovery rates.
- *Preservation of Resources:* AI's precise organizing and recovery expertise aid in the upkeep of resources. Valuable reserves like silver, gold, copper and lithium may be retrieved professionally, dropping the ecologically destructive excavating endeavours.
- *Ecological Preservation:* AI in e-waste administration is fundamental to environmental preservation since it lowers the negative effects of e-waste clearance.
- *Financial Prospects:* AI-based e-waste administration results have created novel commercial prospects through stimulating the evolution of a circular prosperity.

5.4 *AI applications in E-waste management*

- *Automated Waste Organizing as well as Classification*: Computer visualisation is used by AI-enabled organizing systems to recognise and categorise distinctive types of e-waste, such as circuit panels, metallic elements, and plastics. Robots with AI resources can programme the sorting process, decreasing human oversight and speeding up the separation of trash.

  For example, ZenRobotics and AMP Cybernetics use AI-driven systems to programme the arrangement of e-waste, progressing accuracy and productivity.
- *Forecasting and Calculation for the Production of E-Waste*: By exploring market trends, invention lifecycle data, and customer behaviour, AI copies are able to estimate the amount and classes of e-waste formed in particular zones. For instance, projecting models estimate the lifetime of end-user gadgets and forecast patterns in desuetude to foresee waste issues.
- *Improved Methods of Recycling through AI-Driven Substantial Recovery*: AI enlarges recovery levels by more successfully identifying and removing valuable items from e-waste, involving gold, silver, and rare earth groups. Intelligent Mincing and Dismantling by AI-powered shredding techniques identify possibly dangerous resources and encure that electronics are taken apart safely.
- *Supervising and Pursuing of E-Waste by Integration of IoT and AI:* IoT instruments and AI observe the flow of e-waste from gathering locations to recovering facilities, promising obedience to legal obligations.
- *Lifecycle Estimation and Regulation through Product life Analysis:* AI helps producers create more ecological products by estimating the eco-friendly control of electronic tools over the course of their lifespan.
- *End-of-Life Assessment Systems:* AI presents references for the best end-of-life decisions (reuse, recycling, or disposal) dependent on the remaining value and specification of machines.

5.5 *E-Waste production in Uttarakhand: A mounting concern*

A growth in e-waste generation has been recognised to heightened use of smartphones, laptops, household appliances, and Internet of Things mechanisms. Uttarakhand, a

prevalent tourist destination, has a rise in temporary electronic machine users, which contributes to more trash by about 25%. The unorganised region processes a substantial amount of e-waste, which poses a threat to disassembly and unacceptable removal.

5.6 *E-waste administration regulatory background*

Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) conformity is needed under the E-Waste (Management) Rules, 2016 (Amended 2022), which emphasizes the reliability of manufacturers to ensure the proper disposal. The Uttarakhand Pollution Control Board (UKPCB) is in charge of enforcing environmental regulations regarding the administration of e-waste and supervising compliance. The competent concentration of legislation is troubled by low understanding, inadequate agreement, and a lack of experienced waste administration infrastructure.

5.7 *Potential products of AI in E-waste management in Uttarakhand*

- *Automatic Classification and Categorisation of Waste:* AI-Powered Organizing Systems use organization learning and laptop vision processes to acknowledge and sort numerous e-waste foundations, incorporating metals, plastics, and dangerous components. And can be established in major cities like Dehradun and Haridwar, which construct a lot of e-waste because of their developing commercial and IT regions. Companies like BRP Infotech Pvt Ltd have been doing the same in the city of Dehradun.
- *Extrapolative Analytics for Waste Production and Assortment:* AI-based predictive reproductions can investigate historic data and predict future e-waste production patterns, supporting in resource preparation and optimizing gathering schedules and its submission can be cohesive into Dehradun Smart City creativity to track and achieve e-waste successfully.
- *Tracking and Monitoring Systems Powered by AI* : E-waste may be tracked from its source to disposal or recycling facilities using GPS-enabled devices and IoT sensors backed by AI analytics. Uttarakhand is moving towards building that kind of networking system across State. Also by promising traceability, AI-motorised blockchain explanations can stop the unauthorized disposal of hazardous e-waste in ecologically fragile areas like the mounts of the Himalayas. Companies like Dev Bhoomi Recycling Pvt Ltd have been doing the same in the city of Dehradun, even after facing a lot of challenges of having fewer collection centres because of it being in a hilly area, less awareness and fewer employees like in Sahastradhara Dehradun.
- *AI-Powered Equipment for Recycling and Disassembling*: Robotic approaches with AI resources are able to accurately disassemble and abstract precious substances like gold, silver, and rare earth alloys. And a lot of AI-powered reprocessing systems are positioned in areas like Dehradun and Haridwar so that they could enhance recycling rates and lower conservation risks. Companies like Balaji Niryaat Pvt Ltd have been doing the same in the city of Haridwar and are trying to expand their base in the Uttarakhand region.
- *Using AI to Examine Policies and Agreement*: Artificial intelligence (AI) can assistance in keeping an eye on obedience to e-waste laws through Real-Time Obedience Tracking and inform establishments of any disturbances or unlawful endeavor. SIDCUL (State Industrial Development Corporation of Uttarakhand Ltd.) and other manufacturing zones can use AI techniques to monitor compliance.

6 UTTARAKHAND'S CURRENT AI SITUATION IN E-WASTE MANAGEMENT

At the instant, conventional methods of waste handling and clearance outweigh in Uttarakhand's e-waste controlling systems, with little manipulation of AI technologies. A

substantial amount of the state's e-waste is administered by the informal region, which ends in unacceptable management and unsafe emissions. The Dehradun Smart City Initiative's challenges to incorporate clever waste control systems present a possibility for AI implementation. AI-driven explanations for the state's e-waste controlling can be amplified through alliances between authority groups, educational establishments, and tech corporations.

7 TASKS IN EXECUTING AI IN E-WASTE ORGANIZATION IN UTTARAKHAND

- Inadequate technical expertise and infrastructure:
- Exclusive initial financial outlay
- Policy differences and little cognizance

8 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AI AMALGAMATION IN E-WASTE MANAGEMENT IN UTTARAKHAND

- Invest in AI-Powered E-Waste Sorting Tools
- Construct Predictive AI Prototypes for Forecasting E-Waste
- Advance Blockchain for the E-Waste Development's Transparency
- Programs for Knowledge and Capacity Building
- AI Amalgamation into Smart City Projects

9 KEY FINDINGS

- There were 37.5% (3) of the respondents who belonged to the Non-Polluting category of recyclers. There were an identical 25% (2) of the respondents, each of which belonged to either Orange or Green category. Only 12.5% (1) respondents agreed that they in fact belonged to Red category in terms of pollution potential of categorization of industry.
- Regarding e-waste collection methods in Dehradun, 25% (2) of the respondents each said that they did either door-to-door collection or online collection. 12.5% (1) respondent each preferred all the rest of the options individually namely from community dhalaos and dustbins in colonies, through rag picker mobilizations, through kabaddiwalla and raddiwala tie-ups and through waste segregation at household level and collection through RWA waste agencies. Thus, all sourcing methods were used by the recyclers.
- There were 25% (2) of the respondents who actually pay the collection agents for e-waste collection. An identical 25% (2) of the respondents said that they did so sometimes. Vast majority 50% (4) of the respondents did not pay for collection or resorted to free of charge collection with 25% (2) of the respondents in each category.
- Regarding dealing with e-waste vast majority 50% (4) of the respondents sold to either recycling companies or recycled the e-waste themselves which is a good practice. Another 25% (2) of the respondents sold it as second hand scrap to others while another 12.5% (1) of the respondents sold it as scrap directly. Another 12.5% (1) of the respondents resorted to vendor buyback and exchange process to trade value in e-waste.
- Total e-waste produced was less than 50MT for 37.5% (3) of the respondents and another 37.5% (3) of the respondents for between 50 to 100MT. Only 25% (2) of the respondents agree that they handled greater than 100MT of e-waste at their works. An identical 37.5% (3) each of the respondents send less than 50 MT to between 50 to 100MT for e-waste disposal. 25% (2) of the participants sends greater than 100MT for disposal.
- Larger Portion i.e. 50% (4) of the participants said yes to face challenges with inadequate or outdated equipment for e-waste collection and storage. Those saying No numbered

37.5% (3) of the respondents while those stating they faced this sometimes numbered 12.5% (1) of the respondents.

- A substantial 37.5% (3) of the respondents said that they faced difficulty in ensuring proper segregation and categorization of e-waste materials. This was negated by 37.5% (3) of the respondents even as 25% (2) of the respondents said they did face this issue although only occasionally.
- Only 25%(2) of the respondents agreed that they have a system in place to track and document the dumping plus reprocessing of e-waste materials with the help of machines working on Artificial Intelligence with another 37.5% (3) saying that they did this only sometimes. Those saying No numbered 37.5% (3) of the respondents.

10 CONCLUSION

10.1 *Key findings include*

Only one recycler in Dehradun was classified as Red (high-pollution), while the majority fell into the non-polluting or moderately polluting categories. Similar to previous studies (CPCB 2021; TERI 2020), the majority of respondents fell into the non-polluting and moderate pollution (Green/Orange) categories. As demonstrated by studies conducted by GIZ India and NITI Aayog (2019), which highlighted the hybrid nature of India's e-waste collection networks, the various collection methods—such as door-to-door, online, and rag picker mobilizations—reflect attempts to integrate formal and informal sectors. Most of the respondents do not have the capitals to use artificial intelligence systems because of their low-cost collection schemes. Earlier studies have highlighted the need for digitisation and improved traceability to confirm compliance and accountability in e-waste flows (CSE 2021).

Nevertheless the majority of them manage electronic waste reliably by recycling it themselves or retailing it to recyclers, some of them still sell it as scrap. Noteworthy challenges include insufficient equipment, issues with e-waste segregation, and AI-based tracking of the removal of electronic waste.

Artificial intelligence (AI) has the prospect to **transform** e-waste control through enhanced waste sorting, improved recycling efficiency, and regulatory obedience. While there are still issues to be fixed, further progresses in AI technology and increased collaboration among governments, industries, and knowledge providers could lead to a more justifiable and efficient electronic waste management system. These advances are also a critical step in generating a more sustainable and responsible future.

We are getting closer to a more sustainable and circular method of using and discarding technology as we keep using AI to solve the difficulties associated with electronic waste. Cities like Bangalore and Mumbai, e-waste centers are expanding and operating at a very rapid pace, while Uttarakhand's growing e-waste problems could be significantly addressed by the application of AI in e-waste management. While infrastructure, investment, and informal sector dynamics continue to pose challenges, a concentrated effort through government innovation, public-private partnerships, and technological advancements can result in an environmentally conscious and sustainable e-waste management ecosystem in Uttarakhand.

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Urban India's water supply woes: A review of policies and provisioning

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ABSTRACT: The Census 2011 data indicates that approximately 65.5 million people reside in slum areas, and a significant portion, nearly 70% of rural populations, face increased risks of diseases like malaria and diarrhea, primarily due to insufficient water supply facilities (Govt. of India 2011). Understanding water supply policies and programs, provisioning coverage and resource access is therefore crucial. Improving the current water supply services is the main goal of the planning process. To do this, one must comprehend the current circumstances. Understanding the process within a framework that comprises planning the provision, the intended beneficiaries, and those in charge of carrying out the plan is the main focus of the paper. The study attempts to evaluate the variables influencing water supply planning and to pinpoint the areas where water supply is lacking. The study's foundation is an examination of the main regulations governing urban water supply and distribution. According to the 2011 census, 79% of urban households had access to piped water supply, while only 33% of households access pipe water supply in slums. The study comes to the conclusion that there is still inequality in the water supply policies and provisioning, depriving the poor and marginalized groups of even the most basic access to facilities for drinking water. Caste remains a dominant factor in rural as well as urban areas to determine access to drinking water. To ensure equitable access to water for different sections of society, it is necessary to involve local communities and revive traditional water conservation techniques.

Keywords: Urban, Water supply, Caste, Gender, Policies, and Provisioning

1 INTRODUCTION

Lack of access to drinkable water is one of the key concerns at national and global policy agendas. Efforts are being made to increase access to water and sanitation facilities at global levels through MDG target 10 which states that all countries should provide everyone safe drinking water. The Sustainable Development Goal 6 (SDG-6) aims to "ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all" by 2030 (ESCAP 2016). The SDG target 6.1 calls for achieving universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all by 2030, and 6.2 focuses on achieving access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all and ending open defecation, paying special attention to the needs of women and girls and those in vulnerable situations by 2030 (ESCAP 2016). Providing clean drinking water is a serious

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issue on every continent facing acute clean drinking water challenges. Globally, approximately 748 million people were still without improved drinking water sources as of 2012 (SDG 2015). Waterborne infections can be avoided with clean drinking water. Unsafe water is a contributing factor in about 1 million deaths per year due to diarrhoea (WHO 2023).

Both in small cities and towns and in rural areas, people spend more time fetching water. Therefore, time spent gathering water cannot be utilized for activities related to sustaining oneself (PEP 2006). Women's life is intertwined with fetching water which requires them to travel miles in many areas (Lenka 2022). Research indicates that having reasonably easy access to drinking water is especially crucial for girls' education because it frees them up to go to school instead of having to go fetch water (Sommer *et al.* 2015).

Unsafe drinking water-related illnesses can result in medical expenses that consume a significant amount of income. Families that have an ill adult in the home, as well as those who care for them, are probably less productive. Access to clean water can improve educational participation among girls and reduce illnesses and injuries sustained as a result of traveling to fetch water and find a place to defecate.

Additionally, access to medical facilities and safe water encourages clean delivery methods and reduces the rate of neonatal mortality (WSD 2018). In areas where potable water is readily available infant and child morbidity and mortality rates are dramatically reduced since mothers can spare time to look after the children's well-being. They spend less time fetching water. Furthermore, women and girls who have access to water closer to home are less likely to experience sexual harassment and assault because they won't have to travel far to get it (Baker *et al.* 2018; Sommer *et al.* 2015).

The long-term rate of return is high in the case of the investment in the provision of water facilities. The UNDP estimated that an investment in water supply yields an average economic return of $4.4 to $1 (UNDP 2010). According to World Bank's Water Supply Program estimations India suffered economic losses to 6.4% of India's GDP in 2006 due lack of sanitation facilities. In India, the coverage of piped water supply is poor where more than half of the population relies on unreliable sources of water supply.

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This paper tries to understand the urban water supply frameworks and identify discrepancies in water access based on caste, gender, and class. It also aims to identify significant policy and programmatic gaps in order to promote more equitable water governance. The availability of safe drinking water can help in resolving various issues like poverty, hunger, education, mortality, and gender equality.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study draws upon secondary data sources including the Census of India (2011), National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) Rounds and programme documents of the Ministry of Jal Shakti and Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs to collect pertinent information for analysis and to provide a holistic picture of the water supply system in the country. This diverse array of secondary data enables the study to critically examine existing frameworks, policies, and trends related to water resource policies and provisioning.

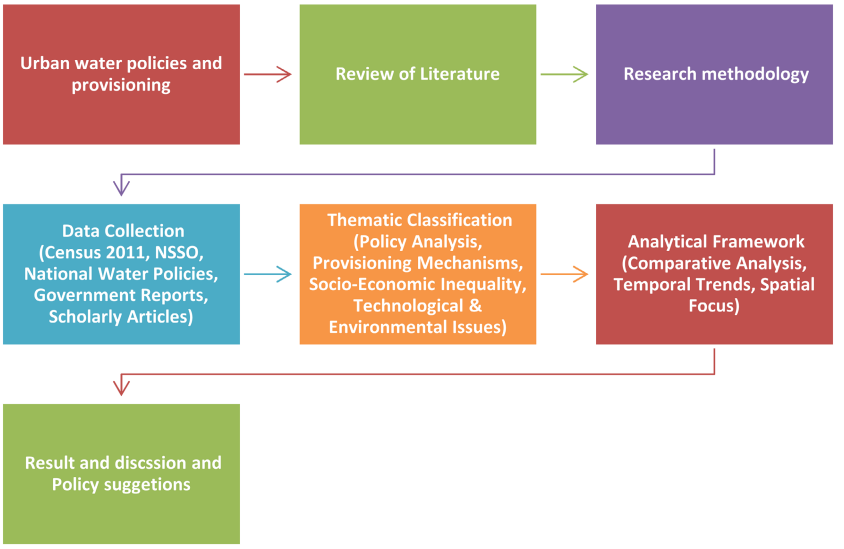


Figure 1. Methodological framework for reviewing urban water supply policies in India.

3.1 *Access to water: Indian scenario*

In urban India, water supply and sanitation remain a major concern. Thirty percent of Indian urban households lacked access to safe piped water in 2011. Between 2001 and 2011, there was only a two-percentage point advancement in the provision of piped drinking water (Bhagat 2014; Lenka 2024). According to the 2011 census, 70% of India's rural population is at risk of vector-borne and water-borne illnesses as a result of inadequate water supplies (Govt. of India 2011). Diarrhea is the third most common cause of death in India. Due to inadequate water supplies, diarrhea accounts for 13% of the deaths of children under five in India (Ghosh *et al.* 2021).

According to Govt. of India (2011), 17.4% of people living in urban areas were slum dwellers. In urban areas, only 62 percent of the households have access to piped water. Less than 50% of the households have access to a piped water supply within their buildings, and 40% get their water from other sources (Govt. of India 2011; Wankhade *et al.* 2014).

3.2 *Policies and provisioning of water supply in India*

Water is essential to economic development because it is a basic need for almost every industry. Thus, from a national perspective, it is crucial to develop, plan, conserve, and manage water resources in an environmentally sustainable way. Although it is not expressly stated in state water policies, states have the right to create appropriate laws, regulations, and policies regarding water that are consistent with the general principles of the national legal framework. India brought its first water policy in 1987. One of the main goals of the policy was to ensure access to drinking water for all by 1991. The key focus of the policy was on the creation of an information system, improving availability, project planning, upkeep and modernization, structural safety, groundwater development, water allocation priorities, irrigation, drinking water supply, and water resource management (Schiff 2022). It also emphasized the role of farmers and nonprofit groups in the regulation of water quality, zoning, and conservation initiatives. The policy highlights the importance of flood, drought management, prevention of land erosion, scientific and technological advancements, and training.

In 2002, the second national water policy was unveiled. Rehabilitation and resettlement, financial and physical sustainability, project monitoring, and fair water sharing and distribution

among states were among the key topics covered by the new national water policy. The community's concerns are taken into account in this policy. The role of the local community in the management and development of water resources is emphasized. Priorities for water allocation were also established by national water policy in the following order drinking water, hydropower, ecology, agro-non-agro industries, navigation, and other uses (Schiff 2022).

In 2012, the National Water Policy was developed with the goal of managing water crises. Inadequate water governance and management have resulted in dire circumstances in certain regions of the nation. Increased soil erosion, more frequent droughts, and water-related disasters are all consequences of climate change, which also contribute to water crises. There is insufficient use of contemporary methods, scientific planning, and a sufficient number of qualified staff members. During the planning phase, public agencies responsible for managing and distributing water often ignore the input of local residents and farmers. Therefore, water resource planning policies must adhere to fundamental principles that prioritize the interests of poor and marginalized communities. (Lenka 2024).

To address the issue of water supply, the Indian government developed and executed several programs, including the Jawaharlal Nehru National Renewal Urban Mission (JnNRUM), the Accelerated Urban Water Supply Programme (AUWSP), the National Slum Development Programme (NSDP), and megacity initiatives such as the Swarna Jayanti Shahari Rozgar Yojana (SJSRY), the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation & Urban Transformation (AMRUT), the Integrated Development of Small and Medium Towns (IDSMT), and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs and the National Institute of Urban Affairs' Urban Water Policy. These programs are intended to facilitate the development of urban infrastructure, with a particular emphasis on water supply (GoI 2019). Even after the implementation of various programs and policies for water supply, the results are not satisfactory. Social and economic inequalities mediate and/or obstruct access to water supply services (Kumar *et al.* 2021; Lenka 2024; Truelove 2019).

The study conducted by Panda and Agarwal (2013) on public provisioning of water and sanitation in the slums of Delhi shows that inadequate provisioning and poor implementation of schemes and programmes affect water supply. The study also noted that to ensure that programs and schemes are implemented smoothly, challenges including inadequate human resource convergence, centralized budgeting, and a lack of decentralized planning must be overcome. In their research, Hope and Rouse (2013) discovered that insufficient policy responses are mainly unsuitable for tackling the problems associated with preserving water security. Table one mentions the details of urban water supply and policy provisions in India.

Table 1. Urban water supply policies and provisions in India.

Sl. no	Policy/Program	Year	Key Objectives/Provisions	Implementing Agency
1	National Water Policy	1987, 2002, 2012	Prioritize drinking water, promote water use efficiency and community participation	Ministry of Jal Shakti (MoJS)
2	Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM)	2005	Improve urban water and sanitation infrastructure in 63 mission cities	MoHUA
3	Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT)	2015	Universal water supply coverage, sewerage management, water conservation	MoHUA
4	Swachh Bharat Mission (Urban)	2014	Encourage the construction of toilets, enhance sanitation and hygiene, and provide clean drinking water.	MoHUA
5	Smart Cities Mission	2015	Integrated infrastructure with smart water management in 100 cities	MoHUA

(*continued*)

Table 1. Continued

Sl. no	Policy/Program	Year	Key Objectives/Provisions	Implementing Agency
6	Urban Infrastructure Development Scheme for Small and Medium Towns (UIDSSMT)	2005	Provide small and medium-sized towns with essential services, such as a water supply.	MoHUA
7	National Urban Sanitation Policy (NUSP)	2008	Develop city sanitation plans, safe water access, and capacity building	MoHUA
8	Har Ghar Jal (Urban)	2021	Functional tap water connection to every urban household by 2024	Ministry of Jal Shakti
9	Model Building Bye-Laws (MBBL)	2016	Mandates rainwater harvesting and water reuse in urban buildings	MoHUA
10	State Water Policies	Various	Tailored state-level approaches to water management aligned with national policy	Respective State Governments

Source: Government of India, policies and programs related to urban water supply

3.3 *Water supply: Economic and political factors*

Studies show that in India social standing, political connections, and cost determine access to a water supply. According to Edelman and Mitra (2006), the majority of the impoverished and marginalized population resides in urban slums and other informal localities, where they face significant challenges in obtaining access to water resources. Saroj *et al.* (2020) study provides evidence that residents of informal settlements and slums, as well as those in poor economic conditions, frequently lack access to municipally provided tap water supply facilities in many Indian cities and towns. According to a study by De *et al.* (2017), the urban poor are the ones who are most negatively impacted by inadequate water supplies because they cannot afford to pay for packaged water or to stand in line for water because doing so would mean losing out on income. Anand (2001) conducted a study in Chennai's slums and found that slum dwellers face problems in accessing the water supply. People are forced to pay a high cost to private tankers to get drinking water. The cost of packaged water has gone up four times higher than the actual rate.

Both government and nongovernment organizations run various programs like Swachh Bharat Mission (Urban) and NGO-led community managed initiatives to solve water supply issues in slums. But these programs reach only some families. Gimelli *et al.* (2018) contend that political will is essential to obtain access to water supply facilities. Given their poor and low status, the slum population lacks the power to influence the political parties' election manifestos. They fail to create pressure on the political parties to include the issues of lack of access to water. However, at the local level elections such as municipality slum populations try their best to demand water in return for votes. For instance, in the Mumbai municipality election, where voters demanded that 'whoever will give us water is going to get our votes'. Bouselly (2006) study shows that most of the slums are unplanned settlements and have limited access to basic services. Truelove (2011) study shows that water distribution in Delhi is based on power. The study also finds that powerful, affluent families can access clean water easily, and poor people suffer a lot. Most urban poor people rely on water tankers for their water needs. People must stand in long lines for hours in order to collect water from the tanker[1].

3.4 *Access to water: Complex interaction of caste and gender*

Enhancing everyone's access to water supply in India has grown to be a top development priority in recent years. However, studies show that people have strong faith in religion and believe in the notion of purity and pollution (Jha,2010). In this context, historically, caste

status has influenced access to drinking water for the majority of Dalits (Acharya 2010). Ghosh *et al.* (2023) in their study mentioned that caste/tribe status has a direct link with access to the water supply. While the national average is 71% of households with drinking water, only 55% of SC and 57% of ST households have it on the premises. Joshi (2018) in his study mentions that complex interlinkages between caste and gender define water allocation and access. In general, women spend long hours collecting water, and Dalit women in particular wait longer as they can fill water only after the Caste Hindu women (Dutta *et al.* 2018; Lenka 2022). The girl child is four times more accountable than a male child for fetching water from distant sources (Joshi *et al.* 2012). According to Koonan (2016), the absence of nearby water facilities puts women at risk for physical and sexual abuse, among other health, safety, and dignity issues.

3.5 *Administrative and technological issues in water supply provision*

Poor administrative management and infrastructure are other causes of poor water supply provision. Indian states have the worst infrastructure for water supply (Dutta *et al.* 2015). Satpathy and Jha (2022) in theirstudy shows that millions of urban dwellers are excluded from water supply services because of a lack of administration. Due to limited access to the water supply, they pay a high cost and get poor-quality water from unreliable sources. The root cause of poor water supply is the inability of city management. The study also shows that the physical location, lack of voice, and greater vulnerability of the urban poor prevent them from demanding and accessing water services, which urban elites capture and utilize at the cost of the poor. Bownder and Chatrri (1984) in their study show that poor management is responsible for poor water supply. Without a better management strategy and cooperation among various stakeholders, coverage would remain poor (Evans 2005).

In addition to poor management, a lack of access to new water technology in designing water supply results in water wastage (Ali 2010). Another study shows that the per capita urban water use can be significantly reduced through the use of new water technology. The technology deals with saving water, leakage and pressure control, domestic water recycling, and large-scale interventions (Suzenet *et al.* 2002). Another study mentioned that it is not only the quantity that matters but also the quality. This means that technology design should fit the environment and improve the quality of water supply (Dutta *et al.* 2015). Kumar (2014) in his article cites the example of European countries that are using technology to treat sewage water.

3.6 *Conflict over river water sharing and environmental factors*

In India, rivers and groundwater are the two main sources of water for irrigation and drinking in most cities and towns (Panwar 2014). There are conflicts between different states in India over the use of river water as a result of rapid urbanization and industrialization, irregular rainfall, and overuse of river water. For instance, Odisha and Chhattisgarh are fighting over the distribution of the Mahanadi River water. Tamil Nadu and Karnataka are fighting over the Cauvery River water. Similarly, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, and Karnataka are involved in the Krishna water distribution dispute. Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, and Maharashtra are involved in the Godavari water dispute. In the north dispute over Ravi, Beas, and Sutlej water is between Rajasthan, Punjab, and Haryana. Meanwhile, Narmada water distribution is contested between Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Rajasthan.

The decline of groundwater is another major challenge. Over-exploitation of groundwater through tubewells, deep borings in apartments and households, shrinking natural water bodies (Indian Express 2019), and a decline in average annual rainfall have resulted in the depletion of groundwater. As per the Central Water Commission, the State of Tamil Nadu experienced a 44% shortfall in rainfall by June 2019, reflecting the intensifying challenges of

water scarcity in urban India. In cities like Chennai, Delhi, Bhubaneswar, Kolkata, Gorakhpur, Nagpur, and Mumbai, the groundwater is rapidly declining. Sabat (2012) in his study found that in Bhubaneswar, during the summer seasons, the groundwater level decreases, which results in water scarcity. Encroachment of wetlands and illegal construction on riverbanks is also responsible for groundwater crises. For instance, Chennai has lost 33% of its wetlands due to development projects and illegal encroachments over the decades (Dutta 2016).

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A mismatch between water policy, planning, and implementation has led to the present water crisis in the country. It is a matter of policy planning to ensure a proper water supply to all. However, the policymakers and planners give less attention to the demand management mechanism to reallocate existing supplies. Improper implementation of water policies at the grassroots level creates various problems with pipe water supply in urban areas. The national water policy changed its priorities over a period. Drinking water supply, irrigation, hydropower, ecology, agroindustry, non-agroindustry, navigation, and other uses were prioritized in the 1987 water policy. However, the 1987 draft priorities for water allocation were abandoned in the 2002 water policy priorities. The Water Policy of 2002 states that it is advisable to promote private sector involvement in the planning, development, and administration of water resources. However, the 2012 water policy advocates for the state's control over natural water resources. The groundwater policy is not properly implemented by the government, and it remains unregulated in most states. Water policies pay very little attention to regulations, permits, restrictions, and penalties for to use of water, especially groundwater.

The National Water Policy of 2012 promotes rainwater harvesting to boost water availability in urban regions and incentivizes states to restore traditional water harvesting systems. The Model Building Bye-Laws of 2016 mandate rainwater harvesting for residential plots exceeding 100 square meters. Rainwater harvesting is required for new construction with roofs larger than 100 square meters and plots larger than 1,000 square meters (GoI n. d.). Moreover, rainwater harvesting is mandated by the Central Ground Water Authority (CGWA) in residential colonies, institutions, and buildings with tubewells situated in notified areas. Similarly, installing rainwater harvesting systems in public, private, commercial, and institutional buildings is given top priority under the Rainwater (Harvesting and Storage) Bill of 2016. In order to alleviate water scarcity and lessen reliance on outside water sources, rainwater harvesting in urban areas ought to be given top priority. Rainwater harvesting system installation in public, commercial, and residential buildings must be encouraged by policy. It is possible to offer subsidies or tax breaks as incentives for implementing these systems. Furthermore, rainwater harvesting will be made mandatory in new construction projects and integrated into urban planning to support resilient urban flooding and sustainable water management.

The government has implemented several water supply policies and programs such as the National Water Policy (1987, 2002, 2012), AMRUT (2015) and Har Ghar Jal (2021) which are aimed at ensuring Universal access to piped water supply. All the policies and schemes talk about coverage and provisioning point of view, but very little attention is given to the provider's point. Several studies argue inadequate water policies and poor infrastructure are the primary obstacles to realizing universal access to potable water and sanitation facilities in urban areas. Inadequate provisioning and poor implementation of schemes and programmes affect water sanitation services (Panda and Agrwala 2013; Robert and Rouse 2013; Wankhad 2015).

Urbanization, factories, construction of buildings, and deforestation are the main reasons for reducing the groundwater and water supply (Sabat 2012). The water resources are

polluted due to untreated chemical waste from factories, and a lack of sewerage facilities is responsible for changing the groundwater quality (Kundu 1991). An additional factor contributing to the inadequate water supply in urban areas is poor administrative management (Bownder and Chatrri 1984).

Indian states need to adopt better technology for water supply (Dutta *et al.* 2015). The technology can be used to deal with leakages and pressure control, domestic water recycling, and large-scale interventions to conserve water (Dutta *et al.* 2018; Kumar 2014). Politics also plays a crucial role in determining access to water. The water distribution in states based is on power.

Economic factors play an important role in accessing water supply. Affluent families get better water supply and sanitation facilities than the poor (Truelove 2011). Poor water supply is the cause of high mortality and diarrheal deaths of children. Improved water supply and sanitation can reduce 10 percent of the global burden of disease (Haller *et al.* 2007; WHO-UNICEF 2002). Poor economic condition is one of the main reasons, people are not able to access tap water supply (Anand 2001). The private tanker also charges a high amount for providing drinking water in slums and those who can't pay suffer a lot (Hope and Rouse 2013; NSSO 2014). It can be concluded that access to water remains caste and gender-biased where only females are responsible for fetching water where they spend long hours. The girl child is four times more accountable than the male child for fetching water from distance sources (Bhullar 2014; HDR 2011; Joshi *et al.* 2012). Caste and gender inequalities persist as major barriers to equitable water access. Across rural and urban areas caste is a dominant factor influencing access to water sources. Dalit communities and women, especially in rural areas, continue to bear the brunt of water insecurity. Women and girls spend inordinate amounts of time fetching water, which hinders their education and exposes them to safety risks. Dalits have relatively poor access to piped water. Dalit women have to travel long distances and wait for longer time to fetch water as compared to caste Hindu women (Borooah *et al.* 2015; Joshi 2011; Kumar 2014).

5 CONCLUSION

The water supply policies, provisioning, and providers are closely connected with each other. Policymakers, bureaucrats, and planners need to form interlinkages between various service-providing agencies. A multifaced approach is required to protect and conserve water bodies so that all sections of society can get benefit from various development policies and programmes. To conclude, it can be said that integrating effective water management programmes with decentralized implementation strategies and distribution can make urban and rural areas a livable place.

In Ranchi, Kishorganj area where municipal water tank sharing resulted in a fracas with five persons stabbed. All are admitted in government hospital. One of the victims who stabbed five times during the incident. A case involving a murderous attempt and additional charges has been reported to the police station. Due to the depletion of groundwater and the inability to supply water to the tail end through surface reservoirs, Ranchi is experiencing a severe water crisis.

CONFLICT INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

FUNDING

None

NOTE

1. In Ranchi, Kishorganj area where municipal water tank sharing resulted in a fracas with five persons stabbed. All are admitted in government hospital. One of the victims who stabbed five times during the incident. A case involving a murderous attempt and additional charges has been reported to the police station. Due to the depletion of groundwater and the inability to supply water to the tail end through surface reservoirs, Ranchi is experiencing a severe water crisis.

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Online gaming and legal challenges in India

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ABSTRACT: Online gaming's explosive rise in India has generated both excitement and anxiety, resulting in a complicated and constantly changing regulatory environment. The online gaming sector is flourishing because to the broad availability of internet, the low cost of smartphones, and the rise in computer literacy. However, there are a number of legal and regulatory issues that come with this extension, especially with regard to the distinction between "games of skill" and "games of chance (Writ Petition No. 19570 of 2022, High Court of Karnataka 2023)." The latter frequently falls under gaming laws, which are primarily regulated by individual states and frequently forbidden, therefore the distinction is vital. India lacks a unified national framework for online gaming regulation, which results in conflicting policies and unclear authority. While some states have taken a more progressive approach, and others like Telangana and Tamil Nadu have imposed rigorous limitations. The demand for extensive regulation has also increased because to worries about financial fraud, addiction, underage involvement, and user data protection. This abstract analyzes the laws that currently regulate online gaming in India, looks at significant court rulings, identifies regulatory gaps, and assesses recent government efforts to create a unified regulatory framework (Chandola 2024).

Keywords: Online gaming, Gambling, Legal challenges, state wise

1 INTRODUCTION

Rising smartphone penetration, reasonably priced internet connectivity, and a quickly changing digital entertainment landscape are some of the reasons behind the impressive expansion of India's online gaming market in recent years. Since millions of people play a wide range of gaming formats, from casual mobile games to skill games that require real money, the industry has developed into a significant contributor to the digital economy, attracting significant investments and creating a big number of job opportunities. However, its rapid expansion has also brought to light certain legal concerns that will continue to shape its future (India Brand Equity Foundation 2024). India has a merely disorganized legal system that regulates online gaming. The Indian Constitution's federal structure gives each state the sole authority to enact laws pertaining to gambling and betting. Because of this some governments, like Tamil Nadu and Telangana, strictly prohibit real-money gaming, while others, like Nagaland and Sikkim, have taken progressive steps by allowing regulated internet gaming through licensing regimes and self-regulatory agencies. A large portion of the regulatory ambiguity stems from antiquated colonial-era laws like the Public Gambling Act of 1867 (Government of India 1867), which ignores the complexity of contemporary digital gaming environments (Sreenath 2023).

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1.1 *Research objectives*

- To investigate India's existing legal and regulatory framework regarding online gaming.
- To determine and examine the main legal issues concerning online gaming in India
- To research the laws and regulations pertaining to online gambling that have been implemented in a few countries (Australia & United Kingdom).
- To compare the regulations for online gaming in India with laws of other countries.

1.2 *Research methodology*

- A qualitative, doctrinal, and comparative legal research methodology will be used in this study
- The study will employ doctrinal (black-letter law) research to examine Indian and a few other international jurisdictions' statutes, case laws, and regulations.
- India's legal system can be compared to worldwide regulatory models with the aid of comparative legal analysis. The difficulties will be identified and reforms will be proposed using descriptive and analytical methodologies.

2 AN OVERVIEW OF INDIAN ONLINE GAMING INDUSTRY AND IT'S GROWTH

Market valuation and compound annual growth rate (CAGR): According to recent research, India's online gaming market has grown significantly in few years. For example, the industry has increased from about INR 79 billion in 2020 to over INR 135 billion in 2022, according to market projections. Over the upcoming years, projections indicate a CAGR of 20–25% (India Brand Equity Foundation 2024).

Chart 1: Over the past few years, the Indian online gaming industry has expanded dramatically, and growth is anticipated to continue between 2022 and 2027. The market's estimated value in fiscal year 2022 was $2.6 billion. By 2027 it is anticipated to have grown to $8.6 billion, representing a 27% compound annual growth rate (CAGR). Such growth Driver because of Smartphone penetration High internet Gamification in entertainment and sports Youth-centric digital culture. The industry has created addiction, financial loss, and exposure to inappropriate content persist (Dubey 2022).

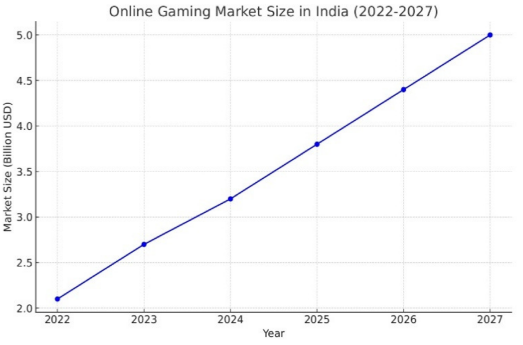


Chart 1. Online gaming market size 2022-2027.

Chart 2: User Base Growth of Indian gaming industry is also growing rapidly. The growth is not only reflected in revenues but also in the expanding user base. According to recent

projections, there will be over 400 million active online gamers in India by 2024. This figure is expected to rise due to improved accessibility and the popularity of a variety of gaming forms, including competitive esports, real-money skill games, and leisure mobile games. A line graph 2 plotting the number of active gamers over the last few years (e.g., from 2020 to 2024) would show an exponential rise which is like boost in gaming industry (Basuroy 2024).

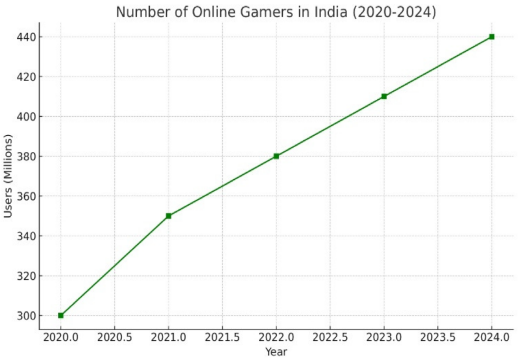


Chart 2. Online gamers in India 2020-2024.

3 THE PRESENT LEGAL CONTEXT OF ONLINE GAMING IN INDIA

India's gaming legal environment is complex, shaped by a confluence of state and federal legislation, new regulatory initiatives, and new issues. The Public Gambling Act 1867 (Government of India 1867), was the primary law that first regulated all gambling activities in India. Except for lotteries and skill games, this law outlawed all forms of gambling and betting. The 1867 Public Gambling Act prohibits the gambling but states have different interpretations of this central law because it forbids running or visiting public gambling establishments but leaves online gambling unaddressed. Additionally, under Entry 34, List II of the Seventh Schedule to the Indian Constitution (Government of India 1950), each state has the authority to enact laws to regulate such operations inside their borders. In the past, several states have made an effort to determine whether online gambling is permitted within their borders. Telangana, Assam, and Orissa have all banned online gaming with stakes. Since gambling is a state matter, each state has passed its own legislation. Certain types of internet gaming are subject to licensing regulations in Sikkim and Nagaland (Government of India n.d.). There are fourteen states like, Kerala, Goa, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, West Bengal, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Manipur, Sikkim, Nagaland and Mizoram which are most open to online gaming. Service providers are permitted to install online gaming machines in gaming parlors with LAN connections thanks to the "Sikkim Online Gaming (Regulation) Amendment Act 2015 (Government of Sikkim 2015)". Online gambling is not also specifically regulated by The Information Technology Act 2000 (Government of India 2000), even if it does govern electronic activities. Nonetheless, it gives to government, the authority to restrict access to unlawful material, such as websites that offer gambling (Kale and Aameer 2022).

Judicial pronouncement: some case laws which enlightens legality of online gaming

(1) **In KR Lakshmanan v. State of Tamil Nadu** (*K.R. Lakshmanan case* 1996): The Supreme Court of India came to the conclusion that gambling is comprised of three elements which is contemplation, chance, and reward. The court ruled that gambling is only the practice of exchanging a money for the chance to win a prize.

(2) In the 1957 case of **State of Bombay v. R.M.D. Chamarbaugwala** (*R.M.D. Chamarbaugwala case* 1957), the Court of Appeals of India rendered a decision on the issue of games of skill vs games of chance. It concluded that a game of skill is allowed since it does not fall under the definition of "gambling," which is illegal in India. Games where the outcome was primarily determined by "skill" rather than pure luck were seen as games of skill.
(3) Similar to this, a petition contesting the legitimacy of "Rummy" was brought in the **State of Andhra Pradesh v. K. Satyanarayana** (*K. Satyanarayana case* 1968) case. The court rejected the challenge once more, ruling that Rummy is a skill-based game rather than a chance game. Rummy was deemed to be a game in which skill outweighed chance by a wide margin. According to the Supreme Court's historic ruling in the KR Lakshmanan case, horse racing is also regarded as a game of skill.
(4) **Varun Gumber v. Union Territory of Chandigarh (***Varun Gumber case* 2017): In this instance, the petitioner contended that Dream 11, a platform for fantasy sports, ought to be categorized as a game of chance and, as such, be prohibited from gambling. The Punjab and Haryana High Court decided in favor of Dream 11, concluding that the platform is lawful because it requires a high level of talent. The legality of fantasy sports in India has been established in large part because to this ruling.
(5) **Galactus Funware Technology v. State of Karnataka (2022)** (*Galactus Funware Technology Pvt. Ltd. case* 2022): In This case contested the legitimacy of the Karnataka Police (Amendment) Act, 2021 (Government of Karnataka 2021), which made playing skill-based online games for money illegal. The Karnataka High Court invalidated the amendment because it infringed upon the right to equality guaranteed by Article 14 of the Indian Constitution (Government of India 1950). The court also state that amendment's complete ban on all online gambling activities with monetary stakes was irrational and unreasonable.

According to the judgment mentioned in the preceding paragraphs, the majority of the conflicts surrounding internet gaming center on the question of "game of skill vs. game of chance." However, there are also disagreements about taxes, infringement of intellectual property, and invasions of privacy. Furthermore, cases may involve physical or psychological harassment. As a result, a wide range of other conflicts that occur or may occur in this industry require attention and regulation.

4 ONLINE GAMING AND LEGAL CHALLENGES, A COMPARATIVE STUDY: (INDIA, UK, AUSTRALIA)

Online gaming has become a worldwide phenomenon, with millions of people engaging in esport, fantasy sports, real-money gaming, and leisure games. Despite the fact that this digital industry has grown in popularity and income in many countries and Australia & UK are two of them along with India. The reason behind choosing Australia and UK with India for comparison is legal systems of these nations, which is vary greatly due to cultural, political, and regulatory factors.

Country-Wise Legal Framework Overview:

Country	Key Regulatory Authority	Governing Law(s)	Skill vs. Chance	Status of real-money gaming
India	MeitY, State Governments, GST Council	IT Rules 2023 (Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology 2023), Public Gambling Act 1867, State Laws	Important distinction	Legal skill-based games; banned in some states

(*continued*)

Continued

Country	Key Regulatory Authority	Governing Law(s)	Skill vs. Chance	Status of real-money gaming
UK	UK Gambling Commission	Gambling Act 2005 (United Kingdom 2005)	all regulated under gambling	Fully legal and regulated
Australia	Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) (Australian Communications and Media Authority, n.d.)	Interactive Gambling Act 2001 (Commonwealth of Australia 2001)	Not core distinction	Heavily restricted; sports betting allowed; casino games online prohibited

Australia: In Australia, online gambling is governed by both the federal and state governments. The nation's Interactive Gambling Act of 2001 forbids internet gambling activities, including online casinos, poker, blackjack, and other games. Additionally, the promotion of interactive gaming websites created especially for Australians is prohibited by Section 7A of the Act (Commonwealth of Australia 2001). In Australia, sports betting, horse racing, greyhound racing, and other related activities are permitted if licenses have been granted by the government.

United Kingdom: The United Kingdom Gaming Act of 2005 governs online gambling and betting in the United Kingdom. Section 6 of the Act defines gaming as "playing a game of chance for money." According to this statute, a "game of chance" is any game in which talent wins out over chance or in which skill and luck are combined. All sports wagers, including those on races, competitions, and other events, are covered under Section 9 (United Kingdom 2005). According to Section 50 of this Act (United Kingdom 2005), children are prohibited from engaging in gaming and gambling activities since only adults over the age of 18 are permitted to do so. Under the guidelines of this Act, users over 16 may also take part in small-scale gaming, lotteries, and betting. A Gambling Commission has been established to grant licenses to companies who offer these services in order for them to operate in the country.

5 COMPARATIVE SNAPSHOT OF LEGAL FRAMEWORK: INDIA, UK, AUSTRALIA

The legal environment around internet gaming differs greatly between jurisdictions, influenced by the cultural background, regulatory priorities, and past development of gambling legislation in each nation. The legal system in India is disjointed, consisting of both federal and state laws, many of which date back to the digital age. Legality is largely determined by the contrast between "games of skill and games of chance", and recent trends point to a move toward central regulation (Kalwani and Surange 2020).

The following table provides a comparative analysis of the main legal elements that control online gaming in Australia, the UK, and India, emphasizing parallels, divergences, and the dynamic character of regulatory frameworks:

Aspect	India	UK	Australia
Regulatory Structure	Dual-layered: Central (IT Act, GST), and State-specific laws	Centralized regulation under UK Gambling	Federal structure, but IGA 2001 applies

(*continued*)

Continued

Aspect	India	UK	Australia
		Commission	nationally
Main Regulatory Body	MeitY, GST Council, State Governments	UK Gambling Commission	Australian Communications and Media Authority
Governing Laws	IT Rules 2023, Public Gambling Act 1867, State Acts	Gambling Act 2005, LCCP (License Conditions and Codes of Practice)	Interactive Gambling Act 2001
Games of Skill vs. Chance	Legally significant; Skill-based games allowed	Less emphasized; all require regulation	Not a key classification
Taxation	28% GST on full bet amount; TDS on winnings > ₹10,000	15% Point of Consumption Tax (PoCT) + corporate tax	Corporate tax + local betting levies
Offshore Platform Access	Often accessed illegally via VPNs; enforcement is weak	Strictly prohibited; strong penalties for non-compliance	ACMA actively blocks offshore gambling websites
Fantasy Sports	Legal (e.g., Dream11, MPL); subject to state bans	Legal and licensed	Generally allowed but not widely commercialized
Sports Betting	Fantasy sports legal as skill games in most states; traditional betting mostly prohibited	Fully legal and well-regulated	Allowed with license; popular betting markets include sports and racing
Advertising Regulation	ASCI guidelines for gaming ads; "not an income opportunity" warning required	Strict guidelines from UKGC; mandatory warnings & responsible play ads	Strict codes via ACMA and national advertising standards
Consumer Protection	SRBs (Self-Regulatory Bodies), KYC, grievance redressal	Strong focus; UKGC mandates Responsible Gambling Tools (RGTs)	Self-exclusion, AML compliance, player harm reduction tools mandatory
Legal Challenges	State vs. Central jurisdiction disputes; High Court rulings inconsistent	Calls for reforms; balancing innovation vs. consumer safety	Clashes over freedom vs. gambling harm reduction

6 CONCLUSION

Internet platforms are the most underserved industries in the nation. India needs to stop using physical laws to control online gambling due to the unique way these platforms operate, their reach, and their sample area. Furthermore, the Indian government may duplicate key elements of many international laws based on their enforcement and implementation in India if it is unable to enact new legislation. The judiciary has always been proactive in recognizing the problems with online platform regulation, but it has always exercised caution when interpreting current laws in a dynamic manner. Since it is a well-known fact that legislation cannot be introduced on a regular basis, the judiciary has the authority to revive out-of-date statutes in the interim rather than recommending that the state enact new regulations. However, since the court can only interpret existing laws and cannot make new policies, the need for new legislation is never denied.

The only way to handle the dynamic character of these platforms is to set up a distinct regulatory body that has the power to regularly issue rules and notifications in order to monitor online gambling activities. The authors also think that regulation is a better option in the debate over whether online gambling services should be completely prohibited. The legislature should refrain from taking a strict and unyielding stance against gamblers when it

comes to regulating online gambling companies. The focus of the regulation should be on safeguarding the rights of gamblers against dishonest players, fraudulent platforms, and hackers.

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Validity of electronic contracts in Indian landscape

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ABSTRACT: The boom in Information Technological sector has paved way for digitization of almost everything globally. One such burning example is that of electronic contracts. Through this paper the author takes into consideration the various factors, challenges and outcomes which circumspect the e-contracts enforceability in India. The statutory enactments like Bhartiya Sakshya Adhiniyam,2023; The Contract and the I.T. Act intertwined together forms very basis of electronic contracts in India. Through this paper precedents upholding the validation and enforcement of digital signatures and contracts electronically signed have been cited. The research paper also delves into the challenges posed while making use of electronic contracts in India including but not limited to jurisdiction conflicts, competency of parties virtually and veracity of existing cyber security laws. Through this paper the emphasis has been laid down on taking effective steps to overcome these challenges through awareness programmes, legislative reforms and robust security. The paper concludes signifying the need of research and development for developing an ecosystem of trust, safety and security in digital world.

Keywords: E-Contracts, electronic signature, legal framework, electronic evidence

1 INTRODUCTION

In recent past, the proliferation of digital technologies has significantly reshaped the global business landscape, from purchasing a small candy to acquiring large companies. This digital shift, further accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has made platforms like Webex, Zoom, and Microsoft Teams, crucial for business meetings and judicial proceedings. Similarly, e-contracting, a significant outcome of this digital revolution, has become an indefinite part of our lives. Electronic contracts, commonly called E-Contracts, are generally entered over the Internet on digital platforms. From booking a taxi to purchasing properties, the ubiquity of e-contracting is now undeniable. It is, moreover, accessible and convenient to execute electronic contract instantly by sharing electronic communication between the parties contracting by way of offer and acceptance. Electronic contracts are just the same as traditional on-paper contracts and, therefore, are enforceable by law. The essential elements concerning e-contracts execution are also similar to that of a contract such as lawful object, lawful consideration, offer, acceptance, free consent, and lawful object. E-contracts can be employment contracts, distribution agreements, leasing agreements, etc. They can also be formed through email when parties willing to enter into a contract communicate about the details of the same via email. Electronic contracts have become integral to modern commerce, facilitating transactions across various sectors. In India, the rapid digitization of the economy has led to an increased reliance on electronic transactions, necessitating a comprehensive legal framework to govern E-Contracts. As per the Contract Act , there exist no important element stating that a contract should be only on paper. Hence, we can also consider e-contracts to be valid under the act.

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This paper examines electronic contracts' validity exploring the legal statutory framework, challenges and prospects associated with electronic contracts.

2 RESEARCH PROBLEM

Through this paper the author highlights the need of validation and implementation of electronic contracts in India. Even though electronic contracts have become part of our lives there are lacunae in its implementation, status and acceptance globally in this fast-changing digital environment.

3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is important because it provides information for businesses, legal experts, and policymakers regarding the legal position of e-contracts in India. The present research helps create a more stable and dependable digital environment by analysing the interactions between the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam of 2023, Indian Contract Act, 1872 and the I.T Act, 2000.

4 RESEARCH GAP

This prevailing view of existing body of literature is divided in accepting the electronic contracts in day-to-day lives. Through the medium of this paper the researcher wants to bring into consideration the several legal aspects concerning electronic contracts in order to fill in the void created by lack of awareness and knowledge of electronic contracts. This paper also aims at taking into consideration the different viewpoints keeping in mind the empirical and practical approaches towards usage of electronic contracts.

5 RESEARCH AIM

The aim is to bridge the gap of non-acceptance of electronic signatures and electronic contracts in daily use in order to ease business transactions globally. The research paper also emphasise on developing, nurturing and promoting a secure, safe and trustworthy digital ecosystem by taking cognizance of statutory legislations, real life challenges and prospective developments which could be a game changer for executing contracts.

6 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- Examination of existing statutory legislations such as the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam of 2023, I.C.A, 1872 and I.T. Act, 2000 for enforcement and validation of electronic contracts in India
- To take into consideration the challenges that comes in way of enforcement and validation of electronic contracts
- To emphasise on the silver lining amidst resistance as to acceptance of electronic contracts in India. To focus on technological advancements advocating usage of electronic contracts by raising awareness amongst concerned stakeholders.

7 LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR ELECTRONIC CONTRACTS IN INDIA

The Contract Act in India enshrines the statutory framework concerning traditional contracts is but e-contracts, also circumscribes two more legislations, which include the IT Act, 2000 and the Bhartiya Sakshya Adhiniyam, 2023, under its ambit.

The Act establishes a fundamental rule, i.e., a contract is valid only if it is made by parties competent to contract and with their free consent for a lawful object and consideration. A contract is formed by accepting an offer and informing the other party of such acceptance. This intimation must come from some external mechanism or forces that the law considers sufficient. Thus, electronic contracts have equal footing as that of written contracts; the only requirement is that it should have all the elements of a valid contract.

The Amendment in the I.T Act introduced the above provision in year 2008 after validating the dependence on electronic mechanism to execute commercial agreements. This is applicable on electronic contract creation, proposal intimation, and acceptance communication. In e-commerce, an e-contract is created when two or more contracting parties interact electronically through computer program, e-mail, a computer program, or atleast two electronic agents that recognize the existence of a contract. According to the I.T. Act, 2008, the two parties between whom the electronic contract is performed are the Originator and the Addressee.

Indian law, and especially the I.T Act, 2000, recognizes not only e-contracts but e-signatures as well. A signature on a document indicates that the person signed accepts the terms envisaged in the document.

The Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam, 2023 contains the provisions, i.e., section 61 and section 63, through which the Indian courts now recognize electronic documents in the courts. The Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam (Indian Evidence Act) explicitly addresses electronic and digital records' evidence admissibility and legal validity. The provision enumerated above reinforces the acceptance of electronic contracts to that of other contracts which are conventionally signed using pen and paper.

Moreover, section 63 also emphasises that an electronic data which is being saved, reproduced or captured will be substantial evidence and will have same standing as that of a document. In order to ensure that the document is effective evidence one needs to check that the information extracted from secondary device is accurate and reliable and has been processed correctly. Also, the secondary device being used should be one which is used on a daily basis for creating, storing and analysing the information. These double checks upholds the reliance on electronic contracts in their usage. This provision keeps electronic contracts on the same footing as that of pen and paper contracts.

8 DIGITAL SIGNATURE AND ELECTRONIC AUTHENTICATION

One benefit of electronic administrative contracts is that they may be completed electronically. How to prove the contract in court is called into doubt by this. Proof of electronic writing, editing, and signature is crucial in this context. According to Article 1 of The Electronic Signature Model Law of the UNCITRAL, an e-signature is a single character that identifies the signatory and can take the form of letters, numbers, drawings, signs, or other symbols. India's laws recognize using digital signatures to create an electronic contract. E-contracts require an 'e- signature,' recognized under the IT (Amendment) Act, 2008.

From the case mentioned above, e-contracts require electronic signatures from both the originator and addressee to be valid. The Information Technology Act 2000 recognizes electronic signatures under Section 5 of the act. (Information Technology Act, 2000, § 5)

The Indian legal system recognizes the validity of e-signatures, primarily through provisions in the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam. Section 85B of the Act creates a strong presumption regarding electronic signatures. According to this, the court will assume that the contract was truly completed by attaching the parties' digital or electronic signatures to it in any legal procedure involving such an agreement. Additionally, Section 86 of the Act gives much importance to electronic signatures. This Act has given rise to a presumption of accepting the contract by affixing secure and safe digital signature on documents.

Another statutory legislation is that of Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam. This has given the much need legal recognition the electronic contracts. Although, there exists challenges in

acceptance and implementation of digital signature usage, one such is that of authenticity and reliability. Moreover, in digital era of technological advancements electronic signatures are susceptible manipulation and alteration which further weakens the idea of dependence on electronic contracts fully. Another challenge is that of authentic Certification Authorities (CAs).

The resistance against accepting and implementing electronic contracts also pose a major hurdle. This opposition and reservations of using conventional methods by many has posed a greater challenge in widespread acceptance of digital signatures. It is because of this challenge research and development is very much required. Once, the electronic signatures gain the momentum it will smoothen the process of business transactions.

9 CHALLENGES FACED BY E-CONTRACTS

The most common challenge is that of acceptance of electronic contracts in India. Simarpreet Saluja. (2020, June 9) This is due to the lack of trust in electronic signature usage. In addition to this factor such as jurisdiction, data protection and security also poses a major setback to electronic contracts acceptance and usage. The issue as to jurisdiction crops up because of borderless nature of electronic contracts. (Gurjar, N. L. (n.d.).)Although, The I. T. Act, 2000 has tried to resolve such conflict of jurisdiction by stating that the place of business of the sender and receiver will be considered as the address for dispatching and receiving. But this resolution is in conflict Section 20 of the Civil Procedure Code, 1908 which state that the suit shall be filed where a cause of action arose. This further adds on to less inclination towards electronic contracts. To re-affirm the statutory backing provided by Information Technology Act,2000, in the landmark case of P.R. Transport Agency vs. Union of India & others, the Hon'ble High Court of Judicature of Allahabad has clarified the jurisdictional ambiguity by stating that both the place of recipient of email and place of business will be considered, however this ruling has only persuasive value.

Indian courts have dynamically recognized e-contracts, strikingly in cases like Trimex Worldwide FZE Ltd. v. Vedanta Aluminum Ltd., where the Preeminent Court maintained an official assention shaped through mail trades. Courts have moreover approved standard-form online contracts when clients have deliberately concurred by clicking acknowledgment. Be that as it may, statute around e-contracts remains cautious and immature, particularly concerning advanced assent by means of tricky interfacing, hyperlink-embedded terms, and mechanized contract operators. This legitimate equivocalness makes challenges in requirement, especially in debate including customer rights or information assurance, highlighting the require for clearer, tech-sensitive authoritative and legal approaches.

Rising innovations like AI-driven bots and blockchain-based shrewd contracts advance complicate the scene. These frameworks regularly execute assentions independently, without human oversight, raising uncertain questions almost purposeful, obligation, and enforceability beneath Indian law. Right now, there's no statutory system administering contracts shaped by non-human specialists or self-executing computerized conventions. To keep pace with this change, India must seek after comprehensive lawful reforms—updating commercial laws, preparing legal in computerized contract issues, and building up user-friendly redressal components. Similarly vital are computerized proficiency activities to enable underrepresented clients. The overarching point ought to be to cultivate a legitimately vigorous, comprehensive, and innovation-friendly advanced economy.

The Incomparable Court's administering in Bhagwandas Goverdhandas Kedia v. Girdharilal Parshottamdas built up a significant lawful guideline with respect to the communication of acknowledgment in contracts shaped through immediate communication. The debate centered on whether a contract was concluded in Ahmedabad, where the offer was made, or in Bombay, where the acknowledgment through phone was gotten. The Court held that for immediate communication modes—such as phone, wire, and by expansion, advanced computerized devices like e-mail and messaging—the contract is shaped at the put where the

acknowledgment is gotten and listened by the offeror. This checked a critical takeoff from the postal run the show, beneath which acknowledgment is total when the letter is posted.

In Trimex Worldwide FZE Ltd. v. Vedanta Aluminum Ltd., the Incomparable Court of India certified the enforceability of contracts shaped through mail correspondence. The case emerged when Vedanta sponsored out of a bauxite deal assention after basic terms—such as cost, amount, and delivery—had been finalized over an arrangement of emails with Trimex. In spite of the nonattendance of a formally marked contract, the Court held that the mail trades prove a clear deliberate to make legitimate relations and built-up agreement advertisement idem between the parties. This administering fortified the guideline that formal documentation isn't a prerequisite for enforceability when the parties' conduct and communication show common assention on basic terms.

10 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Indian legal framework, comprises of the I.T Act, 2000, the Indian Contract Act, 1872, and the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam of 2023, provides a foundational basis for the validity of e-contracts. The Informational Technology Act, particularly Section 10A, explicitly recognizes the enforceability of contracts made through electronic mode, thereby equating them with conventional paper-based contracts. This recognition aligns with the UNCITRAL Model Law on Electronic Commerce (UNCITRAL. 1996), which advocates for the equal treatment of electronic contracts. However, the practical application of these laws reveals persistent challenges. As highlighted, a significant impediment is the lack of awareness among stakeholders regarding the legal standing of e-contracts. This lack of awareness contributes to a hesitancy in adopting e-contracting practices, particularly among smaller businesses and individuals. (Smith and Jones, 2022) Furthermore, concerns about data security and privacy continue to undermine trust in electronic transactions. The borderless nature of e-contracts introduces jurisdictional complexities, making it difficult to determine the appropriate legal jurisdiction in case of disputes. The conflict between the IT Act and the Civil Procedure Code regarding the place of jurisdiction, as noted in the P.R. Transport Agency vs. Union of India & others (P R Transport, 2006) judgment, exemplifies this challenge. iPleaders. (2021, May 28) The discussion on digital signatures and electronic authentication reveals both progress and persisting issues. Although, The Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam has given recognition to electronic signatures but the concerns pertaining to security, data theft, verification of electronic signatures still poses a major concern.

Table 1. Challenges and legal provisions in India related to electronic contracts.

Challenge	Relevant Legal Provision	Impact
Lack of Awareness	Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam of 2023, IT Act, 2000, Indian Contract Act of 1872,	Hesitation in adoption, undermining trust in e-contracts
Data Privacy and Security	Information Technology Act, 2000,	Undermines trust, potential legal liabilities in case of data breaches
Jurisdictional Issues	Information Technology Act of 2000, Civil Procedure Code, 1908	Legal ambiguity, difficulties in resolving disputes, potential for conflicting judgments
Security of Digital Signatures	B.S.A, 2023 I.T. Act, 2000	Risks of manipulation, undermining the integrity of e-contracts, potential for fraud
Slow Adoption Rate	Information Technology Act of 2000, various government policies and initiatives	Limits the potential benefits of e-contracts, slower digital transformation

11 CONCLUSION

With advent of time and technological development electronic contracts has gained momentum by way of statutory legislations, judicial precedents and awareness workshops conducted by various autonomous and government bodies. Although, the Indian legislature has time and again made modifications by way of amendments in various statutory provisions for electronic contracts acceptance and implementation but there still requires persistent solutions in to overcome challenge of acceptance of electronic contracts so as to effectively cater to the growing needs of electronic commerce. By overcoming challenges pertaining to jurisdiction, security concerns, verification and competency of parties the future of electronic contracts will be a blessing to the concerned stakeholders. The acceptance and implementation of electronic contracts would give an impetus to India in achieving its digital mission as well. To bolster the growth of electronic contracts in India there has to be amendments in statutory legislations. Not only this the government should develop a robust mechanism of safe and secure transactions digitally which will instils the faith of the people in electronic signature and electronic contracts.

The future research area would focus upon the following:

- Overcoming the challenge of electronic signature security concerns
- Synthesising the technological innovation of artificial intelligence and block chain to improve data security concerning electronic contracts
- Evaluating the existing legal framework to meet the ongoing electronic commerce demands

India has full potential to achieve its digital mission by developing mechanism that would lead to electronic contracts acceptance which would further smoothen the path of cross-border transactions.

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Artificial intelligence and criminal justice: Challenges to due process and legal accountability in India

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ABSTRACT: Integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the criminal justice system will raise some serious concerns regarding the protection of constitutional rights, algorithmic accountability and fairness. Use of facial recognition systems, predictive policing and automated risk assessment through artificial intelligence in police functionality and court process raises the concern of accountability and biased decisions as opposed to human diligence and decision making, as Artificial Intelligence makes decisions on the basis of some predefined data sets, informational pools and commands. In the absence of any regulatory framework to regulate the use of AI in the criminal justice system, the risk of violation of fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution of India will always be there. This paper analyses these concerns posed by the integration of artificial intelligence in the criminal justice system and the challenges faced in the same, such as algorithm bias, opacity, disproportionate profiling, and erosion of judicial discretion. International frameworks to regulate artificial intelligence, such as the European Union AI Act and the United States Algorithmic Accountability Act, provide instructive contrasts, demonstrating the importance of rights-based, accountable, auditable, and human-centric AI systems. The paper concludes by advocating a legally binding framework that includes mandates to maintain transparency, algorithmic explainability, and judicial oversight, ensuring that the use of AI in the criminal justice system complements rather than compromises the constitutional rights and due process in the Indian justice system.

Keywords: AI, Governance, Criminal Justice System, Constitution, AI Regulation, AI Safeguards

1 INTRODUCTION

Artificial Intelligence technologies have increasingly infused India's law enforcement and judicial system. In the press release by PIB 2025, it is advocated that the integration of artificial intelligence in law enforcement will make the police, forensics, jails, and courts future-ready and will allow them to streamline their operations and reduce delays, making justice more accessible to the people. The use of Machine Learning, Natural Language Processing, Optical Character Recognition, and predictive analytics is seen to be the leverage to automate administrative tasks, prevent crime, and improve case tracking to reduce the case backlogs in the Indian judicial system, removing the language barriers, etc. The use of AI in automated case management will help in reducing backlogs and delays in cases. AI will also help in effective legal research and finding precedents. AI can be used to make predictions for the outcomes of the case based on the predictive insights in a case for better risk assessments.

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Artificial intelligence will also enable law enforcement agencies to analyze crime patterns to identify high-risk areas and criminal behavior so that they can take proactive measures. AI in surveillance, forensics, and investigation can reduce the time taken for the identification of the offender and apprehension with the use of facial recognition technology, AI-powered drones, forensic analysis of evidence and digital crime trails, and also to manage databases efficiently.

On one hand, the use of AI in law enforcement opens the door to limitless opportunity; on the other hand, the use of tools such as facial recognition, predictive policing, and automated evidence systems raises serious concerns and questions about the individual rights and legal accountability of these tools. The implementation of these AI-assisted tools without legislative or judicial oversight might lead to the violation of the constitutional protections guaranteed under Articles 14, 19, 21, and 23 of the Indian Constitution. (Basu 2020)

The challenges that are posed by these AI tools to due process and constitutional safeguards need a regulatory framework founded on constitutional rights, taking its shape from the global models (European Commission 2021), as the emerging evidence from the deployment of facial recognition at protests by Delhi police and the implementation of predictive policing in Hyderabad showcases India's regulatory lag and highlights the urgent need for the statutory and procedural framework (Internet Freedom Foundation 2021), as unchecked use of AI tools risks systematic violation of civil liberties and fairness in the criminal justice system.

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE: THE FOLLOWING ARE THE RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

(a) Examine the integration of AI in the Indian Criminal Justice System
(b) Identify legal and constitutional challenges arising due to such integration.
(c) Comparative analysis of the global and Indian legal frameworks for regulatory insights.
(d) To recommend a rights-based regulatory model for AI governance.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The paper adopts a doctrinal and comparative legal methodology based on

(a) Analysis of constitutional provisions and court rulings
(b) Review of existing legal and policy documents
(c) Comparative study of international legal instruments
(d) Secondary sources such as Journal articles, reports, and Expert commentary

4 AI IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE: GLOBAL AND INDIAN LANDSCAPE

AI tools, ranging from facial recognition to predictive analysis, are increasingly embedded in the criminal justice system around the globe. In the U.S.A., the use of COMPAS (Correctional Offender Management Profiling for Alternative Sanctions) as a risk-assessment algorithm influenced the sentencing decision but has been shown to reinforce racial bias (Angwin *et al.* 2016). The European Union's proposed AI Act classifies AI tools as a high-risk category and mandates human oversight to maintain transparency and fairness (European Commission 2021). China integrated AI into the surveillance-heavy smart courts, while South Korea and Japan pilot AI for crime forecasting under formal regulatory

oversight (Lee 2022). Canada, under the Directive on Automated Decisions making (2019), mandates Algorithmic Impact Assessment for all federal institutions using automated decision-making. Australia introduced the AI Ethics Framework (2019) grounded on the principles of fairness, privacy, transparency, and accountability. The OECD AI Principles (2019) emphasize human-centricity, robustness, and accountability.

In India, the adoption of AI in the criminal justice system is increasing rapidly without any parallel regulatory oversight. The NCRB's Automated Facial Recognition System (AFRS) (Ministry of Home Affairs 2019) aims to assist in identifying suspects but lacks the statutory safeguards for the consent of people whose facial data is recorded or the data retention standards. The use of predictive policing tools by the Hyderabad and Delhi police has been criticized for targeting minority communities without due process (Internet Freedom Foundation 2021).

The lack of a regulatory framework to regulate the use of AI in law enforcement is creating a vacuum inconsistent with Article 21, which demands just, fair, and reasonable procedures (Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India 1978), and the Digital Data Protection Act, 2023, provides for limited coverage for state use of data, and Section 17 permits government exemptions, undermining privacy rights affirmed in Puttaswamy vs. Union of India, 2017. No Indian law requires the disclosure of AI logic, source code, or impact assessment, creating a situation of algorithmic opacity that further denies rights guaranteed under Article 21 and Article 22 and the opportunity for the accused to challenge the evidence. The AI tools used for surveillance often use historic crime data, and it may lead to disproportionate surveillance of certain castes, classes, and religious communities, raising concerns about bias and the protection guaranteed under Articles 14 and 15.

In the UK, there is an independent body like the UK's Surveillance Camera Commissioner to oversee the use of AI-embedded systems in surveillance, and there is no such body appointed in India and the deployment of such systems without public debate or judicial approval compromises democratic accountability.

5 CONSTITUTIONAL RISKS TO DUE PROCESS UNDER ARTICLE 21 AND AI

India has witnessed transformation of just, fair and reasonable proceed as embedded in the Article 21 of the Indian constitution, from being narrowly interpreted in A.L. Gopalan v. State of Madras, 1950 to the stage where due process is included in the procedure established by law in Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India, 1978, and the subsequent rulings in Puttaswamy (2017) & Joginder Kumar (1994) expanded the aptitude of Article 21 by including the right to privacy, freedom from arbitrary detention, and informational access.

5.1 *Automated profiling and arbitrarily targeting*

The use of AI tools such as predictive policing and facial recognition without judicial oversight or consent causes concerns about the flagging of individuals based on statistical risk rather than concrete acts, violating the presumption of innocence, freedom of expression, and due process requirements guaranteed under Article 14, Article 19(1)(a), and Article 21. During the 2020 Anti-CAA protests, Delhi Police used facial recognition software to identify and surveil protesters, raising concerns of profiling and prior restraints (Internet Freedom Foundation 2021).

5.2 *Risk of misidentification and false arrests*

Studies reveal higher error rates for women and darker-skinned individuals in facial recognition systems (Buolamwini and Gebru 2018). The deployment of these tools without accuracy benchmarks and judicial validation increases the risk of wrongful detention and

violation of Article 22 safeguards, as a protester in Delhi was wrongfully detained based on an FRT match despite the fact that the protester has no prior criminal record, highlighting the threats of FRT (India Today 2021).

5.3 *Predictive policing and presumption of guilt*

AI-based policing changes the principle of criminal law by criminalizing based on probability over proven conduct. Individuals may be identified as potential offenders based on area codes and past associations without any legal wrongdoing, and it undermines Article 20 (3) on self-incrimination, liberty under Article 21, and protection from bias under Article 14.

5.4 *Non-disclosure of algorithmic evidence*

In the absence of any law or guidelines regarding the disclosure of source code, logic, or training data used by AI tools, opacity in AI-based court decisions is created, and this denies the right of cross-examination by producing evidence to rebut the analysis or decision proposed by AI, breaching the protection stated in the Zahira Sheikh case (2004) and the principle of natural justice.

5.5 *Erosion of judicial discretion*

Tools like SUPACE, though currently having limited application, illustrate potential overreliance on the machine logic in appreciating evidence and judicial decisions. Judicial independence and discretion may erode if decisions defer to unexplainable algorithmic output. It is also stated way back in 1978 in the Mohinder Singh Gill case (1978) that judicial orders must reflect reasoned human application and not opaque computational conclusions. The decision came when the decision-making was based on human commands given to a machine rather than in the age of AI, where the algorithmic ability of the AI makes decisions based on training and data inputs.

5.6 *Philosophical legal theories and AI deployment*

A.V. Dicey's doctrine of the Rule of Law emphasizes that all administrative actions must be bound by law, and no individual is to be subject to arbitrary power; the deployment of predictive policing or facial recognition without legislative authorization or judicial oversight contravenes this core principle. Also, John Rawls' theory of procedural justice insists that just outcomes only come from just procedures, and the opaqueness and non-disclosure of AI algorithms deny individuals a fair hearing, and the absence of the opportunity for cross-examination violates procedural fairness.

6 THE FALLACY OF OBJECTIVITY IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE

6.1 *The myth of neutrality*

AI systems are often promoted as neutral, rational, and objective alternatives to flawed human judgments and free from any bias or predetermined decisions. Nowhere is this myth more prevalent than in the criminal justice system, where algorithms are deployed to support decisions based on surveillance, arrest, risk assessment, and even sentencing. The supporters of AI argue that the implementation and integration of AI in the criminal justice system can reduce bias and increase efficiency. On the contrary to the neutrality of the AI system, it is observed by legal scholar Frank Pasquale (2015) that algorithms are not neutral arbiters of truth but reflections of social, institutional, and political assumptions embedded in code. The fallacy of

treating machines as impartial decision-makers poses serious dangers in judicial systems that are built on the principles of fairness, accountability, and individualized consideration.

Every decision that is taken by AI is based on choices made by scientists and engineers related to variables, data labels, optimized outcomes, and performance validation. These decisions reflect institutional priorities and ideological leanings. For example, using past arrest data as a proxy for criminality, AI will assume that historical policing practices were fair and will assume the same class of persons are habitual offenders, and predictive policing will create bias against them and will consider it as fair based on data sets embedded in algorithms.

6.2 *Training data reflects societal bias*

In criminal justice, data is not a neutral record of behavior; it is a product of socially constructed interactions between marginalized communities and state power. In India, arrest records are more prevalent among the poor, Dalits, and Adivasis, which is no indication of criminal behavior in a particular section of society. Empirical studies (NCRB 2022) show that Dalits and Adivasis are overrepresented in the undertrial population, indicating systematic bias. If this data is fed to the AI system for training purposes, it will only amplify the existing inequalities, making them appear statistically inevitable rather than institutionally created. As Virginia Eubanks (2018) describes in her influential work, Automating Inequality, such AI systems function as "digital poorhouses" and tools for controlling and disciplining vulnerable populations under the guise of efficiency.

AI-based decisions may be 99% accurate but still need to be accepted as cautiously as possible, where constitutional safeguards of liberty and dignity are at risk. Judges are human beings who are imbued with moral culpability, sensitivity towards socio-economic conditions, and rehabilitative possibilities in an offender, but machines are not. Relying on data-driven models reduces the legal reasoning to pattern recognition and leaves no space for human empathy, discretion, and constitutional nuance.

Algorithms in criminal justice do not eliminate human error; rather, they codify and conceal it. Treating them as neutral systems erases the social context of data generation and shifts accountability away from human actors. For India, recognizing the fallacy of algorithmic objectivity is a constitutional imperative. Any attempt to regulate AI in criminal justice must begin by rejecting the technocratic myth that mathematical precision equals justice. Without this epistemic shift, reforms will remain surface-level, legitimizing systemic bias under the illusion of impartiality.

7 GLOBAL LEGAL FRAMEWORK: LESSONS FOR INDIA

AI Act (2021), The European Union in the area of criminal justice has taken a proactive regulatory approach to AI deployment, and it is the first comprehensive legislative proposal to regulate AI. It classifies AI systems into four categories: prohibited risk, high risk, limited risk, and minimal risk, and the AI tools, such as facial recognition, emotion detection, or predictive analytics, are designated as high risk, thereby subjecting them to mandatory conformity assessments before market deployment, assessment of impact on fundamental rights, obligation for human oversight, explainability and redress mechanisms, and centralised governance by proposed EU Artificial Intelligence Board.

The AI Act ensures that technological innovations are always subordinate to constitutional values, including privacy, fairness, and proportionality. The GDPR (General Data Protection Regulations), particularly Article 22, complements the AI Act by empowering individuals to not be subject to fully automated decision-making that has legal effects, to receive meaningful information about the logic involved, and to demand human intervention and consent outcomes.

In R. (Bridges) v. Chief Constable of South Wales Police (2020), the UK Court of Appeal ruled that the use of real-time facial recognition without proper legal safeguards violated privacy and equality laws. The ruling emphasized the necessity of impact assessments and the need for public consultation before biometric surveillance. This jurisprudence, though from post-Brexit UK, remains highly influential across Europe and sets a benchmark for procedural safeguards in surveillance contexts.

In the United States, a sector-specific and case-based model for AI governance is used with considerable reliance on judicial interpretation and institutional transparency. The Algorithmic Accountability Act was formally introduced for the first time in 2019 but was later reintroduced in 2022. The act stipulates that an algorithmic impact assessment must be carried out by the companies employing automated decision-making in domains involving a higher degree of scrutiny, such as criminal justice frameworks. This is imperative to ascertain the risk of discrimination, defects, and corrupt application of data, and the same should be apprised consistently to regulatory authorities in the form of audits and mitigation strategies. Though not yet in force, this bill points towards an augmentation in bipartisan consensus on the detriments of unregulated incorporation of AI in pertinent public functions.

In State v. Loomis (2016), the Supreme Court of Wisconsin supported the use of the COMPAS risk assessment tool in according sentences subject to certain conditions. It stated that AI should not be used as an exclusive determinant in judicial decisions. The courts are required to back their observations with reasoned justification and ensure that the defendants are apprised about algorithmic limitations. This is indicative of a judicial effort to strike an equilibrium between due process and innovation without legitimate legislation in force.

Several cities in the United States, including San Francisco, Oakland, and Portland, have restrained the use of facial recognition due to a possible presence of racial bias, absence of transparency, and probable contraventions of civil liberties. These are indicative of efforts by subnational actors towards concertizing and preserving constitutional norms in the absence of a regulatory framework.

8 CONCLUSION

To integrate AI in the Indian Criminal Justice System ethically, there is an abject need to formulate a dedicated, well-structured legal and regulatory framework. Firstly, India should incorporate AI into its criminal justice systems, cohesive with the constitutional safeguards provided under Articles 14, 21, and 22 of the Constitution. This legal and regulatory framework should define and govern high-risk AI systems, obligate algorithmic transparency and impact assessments, and concretize accountability by enforcing rights and penalties in case of the corrupt usage of data. Furthermore, codification of procedural safeguards like the right to explanation, protection from detention solely algorithmic in nature, and human failures should be done. These institutional actions should be concretized by a transparent procurement process, public consultations, and assimilation of marginalized sections adversely affected by over-policing historically.

Besides, there is a need to establish an independent National Commission on AI and Criminal Justice, having the authority of constitutional bodies such as the Election Commission or NHRC. The functions of this commission are to act as a watchdog on AI deployments and their approvals, maintenance of a public AI registry, act as an audit authority, and act on algorithmic grievances. This will balance technological advancements and constitutional principles of dignity, equality, and accountability, as affirmed in the cases of A.K. Roy v. Union of India (1982) and S.N. Mukherjee v. Union of India (1990). Justice should revolve around liberty and transparency. Moreover, AI should be subjected to constitutional morality by incorporating rights-based and human-centric measures vis-à-vis governance through AI, consequently furthering the principle of the rule of law in the digital era.

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AI and forensics: Challenges in the criminal justice system

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ABSTRACT: The present era is marked by rapid technological advancements which have a major significance in almost all the spheres. It has special significance in legal field especially under criminal justice system. The application of technology in law has various facets especially in the form of forensic evidence. It is seen that forensic evidence plays a crucial role in determining the guilt of accused. The failure to analyse the evidence properly by the Forensics may lead to miscarriage of justice to the victim. Even it is an active step towards speedy investigation of cases by the police officers. This importance has been incorporated under Section 176 of BNSS, 2023 which makes mandatory provision for the collection of forensic evidence.

It is seen that the Artificial Intelligence (AI) is revolutionizing day by day and is being widely used in medical scientific experiments for accuracy and efficiency. The technological growth has led to greater impact of AI in Forensics as well. It helps in identification of the accused through various other evidences. Scientific experiments assist in confirming the actual perpetrator of the crime through DNA tests, fingerprints scan, handwriting detection, facial recognition and extraction of information through electronic devices (digital forensics).

Although the AI has positive impact upon the criminal investigation but it's negative impact could not be looked away. The fact that there exists difference between human and machine could not be denied. Since AI is machine programmed, it has the chance of being misappropriated through fabrication of false evidences. Therefore, there exists need of certain ethical standard guidelines for the regulation of AI in forensic analysis.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Forensics, Evidence, Privacy, Criminal Law

1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

(1) To what extent has AI been successful in improving the efficiency and accuracy of forensics investigation?
(2) What are the possible challenges to the use of AI in criminal investigations?
(3) How has AI proved to be boon in the field of criminal forensic investigation?
(4) Whether AI can replace human agency during the investigation of cases?

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2 HYPOTHESIS

The application of AI in the field of criminal investigation is successful for the speedy disposal of cases as well as for the better administration of justice.

3 INTRODUCTION

The 21st Century is often known for its technological advancements that affect various emerging fields. Law is one of such fields where technology is developing rapidly. The legal field has never been a static concept; rather it is dynamic in nature. It means that it keeps on changing with the needs of society. To cater the needs of society and ensure justice, it becomes important for the law to modernise.

Various branches of law have the application of technology for quicker decision-making as well as for increased efficiency and accuracy. Even the science has greater impact in legal studies. The application of science in law is generally seen in evidence collection.

The Criminal Justice System is aimed towards punishing the guilty so as to provide justice to the victim. The standard of proof in criminal cases is that the "guilt of accused is to be proved beyond all reasonable doubt". The prosecution must adduce the evidence of high standard in such a way that accused guilt is perfectly determined without any scope of 'doubt'. Forensic Science is one such technology that assists in the criminal justice since it helps in providing standard evidences against the person put on trial. Besides this, it enhances the quality investigation. It is seen that in criminal cases, since the period to complete the investigation is not specified therefore it causes delay. Even in certain cases time has been specified, but it is seen that the investigation could not be concluded within that particular time period. Hence, it adversely affects the administration of justice.

4 FORENSICS IN CRIMINAL INVESTIGATIONS

Under criminal law, the 'evidence' acquires a very crucial place. It is an instrument to prove or disprove a fact. There exist various classifications of evidences that aim towards the administration of justice in serious offences. However, the parties must adduce the best evidence to strengthen their side. The circumstantial evidence refers to the facts that are not directly related to the fact in issue, but are closely connected with it.

> *"Circumstantial evidence is that which relates to the series of other facts than the fact in issue: but by experience have been found so associated with the fact in issue in relation of cause and effect that it leads to a satisfactory conclusion."*[1]

Forensic Science is the branch of science that applies the scientific and innovative methods in legal field. This is the kind of evidence which could not be perceived by human agency. It requires experiments and observations in order to arrive at a conclusion. It is generally used in the investigation of crime as well as for analyzing the evidence for the determination of guilt of accused.

> *"The term forensic evidence encompasses two distinct ideas and processes. The forensic part refers to the process utilized in the forensic science at issue through which facts are generated."*[2]

Generally, in cases where there is direct evidence available, the circumstantial evidence is not considered. This is also known as the 'rule of best evidence'. Cases where direct evidence is absence, circumstantial evidence plays a major role. The five golden principles laid down in the landmark judgment of *Sharad Birdhichand Sarda v State of Maharashtra* [3] and

reiterated in *Hanumant v State of Madhya Pradesh* [4] must be strictly complied. In order to rely the case upon circumstantial evidences, the chain of evidences must be established. Also, it must be complete and no scope for other possibility shall exist.

The Forensic Science in collection of evidence involves analysis of DNA Tests, Fingerprints, Handwriting, facial recognition, ballistics or tool marks, blood splatter, footprints and other medical evidences. The recognition of such evidence has been made possible through the application of technology and scientific methods. The analysis of such kind of evidences is made possible through the process of experimentation and observations.

> *"The expression 'medical evidence' compendiously refers to the facts stated by the doctor either in the injury report or in the post-mortem report or during his oral testimony plus the opinion expressed by the doctor on the basis of facts stated."* [5]

The term 'forensic evidence' has not been expressly mentioned under the old criminal laws. Section 157 CrPC, 1973 did not mention the compulsory collection of forensic evidence in case of the commission of the crime. From this, it could be inferred that the police officers can exercise their discretion in such cases. It doesn't mean that forensic evidence was not collected at all rather it was subject to the discretion of investigating officer. But BNSS, 2023 has made a mandatory provision under Section 176(3) collection of forensic evidences. It states that where the committed offence is punishable for 7 years or more, forensic expert shall visit the crime science and collect forensic evidences which should be video graphed either on mobile phone or other electronic device. The evidentiary value of forensic evidence comes under the category of 'expert evidence'. Therefore, it acts as corroborative piece of evidence and not the substantive evidence. The evidence of expert is kept on lower footing as compared to ocular witness. The reason behind this is that the ocular evidence is the 'direct evidence' and has more weight than the 'circumstantial evidence'.

> *"It would be highly unsafe to convict a person on the sole testimony of an expert"*[6]

5 IMPACT OF AI IN FORENSICS

Artificial Intelligence is the science that aims towards making the machines efficient in such a manner that they resembles human mind. The function of AI includes decision making, pattern recognition, learning, problem solving etc. Besides this, these systems can also perform a wide range of functions, from speech recognition and image processing to autonomous driving and complex problem-solving. Such activities could be done by the technology in quicker way than the humans.

> *"Machine learning is an application of AI that mimics this ability and enables machines and their software to learn from experience."*[7]

This distinctive feature of the technology has a greater impact upon the number of fields especially the law. It helps in the identification of the accused through various means and methods. Forensic Science applies the scientific and innovative methods in the course of investigation to determine the actual perpetrator of crime. Such kinds of methods act as boon for the investigation of cases. This technique has vital importance in legal field since it way to ensure justice to the victim.

> *"Sciences used in forensics include any discipline that can aid in the collection, preservation and analysis of evidence such as chemistry (for the identification of explosives), engineering (for examination of structural design) or biology (for DNA identification or matching)."*[8]

There are various branches of forensics that helps in analysing the evidence. One such branch is the 'Digital Forensics' that works in the electronic sphere. The electronic devices such as the laptops, mobile phones, and computers are well-analysed in order to obtain the relevant data. It could include communication records, social media posts, messages sent, locked applications, encrypted data etc. The access to deleted information (texts, e-mails) could also be made for facilitating the investigation.

> *"The application of AI in digital forensics encompasses a range of techniques, including machine learning (ML), deep learning, natural language processing (NLP), and blockchain integration. This section explores these AI techniques in detail, highlighting their roles, implementations, and contributions to digital forensic investigations."*[9]

Autopsy is one of the branches of forensics that plays a vital role in heinous criminal matters. The post-mortem of the body can provide the date and time of offence, intensity of injury, cause of death and many more could be done easily because of application of AI. All these information provides assistance to the investigating authority to identify the actual perpetrator of crime. The medical reports of victim or suspect are an important key for identifying the real culprit. These reports relates to DNA tests, fingerprint or facial recognition, handwriting and many more. Lot of samples are stored in the electronic database which matches the obtained sample to these stored data. This is done through the use of AI devices.

> *"AI algorithms are being used in medicine to interpret radiological images, which could have important implications for the criminal justice and medical examiner communities when establishing cause and manner of death."*[10]
>
> *"DNA analysis produces large amounts of complex data in electronic format; these data contain patterns, some of which may be beyond the range of human analysis but may prove useful as systems increase in sensitivity."*[11]

There are several cases where prior knowledge of offence is required for the 'security of nation'. Sensitive issues that would affect the sovereignty and integrity of the nation need to be catered before the actual commission of crime. Such prediction of the crimes could be made possible through the application of AI. This process is termed as 'predictive policing' and is more widely in practise especially in the European countries.

> *"By using AI and predictive policing analytics integrated with computer-aided response and live public safety video enterprises, law enforcement will be better able to respond to incidents, prevent threats, stage interventions, divert resources, and investigate and analyze criminal activity."*[12]

The weapon used while the commission of crime is termed as 'real evidence'. The identification of this weapon is done through the application of AI. One such instance is the ballistic report that is made in accordance with the information received through the AI.

The growth of AI in the field of forensics assists in the speedy disposal of cases. All the above mentioned tasks could not be done by one's one ability since such a level of accuracy can only be possessed by technology i.e., the Artificial Intelligence.

Information with regard to the age or gender of the suspect could be known through the analysis of voice recordings. The AI could also help in the facial recognition of the suspect.

> *"Through initiatives such as the Intelligence Advanced Research Projects Activity's Janus computer-vision project, analysts are performing trials on the use of algorithms that can learn how to distinguish one person from another using facial features in the same manner as a human analyst."*[13]

6 CHALLENGES

Data privacy has always remained a serious issue with respect to the technology. The term 'data privacy' refers to the preserve the data from being accessible by third-party for unethical purposes. AI has raised concerns about data collection, surveillance, and the potential misuse of information. The information stored electronically is under the threat of being misused. This information could include various sensitive information which once leaked would have adverse effect upon the individual. Therefore, various attempts are being made through the way of legislations so as to ensure the privacy.

> *"The use of AI in criminal justice necessitates the collection and analysis of large datasets, raising concerns about the privacy and security of sensitive information."*[14]

Accountability refers to the responsibility for actions or outcomes resulting from AI's use, especially when it impacts people's lives such as criminal justice. Whenever a human makes a mistake, he could be held accountable for it. But, the same is impossible in case of machines. If harm is suffered to an individual due the malfunctioning of AI, there's neither a remedy nor an action could be taken against such software. It is because the AI is not a 'person' either natural or juristic.

Another challenge is that AI can be opaque or act as a "black box". It signifies making it difficult to trace decision-making processes or understand how outcomes are reached. This lack of transparency can complicate assigning blame in cases of error or harm.

The data stored in the database could easily be manipulated through human agency. The immense growth of technology has also led to the growth in cyber-crimes. The information stored in database could be modified so as to give different result. Such kind of defect may lead to the adverse effect in the administration of justice.

> *"One of the primary concerns is the risk of inaccurate or fabricated information, also known as "hallucinations." As the survey revealed, three-quarters (76%) of UK legal professionals are concerned about this issue when using public-access generative AI platforms."*[15]

Although the AI has expertise in various fields but the human mind could not be neglected. The fact that a machine could not be so advanced that it could replace human mind. Even the AI is the machine that is created through the human intelligence. Also, it contains the information that is specifically stored by a person.

The information obtained through AI cannot be trusted absolutely. The reason behind this is that it could adopt biasness. It is possible when the information stored is biased in nature then the outcome would be biased. AI and algorithmic bias refers to the unintended and unfair results that arise when AI systems make decisions based on biased data or faulty assumptions. Since AI models learn from historical data, they can inherit and retain existing stored biases, such as racial, gender, or socioeconomic disparities.

> *"Other risks, such as over-reliance on AI (a concern for 50% of lawyers), leaking confidential information (49%), and accidental bias (43%), are also valid concerns that must be addressed. Tom Whittaker, a Director and Solicitor Advocate at Burges Salmon, highlights the importance of information security requirements. AI use policies, vendor due diligence, and other steps to mitigate the risk of confidentiality breaches."*[16]

7 CONCLUSION

The technology has greater impact upon the legal field as it aims to modernise the methods and means of investigation. Such advanced methods prove to be boon for the Indian legal system. It also accelerates the process of investigation which generally is time-consuming. But the issue is whether such technological advancements are really the boon or curse for the individuals. The growth of AI has simplified various tasks that could not be done by humans easily. The forensic evidence is based upon the opinion of experts which are backed by experiments and observations. But it could be seen that there are certain drawbacks with respect to these evidences. It could not be relied upon blindly because the technology works upon the intelligence stored by the human agency. There always remains the possibility for tampering the electronic evidence as well. Therefore, proper caution shall be taken in considering such kind of evidences.

8 SUGGESTIONS/FINDINGS

(1) In order to ensure privacy, the sensitive information needs to be well-encrypted and authenticated through advanced techniques. Also, strict laws and regulations to regulate privacy concerns needs to be legislated.
(2) Resolving the AI biasness, it is important to train the system on diverse and representative data to avoid reinforcing biases relating to race, gender, or socio-economic status. Tools for the detection of biasness in AI system should be installed.
(3) There is need for standard comprehensive regulations for the application of AI in criminal investigations. This includes the rules for the admissibility of AI generated evidence in Court and guidelines for its use during criminal investigations.
(4) The use of AI in forensic investigation doesn't mean that humans are replaced rather AI is for the assistance for human experts. Humans should be involved in decision-making process for interpreting the findings of AI, ensuring accuracy and for accessing the content.
(5) Initiatives for preventing possibility of tampering shall be made by the highest levels of cyber security in AI systems. It can be made possible through regular security audits, encryption and secure data transfer protocols

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Medical malpractice and exigency of codified law in Bangladesh: A study on the attitudes of general people

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ABSTRACT: Medical malpractice is a violation of the standard of care that occurs when a medical professional selects the erroneous method of treatment which harms their patients or lead to their deaths. Medical malpractice is the instance of negligence or ineptitude of the medical professionals. Several individuals are injured each year as a consequence of medical malpractice. The legal system of Bangladesh lacks both a detailed framework and specific legislation which could restrict negligence practices. However, there are some legal provisions under different statutes, but which are ineffectual to deal with medical negligence lawsuits. The health care system in Bangladesh suffers from degradation because of three main deficiencies: the lack of both law and medical council and the spread of medical management as a business. Health care system degradation plays an active part in building negative patient attitudes and driving their dissatisfaction with Bangladesh's current healthcare organization. In this study, a questionnaire-based survey has made to analyze the attitude towards medical malpractice among general people in Bangladesh.

Keywords: Medical Malpractice, Codified Law, Medical Negligence, Medical professionals, Health-care System

1 INTRODUCTION

Medical professional negligence is defined as absence of reasonable care and skill, or willful negligence of a medical practitioner in the treatment of patient, which cause bodily injury or death of patient (Reedy 2016). Medical malpractice means a doctor's failure to exercise the degree of care and skill that a physician or surgeon of the same medical specialty would use under similar circumstances (Garner 2009). Medical professionals have a legal duty to uphold the standards of care set by the medical council. The failure to exercise a duty of care on the part of medical professionals leads to medical malpractice. Medical negligence is the key element of a medical malpractice lawsuit. Any patient or his representative, who is the victim of medical negligence, can file a medical malpractice lawsuit against doctors, dentists, nurses, lab technicians, other medical professionals, hospitals, and clinics.

2 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- This research aims at discussing and examining the attitude and level of awareness of the general population in Bangladesh towards the issue of medical malpractice.

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- Furthermore, this study focused on recommendation for implementation of effective codified law to intercept medical malpractice in Bangladesh.

3 METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

In this research, quantitative research methodology is used to find out the knowledge and opinion of general people towards medical malpractice in Bangladesh. For the collection of primary data, a questionnaire-based survey consisting of five questions was conducted on one hundred general people who had been hospitalized or out-patient within the territory of Dhaka. Respondents were structurally interviewed to figure out their attitude and opinion on medical malpractice. The questionnaires were carried out over a period of six months. All participants voluntarily completed the questionnaire and their identities are not disclosed. In this study, both primary and secondary data have been utilized. Secondary data has been collected from books, articles, newspapers, and websites. Simple percentage formula has been applied to analyze the collected primary data and presented in pie charts for analysis.

4 DISCUSSION

Health care system in Bangladesh is not as advanced like other developed countries of the world. Bangladesh health care system is commercialized and overloaded. The present ratio between doctors and patients falls short of international benchmarking. Dhaka possesses only a limited number of international-standard hospitals while other districts of Bangladesh lack advanced health care facilities. Both public and private health care sectors are criticized with the allegation of medical negligence in Bangladesh. Lives have been endangered and irreparable harm has been caused because of medical negligence like wrong surgery, delayed diagnosis, surgical errors etc.(Dhaka Tribune 2023). Concern over the quality of health-care services in Bangladesh has resulted in a loss of faith in health-care providers, low use of public health facilities, and increased outflows of patients from Bangladesh to hospitals abroad (Mohiuddin 2020).

Bangladesh lacks both an exact and unified legal system to handle medical negligence cases alongside deceptive medical activities and medical professional misconduct. As a result, by using this haziness the wrongdoers are very often beyond the grip of law (Fahim 2018). There is no special court established to intercept medical malpractice in Bangladesh. In absences of codified law some medical professionals disregard the rule of their noble profession and medical malpractice has become an awful issue of Bangladesh. Bangladesh has some laws that address medical malpractice, yet their current procedures remain complex, consume additional time and money, provide inadequate results because of biased investigations and strict evidence standards. Therefore, victims or their families are reluctant to bring formal allegation against medical practitioner (The Daily Star 2017).

4.1 *Under the constitution of Bangladesh*

The Constitution of Bangladesh functions as Bangladesh's highest legal authority. Article 32 The Constitution of Bangladesh recognizes "the right to life" as one of its fundamental rights. Under the provisions of the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh article 15(a) the state bears a responsibility to provide essential life necessities which include medical care and article 18 defines State obligations to elevate nutritional quality and advance public health standards. The constitutional solutions to address medical mistake are found through the combination of Article 15,18 with 31,32 and 44. Citizens can enforce these rights through writ petitions executed under article 102 of Bangladesh Constitution. (Laws of Bangladesh, n.d.)

4.2 *Under the Penal Code, 1860*

Bangladesh provides medical malpractice remedies by sections of the Penal Code 1860. The Penal Code 1860 establishes four sections by which victims' patients may file medical malpractice lawsuits against health practitioners under 304A, 337 and 338. A person who causes death through a rash or negligent act other then culpable homicide will face a five-year imprisonment term or monetary punishment or both under the Section 304A of this Penal Code. The Code declares that someone who performs acts rashly negligently to endanger human life will receive imprisonment of either description for up to three months and/or two hundred and fifty takas in fines according to section 336. Under the section 337 of the Code someone who causes injury to another individual through unsafe or careless conduct endangering human life or proposal safety faces prison of six moths either descriptions with or without a fine penalty of five hundred taka. The law defines grievous hurt through dangerous acts that results in such injuries that threaten life or proposal safety and sets the penalty at imprisonment of either description for up to two years combined with a maximum fine of five thousand taka (section 338).(Laws of Bangladesh, n.d.)

4.3 *Under the Bangladesh medical and dental council act, 2010*

The Bangladesh Medical and Dental Council functions as the regulatory organization for all health professionals and medical practitioners who have registered in Bangladesh. Under the Section 23 of the Bangladesh Medical and Dental Council Act, 2010 the council possesses the power to refuse person registration and order total or period suspension of medical practitioner or dentist names found guilty of professional misconduct. Under the Section 28 of the Act anyone who misrepresents their status as a registered medical practitioner faces financial penalties of Taka one lakh or receives imprisonment for three years or faces both penalties. Under this Act section 29 prohibits registered medical practitioners from using any false title or designation or description or symbol when it indicates additional professional qualifications. Violating this law results in legal consequence which include a maximum fine of take one lakh combined with imprisonment for three years or both these penalties from converting medical practitioners. Additionally, when violations taka per contravention. Section 30 of this Act impose a three-year imprisonment penalty and a taka one lakh fine or both on doctors who prescribe forbidden drugs.(Laws of Bangladesh, n.d.)

4.4 *Under the medical practice and private clinics and labs (Regulation) ordinance 1982*

By section-11 of the Medical Practice and Private Clinics and Labs (Regulation) Ordinance, 1982 the director general of health services or another authorized officer holds to inspect private medical establishments to verify compliance with Ordinance provisions. When the director general discovers contraventions of this Ordinance provisions, he will recommend government actions that include depriving medical practitioners of private practice while authorizing private clinic license revocation and demanding laboratory permanent closure. (Laws of Bangladesh, n.d.)

4.5 *Under the consumer rights protection act, 2009*

According to Section 2(22) of the Consumer Rights Protection Act, 2009 services encompass health services that users obtain in exchange for payment yet exclude cost-free medical care. The Act's Section 52 sets penalties for service providers whose actions put service recipients' basic safety at risk through any destructive behavior that carries a potential three-year prison sentence accompanied by a maximum Taka two lakh fine or both. The Act stipulates in section 53 that service providers may receive imprisonment for three years or face fines up to

Taka two lakh or both punishments after damaging a service receiver's health or life through negligence, irresponsibility, or carelessness. This law contains weaknesses that prevent its effective application when evaluating medical negligence cases. (Laws of Bangladesh, n.d.)

5 CORE INSIGHTS: MEDICAL MALPRACTICE LAWS IN INDIA AND BANGLADESH

India has a more comprehensive and accessible framework for addressing medical malpractice, particularly through its Consumer Protection Act and the National Medical Commission. However India has some other laws to deal with medical malpractice cases named- Indian Penal Code, (IPC), The Clinical Establishments (Registration and Regulation) Act, Indian Contract Act, Law of Torts (Common Law), Right to Information Act. Bangladesh, which shares similar principles of penal and tort (because of having similar colonial legal heritage) has no particular mechanisms (specific to consumers) and it experiences poor enforcements. The two nations have issues with the judicial backlog, low knowledge among the people, and accessibility in rural states. India leads in the spheres of judicial activism, development of case law and access of patients to redressed mechanism.

6 DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The questionnaire-based survey was conducted on one hundred people and consisted of five questions about their attitude towards medical malpractice and exigency of codified law in Bangladesh and their opinion on this issue. The study conducted on people who had been hospitalized or out-patient within the territory of Dhaka.

6.1 *Were you a victim of medical malpractice?*

Thirty percent of surveyed individuals declared they endured medical mistreatment at public and private hospitals and dental clinics and diagnostic facilities across Bangladesh. The doctor at the hospital failed to detect cardiac tamponade and his father subsequently died due to non-treatment. The medical stuff deduces to provide a delayed bowel obstruction diagnosis to his relative which results in the patient perishing from their condition. Through his voice a patient survivor declared that incorrect anesthesia administration by an anesthesiologist created lasting brain damage. During the corona pandemic numerous hospitals rejected patients requiring emergency hospitalization and hospital authorities expelled families of hospitalized patients after detecting corona virus in their relatives.

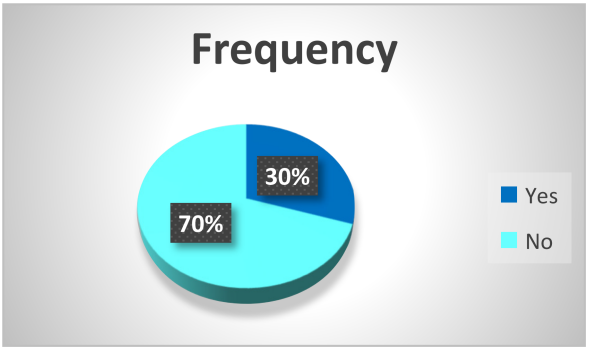


Figure 1. The graph shows that 30% of the respondents were the victim of medical malpractice and 70% of the respondents were not victim of medical malpractice.

6.2 *Are you satisfied with the medical treatment service in Bangladesh?*

In Bangladesh medical treatment service are inadequate. The qualities of services provided by public hospitals are second rate. According to the respondents, most of the public medical practitioners are negligent about their public service because they are concerned about their income from private chambers. Private hospitals and clinics are more expensive than the public sectors, consequently poor and mid-income people cannot access extravagant cost of private treatment facilities. The upper-class people prefer to go abroad for their better treatment. Furthermore, respondents stated that, some of the common scenarios of public and private hospitals are that, medical practitioners do not stay at their places of posting, negative attitudes of medical practitioner, nurses and other medical professionals, lack of drugs, long waiting time for doctor's consultation and treatment, limited consultation length, tendency of doctors to recommend unnecessary test and drugs for which they gets commissions etc. Certain private hospitals in Bangladesh maintain essentially dead ICU patients while inflating their hospital bill or refuse to bodies until pay their bill. Eighty percent of the respondents were disappointed with the current 'medical services, while only twenty percent admitted that they were satisfied.

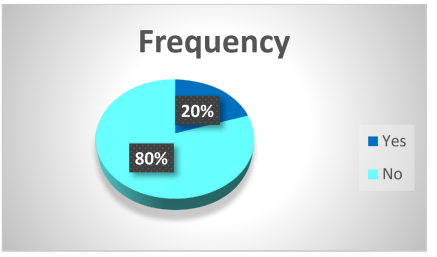


Figure 2. The graph indicates the unpleasant scenario of health care system in Bangladesh. 80% of the respondents were disappointed with the current 'medical services, while only 20% were satisfied.

6.3 *Do you know victim can file a case against medical malpractice?*

Ninety percent of the respondents confessed that, they knew they could file a suit against medical malpractice and only ten percent respondents said that they did not know about their right to sue. Lack of codified law and legal knowledge about remedies available against medical malpractice, long drawn regular trial procedure in the court and excessive legal expenses of litigation are the reasons of unwillingness of people to initiate action against medical malpractice.

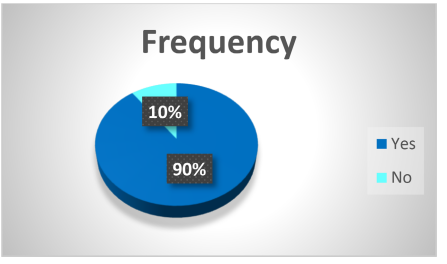


Figure 3. The graph indicates that 90% of the respondents knew they could file a suit against medical malpractice and only 10% of the respondents did not know about their right to sue.

6.4 *Do you need an advocate for filing a case against medical malpractice?*

All the respondents agreed that one should consult an advocate before bringing a claim of medical negligence. Advocates are qualified in legal matters and represent their clients before the court for justice. They use their law knowledge to help clients to understand legal issues and assist them in creating a strong case. Moreover, medical Malpractice claims can be very technical and complex. So, one should appoint an advocate who has experience in assessing and executing medical malpractice cases, to pursue a medical malpractice lawsuit.

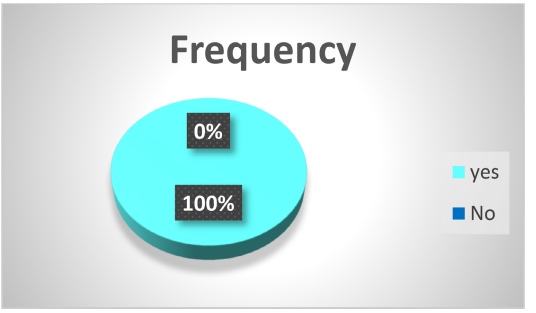


Figure 4. The graph reveals that, 100% of the respondents agreed that one should consult an advocate before filing a case against Medical Malpractice.

6.5 *Do we need a codified law to intercept medical malpractice in Bangladesh?*

Now a day's medical malpractice has become an alarming issue and there is no codified law to intercept medical malpractice in Bangladesh. The existing laws are not adequate to deal with medical negligence. In absence of a codified law, it is difficult to put an end to medical malpractice of registered medical practitioners and others medical professionals. Therefore, a codified law should be enacted to prevent the medical malpractice in Bangladesh. All the respondents strongly recommended for the implementation of a codified law against medical malpractice in Bangladesh.

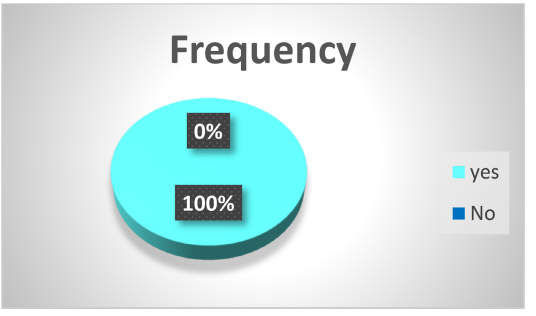


Figure 5. The graph indicates that, 100% of the respondents strongly recommended for the enactment of codified law against medical malpractice in Bangladesh.

7 CONCLUSION

The justice system, which governs medical mishaps committed in Bangladesh, is not well established unlike in the developed countries. To bridge gap, the government of Bangladesh

should enact a codified law and enforce the law strictly in Bangladesh. Specialized health courts or tribunals should be established under the codified law to solve the cases relating to medical negligence efficaciously. Judges advocates and investigating officer's ought to be specially trained to handle medical malpractice cases. Regular in-service training on medical ethics and medical jurisprudence for medical professionals must be standardized to improve their medical etiquette. Awareness programs can be broadcast through media to raise awareness among the public about their right to sue against medical malpractice. Law Commission of Bangladesh had also suggested for the enactment of codified law regarding medical malpractice (Billah 2013). Ethical medical practice with the proper use of advanced technology, transformation of Bangladesh Medical and Dental Council (BMDC) into an efficient council and implementation of codified law can abolish medical malpractice from Bangladesh.

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Constitution of India governing hate speech

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ABSTRACT: Freedom of speech is a fundamental right to voice one's opinion, beliefs and views unaccompanied by fear of reprisal, legal action or censorship. Hate speech is considered as an anomaly to freedom of speech, particularly when it incites violence or discrimination. This paper discusses hate speech, its detrimental effect on individuals and societal structure and hate speech regulation. Despite numerous legislations, the cases of hate speech is on the upswing resulting in hate crimes and this emphasizes the need to range over measures to combat hate speech and upon the need to work on the proper implementation of existing laws. The paper also highlights the distinction between protected and unprotected speech because it is the hate speech that needs to be regulated.

Keywords: Hate Speech, Free Speech, Public Order

> *"There is a fine line between free speech and hate speech. Free speech encourages debate whereas hate speech incites violence."*
>
> -Newton Lee

1 INTRODUCTION

Though hate speech has been dealt with in different enactments in India, it is ill-defined in any of the enactments. In Pravasi Bhalai Sangathan's case[1], the Supreme Court of India defined hate speech as "an effort to marginalize individuals based on their membership in a group which seek to delegitimize group members in the eyes of majority reducing their social standing and acceptance within society."

As per Law Commission of India[2], hate speech is an expression which is discriminatory against groups identified or founded on their race, caste, community, residence, sexual orientation, etc. or which is abusive, intimidating, insulting, harassing, etc.

Hate Speech is not merely about hurting the sentiments or insulting. It embraces the speech that instigate violence and enmity which leads to disturb the public order and harmony of the society at large. India has witnessed several cases where hate speech resulted in hate crimes and led to communal riots and grisly killing. In the recent times, several cases of mob lynching have been reported which is a direct outcome of hate for a specific community. It affects the victims in several ways by exposing them to hatred, discrimination, exclusion and violence qua their membership in a group. Minorities are far more vulnerable than majority. Therefore, hate speech is a serious problem and to combat it effective measures are needed to be taken as it is a need of the hour. A robust democracy ensures participation and inclusion of all its citizens and equal respect and dignity of all regardless of their religion, ethnicity, castes, etc.

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Recently Yog Guru Ramdev made a detrimental statement against a popular brand "Hamdard" in respect of its Sharbat calling it 'Sharbat Jihad', thereby trying to invoke hatred against a community targeting their religion. His statement is detrimental and abusive and has the tendency to disturb communal harmony. Hamdard had moved Delhi High Court, where the Court condemned by stating "It shocks the conscience of the court. It is indefensible." It ordered Ramdev to take down all related videos immediately.[3]

Jeremy Waldron, a legal philosopher argued that hate speech damages two values. First is the 'Value of inclusiveness' and second is the 'Value of dignity'[4]. Inclusiveness refers to the idea of inclusion where a pluralist society with multiplicity of races, religious, ethnicity, etc. guarantees to each person a life without discrimination, enmity, savagery and exclusion both individually as well as member of any group. Second is dignity which Waldron defines as equal citizenship which guarantees everyone's social standing. Both these values emphasize that no person should be subjected to such discrimination which belittle his status or virtue qua person or as a member of a group.[5] An examination of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act[6] and Sati (Prevention) Act[7], shows that hate speech is most easily comprehended as a part of historical practices of subordination which includes exclusion, hostility, and violence. The regulation of such speech becomes justifiable under 'decency and morality' clause of article 19(2) of the Constitution[8]. In determining if a form of expression meets the criteria for hate speech, the context, speaker's identity, target's identity, the prevailing social situation, etc. are crucial. In a country like India, which has been stratified into multiplicity of religion, ethnicity, caste etc., it is not possible to develop an absolute criteria for all situations and this demands interpretation by the judiciary[9].

Article 19(1) (a) of the Constitution of India guarantee freedom of speech and expression. However, its clause (2) provides reasonable restrictions for balancing its abuse and misuse in the interest of sovereignty and integrity of India, security of the State, friendly relations with foreign states, public order, decency and morality, contempt of court, defamation or incitement of an offence. The grounds for restricting hate speech can be reduced to incitement of an offence, public order, defamation, decency and morality. It is often argued that restricting hate speech may lead to the violation of right to freedom of speech and expression which is a fundamental right and could be detrimental to political awareness, artistic voicing, constructive criticism and academic analysis.[10]

> *"Addressing hate speech does not mean prohibiting freedom of speech. It means keeping hate speech from escalating into something dangerous, particularly incitement to discrimination, hostility and violence, which is prohibited under international law."- Antonio Guterres.*

It is worth emphasizing that while majority of democracies worldwide guarantee freedom of speech, yet they also have laws to regulate hateful content which may result in disturbing public order.[11] Therefore, it is necessary to understand that free speech and hate speech are not same thing. From a legal stance, there is a very fine line that divides both. Free speech is more compassionate as it seeks to be considerate of others, while hate speech is connected to hate crimes as it encourages intolerance, violence and abusive conduct and results in enmity and hatred.[12] It mainly targets vulnerable population like religious minorities, LGBTQ people, women and young girls with the threat of physical and sexual violence. International Conventions like UDHR, ICCPR, ICERD, CEDAW, Rabat Plan of Action, seek to deal with hate speech and its related issues by establishing a regulatory framework to safeguard fundamental human rights while simultaneously proscribing violence and incitement to hatred.

1.1 *Impact of political hate speech*

The religious diversity of India makes it vulnerable to violence where religious fervor may be sparked quickly. When a politician spews hate speech, it has considerable consequences due

to its widespread influence which can result in disrupting public order.[13] In the recent past, India has witnessed more frequent communally charged speeches especially during elections to influence voters. Hate speech incidents targeting religious minorities jumped from 668 in 2023 to 1,165 in 2024, experiencing a dramatic74.4% increase. 462 (39.7%) hate speeches were delivered by politicians. 373(32%) of total hate speech incidents transpired during 2024 general election between March 16 and June 1.[14]

In Bal Thackeray's case[15] the Supreme Court finds that Bal Thackeray's speeches during the election campaign constituted corrupt practices specially, the speeches were seen as appealing for votes based on candidate's religion and promoted enmity between different religious communities violating sections 123(3) & 123(3-A) of the Representation of the People Act. Various commission of inquiry set up to inquire into riots and caste & communal violence have also stressed upon the impact of hate speech in invoking savagery and communal feeling. Muzaffarnagar Riots in 2013 and Delhi Riots of 2020 are few instances which resulted due to inflammatory speeches by political leaders. An analyses by the Association for Democratic Reforms and National Election Watch uncovers that a worrying number of law makers in India have hate speech charges against them.[16]

Another great concern for the country is the mainstream media and news anchors who in their live shows fearlessly promote and advocate hatred and infact many times with a set propaganda misguide the viewers through false and misleading informations and thereby inciting hatred and animosity.

Suresh Chavanke, the editor- in- chief of Hindi news channel "Sudarshan" was nabbed in 2017 for fostering communal strife in Sambal district, Utter Pradesh and for offending religious beliefs.[17]

In Amish Devgan Vs Union of India (2020)[18], a television journalist, Amish Devgan was accused of deliberately and malevolently insulting a holy saint of Muslim Community in his TV debate. The court noted that hate speech has three components – the content, intent and harm or impact and that the speaker's intention to instigate or to inflict harm must be considered in addition to the content.[19]

1.2 *Social media and hate speech*

Internet and digital media have become indispensable communication channels by which individuals can exercise their right to express ideas freely but with the rise of social media, new challenges have emerged to curb hate speech. Social medial platforms like Facebook, Whatsapp, Youtube, X and Instagram have become a fosterer of hate speech, hate campaign and bigoted languages. Also, gender and community based online violence require prompt response in the interest of societal harmony. Out of 1,165 hate speech incidents in 2024, 995 were first shared or live streamed on social media platforms with Facebook in the lead of 495 events.[20]

As mentioned above, hate speech is undefined under Indian law, but there are various provisions under different laws which deal with governing hatred, disrespect, discrimination and incitement to violence, viz. The Indian Penal Code, 1860, Ss. 124A, 153A, 153B, 153C, 295A, 298, 505 (1) and (2). The corresponding Bhartiya Nyaya Sahita, 2023, Sections 196 (1), 197 (1), 299, 302, 353; The Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955, S.7; The Representation of People Act 1951, Ss. 123(3), 123(3A), 125 and 324; The Cinematography Act 1952. Ss. 4, 5- B &7;The Religious Institutions (Prevention of Misuse) Act.1998,S.3(g); The Cable Television Network Regulation Act 1952, Ss.5 & 6; The Schedule castes and Schedule Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989, S.3 (1)(x). Though these provisions are nearly the same regarding the type of content they aim to control, the punishment for these provisions differ.[21] The Supreme Court of India has elucidate the Constitution in order to limit these provision under reasonable restrictions as envisaged in Article 19 (2).

1.3 *Hate speech interpretation by the Apex court*

In Lalai Singh Yadav's case[22] the Uttar Pradesh government directed confiscation of a book entitled 'Samman Ke Liye Dharm Parivartan Karein' (Revolutionize religion for the sake of equality) on the ground that it violated Sections 153 A & Section 295 A of the IPC and claimed that it intentionally and spitefully outraged the religious feeling of Hindus and insults their religion. Rejecting this contention the Supreme Court held that rational assessment of religious tenet did not amount to an offence under Sec. 153 A or Sec. 295 A and that it fell under the category of legitimate criticism[23].

In Shreya Singhal's case,[24] the court distinguished debate, advocacy and provocation holding that the first two were indispensable to Article 19(1)(a).The Court declared S.66 A of Information Technology Act unconstitutional and struck it down and held that the provision was violative of Article 19 (1) (a).

In Shaheen Abdulla's case[25] the court directed the government of Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Delhi to take sue moto action beforehand, irrespective of the religion of the offender.

In Kaushal Kishore's case[26] the Constitutional bench of Supreme Court pronounced that the grounds specified in Art. 19(2) for enforcing reasonable restrictions on the right to freedom of speech and expression are exhaustive and refused to extend the restrictions envisaged in Article 19(2) by invoking other fundamental rights, by that mean maintaining the equilibrium intended by the Constitution.[27]

1.4 *Hate speech and gender based violence*

Verbal violence can be distinguished as hate speech. It vilifies the individuals or group on the grounds of gender, sex, sexual preference or sexuality. It is a kind of discrimination violating their fundamental rights to equality and dignity. It mainly targets women and LGBTQ+ people.[28]

It is seen that deep concern for law and order govern the legal regulation of speech and this may lead to repress the right of free speech by censoring artistic work, criticism of religion, satire, creative endeavor and challenge to social orthodoxy. This becomes an extra – constitutional method to curb speech.[29] This is the reason that it becomes critical to understand what actually constitutes hate speech before imposing restriction or before regulating it. Judicial principles in India have stressed upon rational, logical and scholarly speech as signs of acceptable speech where context of speech is the determining factor. For example, if the content is abusive, coarse, vituperative or offensive then it is a sign of hate speech.[30] The records of appellate courts show that content of work of "academic or scholarly" character are protected under Article 19(1) (a), provided that the work should not be of dubious quality. The language of the work is the determining factor.[31]

Hate speech violates Article 14, 15 and 21 because it threats equality, rule of law and rights of targeted people to live with dignity and tends to create discrimination based on race, caste, religion, gender etc., thereby disturbing the democratic fabric of the county. The targeted people, afraid to approach public areas or to engage in any conversation and this is detrimental to their fundamental right to live with dignity.[32]

2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The researcher has resorted to doctrinal method of research with an analytical approach and has adopted varied methodology including comparative analysis, textual analysis and historical analysis.

Primary Sources – Constitution, regulations, cases, commission reports, statutes, etc.

Secondary Sources – Scholarly journal articles, legal commentary, books, non-academic articles etc.

3 RESEARCH DESIGN

The right to free speech is imperative for the enjoyment of and for safeguarding human rights. It is significant to understand that free speech and hate speech are different and before imposing restrictions, it is important to determine as to what constitutes hate speech. For effective regulation of hate speech, we should adopt a holistic approach which includes prevention, education, legal action, support to victims and accountability.

4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

- To determine the root causes that are responsible for hate speech incidents and the conditions that contribute towards it.
- To evaluate whether regulations are effective at balancing free speech with the prohibition of hate speech.
- To promote educational strategies to raise awareness and to promote communal understanding.
- To understand how technology and digital media are used to promote hatred. In 2024, of 259 documented events of dangerous speech instigating violence, 219 were first shared or live streamed on social media. Facebook reported for 164, YouTube for 49 and Instagram for 6.[33]

5 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

To combat hate speech issues and its related crimes we must first analyze the contributing factors and must work upon them. Few such reasons can be ineffective regulatory framework against hate speech; biased media reporting boosting divisive narratives; social media platforms fostering hate speech; lack of awareness and education among people on the consequence of hate speech; social and cultural diversity; political polarization for divisive agenda; historical tensions among various ethnic and religious groups; and lack of initiatives for intercultural dialogue and community understanding.[34] We need to take appropriate steps to address this issue. Few such measures include:-

- The laws prohibiting hate speech should be strictly implemented. It is seen in several cases that no action is taken against persons spreading hate speech despite court's order.[35]
- Swift steps are required to promote social media literacy and content regulation to combat online hate speeches.
- Education is most powerful and effective weapon to combat hatred by making people aware of the harmful consequences.

6 CONCLUSION

The cases of hate speech and hate related crimes are on continuous rise. Despite several provisions in different laws, we have attained only partial success in regulating hate speech. To combat hate speech, steps need to be taken not only to prevent hate speech and its

dissemination, but also to foster culture of tolerance and respect. Education is pivotal in accomplishing this goal. The continuously rising cases of hate speech and its related crimes draws our attention towards the improper functioning of our laws and this alarms the need to introspect our existing laws. Free speech is crucial for the overall growth of the people and to uphold democracy; while hate speech can lead to human rights violation including genocide, discrimination, dehumanization, and stigmatization.

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Unveiling the margins: Analyzing the social impacts of exclusionary categories in the Surrogacy Act of 2021

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ABSTRACT: The Surrogacy Act, 2021 is an extensive reform of the prevailing surrogacy legislation and other related regulations in India, introducing critical modifications such as exclusionary criteria which restricts access to services relating to surrogacy. The aim of such restrictions is to avert economic abuse and safeguard the rights of surrogates and children. They also pose questions on social equality and inclusiveness. This paper critically investigates the societal impacts of exclusions, focusing on the most affected underprivileged groups and the ones who are outside the traditional family systems. This paper tends to examine the rationale for these provisions and the broader impact of it on societal perspectives and familial norms. Although the Act aims to be protective, its execution may unintentionally sustain bias and intensify socio-economic inequalities. This paper promotes a comprehensive strategy and corresponding amendments to provide fairness and respect for all parties involved in surrogacy. It advocates for a more comprehensive and holistic framework for surrogacy law that blends protection with the imperative for equitable access.

Keywords: Surrogacy, Exclusion, Society, Surrogates, Motherhood, Women

1 INTRODUCTION

The Surrogacy Act, 2021[1] has significantly altered the legal framework for surrogacy agreements and incorporated exclusionary clauses that prohibits some individuals from engaging in such arrangements. These exclusions raise pertinent questions concerning their social ramifications and the effects on marginalised groups within the context of the newly enacted legislation. In assisted reproduction, surrogacy refers to the procedure in which a surrogate mother carries and gives birth to a child for the intended parents. The Act seeks to regulate surrogacy agreements by addressing the rights and welfare of all parties involved. However, within this regulatory framework, certain demographics are excluded from using surrogacy services based on specific criteria.

Assessing their potential impact[2] on marginalised groups and society at large hinges on the recognition of the social consequences of these exclusionary criteria. Analysing the provisions of the Act will elucidate the legislature's intent towards exclusion and its implications for the parties who are affected.

Surrogacy is increasingly prevalent due to globalisation and the rapid technological advancements. Nevertheless, deficient oversight has resulted in ethical dilemmas, the exploitation of vulnerable populations, and issues with the rights of surrogates and children. In response of it, The Act of 2021 was enacted, so as to ensure legal protection and establishment of ethical standards within this sector of surrogacy.

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The aim of this research is to examine the social dynamics and consequences of preventing certain individuals from accessing surrogacy services. It seeks to examine the impact of these exclusions on marginalised groups, family relationships, and societal norms. This paper elucidates the complexities and challenges posed by the Surrogacy Act, 2021. It aims to enhance understanding of the societal implications of exclusionary criteria in the Act. Analysing these consequences will assist the researchers in establishing a basis for further investigation and potential legislative reform to promote a more inclusive and equitable surrogacy law.

2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study seeks to examine the societal consequences of the exclusionary provisions of the Surrogacy (Regulation) Act, 2021 on the individuals and communities beyond the jurisdiction of this Act. The methodology applied for the purposes of this research is doctrinal in nature.

3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To study the effect on the groups omitted under the Surrogacy Act, 2021.
- To study how these exclusions has affected people socially, psychologically, and legally.
- To examine the Act's congruence with international human rights norms and constitutional rights.
- To suggest changes towards a more inclusive surrogacy law.

4 THE NEED OF RESEARCHING THE SOCIAL EFFECTS OF EXCLUSIVE CATEGORIES

Surrogacy has been an intense issue in India, as it raises several moral and legal questions. Surrogacy was not specifically governed at first, and courts enforced agreements using standard contract law. A historic case underlined the need of clearer rules to protect the rights of persons engaged, especially the kid and the surrogate mother. Commercial surrogacy particularly raised concerns about child trafficking and mistreatment of women. Courts have tried to deal with this complexity by giving topmost priority to the child welfare and avoiding statelessness. In 2016, a Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill[3] was proposed to tackle such issues. The Surrogacy (Regulation) Act, 2021,[4] totally forbids commercial surrogacy.

A major concern behind the enactment of the 2021 Act was the increasing threat of human trafficking in the light of unregulated surrogacy. As commercial surrogacy was thriving as a business all over the country, various reports validated the fact that children were treated as commodities. These practices were banned by the 2021 Act, as only altruistic arrangements with strict regulations are permitted under the Act. The surrogate only receives insurance coverage and compensation solely for medical expenses without any additional financial payment. As commercial surrogacy is banned, the risks of human and child trafficking is reduced. There is an urgent necessity for a more equitable framework to safeguard the rights of surrogate mothers and to ensure the rights and welfare of children conceived through surrogacy.

Analysing the societal implications of the ones who are excluded in the Surrogacy Act, 2021[5], is essential for various reasons. It enables us to evaluate the legislation based on the criteria of justice and equality. It is essential to investigate whether certain individuals or groups are disproportionately affected by these exclusions and whether this perpetuates social inequality. Examining the social effects enables the identification of potential legislative deficiencies and fosters the development of more inclusive policies aimed at social equity.

Exclusionary categories may disproportionately impact marginalised groups and communities. These groups already have restricted access to reproductive options and societal bias.[6] Investigating the social ramifications of exclusive labels elucidates the ways in which marginalised groups experience greater exclusion and deprivation of reproductive choices, therefore facilitating the dismantling of structural barriers and promoting inclusivity.

Surrogacy is essential for various family structures, including single parents, same-sex couples, and individuals facing infertility challenges. Exclusionary criteria may inhibit specific couples or individuals from initiating their families. Analysing the social implications enables us to understand how inclusive policies influence the identification and structure of diverse family configurations, as well as the emotional well-being of those affected.

Research on the social implications of exclusive categories offers a robust foundation for policy reform and advocacy initiatives. It offers evidence-based insights to provide lawmakers, activists, and stakeholders with tools to advocate for substantial legislative reforms, thereby promoting more inclusive and equitable surrogacy practices. Research highlighting social implications can influence public opinion, inform policy discussions, and advocate for prioritising social well-being.

The promotion of fairness, justice, and inclusion in the Surrogacy Act of 2021[7] is contingent upon the societal implications of the restricted categories established within the Act. It allows us to confront social norms, reveal the marginalisation of specific groups, and advocate for legislative reforms that uphold reproductive rights and recognise diverse family structures. Comprehending the social ramifications enables us to cultivate a society that is more equitable and inclusive, thereby respecting the rights and choices of each individual.

5 JUSTIFICATION FOR THE EXCLUSION OF CATEGORICAL CATEGORIES AND THEIR CRITERIA

The Act of 2021 delineates exclusionary factors to determine individuals' eligibility for participation in surrogacy arrangements.[8] These categories aim to establish limitations and protect the rights and interests of all individuals. While specific requirements may vary by jurisdiction, the following excluding characteristics are commonly identified in surrogacy legislation:

5.1 *Age limitations*

The Act may impose age limitations on prospective parents and surrogate mothers. A minimum age requirement for prospective parents may be established to ensure they possess the maturity and capability to fulfil their responsibilities. Similarly, surrogate mothers should have a maximum age limit to consider the potential risks associated with advanced maternal age during pregnancy.

5.2 *Medical conditions*

The legislation may prohibit individuals with certain medical conditions from participating in surrogacy arrangements. One must consider these circumstances, which may encompass significant medical or psychological issues jeopardising the safety of the surrogate mother or the child. The safety and health of all involved parties must be the paramount focus.

5.3 *Criminal background*

Exclusionary criteria may encompass individuals with a history of criminal conduct, particularly those related to child abuse, violence, or sexual crimes. This criterion aims to protect the child's welfare and safety while preventing potential exploitation or harm inside the surrogacy agreement.

5.4 *Marital status*

The Surrogacy Act, 2021 may restrict eligibility for surrogacy based on marital status. It may, for instance, inhibit individuals or couples from utilising surrogacy services. The rationale for this exclusion may vary based on cultural or social norms, legal recognition of non-traditional relationships, or concerns regarding the stability and support available to the child.

5.5 *Citizenship or residency*

Some governments establish citizenship or residency requirements, necessitating that at least one intended parent be a citizen or legal resident of the country where the surrogacy occurs. This regulates international surrogacy and addresses concerns around legal jurisdiction and the preservation of children's rights.

6 TALK ABOUT POSSIBLE CONFLICTS AND ETHICAL DILEMMAS

The ethical and moral dilemmas of surrogacy are intricate. A significant concern is the comfort and liberty of surrogate mothers. Safeguarding that will provide complimentary consent, which is essential. If surrogates experience financial or emotional pressure to engage in surrogacy, their autonomy may be undermined, potentially leading to exploitation. Organisational ethical rules, such as those established by the American Society for Reproductive Medicine, emphasise the necessity of safeguarding the rights of surrogate mothers throughout the process.

Commercial surrogacy presents a significant issue about the commodification of reproductive services. The financial compensation in these agreements prompts enquiries on the perception of the surrogate's body as a commodity and the potential power imbalances between intended parents and surrogates. Ethical dilemmas exist about the optimal compensation for surrogate mothers for their reproductive contributions and ensuring that financial incentives minimally influence their decisions.

Moreover, the rights of a child born through surrogacy raise ethical dilemmas regarding the child's entitlement to knowledge of their genetic heritage, the significance of genetic connections in familial relationships, and the psychological implications of surrogate childbirth. Surrogacy presents a complex ethical dilemma, as tensions may arise between the child's right to access knowledge regarding their biological heritage and the intended parents' need for confidentiality.

Various civilisations may encounter significant ethical dilemmas about divergent cultural and theological perspectives on the morality of surrogacy. Tension exists between individuals seeking surrogacy and societal or religious norms, as certain religious traditions deem surrogacy immoral or contrary to natural reproductive processes. This disagreement highlights the challenge of balancing respect for individuals' reproductive autonomy with cultural or religious convictions. Reconciling these conflicting perspectives while enabling individuals to make informed, independent decisions on their reproductive options poses an ethical challenge for politicians, healthcare professionals, and society at large.

The potential for psychological and emotional risks faced by surrogate moms presents a further ethical dilemma. Surrogacy involves significant emotional involvement, particularly during the prenatal period and after birth, potentially leading to attachment and loss. The emotional distress or difficulty in managing the separation from the child generates disagreements among surrogate mothers, highlighting the necessity for comprehensive psychological support and counselling services throughout the surrogacy procedure.

Moreover, ethical enquiries on the rights and responsibilities of prospective parents concerning the disposition of embryos and parental decision-making may arise. Disputes about custody, parental rights, and the handling of embryos in situations of relationship

dissolution or unforeseen occurrences can result in intricate legal challenges and ethical dilemmas. Consequently, explicit legal frameworks and ethical guidelines are essential to address instances where conflicts emerge between the child's best interests and the desires of intended parents to assert their parental rights.

7 ANALYSIS THE SURROGACY ACT, 2021 VIS-À-VIS SURROGACY LEGISLATIONS IN DIFFERENT NATIONS

The Surrogacy Act of 2021 in India restricts surrogacy to married heterosexual couples who have been married for a minimum of five years and possess verified infertility, hence barring single individuals and members of the LGBTQ+ community. In contrast, countries such as Canada and the Netherlands possess inclusive law that upholds reproductive rights for all, thereby promoting equality and autonomy.

Criteria for Genetic Relatedness: The Surrogacy Act, 2021 in India stipulates that, excepting persons requiring donation gametes or embryos, at least one of the intending parents must possess a genetic connection to the child. By emphasising the will to parent and legal recognition, the United States permits surrogacy devoid of genetic connections to go unimpeded. This inclusive methodology prioritises parental intent above biological connections.

The Surrogacy Act of 2021 in India prohibits commercial surrogacy, enabling only altruistic surrogacy, which allows remuneration solely for medical expenditures. This prohibition, intended to prevent exploitation and commodification, restricts access for several individuals. The United States permits commercial surrogacy, enabling surrogates to receive compensation. These approaches highlight ethical concerns regarding the protection of surrogates and the assurance of equitable access to surrogacy options.

The Surrogacy Act of 2021 in India sets regulatory bodies, including the National and State Surrogacy Boards, to supervise surrogacy contracts. These officers supervise compliance monitoring, sanction agreement approvals, and validate eligibility. Likewise, countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom possess legislation safeguarding the rights of intended parents, surrogate mothers, and children, thereby ensuring ethical and legal surrogacy activities.

8 CONCLUSION

Promoting inclusion and social justice in surrogacy practices necessitates a meticulous, comparative approach inspired by global insights. An review of foreign surrogacy regulations offers valuable insights into potential solutions for enhancing the fairness and accessibility of surrogacy for all parties involved. Progressive nations like Canada and the Netherlands endorse inclusive surrogacy legislation, permitting it irrespective of sexual orientation, marital status, or gender identity. These methods emphasise reproductive autonomy and the welfare of all participants, including the child.

In contrast, several restricted jurisdictions like India, governed by the Surrogacy Act of 2021, persist in implementing exclusionary criteria, including the requirement of genetic relatedness and the limitation of access to married heterosexual couples. Numerous prospective parents face constrained reproductive choices, hence potentially marginalising individuals and perpetuating existing societal inequalities.

Despite variations in legal and cultural contexts, a collective commitment to human rights and justice need to regulate surrogacy legislation universally. Policymakers may strive to establish a global surrogacy framework that upholds autonomy, ensures protection, and promotes dignity for all stakeholders by adopting the best practices from inclusive nations. A comparative analysis identifies areas for reform, so facilitating the establishment of more equitable and inclusive surrogacy agreements globally.

9 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMPREHENSIVE SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE

Comprehensive support and guidance for surrogacy initiatives encompasses several factors crucial for the well-being of all involved parties. Firstly, facilitating access to counselling services ensures emotional support and guidance during the surrogacy procedure. This underscores the necessity of professional counsellors well-versed in reproductive ethics, family dynamics, and psychological health, catering to the specific requirements of prospective parents, surrogate mothers, and other pertinent individuals.

Secondly, the promotion of comprehensive knowledge and effective sharing of information is essential. Both intended parents and surrogate mothers can make informed decisions by offering accurate and equitable resources regarding surrogacy processes, potential risks, and legal implications. The creation of instructional materials and programs ensures access to essential knowledge through collaboration among medical professionals, legal authorities, and seasoned practitioners.

Another significant component is legal assistance.[9] Accessible and affordable legal counsel tailored to surrogacy agreements is advocated to comprehend the intricacies of legal difficulties in surrogacy. Establishing legal clinics or organisations that offer pro bono or low-cost assistance aids individuals or couples facing financial constraints in navigating legal complexities, like contract draughting and understanding parental rights. Collaboration among medical professionals, surrogacy agencies, and healthcare providers establishes policies and standards to ensure optimal medical treatment.

Advocating for the establishment of peer mentorship programs and support systems provides invaluable emotional support. In addition to formal counselling programs, intended parents and surrogate mothers may be linked with individuals who have experienced comparable situations, facilitating the exchange of insights, practical guidance, and emotional support.

10 POTENTIAL REFORMS AND FUTURE ORIENTATIONS

One potential modification is to endorse the Surrogacy Act of 2021 by incorporating previously prohibited groups, which may involve revisiting the exclusion criteria and expanding the eligibility parameters to encompass historically marginalised groups or persons. The laws require amendment to let same-sex couples, individuals without a genetic connection to the child, and others with diverse reproductive statuses to receive surrogacy procedures.

Incorporating anti-discrimination provisions in the Surrogacy Act, 2021 will ensure equitable access to surrogacy contracts. Such sections would explicitly prohibit discrimination based on factors such as sexual orientation, gender identity, genetic affiliation, or disability. Implementing anti-discrimination policies will enable the law to confront societal prejudices, safeguard individual rights, and promote diversity.

Reforms must prioritise comprehensive assistance and guidance for individuals negotiating the surrogacy process. Implementing counselling services, educational resources, and legal assistance might ensure that all participants had the knowledge and tools necessary for informed decision-making. By offering comprehensive support, the legislation can promote equitable access and protect the welfare of all individuals involved in surrogacy arrangements.

Policymakers can amend legislation to address the evolving demands and challenges of the surrogacy landscape through continuous research and evaluation. Implementing these modifications will facilitate the establishment of a more equitable and socially responsible surrogacy framework that safeguards the rights and welfare of all involved parties.

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Enhancing rehabilitation for prisoners: The effect of mental health interventions on violence reduction and positive outcomes in India

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ABSTRACT: Although mental health problems are rather common among Indian inmates, the nation's prison system has given this urgent issue little thought. Lack of comprehensive mental health services in Indian jails has resulted in higher degrees of violence and unsatisfactory results for people behind bars. The need for mental health treatment in declining violence and educating results for Indian convicts is dealt with in this paper. This study examines the present level of mental health services in Indian prisons and explores the frequency of mental health illnesses among prisoners. It also addresses the need for legislative reforms and proper resource allocation as well as the possible advantages of offering jailed people thorough mental health treatment programs. Acknowledging the need for mental health treatment in the correctional system enables India to build a road for more successful reintegration of prisoners into society and more efficient rehabilitation.

Keywords: Mental Health Treatment, Convicts, Criminal Justice System, Rehabilitation, Prison Reform

1 INTRODUCTION

In the current scenario, people are realizing the importance of mental health treatment in prisons all around. Many Nations have given mental health[1] treatments top priority within their prison systems as they realize its importance for general wellness, behavior, and successful rehabilitation[2] of prisoners. But in India, this facet of prisoner treatment has been mostly overlooked, with dire effects for society at large as well as for individual prisoners.

India's incarceration rate has been rising continuously, which has crowded jails and taxed resources. Although the correctional system's emphasis has always been on punishment and containment, there is growing body of academic and legal discourse that addresses and acknowledges the mental health issues of the prisoners. Among the population of prisoners, mental health problems are very common. These untreated mental health issues add to the greater violence in prisons and jails, therefore endangering the safety and welfare of staff members as well as other inmates.

Understanding the need of mental health treatment inside the prison system, India[3] may encourage a more rehabilitative approach of detention. The Criminal Justice System in our country has always focused on punitive measures of punishment and had laid minimal emphasis on the rehabilitative approach and the mental and psychological care of the prisoners. Improved psychological well-being services would not only assist the wellness and successful re-integration of prisoners but also provide safer prison surroundings and reduce the load on the criminal justice system.

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2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts the doctrinal method of research. The goal is to have a thorough awareness of how mental health treatments might improve offender rehabilitation and help to lower violence in prisons. For this the study relies on the critical analysis of various case laws, policy documents, statutes and reports.

3 RESEARCH GOALS

- To examine the existing legal and policy framework governing mental health treatment in our country.
- To evaluate whether the current policies and prison framework are effective to incorporate mental health treatments.
- To provide frameworks and reforms to enable the integration of mental health in rehabilitation programs and prisons.

4 STATEMENT OF THE ISSUE

Often disregarded are the criteria for mental health of inmates in India, resulting in a significant issue within the Indian correctional system[4]. Lack of thorough psychological well-being assistance and help for persons in jail has had detrimental effects on the successful reintegration and rehabilitation into the society.

The present resources which deal with the healthcare of the prisoners in the Indian prisons seems to be largely inadequate. It suffers greatly from limited resources, inadequate staffing, and a lack of specialized training for prison staff in spotting and treating mental health problems. This disparity deprives inmates of necessary mental health treatments and interventions.

Unresolved mental health problems lead to more conflict, hostility, and dangerous situations for staff members as well as for convicts. The probability of violence increases without sufficient mental health treatment, endangering the safety and welfare of all. Recognizing the need of mental health care inside the prison system is crucial if we are to meet these difficulties. Reducing violence and enhancing results for imprisoned people in India depends on operational policies, more resource allocation, and comprehensive mental health campaigns meant to meet the particular needs of confined people.

5 RELATION AMONG MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS AND PRISONS VIOLENCE IN INDIA

Within the Indian jail system, the relationship between mental health problems and violence seems to be a major concern. As per a recent report, in 2022, there were only 25 psychologists or psychiatrists for over 5.7 lakh inmates, meaning 1 professional per 22,929 prisoners. Although the number of reported inmates with mental illness doubled from 4,470 in 2012 to 9,084 in 2022, the support system has not kept pace.[5]

Many contributing elements highlight the pressing need of treating mental health problems in order to lower the cases of violence in jails. They are as follows:

Untreated Mental Health Issues: Lack of thorough mental health initiatives and restricted access to experts in prisons sometimes results in the neglect of problems, therefore raising the chances of violent events and creating danger for all within and outside the prison premises.

Co-occurring Substance Abuse Issues: Many of the inmates with mental health problems also struggle with drug misuse issues, which can aggravate already present mental health issues and compromise impulse control and judgment.

Environmental Stressors: The jail surroundings can be demanding and help mental health problems either develop or worsen. A hostile and emotionally charged environment can result from overcrowding, lack of privacy, aggression, and personal liberty lost.

Insufficient Staff Training and Resources: Managing people with mental health issues and handling conflict situations is something prison staff members sometimes get little instruction in. Effective de-escalation strategies can be hampered by the lack of resources, including mental health professionals and specialized training for personnel.

6 LAWS GOVERNING MENTAL HEALTH OF PRISONERS IN INDIA

In India, there is no particular legislation which talks about the protection of mental health of the prisoners. Although various provisions in several other prevailing statutes, the judgments of the courts and International Conventions and treaties confer on the State the responsibility to protect the mental well-being of the prisoners.

In Re-Inhuman Conditions in 1382 Prisons[6] (2016), the Supreme Court directed the government to ensure basic human rights, including health care, in prisons. In the year 2024, keeping in mind the inhumane conditions of prisoners, the Supreme Court issued directions to States and UTs to prevent overcrowding in prisons[7] In the case of Sartaj @ Allaharakha v. State of NCT of Delhi (2023)[8], the Delhi High Court issues directions to authorities for protecting Mental Integrity, Soundness of Mind of Prisoners. The mental health care and the prison administration under the prison system in India is governed by the blend of provisions in the Constitution of India, the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017, The Prisoners Act, 1900 and the Model Prison Manual, 2016.

6.1 *The constitution of India*

Article 21 of the Constitution guarantees right to life and personal liberty. This includes the right to live with dignity and right to basic medical facilities and healthcare for prisoners. The Directive Principles of the State Policy under Article 39(e) mandates the protection of health for prisoners too.

6.2 *The mental healthcare act, 2017*

Under this Act, every individual has the right to quality and affordable services with regard to mental health. As per Section 103, all the prisoners with mental illness should not be confined in the premises of the prison, rather they must undergo there treatment in a mental health establishment. A list of duties and responsibilities of the police, courts and prisons are also provided in Sections 100 – 105 of the Act.

6.3 *The prisoners act, 1900*

This Act provides that all the prisoners suffering from mental illness should be transferred to different prisons or to mental health establishments.

6.4 *Model prison manual, 2016*

This manual is issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs and lays importance on the mental health care of the prisoners. It provides for the procedures for screening in relating to

medical and mental health upon admission and during incarceration. The manual provides several recommendations too.

6.5 *International instruments (Guiding India's obligations)*

The Nelson Mandela Rules and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities lays emphasis on the importance of right to dignified life, which includes the mental healthcare for prisoners.

Regardless of what is prevailing in black and white in the law of the land and other Statutes, significant implementation gaps prevail. The position of the mental health care of prisoners in our country do not even touch upon the minimum standards prescribed by various International treaties and Conventions. Stringent measures for strengthening the enforcement mechanism, regular audits of the mental healthcare services in prison and allotting experts and professionals relating to mental health care in prisons are some methods which must be opted in order to align with the basic standards prescribed under the Constitution and International Human Rights Treaties.

7 OBSTACLES AND INCENTIVES TO MENTAL HEALTH CARE IN PRISONS[9]

Improving mental health treatment in Indian prisons calls for an all-encompassing strategy including sufficient financing, better training for jail staff, de-stigmatizing initiatives, better cooperation among stakeholders, development of infrastructure, cultural competency in the treatment, etc. By overcoming these challenges, the jail system can improve care for prisoners.

The greatest obstacles in offering sufficient mental health treatment in correctional facilities is the lack of resources and financial support. The effective treatment is greatly hampered by inadequate staffing numbers and a lack of specialized training for jail workers in mental health concerns. Providing mental health care is also hampered by packed jail buildings. Limited space and poor infrastructure make it challenging to set up specific mental health facilities or design therapeutic settings for counselling and treatment. Achieving good results depends on the continuity of mental health being followed. Poor post-release mental health care planning and coordination can lead to a treatment gap, therefore raising the likelihood of relapse or reoffending. Another barrier in providing prisons with effective mental health treatment is language and cultural barriers, as the ones from different backgrounds many have certain specific issues in a cosmopolitan country.

8 FACTORS ENDANGERING MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS IN PRISONS

Keeping the view the situation and considering the obstacles which can arise,[10] the demand of the present day is an all-encircling policy which will include timely identification of mental health disorders, treatment, awareness programs, rehabilitation and reintegration. Individuals who are incarcerated are more susceptible to pre-existing mental health illnesses, including mood swings, PTSD, anxiety and various personality disorders. These problems often stem from inadequate early intervention and insufficient community-based care, resulting in neglected or poorly managed conditions. A considerable proportion of inmates have experienced traumatic events, including physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, neglect, or exposure to violence, which may result in various mental health issues. For the ones who are suffering from trauma, the jail environment might serve as a trigger, intensifying their psychological discomfort. To manage their mental health challenges or the demands of everyday life, numerous individuals resort to substance abuse, exacerbating existing conditions and potentially leading to the development of new disorders, thereby establishing a

cycle of co-occurring issues that necessitate specialised treatment. The prison environment, characterised by isolation, overcrowding, absence of meaningful activities, violence, and reduced personal autonomy, significantly contributes to the emergence and exacerbation of mental health issues among inmates.

9 BENEFITS OF MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT FOR PRISONERS

Mental health therapy in prisons offers numerous benefits for inmates, staff, and society as a whole. It enhances mental well-being, reduces aggression, improves rehabilitation outcomes, fosters relationships, and increases the likelihood of successful reintegration into society. Promoting good transformation and improved outcomes for Indian prisoners depends on realizing the significance of mental health care in the penal system.

Treatment help convicts to have better general mental well-being. It improves emotional stability, helps people control symptoms of mental health illnesses, and lessens stress. Better coping strategies, self-regulation, and a sense of wellness that this fosters then help to increase quality of life. Mental health treatment assists inmates in cultivating improved and more constructive relationships with their families and communities. Addressing mental health issues facilitates the acquisition of effective communication skills, conflict resolution strategies, and empathy, so enhancing interpersonal relationships and alleviating familial tensions.

Implementing efficient mental health care in prisons can significantly decrease the incidence of violence among inmates. These treatments can create safer surroundings for staff members as well as for inmates by treating mental health problems and addressing the fundamental causes of aggressiveness and violent behaviour.

Mental health care in prisons helps prisoners be ready for a successful return into society. Dealing with mental health issues helps people develop the tools and techniques required to control their mental well-being, handle pressure, and make wise decisions about their lives. This increases their prospects of finding work, keeping steady residence, and avoiding reoffending. Good mental health treatments lower violence, disciplinary events, and the need for emergency medical treatment. Promoting mental health and effective reintegration can help to greatly lower the expenses related to repeat crimes and re-incarceration.

10 SUGGESTIONS FOR MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT IN INDIAN PRISONS

Acknowledging the need of mental health support, guiding resources accordingly, and using evidence-driven approaches will help prisoners live better, lower violence rates, and increase the possibility of successful rehabilitation and reintegration into the society.

Improvement of mental health treatment in Indian prisons depends on adequate financing and appropriate use of resources. Through staff training, drug access, and dedicated mental health facilities, the government should provide sufficient money to enhance prison mental health treatments.

Comprehensive training on mental health concerns should be given to prison personnel on effective communication tactics, de-escalation techniques, and sign and signal of mental health diseases identification.

Provide easily available mental health services to every prisoner. This entails setting up mental health clinics or facilities inside jails, guaranteeing frequent visits by psychologists, and supplying suitable drugs and treatment choices.

India can strengthen its dedication to safeguarding human rights by combining national and international viewpoints, therefore enhancing the mental health results of its prison population at the same time. Understanding that protecting one calls for addressing the other, this all-encompassing viewpoint links mental health with human rights.

11 MODERN TECHNIQUES FOR REFORMATION

Modern techniques for rehabilitation of prisoners have gradually embraced the techniques which are evidence based for addressing issues such as distress and aggression. One of such techniques is Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. CBT helps in restructuring the patterns of negative thoughts and hence it promotes behavioural change. This technique has been widely supported by the National Institute of Mental Health. This technique has also been integrated in the prison program of Tihar Jail.

Mindfulness Based Interventions is another technique which can be followed. These MBIs include meditation practices like Vipassana, which leaves a significant impact on the enhancement of emotional regulations and helps in reduction of impulsive behaviour. Such practices have also been implemented in correctional facilities like Yerwada and Tihar. These practices can also be complemented by therapy sessions and hobby sessions, like art, dancing etc.

Most importantly, the use of AI along with the other techniques marks a substantial progress in rehabilitation, as AI driven tools can help in detecting the disorders at an early stage, by analysing the voice, or by predictive techniques, or by recognizing the behavioural patterns of inmates.

Using these techniques, the prison system can move towards an effective correction model, rooted in healing of inmates.

12 CONCLUSION

All things considered, the value of mental health treatment in lowering violence and improving outcomes for Indian prisoners is really great. With limited access, inadequate resources, and no thorough treatment program, the mental health services now provided in Indian reformatories are inadequate. The frequency of mental health problems among inmates has greatly hampered efforts at rehabilitation and added to the violence among offenders. This study underlines the main obstacles to efficient mental health treatment in prisons: insufficient financing, ongoing stigma, poor staff training, and the effect of environmental stresses. It has also pointed up the elements causing mental health problems among inmates: pre-existing ailments, trauma history, drug misuse, and disruptive social elements.

Unaddressed mental health issues, coupled with substance abuse and inadequate staff training, increase the likelihood of violent incidents, hence jeopardising both inmates and prison staff. Nonetheless, there remains optimism for advancement. This research paper presents various recommendations to enhance mental health treatment in Indian prisons. Crucial initial endeavours include securing funding and resource distribution, formulating comprehensive mental health policy, and enhancing staff training. Mental health screening and assessment, accessible mental health professionals, and the development of individualised treatment regimens are equally essential. Providing mental health therapy to inmates yields numerous advantages. It enhances psychological well-being, mitigates violent behaviour, augments rehabilitation success, and fortifies social and familial connections—all of which ultimately facilitate a successful reintegration into society. Investing in mental health treatments within correctional facilities can yield long-term financial benefits by decreasing recidivism rates, minimising emergency interventions, and thereby reducing incidents of violence.

India can move toward building a more rehabilitative and encouraging correctional system by realizing the present situation of mental health treatment in prisons. By stressing therapeutic access and a friendly setting, a whole strategy can lower violence and enhance results. Following the suggestions in this document provides a road for effective prisoner reintegration and significant change.

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From suppression to expression: Is the sedition era truly over?

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ABSTRACT: In light of the Supreme Court order to restrain the Central and State governments from taking any coercive action under Section 124A of Indian Penal Code, 1860 while Union government re-examines law of Sedition, Law Commission of India passed its 279th Report on "Usage of the law of Sedition" with its recommendations in April 2023. Further, on 11 August, 2023, the Union government introduced three new bills to replace the decades old criminal laws. Among many amendments, the Union Home Minister perspicuously declared that the law of sedition has been repealed without reservation under the Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023. While this assertion came as a sign of relief for the champions of free speech and civil liberties, it has been short lived, as a similar provision, that is, Sec. 152 is found in the new act. Therefore, this paper aims to critically analyze the aforesaid provision taking into account the recommendations of Law Commission of India and whether law of sedition has been truly repealed or ostensibly and revamped into a prudent or perilous law.

Keywords: Sedition, Freedom of Speech and Expression, Dissent, Democracy, Human Rights

1 INTRODUCTION

Sec. 124A of IPC, 1860, popularly known as the sedition law, is found in colonial jurisprudence as a draconian instrument of control rather than justice. It was written by Thomas Macaulay which was later made statutory in 1870 by British government with purpose of curtailing the anti-colonial sentiment and opposing the dissent against the Crown (S, 2022). Though anachronistic and oppressive in its origins, the provision remained alive in the post-independence era. However, certain observations were made by Supreme Court on sedition until court upheld its constitutionality in "*Kedar Nath Singh v. State of Bihar* (1962 SCR SUPL. (2) 769)", it narrowed its application to words used or actions that incite violence or have 'tendency to create public disorder'. However, the provision has mainly served as a convenient tool in the hands of the State, which has no hesitation in exercising the provision to suppress political dissent, media criticism and activist speech.

Freedom of speech & expression under Art. 19(1)(a) of Indian Constitution, cannot be regarded as only a 'civil liberty', but is rather the sine qua non of democratic legitimacy in a constitutional democracy established on the principles of pluralism and participatory governance. The essence of an open society is about freedom to criticize the government, challenge the orthodoxy and espouse a contrary view. Nevertheless, due to the frequent use of sedition provision, this debate has had a dangerous chilling effect, leading to an atmosphere of fear and inhibition.

The introduction of the BNS, 2023 has formally repealed and replaced Section 124A of IPC by Section 152, a provision which appears to be modernized, but raises serious concern due to its broad and ambiguous language. Even though the government has maintained a clean break with colonial laws, legal scholars and civil rights advocates say that the new

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provision brings back sedition in a new form. This leaves a critical research gap for the lack of doctrinal analysis as to whether Section 152 could actually align with democratic constitutionalism or is instead just reforming the old law under another name. Therefore, this research paper addresses issue whether repeal of sedition law in India is substantive or symbolic? The purpose is to assess the constitutionality of the Section 152 of BNS vis-a-vis Section 124A of IPC, examine its implications on freedom of speech and expression, democratic participation & civil liberties in contemporary India.

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To examine whether the repeal of Section 124A of IPC genuinely marks end of colonial sedition law in India.
- To analyze Section 152 of BNS, 2023, in light of recommendations of Law Commission of India.
- To evaluate the judicial and legislative discourse on sedition through doctrinal and comparative scrutiny.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a doctrinal research methodology, focusing on primary legal sources such as constitutional provisions, statutes, judicial rulings, and official reports. Secondary sources include scholarly articles, legal commentaries, and journal publications. Through a critical analysis of the legislative evolution, judicial interpretation, and recent statutory developments, the paper evaluates the departure or continuity of sedition law within India's legal framework.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 *Colonial origins and post-independence developments*

The sedition law under Section 124A of IPC codified in 19th century was a quintessential colonial tool invented to suppress the political dissent and to protect the continuity of the colonial administration from protest. The provision was drafted initially by Thomas Macaulay but formally introduced by James Fitzjames Stephen in 1870 which criminalized any expression (spoken, written, or visible representation) that intended to defame or sought to defame government, in such a way that it would bring or sought to bring into hatred or contempt, or excited or sought to excite disaffection towards it. Sec. 124A served as a preferred tool of state repression in the trials of Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Mahatma Gandhi. In the historic 1922's trial, Gandhi defined the law as 'the prince among the political sections of the IPC by which the liberty of citizen can be suppressed'. Consequently, Sec. 124A found its place in a jurisprudential paradigm that was inconsistent with democratic freedoms and normative constitutionalism.

However, it has been subjected to continuous legal and political contestation. Despite the unease expressed in the debates of the Constituent Assembly, the provision was not completely repealed. The seminal case of "*Kedar Nath Singh v. State of Bihar* (1962 SCR SUPL. (2) 769)" which created judicial moment for sedition in the constitutional history of India is pivotal in the history. Sec. 124A was upheld but was read down to apply only in cases where the speech or expression tend to or incite violence or threaten public order. The judgment was said to be balancing the law with Art. 19(1)(a) of Constitution that guarantees freedom of speech & expression subject to reasonable restrictions. However, this judicial harmonization did not eliminate the doctrinal ambiguity of "incitement" and the overly broad phrasing of the provision which allowed the state to retain a substantial discretionary power exercised in selective and politically motivated prosecutions.

4.2 *Post-Kedar Nath Era*

Sedition prosecutions rose again in the post-Kedar Nath era unmoored from the incitement to violence threshold. Sec. 124A has been frequently used to book journalists, activists, students and political dissidents for criticizing government policies or for symbolic protest. The empirical pattern of its use suggests that the law has worked, as a rule of thumb for authoritarians rather than as a tool for exercising legitimate regulatory authority. No judicial pronouncements post-Kedar Nath have gone beyond the limitations prescribed therein, but enforcement agencies and lower courts have often trampled on it in practice. Such a disjunction between the interpretative jurisprudence of the higher judiciary and the praxis of law enforcement suggests that there is a pernicious potential of sedition law for policing in democratic framework. The colonial era of Sec. 124A, therefore, outreached itself and not just survived but evolved along with a democratic binding; it was a very serious question about the constitutional maturity and Indian state's commitment to protect dissent and civil liberties (Carrington, 1919). According to National Crime Records Bureau data, 76 sedition cases were registered across the country in 2021, 73 in 2020, 93 in 2019, 70 in 2018, 51 in 2017, 35 in 2016, 30 in 2015 and 47 in 2014 with a very low conviction rate.

4.3 *Judicial pushback and the SG Vombatkere judgement*

The Court's interim order in "*SG Vombatkere v. Union of India* (WRIT PETITION(C) No.682 OF 2021)" was an important milestone in the constitutional jurisprudence of India with regard to the balance between state power and individual liberty. The Court by directing both the Central & State governments to refrain from registering FIRs, conducting investigations or taking coercive action under Sec. 124A of IPC rendered the sedition provision inoperative, though temporarily. It was no mere repeal or judicial invalidation. Rather, it was a rare exercise of constitutional discretion in the name of Art. 142, as a response to legislative inaction. It was meant to emphasize how the judiciary has woken up to a chilling effect of sedition laws restricting freedom of speech & expression when applied disproportionately to dissenters, journalists & civil society actors. In this regard, its intervention functioned as a de facto moratorium on a colonial-era provision that is coming to be seen as anathema to the constitutional promise of democratic engagement.

4.4 *The 279th Law Commission Report: Reform or Retention?*

The judiciary's role in the removal of sedition has been proactive. In tandem with this, Law Commission of India in its 279th Report, published in April, 2023, also reviewed in detail the usage, scope and necessity of the sedition provision. The report acknowledged the abuse of Sec. 124A but was not in favor of its complete repeal. The Commission proposed a calibrated approach whereby the offence would continue to exist but with safeguards that will prevent it from abuse. It recommended a revision of the statutory language to limit its scope, inclusion of procedural filters like prior approval from a senior police officer for a case to be registered and adjacency of evidentiary thresholds to prevent a case from being registered wherein there were no chances of getting a conviction. Notably, the Commission marked a difference between legitimate criticism of the government and sedition by making clear that only speech that incites violence or public disorder should be considered a crime. Nevertheless, the Commission expressed its concern over national security threats and maintained that in a new shape, sedition is still a necessary tool to deal with destabilization acts, particularly in a globalized world that is rife with cyber threats and misinformation (Singh, 2023).

Yet, the Commission's reluctance to indicate repeal rests between the larger tension of preservation of national integrity and the promotion of basic freedom. The insistence that such laws be retained, with safeguards, however, is very troubling in light of its implications

that procedural obstacles cannot insulate a law from executive overreach. On the one hand, it is a theoretically nice distinction between permissible dissent and unlawful sedition, but in practice this kind of distinction is often lacking because it is such a used panoply for calling dissent unlawful, and there is so much leeway in the scope of interpretation that law enforcement can pursue. It also failed to seize a chance to cleave a decisive break from colonial legal legacy and to re-set criminal law to the framework of the Constitution by not calling for a clean repeal. Together, the Supreme Court's order and the Law Commission's report indicate an inflection point at which the judiciary is much more in the spirit of constitutionalism than the legislature and its advisory arms (Aksharra, 2025).

4.5 *Section 152 of the BNS, 2023: A New-Age Sedition Law?*

S.152 Act endangering sovereignty, unity and integrity of India-

> "*Whoever, purposely or knowingly, by words, either spoken or written, or by signs, or by visible representation, or by electronic communication or by use of financial mean, or otherwise, excites or attempts to excite, secession or armed rebellion or subversive activities, or encourages feelings of separatist activities or endangers sovereignty or unity and integrity of India; or indulges in or commits any such act shall be punished with imprisonment for life or with imprisonment which may extend to seven years, and shall also be liable to fine."*
>
> *Explanation.—"Comments expressing disapprobation of the measures, or administrative or other action of the Government with a view to obtain their alteration by lawful means without exciting or attempting to excite the activities referred to in this section do not constitute an offence under this section."*

A more textual and thematic reading of Sec. 152 of the BNS, 2023, however, reveals a reintroduction, albeit in a new role, of the principles lurking in Sec. 124A of IPC. It criminalizes activities that 'excite or attempt to excite secession or armed rebellion or subversive activities' against the sovereignty and unity of India. Its language is broad and boundless, the use of vague and subjective terms such as "subversive activities", "endangering the sovereignty", etc., has a chilling resemblance to the vague terms of Sec. 124A. Such linguistic ambiguity invites discretionary interpretation, thus susceptible to misuse, especially against political dissents, critics of public institutions or any other form of expression, to realize the scrapped sedition law.

4.6 *Judicial interpretation of section 152: Tejender Pal Singh case*

In "*Tejender Pal Singh v. State of Rajasthan & Anr.* (S.B. Criminal Misc (Pet.) No. 5005/2024)", the Rajasthan High Court, while quashing the charges under BNS Sec. 152 and 197, held that these provisions though based in similar words to Section 124A of the IPC (now repealed) shall not be used to stifle lawful dissent and freedom of expression. It also observed that "prima facie, it (S.152) appears to be rather reintroducing section 124-A (sedition) by another name. It is rather debatable as to which of two provisions i.e. the one repealed (sedition) or the one reintroduced is more stringent." Further Sec. 152, which punishes acts subversive of India's sovereignty and integrity, can only be invoked where the act is done with a deliberate and malicious intent to stir up secession or rebellion, and cannot be used for any critical or emotive speech.

4.7 *Assessing the repeal: Reform or rebranding?*

Given that Sec. 124A of IPC is supposedly repealed under BNS, 2023, the ostensible repeal implies that this change in the law is not a historical departure from colonial residues but

may be a strategic linguistic adjustment. Formally, Section 124A has been omitted but Section 152 of BNS brings in a provision with larger and more amorphous contours. Although Sec. 152 criminalizes acts which endanger sovereignty, integrity and unity of India, it borrows from the core aims of the erstwhile sedition law but with a broader reach encompassing electronic communication and symbolic acts. This is a rebranding in sedition, and it is dressed in the language of national interest, but not a dilution. The alleged legislative reform is undermined by the substantive continuity of the offence in retaining discretionary authority with the State, except where there are sufficient procedural safeguards or definitional precision. Such a provision, however, especially when assessed from the vantage point of the principles of constitutional law, in particular the tests of reasonableness in Art. 19(2), is difficult to reconcile with proportionality and overbreadth (Sen, 2016).

In addition, the consequences for civil liberties and a certain type of democratic participation are tremendous. In terms that are also elastic, endangering sovereignty, there is ample scope for executive overreach and arbitrary enforcement along with a chilling effect on political dissent, social activism, investigative journalism. It is clear from patterns of post-enactment that there is already a continuity of coercive State action against critics, including arrests based on broad interpretations of similar provisions. This is an attack on the right to dissent and the public protest as a basic democratic tool. Including "electronic communication" increases the threat to journalistic freedom; surveillance and targeting of online expression compounding the problem in the digital age. Nevertheless, the new provision, being of constitutional interest, has to be approached not just in terms of textual deviation from the sedition law but also in terms of its functional consequences and conformity with the basic rights texture. The credibility of the reform process is thrown into doubt by the dissonance which exists between what is said and what is written in political forums and the actual architecture of the law (Uppal, 2024).

5 CONCLUSION

Upon the removal of Sec. 124A from IPC & insertion of Sec. 152, it is a watershed moment in protecting democratic rights. However, insertion of Sec. 152 resembles a continuation of the punitive approach towards dissent and expression. Linguistic remaking of sedition, in substance, but under new terms of expression, does not effectively dismantle the scaffolding of state power that criminalizes dissent, but, indeed, arguably widens the discretionary net on the purported cloak of protecting national integrity and public order. In regard to this legislative sleight of hand, which merely exposed the deeper jurisprudential dissonance between constitutional promise of free speech & coercive undercurrents of criminal law, is most important. Because intent and not action sufficed, this leads to the critical concern of performative deconstruction of deluded colonial-era legal reform without substantive deconstruction of colonial-era legal philosophy. The digital age thus highlights that persistent reliance, in the state, on vague and overly broad penal provisions invites scrutiny of any legislative language as well as of democratic intent. Hence, unless judicial interpretation, civil vigilance, and legislative precision conjoined universally concur to admit constitutional morality, the specter of sedition may linger, it seems, but in the attire of legislative modernity.

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Digital justice and the future of family courts: The role of AI in transforming access to justice in India

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ABSTRACT: This article explores how digital technologies and artificial intelligence (AI) are transforming India's family law system. There are about 12 lakh pending family court cases across India as of 2024 and India's judiciary is facing huge backlog, especially in the cases of women's rights, child custody, maintenance, and domestic violence. The integration of AI-driven devices, like case triage, e-filing, indicative analytics and on the online dispute resolution, have shown early indications of enhancing access to legal system. Based on government reports, NJDG information, and latest digital justice stats, this research critically examines, both, the potential associated with Artificial intelligence in family legislation applications and its constraints. The results demonstrate quantifiable gains in judicial accessibility and efficiency while emphasizing the necessity of inclusive digital design and ethical oversight.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Access to Justice, ecourts, Family Law, Judicial Digitization

1 INTRODUCTION

Indian Family law disputes are frequently at the cross-road of personal, emotional, & socio-economic issue. Question such as divorce, custody, maintenance and domestic violence have the status of legal matters only but experiences which forms lifelines for persons—particularly females. Indian legislative framework has evolved allover couple of decades, yet judiciary gets hugely over taxed. With over 45 million backlog pending cases throughout the country, the cases of patents (be it matrimonial or otherwise) courts deal with poor efficiency, leading to chronic suffering and denial of instant relief. In this context, technology, particularly artificial intelligence (AI), offers a compelling promise. The AI powered innovation in the legal environment for not replace the judicial thinking but help in making the legal process of doing work more efficiently, more embodiments for the access and for making the whole justice system more inclusive in nature. This paper looks into the collision between Family Law and AI in India to understand with how Artificial intelligence tools hurdling in a full swing in hunt of changing way for resolving disputes, providing easy access to justice and resolving gender based legal bars.

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2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To estimate and identify the scope and trends of pending cases of family dispute in India in National Judicial Data Grid data.
- To review the effectiveness of AI used by tools and digital platforms to increase access to justice involved in family courts.
- To investigate how digitisation of judicial system affects marginalized groups, particular women, in family law disputes.
- To develop policy suggestions on the ethical and fair use of AI in family justice.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is qualitative research, using the mixed-methodology. Quantitative data on time of disposal, adjournment and digitalisation rate were fetched from official sources like National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG), Ministry of Law and Justice & National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB). Also used, supplementary qualitative data, including user surveys and impact evaluations done by legal aid organizations and to understand the adoption of the technology in family courts. Comparative analyses were made from pilot ODR (Online Dispute Resolution) platforms and AI mediated mediation tools used in constituencies of Indian states. Graphs and also tabular summaries are majorly given for presenting state-wise trends regarding Perusal as well as digital reform results[1].

3.1 *Challenges in family law dispute resolution in India*

India's family law has been established to render fair justice in personal matters that contains: family reconciliation, khaula, maintenance, jawak gerah, and kids' personal property interest, commencement of matrimonial jurisdiction by a court-to participant, domestic violence assailant, etc. But the everyday reality of litigants very often proves to be more complicated and harder. According to the National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG), as of 2024 [2], around 11.2% of the total current district court cases are under the family law categories with a large majority being delayed for years. States like Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and Bihar are the worst-hit seeing pendency of over 2.3 lakh, 1.8 lakh and 1.3 lakh matrimonial matters respectively. Such huge numbers are indicative of the strain on the system being placed on the judicial infrastructure and they show that there is a pressing requirement for reform.

Table 1. State-wise Pending Family Law Cases in India (2024).

State	Pending Family Law Cases (2024)
Uttar Pradesh	2,30,000+
Maharashtra	1,80,000
Bihar	1,30,000
West Bengal	1,00,000
Tamil Nadu	80,000
Karnataka	80,000
Rajasthan	70,000
Madhya Pradesh	70,000
Delhi (UT)	50,000

Table 1 summarizes the latest 2024 estimates of family law case pendency in key states: *Source: National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG), District Courts Dashboard, accessed December 2024*

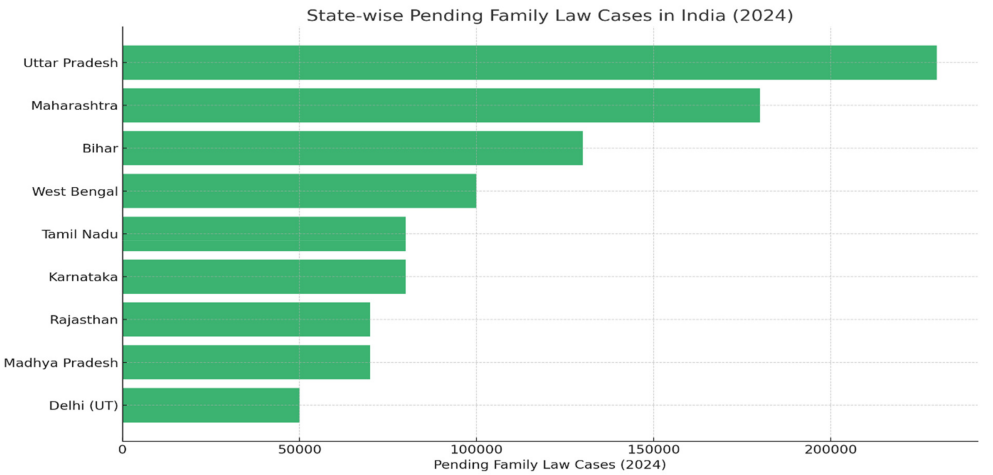


Figure 1. State-wise pending family law cases in India (2024).

Figure 1 state-wise outstanding family law cases in India (2024) presents the distribution of awaiting family law cases by key Indian states as on 2024. Uttar Pradesh tops the list with more than 2.3 lakh cases, followed by Maharashtra, and Bihar, where the cases are under heavy pressure on family courts in densely populated areas. The statistics highlight the necessity for reform action urgently across the family jurisdiction and significant technological intervention to deal with the build-up of backlogs of family disputes.

These delays have serious and irreparable prejudices. Maintenance applications to give lifesaving financial aid to women and their children too often take 12-18 months just to achieve interim relief. Child custody cases on the same would see an excess of adjournments leading to prolonged family disparagement and worst affects psychology of children. The mass of procedural obstacles including repeat adjournments and strike action by inadequate court staff exposes parties to protracted exposure to unbudgeted for conflict.

Survivors of domestic violence also face structural hurdles. According to the national crime records bureau (NCRB) at least 130,000 cases were registered under section 498A of the Indian Penal Code in 2022[3] alone in India indicating the cruelty happening inside the marital home. Some of these complaints evolve into protracted legal proceedings where survivors wrestle for restraining order or find shelter services. NJDG data further show that more than 70% of all civil, including all family disputes, have been pending for over a year showing that delay is normal and not abnormal.

Preliminary research done at a grassroots level from 2018 to 2022 showed that more than 60 percent of the women seeking family law[4] relief at the rural districts delayed for more than a year before receipt of the first substantive hearing. A large number of litigants eventually dropped their cases on account of mental frustration, lack of legal expertise, or the insufficiency of money to engage in litigation. In particular, women's have double folding challenges due to patriarchy so whereas, there is social stigma as well as mobility issues too.

Different challenges are also the fact that there is no dispute resolution resources available to women who are poor, lack of gender sensitive court environments, and lack of legal advocates for underprivileged litigants. In premises without special family courts or

mediation infrastructure, cases frequently get diverted from one to another of ordinary civil courts, thereby worsening the confusion and the delay. In such a climate, subscription to ai tools and of digital infrastructure becomes not merely a convenience but an essential in restoring accessibility and reliability in family law audit.

4.2 *The digital judiciary: eCourts and tech adoption*

Since its 2015 initiation and successive expansions the eCourts project of India has reached significant benchmarks concerning judicial digitalization[5]. The case information system (cis) implementation reached over 95% of the total 20,000 computerised courts throughout India in early 2024. According to the eCommittee of the supreme court data shows that over 13 crore (130 million) cases together with 11 crore (110 million) orders and judgments are now available through the national judicial data grid (NJDG)[6].

The implementation of virtual hearings and e-filing systems in family law has enabled numerous women to participate in legal proceedings by removing physical appearance limitations such as childcare demands and security worries and social limitations. District implementation of e-filing technology in family courts resulted in a minimum 15 percent reduction of first-hearing duration and procedural adjournments decreased by 10 to 12 percent according to ministry of law and justice assessments in 2023[7]. Digital processing has minimized delays of domestic violence act protection orders especially throughout pandemic times because of physical court restrictions limited access.

The ability for online users to monitor their court cases without legal assistance has eliminated one major legal exploit point that used to distort the system. Rural and urban slum NGOs utilize electronic apps which link up with NJDG data to help women monitor their cases while printing court documents and preparing for judicial proceedings. The evolution of family justice now offers a new pathway to fulfil the needs of litigants by using accessible data for enhanced system operations[8].

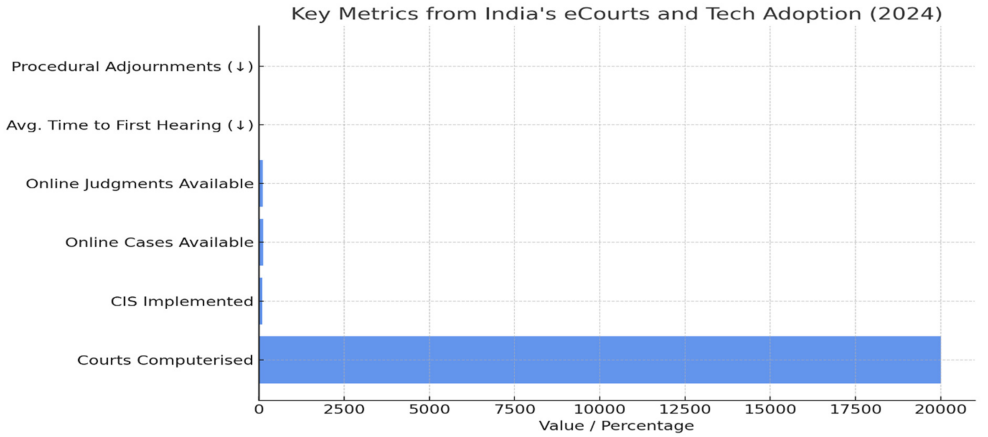


Figure 2. Key metrics from India's ecourts and tech adoption (2024).

The figure reveals key measures showing how technology permeates India's judicial system at present. The Case Information System (CIS) received implementation through more than 95% of all digitized courts that passed 20,000 by early 2024. NJDG serves over 13 crore (130 million) case records and 11 crore (110 million) judgments and orders when accessed through the National Judicial Data Grid system. In family law, tech enabled reforms like e-filing and virtual hearing had fallen some 15% in the average time to first hearing and

around 10-12% in procedural adjournments – and this rise is the evidence that digitisation is making inroads in access to justice.

4.3 *AI applications in family law*

Artificial Intelligence is slowly becoming part of the daily workings of legal procedures. However, in India, the complete possibility of AI in the family law is still unfamiliar, early uses have already specified untransformative results. Document automation software can now help lawyers and litigants draft petitions, affidavits and counterclaims as documents are built from predefined logic and legal language to assure compliance with procedural requirements[9].

One of the most promising elements is the application of AI in predicting the trajectory of disputes. Platforms analysing historical judgments are being piloted to forecast likely outcomes in maintenance and custody cases. This offers litigants and mediators data-driven insights that can facilitate early settlements[10]. This provides litigators and mediators data-driven intelligence to assist in reaching settlements at an early stage of the matter. Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) platforms, like those backed by government or private partnerships, have started to incorporate AI to help mediators by pointing out points of consensus or valid laws that may be useful in narrowing their differences. For instance, last year 2022-2023, the Delhi Legal Services Authority reported that more than 2,400 family disputes were settled via tech-enabled mediation which processed the case duration by nearly 40%[11].

AI has also been used in some pilot courts to triage cases identifying those involving domestic abuse or urgent child custody claim cases to list fast. In 2023, a pilot project in Telangana employed a natural language algorithm trained on FIR and complaint software Keywords to flag high-risk domestic violence cases, decreasing timelines for interim relief from an average of 14 days to just 6 days[12]. These systems are intended to augment, not displace, judicial discretion and provide a catalyst to raise attention to urgent needs within the existing caseload.

4.4 *Access to justice and gender inclusion through technology*

Access to justice is more than just the right to written law; it is the ability to assert one's rights and do so without fear of retaliation, deprivation, or intimidation.

Here, digital technology and AI can be the levellers especially for women who have to trawl their way through family courts. In most cases, women litigators are first-time legal users. They are often scared of court; they lack knowledge about procedures; and they rely on intermediaries whose priority is not always in their best interest.

The A.I. based legal assistants and the chatbots - which are in local dialects - now are starting to close this gap. These tools lay out legal entitlements, help clients with court encounters and enable them produce documents. In states such as Maharashtra and Karnataka, women's helpline service has fused AI technology in order to screen domestic violence reports and send high-risk cases to protection officers[13]. Quoting from a report by a Bengaluru based legal NGO, the usage of AI tools in legal aid clinics has resulted in 28% boost in average response time in filing interim maintenance claims between 2021 to 2023[14].

Empirical evidence has demonstrated women in online mediation platforms have higher customer satisfaction. Nearly 68% of women in a 2023 survey by a Delhi-based NGO engaged in virtual dispute resolution felt that they were given an opportunity to be heard and treated respectfully in contrast to only 42% who experienced so in physical court. This increase in procedural dignity demonstrates the kind of impact to be expected from technology when making justice not just accessible but human. Given that with 74% of the population being mobile phone owners, and 55% regularly accessing the internet, the digital channel has a great opportunity to address significant enduring inequalities in the family justice system[15].

4.5 *Risks, limitations, and ethical considerations*

The expanding part for AI in family law also carries with it major moral inquiries. fdata might inculcating the existing prejudices, particularly, if past judgments are gender insensitive. A predictive model that predicts a lower probability of awarding custody to working mothers, in fact, would perpetuate patriarchal stereotypes[16].

And besides, the reasons behind AI decision making can be very murky. Different from judges who are responsible for their rationality, AI systems, especially those developed by private employers, process as black box systems. Given the emotional and personal stakes involved in family law, this lack of transparency is especially worrisome[17].

Besides this data privacy is a major issue. Family law cases are personal matters, involving sensitive personal information—any accident or intent breach could lead to a nightmare for victims of domestic violence or child abuse.

Finally, while AI can assist in streamlining cases, it cannot replace human empathy. Judges and mediators need to be given not just with technology but with training on how to use them effectively and responsibly. AI should remain a supplement to, not a substitute for, human discretion in cases that involve emotional nuance and moral complexity.

5 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study detects a continued growth in matrimonial case backlog from about 9 lakhs in 2019 to over 12.4 lakh in 2024. The backlogs in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and Bihar are still the highest which reflects a massive strain on the judicial infrastructure. Delays in the hearing of maintenance, custody and domestic violence cases are rampant and most hitting female's litigants.

The technology side consists of the eCourts program having digitally covered over 20,000 courts, with 95% emergence of the Case Information System. More than 13 crore of its case records and 11 crores of judgments can now be accessed digitally. Districts that adopted e-filing have gone for a 15% reduction in time to first hearing and up to 12% fewer adjournments. AI instruments, in the pilot phase, have confirmed capability in do airplanes urgent case and automating document generation. NGOs says that more women reporting of higher satisfaction with virtual legal aid and mediation services. Though these improvements have been realized, the paper also notes risks of algorithmic bias, data privacy breaches, and exclusion of digitally underserved populations. To successfully deploy AI systems in family courts, they must be designed inclusively, ethically assessed and institutional capacity must be part of it.

5.1 *Policy recommendations*

A multifaceted policy framework is necessary to properly incorporate AI into India's family courts. Initially, an Ethics Review Board should oversee the development of an Ethical AI Framework, which would resemble the charter of the Council of Europe and require bias audits[18], accountability, and transparency. Second, with a focus on high-pendency states, AI-assisted mediation and case triage systems need to be expanded throughout India. This is based on international best practices that have greatly increased accessibility and efficiency, like Singapore's e-mediation portal and the UK's online divorce service[19]. Third, building capacity is essential. Digital literacy initiatives should empower litigants, particularly women, and judges, attorneys, and court employees should receive training on the moral and useful application of AI. Fourth, platforms need to adhere to universal design principles, providing voice-activated, multilingual, and mobile-friendly interfaces[20]. Additionally, they should increase inclusive access by implementing Mobile Lok Adalat Vans and eSewa Kendras. Fifth, judicial data must be safeguarded under a strong privacy framework and

legal reforms must acknowledge digital processes. Lawmakers should also guarantee yearly impact assessments and support legal tech innovation sandboxes. These suggestions, which are in line with international models and modified for the Indian context, are meant to create a fair, inclusive, and prepared family court system in the future where technology supports constitutional values rather than takes their place.

6 CONCLUSION

Artificial Intelligence has the potential to revolutionize how family law is practiced and experienced in India. By addressing systemic delays, enabling virtual participation, and delivering predictive insights, AI may make the legal procedure more efficient as well as less intimidating. Above all, it expands channels for empowering women and marginalized communities of litigants who have often been locked out of justice.

But what is must be done with great caution. Legal reform must be accompanied by technological protection, and innovation must be defined by the constitutional values of dignity, equality and justice. If implemented thoughtfully, AI can do more than modernize family law—it can humanize it.

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Justice beyond the courtroom: Rethinking India's indigenous paths to social equity

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ABSTRACT: Modern Indian legal reforms, premised on Western juridical frameworks, presume that codified law and formal institutions are the rightful vehicles for delivering justice. Yet this assumption rests on a cultural self-understanding foreign to Indian traditions. This paper does not ask whether these systems are "efficient" or "just"; it asks whether they are intelligible in the Indian context. Drawing from the philosophical traditions of Dharma and Nyāya, this paper contrasts the Western notion of justice—as universal, codified, and state-enforced—with Indian traditions like the Panchayat, where justice emerges through community consensus and ethical context, revealing an epistemic rupture of colonial legal systems transplant abstract norms, divorcing 'justice' from lived experiences. What remains is a legal order intelligible to law, but alien to those it claims to serve. What we call "delay" or "inefficiency" in the legal system may, in fact, be symptoms of a deeper incompatibility. Traditional systems, far from being rudimentary, reflect a cultivated ability to go-about with disputes—not to adjudicate them from above. Legal reform, then, must begin not with better codes, but with a rethinking of the human being and justice itself. Only then can law become something one learns to live by, not merely obey.

Keywords: Justice, Indian Legal Traditions, Nyāya and Dharma, Legal Reforms

1 INTRODUCTION

What does it mean to speak of "legal reform" in a culture whose understanding of justice has never been legal in the modern, Western sense? That India retained the Anglo-Western legal system after independence is often read as a pragmatic choice. This paper suggests otherwise: it reflects a deeper, unexamined assumption—that justice is the outcome of applying universal laws through formal institutions. But this assumption itself is a product of a culture that believes law is justice. In the Indian traditions, such a conflation would make little sense. Nyāya and Dharma, as conceptual grammars, never presuppose a sovereign authority administering justice through abstract norms. Instead, they assume that justice is always context-bound, relational, and something one learns to do, not merely something one demands. What, then, is the status of today's courts in India? Their legitimacy, we are told, lies in the rule of law. But for whom is this intelligible? The court may deliver a verdict; yet what it often fails to deliver is resolution, restoration, or peace. If law and justice have drifted apart, then perhaps we are not facing a "legal crisis" but an epistemic one—a misunderstanding about what law is, and what it is for. This paper does not propose a return to

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pre-modern systems nor does it romanticize Panchayats. It asks: What were these institutions doing that our modern ones are failing to do? It argues that traditional Indian forms of dispute resolution embodied a different science—a science of restoring order, not of enforcing compliance. These systems were not "informal" or "extra-legal." They were structured practices embedded in a different understanding of human beings and their conflicts. Thus, legal reform cannot be a matter of adding tribunals or digitizing processes. It must begin with a rethinking of what counts as a legal problem and what it means to resolve it. Until we learn to ask how law is understood by those who must live under it, legal reform will remain a solution in search of a problem.

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To critically analyze the gap between formal legal systems and the lived experience of justice and social equity in India.
- To compare the effectiveness of modern courts and traditional Panchayat systems in resolving conflicts and restoring social harmony.
- To propose legal reforms that integrate indigenous wisdom with formal law to achieve more inclusive and context-sensitive justice.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative, analytical research design based on secondary data. It employs conceptual analysis, literature review, and case study methods to explore justice and legal reforms. Data was collected from scholarly books, journal articles, government reports, and credible news sources. The study focuses on analyzing historical traditions of Nyāya and Dharma, the functioning of Panchayats, and modern court systems in India. The sample includes documented case studies such as Gram Nyayalayas and Lok Adalats. Instruments used include thematic content analysis and comparative evaluation techniques. The target population for conceptual analysis encompasses India's legal institutions, traditional dispute-resolution systems, and communities relying on indigenous justice mechanisms.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

India's legal landscape prior to and during colonial times was characterized by legal pluralism – a coexistence of overlapping local jurisdictions and community-specific norms. Village panchayats (literally councils of five elders) were a cornerstone of dispute resolution for centuries. Studies by Baxi and Galanter (1979) document that in pre-British India, most disputes – whether in villages or even towns – were not taken to royal courts but handled by tribunals of the locality: assemblies of elders, caste councils, guilds of traders, or landlords acting as arbiters (Baxi and Galanter 1979). Often, the process was informal and discursive – essentially a form of participatory mediation or arbitration among community members. Importantly, local custom was not seen as a static code but could be "minted for the occasion," i.e. adapted or even created anew to fit the specific context of the dispute. Community enforcement (through social pressure, boycott, excommunication, etc.) gave these decisions force, relying on consensus and shared norms rather than the coercive power of a distant state. This traditional system's strength lay in its problem-solving orientation (action-knowledge) (Rautenbach and Somaru, 2021; Warwantkar 2024; Zeya 2023).

Scholars of Indian jurisprudence note that underlying these indigenous practices are the classical concepts of Nyāya and Dharma. Nyāya, a Sanskrit term for justice, in everyday usage came to mean not just abstract justice but the concrete realization of justice in each case. Amartya Sen (2009) highlights the distinction between nīti (just rules or institutions) and nyāya (realized justice): while nīti corresponds to formal correctness and adherence to codified law, nyāya focuses on what outcomes and lived experiences those rules produce (Sen 2009). Indian intellectual traditions have long recognized that having just laws on paper (nīti) does not automatically ensure justice on the ground (nyāya). This distinction resonates with contemporary concerns that law is not always equivalent to justice – a theme to which we shall return. Dharma, on the other hand, refers to the cosmic order, moral duty, and righteousness that undergirds law. A crucial aspect of dharma is its context-dependence: duties vary by person, role, stage of life, and community. The idea of svadharma in Hindu thought holds that each individual has their own appropriate duties according to their nature and social position. This meant that justice was not served by a single universal code for everyone, but by each person upholding the duties appropriate to their context.

Research on access to justice in India shows that many citizens still instinctively turn to informal community mechanisms when faced with disputes. A landmark survey by the NGO Daksh found that when serious disputes arise, a majority of Indians prefer first to seek help from family, friends, or village elders and community panchayats, rather than approach the formal courts or police (Daksh 2017). Courts and police were in fact the least-preferred options, chiefly because they are perceived as too slow, complex, and costly, whereas indigenous-style mediation is trusted to yield quicker, culturally resonant solutions (Misra and Keerthiraj 2025). However, the literature also documents the decline of traditional panchayats in the face of state-building and modernization. During the colonial era, as British courts and codified laws spread, the authority of village panchayats waned, and many customary practices were delegitimize or outlawed, especially if they conflicted with colonial notions of justice or human rights. In independent India, there was a constitutional push for Panchayati Raj (local self-government) culminating in the 73rd Amendment (1992) that gave rural panchayats formal governance roles. Yet, their judicial or dispute-resolution functions were not robustly restored. The literature review thus points to a tension between two systems of justice. Bridging this divide is a central concern for legal reformers and scholars aiming to achieve the constitutional promise of justice and equality for all.

4.1 *The modern legal system: gaps between law and justice*

The epistemic gap between law and justice – where law in books diverges from justice on the ground – is perhaps most starkly illustrated by the chronic delays and backlogs in the judiciary. As of 2025, Indian courts at all levels were burdened with over 52 million pending cases. Shockingly, over 180,000 cases in the High Courts and lower courts had been pending for more than 30 years, meaning generations can pass without resolution (India Justice Report 2025). At the current rates of disposal, a 2018 analysis by NITI Aayog estimated it would take 324 years to clear the backlog of cases – effectively an infinite deferral of justice for many (NITI Aayog 2019). Another aspect of the gap between law and justice is how legal universalism handles diversity. India is a plural society with myriad cultures, languages, religious norms, and customary practices. A single statutory law – however well-intentioned – can have unintended consequences when applied uniformly. For example, a law that is blind to tribal customs might end up criminalizing traditional practices, or a strict application of contract law might ruin a poor farmer who defaulted due to drought (where a local council might have mediated a more sensible solution). The rigidity of codified law offers little room for context or experience; judges are bound to apply statutes, and although they have some discretion in sentencing or relief, it is limited.

4.2 *The panchayat approach: Case study and data*

The Nyaya Panchayat system, first experimented with post-independence and re-invigorated by the Gram Nyayalayas Act (2008), was designed as a grassroots judicial forum. The idea was to have a court at the village level, presided by a trained judge (Nyayadhikari), but operating with simpler procedures, local language usage, and an emphasis on conciliation. As of early 2022, 476 Gram Nyayalayas (village courts) had been notified across 15 states, though only 258 were operational in 10 states. States like Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan have been pioneers, while many states have lagged in implementation (Government of India 2009). These Gram Nyayalayas collectively handled about 43,914 cases between December 2020 and February 2022, a modest contribution given the scale of pending cases nationally, but significant for the communities they serve (Ministry of Law and Justice 2024). The scope of Nyaya Panchayats is limited by design – they typically handle minor civil disputes and petty criminal matters, with caps on the penalties. Serious offenses remain with regular courts. Reports indicate that where they function, these village courts indeed provide speedier, affordable justice.

To gauge outcomes, one can look at Lok Adalats. Lok Adalats are essentially ad-hoc forums where pending court cases or pre-litigation disputes are settled by negotiation and compromise facilitated by judges and mediators. They draw inspiration from the Panchayat spirit of compromise. The impact of Lok Adalats has been significant: in a single day national Lok Adalat held in September 2024, over 11.4 million cases were settled across India. Of these, about 9.46 million were pre-litigation matters (disputes resolved before ever reaching a formal court) and nearly 2 million were existing court cases that got disposed of through settlement (HT Correspondent 2024). The sheer volume – millions of cases in a day – underscores how much latent demand there is for amicable, quick resolutions. These ranged from bank loan recoveries, traffic fines, utility bill disputes, to family settlements. The Lok Adalat phenomenon demonstrates that when given an opportunity for direct engagement and compromise, litigants often prefer it to the adversarial win-lose contest. It's a validation of the traditional ethos within a modern framework.

5 DISCUSSION

The foregoing analysis suggests that rather than viewing the Western legal system and indigenous justice traditions in opposition, Indian legal reform should seek a synthesis, leveraging the best of both. Justice and social equity in a vast, diverse democracy like India will not be achieved by a single paradigm alone. What might such a synthesis entail? One pathway is to formally recognize and incorporate local customs and knowledge into the application of law. The judiciary to some extent already allows this – for instance, customary law is recognized in areas like tribal land rights, and the Panchayati Raj Acts in various states sometimes give village councils a role in minor dispute settlement.

- The success of Lok Adalats and the potential of Gram Nyayalayas indicate that scaling up these alternatives could greatly enhance access to justice.
- India could adopt more restorative justice programs – for instance, community conferencing for juvenile offenders (bringing together the youth, family, victim, and community members to collectively agree on repairing harm), which is reminiscent of a panchayat. This not only helps the offender reintegrate but often is more satisfactory to victims than a court sentence because their perspective is addressed.
- Embracing a pluralistic legal order – where multiple forums and norms coexist – could actually promote equity. For instance, a poor illiterate villager might never file a suit in the district court due to cost and fear, but he might speak freely before a Nyaya Panchayat. By providing multiple channels, the system can cater to different needs.

- Lessons from indigenous systems could also inform reforms within the formal courts. One lesson is simplification – the procedural law could be simplified for certain categories of cases akin to how panchayats operate with less formality. Indeed, some steps in this direction exist.

6 CONCLUSION

Justice in its truest sense is more than the pronouncement of a verdict or the enforcement of a code, it is the establishment of right relationships in society. This research has examined how modern India's quest for justice and social equity can benefit from engaging its own civilizational heritage of dispute resolution. We found that Western-origin legal systems, for all their strengths in formal equality and procedural safeguards, often struggle with delivering timely and meaningful justice on the ground. The indigenous Indian approach, exemplified by village Panchayats guided by Nyāya and Dharma, offers valuable insights: it is case-specific, dialogical, and oriented toward reconciliation rather than mere rule-enforcement. The shortcomings of the formal system – massive backlogs, high costs, procedural complexities, and a failure to mend social fabrics – underline the need for reforms that make the system more responsive and equitable. Legal reforms in India must therefore be two-pronged: (1) Internal reforms to simplify procedures, increase judicial capacity, and imbue the system with a sensitivity to outcomes (justice as experienced by the people, not just on paper); and (2) External integrations that bring alternative forums like Nyaya Panchayats and Lok Adalats into the mainstream justice delivery framework as legitimate, empowered partners. Ultimately, the measure of success will be when law as written and justice as lived experience converge – when the nyāya (realized justice) of outcomes matches the nīti (ideal of just rules). The future of justice in India may well lie in this fusion of the courtroom and the community, the code and the conscience.

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Surveillance, bias, and justice: Ethical implications of predictive policing in India and the United States

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ABSTRACT: This study compares predictive policing technologies between the USA and India to understand the relationship between artificial intelligence (AI) technologies and policing practices. The study reveals the implications of AI in policing at a time when concerns about systemic bias and civil liberties related to AI are prominent. This section details how predictive policing evolved from the NYPD's CompStat to modern AI-enabled systems to illustrate how the influences of operational needs and past influences have led to the implementation of this technology. This study adopts a methodological approach where the researcher provides prospective case studies from real-world uses of predictive policing, and the methods are matched with a qualitative review of the literature and existing policy papers. The study is preventative by emphasising community engagement and accountability to eliminate the disproportionate impacts that policing has on already marginalised people. The study provides practical recommendations for law enforcement organisations to ethically adopt an AI technology and preserve public trust, while engaging wider public discussion about the ethical implications of using available public data for surveillance purposes. Ultimately, the study promotes a balanced discussion about how we want our policing approach to evolve in an increasingly automated context.

Keywords: Predictive Policing, Artificial Intelligence, Civil Liberties

1 INTRODUCTION

A generation of mathematicians, physicists, and philosophers became aware of AI during the 1950s. We are now posed the question, "If a human being is provided with data or facts to identify cause(s) of issues, then what in the name of the good Lord is preventing us from creating a 'machine' for that type of activity?" British polymath Alan Turing showed his remarkable mathematical ability and the potential for AI. In Turing's 1950 article "Computing Machinery and Intelligence," Turing considered this very framework while analysing the intelligent behaviour of computers. However, Turing could not develop a practical solution based upon the limited power of the machine - it could only handle new tasks. It could not recall any tasks that it had done before. AI is becoming an advanced reality as computers increase their speed and decrease their costs. Storage becomes nearly endless, and humans have begun to exploit machine learning algorithms to solve complex problems. As an example, from 2011 onwards, when IBM's Deep Blue chess software

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defeated ranked Grandmasters, the news of the developments in AI followed with improvements in human-like speech recognition, robotics-humanoids, AI news-readers, and AI policing (Meena and Joshi 2023). "It is going to achieve something in really changing the possibilities for what AI can make happen in ways we could not have imagined," UNESCO states. The Government of India (under the auspices of the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) and the Bureau of Police Research & Development (BPR&D)) launched the Vimarsh 2023 5G Hackathon with a goal for examining AI use cases in law enforcement, specifically AI-assisted FIR speech recognition, drone surveillance, augmented reality in investigations and predictive analysis (Vimarsh 2023). These types of initiatives condition social acceptance of AI tools like facial recognition or predictive policing based upon various reform efforts in data privacy and regulatory controls. At this time, there are no global guidelines for AI. The Office of Science and Technology Policy at the White House proposed ten principals, including increased transparency that addresses risk, ethical considerations in AI implementation, social assessment, and regulatory flexibility based on performance that are intended to develop societal trust and guides responsible development of AI - at this point in history this is very a dynamic consideration as inefficient use of resources with various meanings could land the United States in the wake of the AI momentum history is building. While it is important to note the not insignificant obstacles to implementation, the United States and India are actively implementing AI for law enforcement. On the other hand, China has recently demonstrated positive momentum that could position it to lead the world in AI (AI Standardisation Committee, Department of Telecommunications 2020).

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To examine the current implementation and scope of AI-based predictive policing in India and the USA.
- To compare the effectiveness of AI-based predictive policing in crime prevention, detection, and resource allocation in India and the USA.
- To identify and analyse the ethical, legal and social challenges associated with predictive policing in both countries.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a qualitative comparative method, integrating a literature review with case studies from India and the USA to evaluate predictive policing. The study examines the legal, ethical, and social implications, focusing on surveillance, bias, and accountability. The thematic and cross-national comparison underscores the context-specific challenges of AI-driven law enforcement.

3.1 *What is AI?*

According to a report by the AI standardisation committee, "there is no uniform and globally accepted definition of AI." Alan Turing's quote states that "if a machine and a person communicate, and the person is fooled into taking the machine for a human, then that machine has intelligence"(Turing 1950).

There are several other ways to instantiate the notion of AI. John McCarthy defined it as "the science and engineering of making intelligent machines, brilliant computer programs" (McCarthy 2007).

Kaplana and Haenlein also define AI as "the ability of a system to interpret external data correctly, learn from such data, and use those lessons to achieve specified goals and tasks with flexible adaptation"(Kaplan and Haenlein 2019)

NITI Aayog provided this definition: Aayog defines AI as "an amalgamation of technologies that allow machines to execute tasks with an increased measure of intelligence, emulating human capabilities of sensing, comprehending, and acting"(NITI Aayog 2018). In this context, it refers to the capacity of machines or robots under human direction to perform tasks similar to those performed by intelligent humans. The phrase is most frequently used to describe the development of systems with human-like cognitive capacities, including generalisation, meaning discovery, experience-based learning, and justification.

3.2 *Predictive policing*

Predictive policing employs analytical methods, primarily quantitative, to identify possible targets for crime prevention or the resolution of past crimes involving police participation. The NYPD was already well established in its habit of collecting crime statistics with other revealing signs, such as the locations where gun arrests occurred and the locales where victims were most likely to come from, well over 20 years ago, even before the term "big data" was created. However, the new thing will be the facilities and available data for corporations to analyse and draw conclusions. In particular, predicting future crime incidents will be more accurate as new technologies allow for a wider range of applications and more thorough examination of sophisticated data formats (Brayne 2017).

3.3 *Mass surveillance and predictive policing in India*

Surveillance technologies are arguably the most significant form of preventive policing globally. CCTV surveillance is the most common aspect of surveillance in India. However, research has indicated that CCTV has limited utility in preventative policing unless combined with proactive policing, such as the presence of officers (Agarwal 2018). Advanced technologies such as facial recognition (FRT) and predictive policing software are said to be increasingly adopted by Indian law enforcement agencies, raising valid concerns regarding data transparency and ethical misuse. FRT has been deployed in some instances, such as in the recovery of missing children (Khan and Khan 2024), or for use against protesters, with marginalised groups disproportionately affected. The predictive policing proposals starting from Telangana and Delhi, using embedded technologies such as Prahari, which are intended to enhance safety, raise concerns over systemic bias, underreporting, and the potential to reinforce patterned social prejudice (Fairness in Algorithmic Policing 2022). Without effective regulatory frameworks, these technologies could foster social inequalities, similar to concerns raised concerning analogous projects within the United States.

3.4 *Ethical concerns and civil liberties*

The rampant implementation of predictive policing technologies throughout India raises substantial ethical dilemmas and risks to individual freedoms. As police forces utilise an increasingly broad array of methods incorporating AI and data analysis for crime deterrence, privacy and surveillance issues at the intersection of technology and policing practices have emerged. Technologies such as facial recognition and data mining present a serious risk to individual privacy and often exacerbate existing social inequalities that lead to the discriminatory surveillance of vulnerable and marginalized populations (Narayan 2020). Additionally, the lack of accountability and ethical oversight is a further obstacle to establishing a code of ethical conduct; lack of standards for data use and regulatory

clarity fosters community distrust in police agencies. To combat opportunities for exploitation and misapplication of the technology, it is critical to employ rigorous ethical oversight, a regulatory framework, and independent interactions with the community that provide accountability in the public interest in conjunction with civil liberties. It is also imperative to regain (reconstruct) community trust in police following the absence of accountability of community/motivated over-policing in various forms during the COVID-19 pandemic. Transparency of policing and community engagement in conjunction with policing ensures equity and efficiency, ensuring that predictive technology's applications are monitored and remain in line with individual freedom and civil rights values.

3.5 *Mass surveillance and predictive policing in the USA*

The goal of predictive policing is to predict criminal activity using data-driven technology to optimise police resources, improve public safety, and, ideally, lower crime rates. Predictive policing in America has undergone significant changes in the past decade, primarily because of AI, ML, and big data analytics. It is considered a crucial element in modernising law enforcement. In cities across America, including Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles, multiple initiatives focused on predictive policing have been introduced to optimise resource allocation and lower crime rates.

The path to discovering the origins of predictive policing began with the New York Police Department's (NYPD) CompStat, a management tool developed in the 1990s. CompStat's real-time crime data collection helped identify different regions and develop policing tactics. As technology advanced, predictive analytics software emerged because of law enforcement agencies' pursuit of ever-more-sophisticated analytical capabilities. (Yang 2019)

Shortly after, many police stations implemented predictive policing algorithms that used past crime data to find trends and forecast future criminal activity. To better determine where and when law enforcement should report crimes, these systems analyse various data sources, such as crime reports, socioeconomic data, geographic characteristics, and other inputs.

3.6 *Implementation of predictive policing in the USA*

Police forces use predictive policing algorithms in several areas across the United States. The LAPD's PredPol past crime model uses an algorithm to determine what areas must be patrolled. The benefit of this model is that police can surveil areas of expected crime rather than wait for problems to arise, allowing law enforcement agencies to focus their patrols more efficiently (Meijer and Wessels 2019). The system and algorithms have their fair share of critics based on the biased nature of the data pack behind it about the system's potential to increase efficiency for law enforcement practice. Predictive policing is not applied evenly across the United States, as the LAPD's model is just one of many issues in the predictive policing landscape. The ability of different agencies to procure, implement, and sustain these programs greatly varies, and the situations surrounding implementation vary depending on multiple contextual factors, including funding and resources, technologies, and training. Other agencies have undertaken alternative or similar programming, notably Chicago, but the outcomes have been disparate, creating an ethical conversation and questioning the accuracy and efficacy of reducing crime on the basis of all the variables being credible and comparable.

3.7 *Funding for predictive policing research and implementation*

Although the United States has ample funding for predictive police research and program implementation, it is impossible to derive a total amount of funding or at least an

approximation of funding, because no one keeps track of this funding. Over the last decade, hundreds of millions of dollars in federal funding from the DOJ and other sources have been allocated to analytical research, technology development, and crime prevention. The Smart Enforcement Initiative, which supports research into cutting-edge enforcement tactics like predictive analytics, is especially intriguing. However, money set aside explicitly for predictive policing technologies is typically included in bigger financing initiatives for law enforcement technology advancements. According to a different 2017 report from the Bureau of Justice Assistance, federal funds for innovative policing amounted to more than $15 million, with financing applications for predictive policing temporarily receiving support from multiple sources (Bureau of Justice Assistance 2017). However, it is unclear how much money is allocated specifically for predictive policing research, highlighting the need for a thorough analysis of financing in that field.

3.8 *Ethical concerns and civil liberties*

Predictive policing raises significant ethical problems of civil liberties and discrimination. Critics argue that the use of historical data will reinforce bias and lead to the over policing of already aggressive communities, further infringing on their privacy rights. Thus, there is a pressing need for accountability mechanisms and legal reforms that encapsulate the changing technology used in police practices.

Table 1. Comparative study of predictive policing in India vs. USA

Aspects	India	USA
Legal Framework	Limited regulation and oversight; concerns about misuse linked to preventive detention under Section 151 of the CrPC. Propose restrictions on predicting offenders to strengthen accountability.	Established legal parameters; governed by various state laws and local regulations. Challenges in the overuse of police discretion and data biases.
Implementation	It is still in the experimental phase and is affected by population complexity, urbanisation, and resource constraints. The CN-Map initiative in New Delhi lacks public accountability.	More widespread and established, various models are operational in large police departments. Notable projects include the Chicago Predictive Policing model, which analyses historical crime data.
Technological Adoption	Reluctance due to limited infrastructure; AI's potential was discussed but still underutilised, with an emphasis on location and crime type data rather than individual predictions.	High levels of technological adoption and integration with real-time data analytics for crime prediction. Develop algorithms for actionable insights.
Bias and Discrimination	Concerns about algorithmic bias and its potential to intensify inequalities and unfairly target specific communities are similar to challenges faced globally.	Significant discussions on racial bias and the potential for over-policing in minority communities stemming from biased data.
Public perception and trust	There has been a report of lower trust in the police; predictive policing is seen as a tool that may reinforce biases rather than eliminate them.	Trust varies regionally; community-led policing initiatives attempt to improve rapport, although tensions remain due to historical abuses.
Efficacy and Outcomes	Mixed results; effectiveness questioned with anecdotal evidence lacking systemic validation.	There is evidence, although varying results, with some studies indicating reductions in crime while others emphasise the potential for increased conflict within communities.

4 CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

4.1 *Conclusion*

By investigating their modes of operations, ethical dilemmas, and social implications, the study carefully examined the application and employment of predictive policing technology in India and the USA. AI can significantly improve law enforcement efficiency and deter crime, but the social applications involved do not occur without biases and discrimination. While in the USA, the implications of data bias, racial profiling, and civil liberties violations have provoked intense public backlash in connection with the use of predictive policing, in India, the infrastructural challenges, inconsistent data quality, and limited regulatory oversight have resulted in them only being at the precipice of predictive policing. Both countries show that there is a questionable reliance on historical crime data, which is overseen by biased institutional racism, that can lead to an overall evolution in disparity and deterioration of public trust. The study suggests exposure to harm, especially to marginalised communities, far exceeds the benefits of predictive policing unless there are substantial legal protections, robust transparency obligations, and ethical accountability.

4.2 *Suggestions*

We maintain that regulatory treatment of AI policing should be comprehensive, legally enforceable, and developed in the US and India. Each regulatory framework must have provisions for data privacy, algorithmic accountability, civil liberties, algorithmic transparency and auditability. There must be provisions to give third-party auditors access to all predictive policing technologies and legal requirements for algorithm development and data use disclosure. Community access and involvement must ensure that predictive tools are used equitably and with direct community involvement and support, especially for marginalized communities. Governments must deliver datasets to represent social experiences in the standards, and delays are applied to help improve predictive forecasts and reduce bias. Hanging above all of this, is the idea of implementing ethical training to police officials and AI engineer as both professional and personal agents of reducing, and grappling with, the substantive ethical considerations of using AI in policing; and the repetitional establishment of independent ethics boards that could deliberate on ethical use of AI technology.

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Workable solutions for speedy justice, legal reforms and social equity

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ABSTRACT: Our Constitution has three important parts – Preamble, Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles of State Policy, which unequivocally cast obligations upon the states to, *inter-alia*, secure "*Justice*" for all our citizens. More particularly, one of the major *Preambular Goals* of our Constitution is to secure social, economic and political Justice to every citizen of India. However, "*Justice Delayed is Justice Denied*". The inordinate delay and long pendency of the court cases are becoming the biggest injustice and are flagrantly deterring "*We, the People of India*" from achieving our aforesaid paramount Preambular Goal, which is a cause of grave concern. The present paper endeavors to provide certain workable solutions which may be pertinent for achieving Speedy Justice, which *in-turn*, secures legal reforms and social equity.

Keywords: Justice, Constitution of India, Fundamental Rights, Legal Reforms, Social Equity

1 INTRODUCTION

The alarmingly increasing court case pendency can be understood from the fact that in the year 2014[1], total about 3 Crore cases were pending in various Courts of India which has now exponentially increased to about 5.1 Crore[2] in last just 10 years. As per the National Judicial Data Grid, out of the total about 5.1 Crore cases pending in India as of now, about 82 thousand cases are pending in Supreme Court, about 72 Lakh cases are pending in High Courts and remaining about 5 Crore cases are pending in District Courts and Tribunals. Another worrying part is that out of the above 5.1 Crore pending cases, total about 1.8 Lakh cases are pending for more than 30 Years. Such long delayed justice is worse than the Injustice itself. This clearly indicates that this is the about time to drastically change our strategy and devise a new mechanism to reduce judicial pendency and to secure social equity. There is a dire need to evolve an effective mechanism to tackle the pervasive issue of case pendency. Foundation of our Democracy can only remain robust if "*Speedy Justice is not only done but it is seen to be done*" and thus, it is emergent need of the hour to reform, adapt and resolutely ensure that Justice is served to all.

1.1 *Constitutional goal of speedy justice*

The Preamble of our constitution is the vision-document of our nation which, *inter-alia*, expressly envisions to secure social, economic and political Justice for the Indian citizens.

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Thus, "Social Justice" is a constitutional goal which will have no meaning, if the Justice is not imparted upon our citizens in a speedy and meaningful manner. The Directive Principles of State Policy are a set of fundamental principles to be mandatorily applied by the States in governance and also in making laws in India. It is quite axiomatic from the above that the constitutional goal of social justice can only be secured by achieving equality, freedom and dignity for all citizens of India in a speedy manner. The Constitution warrants Indian Governments to act as a welfare state and make special efforts to particularly uplift the SC, ST, OBC and other weaker sections of the society. There are many schemes and plans which have been framed by the Central and State Governments in order to achieve social justice. Special measures like reservation, adequate electoral representations, scholarships, promotions, special loans, skill-development programs, housing, subsidies and campaigns like "*Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas*" etc. have been adopted by our Central and State Governments, which have undoubtedly helped our country to move forward towards achievement of social justice. However, a lot is yet to be done to secure constitutional goal of speedy social justice for the last persons of our country. More efforts are needed to be done for achieving social, economic and political justice, liberty, equality and dignity for the poorest person of our country, for which a paradigm shift in our policies and drastic changes in the door-step deliveries of such benefits, are needed.

1.2 *Rule of law*

Effective rule of law imparts Speedy Justice, Equality and Freedom to the common citizens which, *in-turn*, protects people from injustice, reduces corruption, poverty and disease, provides opportunities to everyone and ultimately leads to an inclusive and sustainable growth. The Constitution of India squarely encompasses the concept of "Rule of Law". Chapter III of the Constitution guarantees Fundamental Rights. Article 13 prohibits the Government from infringing the Fundamental Rights. Article 14 confers equality and equal protection of laws. Article 19, *inter-alia*, provides invaluable fundamental right to freedom of speech and expression. Article 21 is manifestation of "Rule of Law". Articles 226 and 32 empower the people of India to enforce their fundamental and legal rights through Judicial Review.

1.3 *Role of supreme court*

The Hon'ble Supreme Court of India has played a pivotal role in securing and protecting the "Rule of Law" in India. Although, initially in *Shankari Prasad vs. Union of India*[3] and *Sajjan Singh vs. State of Rajasthan*[4] the Supreme Court had virtually conceded to the absolute power of the Parliament to amend the Constitution, however, subsequently, in *Golaknath vs. State of Punjab*[5], the Supreme Court held that Parliament cannot amend Fundamental Rights. Furthermore, Supreme Court held in *Keshavanand Bharati vs. State of Kerala*[6] that Rule of Law is a part of Basic Structure. Although our Constitution and our Supreme Court have consistently endeavored to achieve complete "Rule of Law", but, sadly, the practical realities are quite disheartening. The rampant corruption, large-scale poverty, lack of effective education, lack of quality healthcare, lack of social security to the large population and frequent incidents of riots, arson and unrest, categorically depict that India, as a country, has failed to achieve the effective "Rule of Law" even after 78 years of its independence.

1.4 *Constitutional goal*

It is the bounden duty of our legislature, executive and judiciary, to effectively realise the constitutional goal of "Rule of Law" through speedy justice. It can be achieved through the following measures – (i) Laws must be clear and accessible, (ii) Equal access to justice by

the vulnerable sections, (iii) Gender equality and (iv) Strong independent judiciary. The Fundamental Rights of the people of India are protected and guaranteed without any exception. Then there has to be proper checks and balances amongst the three organs of the government. Impartial, accessible and expedient Judicial Review is another effective need to realise effective Rule of Law in India. Independent and impartial media (print, electronic and social media) is another pre-requisite for effective Rule of Law. There is also an emergent need of abolition of corruption in the government departments. Robust Law and Order is yet another requirement in this regard. Then there has to be equal access to the Criminal and Civil Justice for all the people living in India. It is true that no society has ever attained an absolute realization of the "Rule of Law", however, the realisation of "Rule of Law" should not also be as worrying as in India presently, as is evident from our day-to-day experiences and also from the WJP's 79th Ranking of India.

1.5 *Sppedy justice as a fundamental right*

The Hon'ble Supreme Court of India has held in a plethora of Judgments including in *Kartar Singh vs. State of Punjab*[7] that *Right to Speedy Justice* is a fundamental right as enshrined within Article 21. However, the harsh reality is that the said invaluable fundamental right is being flagrantly denied to the citizens of India, which is deeply concerning. Judicial Delay directly results into flagrant violations of the fundamental rights and human rights. There are numerous instances of innocent people languishing behind the bar for 20-30 years as their cases are not being decided expeditiously. This is resulting into loss of faith of general public on the Judicial and Legal system which is ultimately damaging the Rule of Law in India. The delay in the justice system also has a huge negative impact on the economy of our country. India has set a target of becoming a USD 5 Trillion economy by the year 2025-26. However, the same is simply unachievable unless the menace of judicial delay is effectively tackled. Thus, it is the bounden duty of every stakeholder to ensure that every person living in India gets Speedy Justice.

1.6 *Social justice delayed is social justice denied*

Social Justice has three parts – (i) Equality of Rights, (ii) Equality of Opportunities and (iii) Equal Treatment in Society. Following are the primary principles of Social Justice – (i) Equal Access, (ii) Equal Opportunities, (iii) Diversity, (iv) Equal Participation and (v) Human Rights. Goals of social justice can be broadly achieved if the above principles of social justice are secured and every citizen of India is imparted Speedy Justice with dignity.

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The important objectives of the instant research paper are as under-

(i) To study the constitutional provisions pertaining to Speedy Justice,
(ii) To critically evaluate the steps already taken by our Legislature, Executive and Judiciary to reduce judicial pendency,
(iii) To analyse the leading Judgments passed by the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India in order to achieve speedy justice,
(iv) To study the key challenges faced by the Judiciary and to furnish certain effective suggestions for our Higher Judiciary,
(v) To devise a meaningful and workable mechanism to tackle judicial pendency and to ensure speedy justice.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to highlight the various contours of the Judicial Pendency, the Researchers have adopted the Doctrinal Research Methodology wherein the Researchers have taken into account the primary sources of information, such as statutory provisions, legal rules and doctrines, judicial pronouncements, international treaties and agreements and have also relied upon the secondary sources of data like books, journals, reports, articles and news that possess some practical utility. The researchers have intended to analyze the technical soundness of the legal propositions to identify the loopholes and gaps so that the law can be made more realistic, pragmatic and effective.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 *Major reasons of pendency*

The major reasons for judicial pendency are shortage of judges and non-judicial staff, lack of infrastructure, lack of training, procedural delays, redundant. Another big reason for large number of pendency of the court cases is the ineffective legislature and executive. People are seemingly losing faith over legislature and executive due to their incompetence, corruption and callous approach, which is directly resulting into over burdening of the courts. It is not out of place to mention that the Government is the biggest litigant and about 50% court cases are filed by or against various governments/ their agencies. If such disputes are resolved at the administrative levels, it would be a great respite to the courts. It is not that our Legislature, Executive and Judiciary are not taking steps to reduce Judicial Pendency. *Per contra*, all three organs of our governance, are consistently taking various steps in this regard. Our Supreme Court and High Courts have also been passing several landmark judgments and suggesting various measures to tackle the Judicial Pendency. The latest addition in this line is a recent judgment passed in *Yashpal Jain vs. Sushila Devi & Others* (Judgment dated 20.10.2023 passed in C.A. No.4296/2023)[8], wherein, the Hon'ble Supreme Court has issued a plethora of issues to reduce pendency.

4.2 *Steps taken by legislature*

In addition to this, our legislature is also endeavoring to enact various laws and incorporate various amendments to reduce pendency of the court cases. Many special statutes have been enacted and now even the archaic CPC, CrPC and Evidence Act have been replaced by new statutes, viz., Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, Bhartiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 and Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam, 2023, with one of the inherent purposes to expedite the criminal justice delivery system. The Parliament of India has also constituted various Tribunals (like Central Administrative Tribunal, National Company Law Tribunal, Debt Recovery Tribunal etc.) to attempt to expedite the Justice Delivery System. Many other measures, like Alternate Dispute Resolution (ADR), Lok Adalat etc. are also being emphasized upon in this regard. Lok Adalat is another significant initiative taken by our judiciary and governments to reduce court cases pendency. Modernizations and Digitization of the courts by way of introduction of - Virtual court system, e-Courts portal E-filing, e-Payment of court fees and fines etc. are the further recent initiatives in this regard.

4.3 *Challenges in the Indian judiciary*

Our Judiciary faces unimaginable challenges in handling the case backlog, out of which the biggest challenge is the lack of Judicial infrastructure and inadequate number of Judges. The Judge-to-Population ration in India is alarmingly low, which can be understood from the following graph-

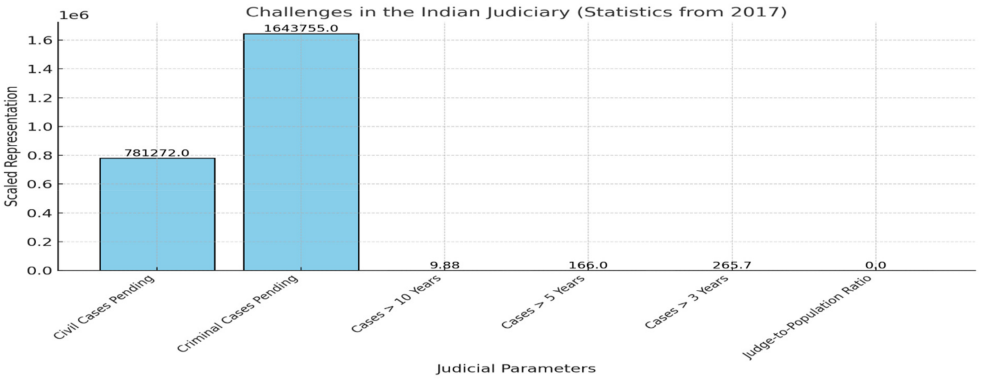


Figure 1. Challenges in the Indian judiciary (Statistics From 2017).

4.4 *Judicial backlog in India*

Due to the above challenges and also due to the variety of other reasons, few of which have been outlined above, the Indian Judiciary has become overburdened and is currently having an alarming pendency of about 5.1 Crore court cases. The ever-increasing backlog and court cases pendency needs to be tackled with a sense of urgency, before the situation goes out of control. The present alarming situation may be understood from the following chart-

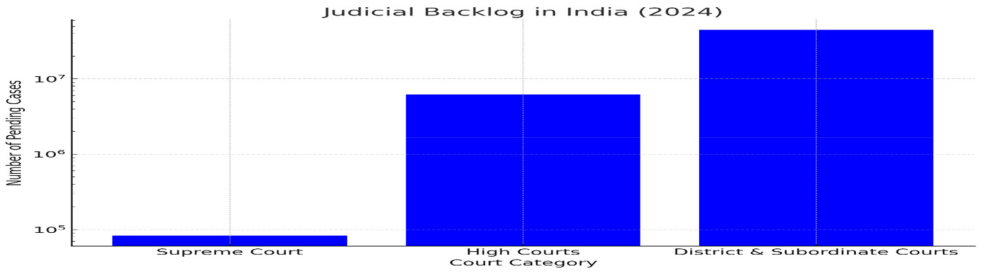


Figure 2. Judicial Backlog in India.

5 CONCLUSION

5.1 *Need of the hour*

As outlined in the beginning, there are total about 5.1 Crore court cases pending in India as of now. If we presume that one court case involves at least two families (one from Petitioner's side and another from Respondents' side) of average four members each then too about 40 Crore citizens of India are suffering immensely due to pendency of the court cases. The said suffering is not only qua the financial draining. But, most importantly, their hopes of Justice are being shattered by every passing day. The injustice done to such litigant might have had an impact on their one day or one week or one month. But this continued pain due to continued delay in dispensation of justice, seems to be eternal. That's how, the delayed Justice is the biggest Injustice to them, perhaps bigger than the Injustice itself against which they have approached the court of law. It is the bounden duty of all legal and judicial stakeholders to devise meaningful mechanism to tackle and defeat this menace of court cases pendency and to secure Liberty, Equality and Justice. However, despite the aforesaid

tangible efforts taken by our Legislature, Executive and Judiciary, there is no much reduction in Judicial Delay rather, the number of pending cases is increasing exponentially by every passing day, which is worrying. People losing faith over our Judiciary will be the darkest day of our democracy.

5.2 *Workable solutions*

Thus, it is the bounden duty of all stakeholders to formulate and implement certain effective and meaningful measures to reduce the court cases pendency and dispense speedy justice. Few of such initiatives may be, as follows –

(1) Existing Judicial Infrastructure should be utilized to conduct Evening/ Night Courts and adjudicate a larger number of cases.
(2) Long Court holidays (Summer/ Winter vacations) should be curtailed and Court Working days should be increased to 7-days a week on a mission mode.
(3) More Judges and Court Staff should be appointed, including those who are willing to work in the night shifts and weekends on rotational basis.
(4) Use of AI (Artificial Intelligence) and Modern Technology should be enhanced in all courts. AI should be placed in every court room to assist lawyers as co-counsels and to assist Judges as Legal Researchers in faster and more accurate manner.
(5) Mandatory issuance of court summons/ notices through email and WhatsApp.
(6) Live streaming and virtual court appearances should be available in all courts across India.
(7) Court orders should be implemented in rem so that similarly situated people are not forced to approach the court for the identical issues.
(8) Mandatory provision of pronouncement of judgment within 30-days from reserving it.
(9) Time bound disposal of trial/ appeal. If a Judge fails to efficiently dispose a case within time, it should be transferred to some other judge and adverse remark should be recorded.
(10) Harsh laws against unnecessary adjournments with heavy penalty against litigants.
(11) Vague and ambiguous laws to be repealed so that there is no need of re-interpretation by appellate courts.
(12) New judicial infrastructure to be Increased with focus on technology e.g., virtual court hearing, e-filing etc.
(13) Quality of Legal Education needs to be substantially improved so that efficient and good quality lawyers join the legal profession. Cross-check needed at the entry level itself.
(14) Mandatory pre-litigation mediation in every court and every civil matter, including, in writ jurisdictions and in matrimonial disputes.
(15) Mandatory in-house mechanism for redressal of grievances of employees (past as well as present) against Government/ Government Departments/ PSUs etc. before resorting to litigation.
(16) Expanding the scope of Alternate Disputes Resolution (ADRs) and simplifying their processes. Provisions of multiple appeals in arbitral disputes to be curtailed. Mediation and Lok Adalat to be promoted and parties to be counseled to resort to ADR before registration of court cases.
(17) All India Judicial Examination for prompt and efficient judicial appointments.
(18) Adequate and regular training of Judges, Lawyers, Court Staff, Police and other stakeholders.
(19) Judicial Accountability and appointment of quality Judges.
(20) Automatic Lapse of Civil Cases if exceptionally delayed. Parties to be compensated for undue delay, if ultimately acquitted.

5.3 *Epilogue*

Needless to mention that the above is just an inclusive list and not an exhaustive list of workable solutions which may be urgently adopted by the stakeholders to secure Speedy Justice and Social Equity for *We, the Common People of India*. With advent of technology, when e-filing, video conferencing hearing and online Justice delivery system are becoming the new norms and transition from tradition to technology is evident, the pursuit of Speedy Justice on a mission mode, is the biggest Legal Reform and the most important need of the hour, before it is too late.

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The role of judicial discretion in bail decisions: Balancing individual rights and public interest

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ABSTRACT: In India, Article 21 of the Constitution establishes bail as a fundamental right, but its enforcement is governed by the BNSS 2023 and the BNS 2023. The legislation, section 480 of BNSS specifies that release on bail is mandatory, with no discretion granted to the court or police. However, in non-bailable cases, when bail is not a matter of right, the court has the power to grant or deny bail after careful examination of different considerations.

This research paper examines the role of judicial discretion in bail decisions, with a focus on balancing individual rights and public interest. The paper analyses the factors considered by courts when exercising judicial discretion in bail decisions, including the nature and seriousness of the offence, the accused's criminal history and record, and the risk of flight or danger to the community. Through a critical analysis of case law, statutes, and scholarly literature, this paper argues that judicial discretion in bail decisions must be exercised in a way that balances individual rights, such as the right to liberty and freedom, with public interest considerations, such as public safety and prevention of crime

Keywords: Judicial discretion, Bail decisions, Individual rights, Public interest, Criminal justice system

1 INTRODUCTION

The power or privilege to formally decide between acceptable possibilities by applying judgment and reason is known as discretion[1]. The concept of judicial discretion is broad because judges can make different kinds of choices in the same situations. A judge has unrestricted discretion in court proceedings. A certain amount of discretion is inevitable because the legislator cannot foresee every scenario that could occur during legal processes. The statutes do not define judicial discretion, even though courts of law use it frequently.

2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Methodology adopted for this study is Empirical Secondary Data where study has been done related to judicial discretion in Bail application. Data has been collected

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from various Annual Report issued by Supreme Court and High Court Data Bases. Secondary sources also used in the study from various books, websites, research journals etc.

2.1 *Court discretion*

In the criminal justice system, sentencing is a crucial component that entails striking a balance between the interests of the accused and society. Only a few offenses in India need a minimum term, while most penalties are the most that a criminal court can inflict. The court has broad authority to impose punishment in the former circumstances, but when imposing penalty, it must apply the concept of proportionality to prescribe liability based on the severity of each type of criminal activity, as laid down by the Hon'ble Supreme Court in the case of *State of M.P. v. Munna Chaubey*[2]. Because each case is different, this method provides the judge a great deal of discretion in deciding on a sentence. This is likely to allow for sentencing that considers more intricate considerations of responsibility. Judges generally agree that punishment should always be proportionate to the offense; however, in realty, sentencing largely based on additional variables factors. Occasionally, the perpetrator's needed for repairs are used to justify a punishment. Occasionally it is desirable to keep him out of circulation, and occasionally the devastating consequences of his crime.

The Supreme Court's observation in *Pyarali K. Tejani v. Mahadeo Ramchandra Dange*[3] should be considered when awarding final sentences in criminal trials: "The magistracy in this country has yet to realise that there are occasions when an offender is so anti-social that immediate and sometime prolonged confinement is the best assurance of society's physical protection." If someone breaks the law can avoid punishment below the FAPA (Food Adulteration Prevention Act) by paying small penalties, it undermines the legislation and makes its enforcement ineffective.

2.2 *Bail*

Both bailable and non-bailable offenses are eligible for bail. The BNSS, 2023 contains clauses allowing for the bail release of accused individuals. In situation when bail is possible in bailable offenses, Section 478 of BNSS permits bail. The BNSS Section 478 declares that being released on bail is a matter of right. This implies that a police station or court's officer-in-charge cannot refuse bail for crimes that are subject to it. For offenses that are not subject to bail, Section 480 of the BNSS, 2023 permits release on bond.

Bail cannot be asserted as a right in such cases. The court has a great deal of authority in deciding whether to grant or refuse bail. The court must strike a balance between the rights of individuals and society when granting bail for non-bailable offenses. The Court considers several factors when granting bail for non-bailable offenses, including the likelihood of re-commission, witness intimidation, evidence tampering, the accused's seniority, potential punishment, evidence strength, and reasonable possibility of securing bail. "The court granting bail should exercise its discretion in a judicious manner and not as a matter of course," the Hon'ble Supreme Court noted in *Kalyan Chandra Sarkar v. Rajesh Ranjan @ Pappu Yadav and Anr*[4]. It is important to mention in these orders the grounds for the first decision to grant release, especially when the accused is charged with a severe crime. However, a full examination of the evidence and recording of the case's merits are not required at the bail stage.

According to *Krishna Iyer J.* In the criminal court system, bail is a hazy area that primarily relies on the bench's judgment, also referred to as discretion of judicial. Because the BNSS, 2023 is unclear on this matter, Court decides to say nothing about whether the order is custodial or not. However, as the matter involves justice, public safety, liberty and the

financial burden on the general public, a well-developed jurisprudence of bail is necessary for a socially sensitive legal system[5].

2.3 *Bail across high courts*

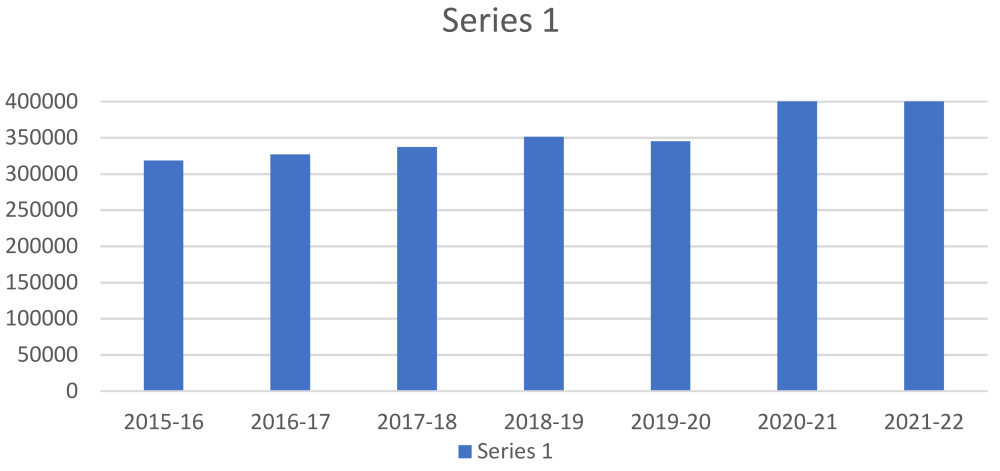
2.3.1 *Aggregate bail applications instituted before all High Courts in India*[6]

Between July 2021 and June '22, 4.3 lakh bail applications were filed before High Courts in India.

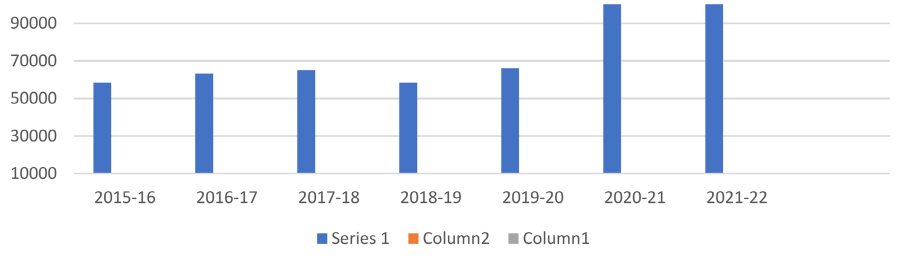
The number has risen steadily since 2015-16, with the biggest jump coming post 2019-20:

2.3.2 *Aggregate pending bail applications before all High Courts in India each year*

While cases being instituted are one section of the puzzle, bail cases should be listed and decided quickly since there are rarely complex issues of law or fact involved. However, the number of cases not disposed and instead carried forward each year has been steadily creeping upwards from 2015-16 indicating a growing backlog of bail cases.

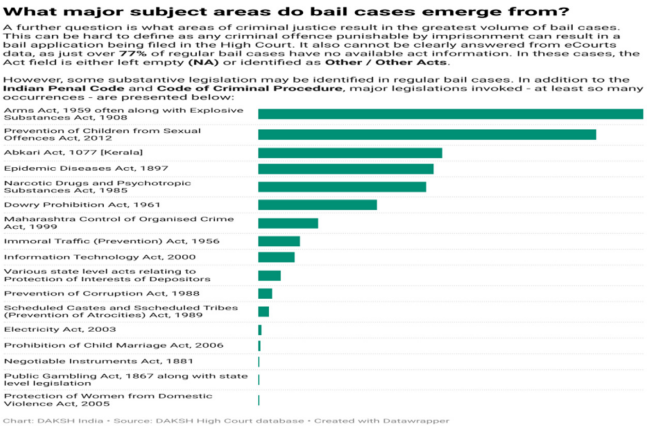


Note: These case institution figures have been provided for a July to June cycle as per the Supreme Court Annual Reports.



Source: Supreme Court Annual Reports 2015-16 to 2021-22

3 SUBJECT MATTERS OF BAIL APPLICATION[7]:



4 DURATION OF BAIL PENDING[8]

How long do bail cases remain pending?

Across the dataset, the median number of calendar days over which cases remained pending for **regular** bail applications was **461 days, about 1 year and three months**. For **anticipatory** bail applications, it was **339 days, about 1 year and one month**.

	High Court	Median pending days (regular)	Median pending days (anticipatory)
1	High Court of Jharkhand	24	54
2	High Court of Kerala	28	NA
3	High Court of Rajasthan	65	NA
4	Orissa High Court	134	398
5	High Court of Jammu And Kashmir	250	NA
6	High Court of Uttarakhand	298	244
7	High Court of Bombay	568	675
8	Gauhati High Court	683	540
9	Allahabad High Court	698	34
10	High Court of Manipur	1,122	672
11	Calcutta High Court	2,478	522
12	High Court of Chhattisgarh	NA	412

Note: Meghalaya, Sikkim and Tripura had no regular or anticipatory pending bail cases, Chhattisgarh had no pending regular bail cases, Kerala, Rajasthan and Jammu and Kashmir had no pending anticipatory bail cases

Median pending days (regular bail) for Calcutta and Manipur were calculated with n=3152 cases and n=2 cases respectively.

Table: DAKSH India • Source: DAKSH High Court database • Created with Datawrapper

5 ANALYSING OF GRAPH

As per the Supreme Court Annual Report, more than 90,000 cases are pending in from 3 lakh cases instituted in 21-22. Bail subject matter includes Arms Act , POSCO, Epidemic crimes NDPS, IT Act etc where most of the cases are pending in state like Jharkhand, Kerala, Rajasthan, Bombay etc.

5.1 *Temporary injunction in civil proceedings*

The status quo or the preservation of the disputed subject matter is ordered by the court in this unusual. The court's discretion, which varies depending on the facts and circumstances of each case, determines whether the right to pursue injunctive remedy exists. The guidelines that regulate the use of discretion granted by CPC, 1908 of Order 39, state that a party requesting a

temporary injunction must persuade the court that the following circumstances exist: -*The initial case comes first*- The term "prima facie" refers to judicial proof that, if accepted, sufficient prove a fact. To put it another way, the prerequisite for granting a temporary injunction is the presumptive existence of a right and its violation. *Convenience balance comes in second*- The court should consider the likelihood of significant harm to the applicant if the injunction is denied against the likelihood of harm to the opposing party if the injunction is granted to apply the principle of balance of convenience. *The third phrase, irreparable loss*- It only indicates that the hurt must be material, meaning it cannot be sufficiently made up for in damages. It does not imply that there must be no physical method of mending the injury.

An injunction can only be granted if the plaintiff satisfies all three of the key material components at the same time; it is not enough that the plaintiff is automatically deemed to have fulfilled the other two ingredients if just one is satisfied. In addition, as an injunction is a discretionary remedy, it is a well-established rule that the plaintiff must appear in court with clean hands and provide all relevant information, both in favor of and against him, for equity relief to be granted. Therefore, the equity principle must also be properly considered before providing such relief.[9] "The granting of a temporary injunction under the powers conferred by order 39 is a matter of discretion," stated *White CJ.* Indeed, it is up to the judge's discretion. However, If the court grating the injunction accurately comprehends the facts and applies the true principles to those facts, then it is a wise use of judicial discretion[10].

5.2 *CPC, 1908 SEC. 151*

Section 151 wording is written in such a way that, although this provision grants a civil court extensive discretion in civil cases, its inherent authority can only be utilized to prevent abuses of the court procedures or to enhance justice, which is what the code is meant to do. Moreover, inherent jurisdiction is limited to situations in which the statute lacks specific requirements.

K.K. Velusamy v. N. Palanisamy[11], The Supreme Court clarified the meaning of Section 151, stating that it is not a substantive statute that gives courts any authority or jurisdiction. It simply recognizes that every court has the inherent discretion to administer justice in accordance with the law, to do what is "right" and undo what is "wrong," that is, to take all necessary efforts to uphold justice's purposes and prevent misuse of its procedures.

Sec. 151 discretion allowed by of the CPC 1908 is not infinite and has to be utilized to protect the rule of law and prevent its abuse, and only in circumstances where the code does not explicitly mention it. In the *Ramji Dayawala v. Invest Import case*[12], The SC noted that the court's discretion depends on several factors that it must consider. It may be used to halt the suit's protracted tactics and to provide the parties with genuine and significant justice.

5.3 *Adjournment*

Order 17 Rule 1 grants the court the authority to give the parties more time and to postpone a suit hearing if there is acceptable justification. The court must undoubtedly evaluate if the reason for the requested delay is sufficient. This complies with the fair trial rule's minimal requirements. However, no one can be allowed to approach a case with a relaxed attitude while still exercising their right to a fair trial.

A light adjournment policy encourages dishonest litigants while the court fails to fulfill its obligation to shield the opposing party from exploitation, needless harassment, and irritation. The court must avoid using delaying strategies by allowing adjournments in a light hearted manner. In the matter of *M/s Shiv Cotex vs. Tirgun Auto Plat p. Ltd. & Others*, the hon'ble Apex court condemned the practice of offering more than three chances for evidence in the following ways [13].

5.4 *Exercise of discretion while granting specific performance*

because special remedy is a sort of judicial relief as well as an adjective law, it is integrally linked to procedural law. In addition to the Specific Relief Act of 1963, courts can offer

specific remedies under other laws. For example, the Transfer of Property Act of 1882 discusses the remedies that a mortgage agreement grants to a mortgagor and mortgagee. The partnership offers a dissolution procedure and accounting services. A action for the administration of a deceased person's estate and accounts may also be considered by a civil court. A remedy for the restitution of recent dispossessions is offered by section 164 of BNSS, 2023 "Specific relief" is used in contrast to compensatory compensation.

Although it is stipulated in the Specific Relief Act of 1963, one cannot claim that the granting of particular performance is a matter of right rather it is an equitable remedy. Granting such relief is entirely up to the court's discretion, and that decision must be wise and founded in good principles. Section 20 of the Act lays out the rules governing discretion. According to the clause, the court's discretion should be sound and reasonable and guided by judicial principles rather than being arbitrary. The court must determine that the individual appearing in court must be in good standing, meaning that the party requesting equitable relief must treat his opponent with diligence. Therefore, the plaintiff's actions such as his delay, compliance, or breach have a significant impact on how the court exercises its discretion. Section 20 of the Specific Relief Act of 1963 states that the Court may appropriately use its discretion in the following situations: -

(1) If the plaintiff has an unfair advantage over the defendant due to contract terms.
(2) If the plaintiff has an unfair advantage over the defendant due to the parties' behaviour or other circumstances.
(3) If the defendant would face hardship if the contract was not performed, while the plaintiff would not face such hardship if it were not performed.
(4) If the defendant entered the contract under circumstances that make it unfair to enforce specific performance even if the contract is not voidable.

Benjamin Cardozo stated in "The nature of the legal process is that "the judge, even when free, is still not wholly free." He is not allowed to create for amusement. He is not a wandering knight in quest of his own standards of morality or beauty. He should take inspiration from hallowed ideals. He must exercise judgment that is guided by custom, methodized by analogy, controlled by a system, and subservient to "the primordial necessity of order in the social life" rather than succumbing to erratic emotion or uncontrolled, ill-defined compassion. The remaining area of discretion is sufficiently broad in all consciences.[14]

6 SUGGESTION

Finding a balance between protecting people's rights and maintaining public safety is still one of the trickiest problems in bail law. Although judicial discretion is essential for customizing bail judgments to the specifics of each case, it must be used fairly, openly, and responsibly. Going forward, several crucial actions can enhance the effectiveness and fairness of bail decisions:

(1) Clearly defines the rules for discretion.
(2) Improve Instruction in the Law.
(3) Encourage Pre trial Detention Alternatives.
(4) Assure Increased Accountability and Transparency.
(5) Regular Evaluation of Bail Decisions.

7 CONCLUSION

Finally, it could be claimed that judicial discretion should always be guided by principles of justice and reason, rather than personal inclinations. The application of discretion is typically constrained by laws or principles and is based on the particular facts and circumstances

of each situation. The court's discretionary authority is sound, reasonable, and guided by judicial principles rather than being unrestricted or capricious. However, it becomes very difficult to make amends for wrongs committed in the name of the law if this discretion is applied arbitrarily in the name of justice. The same purpose for which discretion is granted the cause of justice is destroyed when it is abused.

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India's residential property market 2024: A comparative analysis of growth, demand dynamics, and regional disparities

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ABSTRACT: India's residential property market has demonstrated remarkable growth in 2024, supported by strong economic fundamentals, rising demand for high-value properties, and a stable mortgage environment. Residential sales in major markets increased by 10.6% year-on-year in H1 2024, with premium properties driving 51% of total sales. Cities like Mumbai, Bengaluru, and Kolkata saw significant growth, while new launches also reached record highs, totaling 183,401 units. Despite a slight increase in unsold inventory, the market's fundamentals remain strong, with improved sales velocity and declining Quarters to Sell (QTS) metrics. The rental market saw a 14.60% year-on-year price increase, though supply constraints persist. Stable lending rates and government initiatives, such as the reintroduced PMAY subsidy scheme, have further boosted housing affordability and market resilience. However, regional disparities and labor market conditions continue to impact the sector. Overall, India's residential property market reflects robust demand, rising prices, and evolving buyer preferences, positioning it for sustained growth in the coming years.

Keywords: Residential Property, Housing Market, India 2024, Real Estate Trends, Mortgage Market

1 INTRODUCTION

The residential property market across India has evolved in the year 2024 due to well well-established economy, changing demography, and customer predisposition. This segment is among the most rapidly developing global real estate markets, distinguished by a significant upturn in the demand for upscale houses and apartments, with Mumbai, Bengaluru, and Kolkata being among the primary driving centers. The first half of 2024 only revealed that the residential sales grew by 10.6% yoy, demonstrating that the sector is flexible to global and domestic economic conditions (Knight Frank 2024). Moreover, the growth of the sector is highly dependent on the current economic revival of India and the governmental attempts to enhance the accessibility of the housing market. The market has also been propelled by demand for better or high-value properties, where the share of better quality or high-value properties in the total stock sold in 2024 was 51%. This can be attributed to a change in consumers' preferences, given the increasing disposable income as well as the increasing need for an improved lifestyle. The prevalence of urbanization aspects and the increasing size of the middle-class population have yet again boosted the demand for residential units in metropolitan and tier II cities. At the same time, new project launches rose to a record high, with 183,401 units launched in H1 2024, reflecting continued confidence of developers in the growth of the sector(JLL India 2024). The likes of such development show that the Indian real estate market is not only in recovery mode, but it is also evolving to these new and changing tendencies.

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However, some obstacles continue to present themselves as follows. Non-moving inventory has been slightly higher than the prior year, while the Key Builders Inventories turned more quickly by increasing speed and reducing the QTS figure. There has also been high activity in the rental sector, with an annualized rate of price increase at 14.60 %, while the issue of availability of properties in the market remains a challenge. Through enjoying steady lending rates and the revival of previously suspended Government initiatives like the revamped Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY), affordability concerns have been well contained, developing a steady mortgage market (Anarock 2023). They also reflect the government's intention to see the growth in the residential property segment continue.

Market prognosis is still optimistic because of rising market confidence, better housing ratio, and favorable policies regarding operation. But regional variations in the form of market returns and the impact of the restrictions in the labour market highlight the necessity of more precise regional solutions. The Indian residential real estate market is a live example of a country on the path of urbanization and developing its economy. This report further explores these trends and gives a deeper insight into the factors that defined the market in 2024 and the future.

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To analyze the growth trajectory of India's residential property market in 2024, with a focus on sales, launches, and pricing trends in major urban centers.
- To assess regional disparities in residential property demand and supply, especially contrasting metropolitan cities (like Mumbai and Bengaluru) with emerging Tier II markets (such as Ahmedabad and Greater Noida).
- To evaluate the impact of economic and policy factors, such as government schemes (e.g., PMAY), mortgage rates, and employment trends, on housing affordability and buyer behavior.
- To investigate the rise in demand for premium housing and rental properties, exploring how changing consumer preferences and urbanization influence these segments.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a doctrinal research methodology, primarily relying on secondary data and literature-based analysis. Doctrinal research, also known as library-based research, involves a systematic examination of existing documents, reports, and legal or policy frameworks to derive conclusions relevant to the subject matter.

The research analyzes authoritative and published sources, including market reports from reputed organizations such as Knight Frank, JLL India, and Anarock, government publications (e.g., RBI reports, PMAY schemes, CMIE unemployment data), and industry insights from portals like Statista, IBEF, and The Economic Times. The legal and economic implications of housing policies, mortgage regulations, and regional disparities have been critically reviewed.

4 RESULT & DISCUSSION

4.1 *Housing market snapshot*

It may be observed from the following figure that the Indian housing market has remained on a higher growth track in 2024. According to the information gathered from the Reserve

Bank of India's All India House Price Index, which depicts a YoY 3.30 percent growth in Q1 of 2024–25. This growth may be attributed to steady growth in demand contributed by better market and economic conditions, especially among potential individuals and companies in both urban and semi-urban centers. According to the Reuters survey, house prices are expected to average at 6% in 2024, pointing to the strong consumer demand and a favorable perspective for the residential property market segment. Such data points reaffirm that the housing sector of India is more resistant to global economic fluctuations.

The latest research shows that Mumbai remains a leader in India's most expensive residential property market, with the highest average price per square foot at INR 26,780 or USD 321. This is in accord with the fact that the city is financial and commercial, resulting in high demand for premium properties. Closely behind Delhi and Gurugram focuses both cities have seen an improvement in infrastructure, corporate growth, and interest in the real estate sector. At the same time, affordable markets like Ahmedabad and Greater Noida have experienced the earth-shattering price appreciation, illustrating the heightened demand for properties located outside gateway cities (Knight Frank 2024). These trends point towards an increase in market developments in both upper-end and low-cost housing markets.

Several factors have driven the demand for housing in Tier II cities, such as government policies, improved accessibility, and lower prices. Among all the zones, Ahmedabad is the best market for growth since the impact of industrialization and the rising employment rate is more home buyer population. Similarly, Greater Noida has the benefit of being within the NCR and location advantage in terms of infrastructure, such as Jewar Airport, which is quickly becoming a catalyst for real estate. These cities are termed new age India's home-buyers' preference, where connectivity and affordability are decisive parameters of choice (Anarock 2023).



Figure 1. Average residential property price per square foot, by city.

4.2 *Demand highlights*

India's real estate market also appears to be in good health this year; there is a projected 10.6% year-on-year increase in residential sales in eight major cities during the first half of 2024. Collectively, a sales volume of $ 173,241 units was achieved in this regard, further asserting the sector's resilience amidst a volatile global economy.

The reasons for this growth are stable mortgage rates and increasing disposable income, as well as the introduction of the PMAY subsidy scheme back in 2020 (Knight Frank 2024).

In the shift of demand and supply forces, the following has been identified as a proper trend: There has been an increase in the sales of premium properties. Luxury units with costs

above INR 10 million registered 51% YoY sale growth and accounted for 41% of the overall gross in H1 2024. It has attributed this shift to the need for large, better quality houses, with the new additional amenities when buying a home, especially given the relevance of the home space during the COVID-19 pandemic. It has also been noted that an increase in luxury housing is even more prominent across the metros and cities, as high earning earning professionals and investors look for affordable, quality homes for more than just the instinct of the moment (JLL India 2024).

Region-wise, Mumbai alone holds 27% market share with NCR India at 17% and Bangalore at 16%. Mumbai had understandably taken the lead owing to the principal business hub of India, and apart from that, a tremendous related infrastructural growth over the years, which has included, but not limited to addition of metro lines and the completion of the coastal roads. Although it became a slightly lesser market with a 4% decrease in sales owing to its record-breaking year in 2023, NCR remains an important market, driven by requirements for both luxury and affordable housing (Anarock 2023). On the other hand, Bengaluru continues to stay vibrant, going by the enhanced IT industry, where the young working population, business executives, both expatriate and Indians, still seek to live in mid to high-end residences.

Kolkata emerged as a standout performer, registering the highest year-on-year growth in sales at 25%. This growth is attributed to rising economic activity, improved infrastructure, and relatively affordable property prices compared to other major cities. The city's burgeoning demand highlights the increasing importance of tier-2 markets in India's residential real estate landscape. Together, these regional variations reflect the multifaceted nature of demand across India, showcasing opportunities for growth and diversification in the residential property sector.

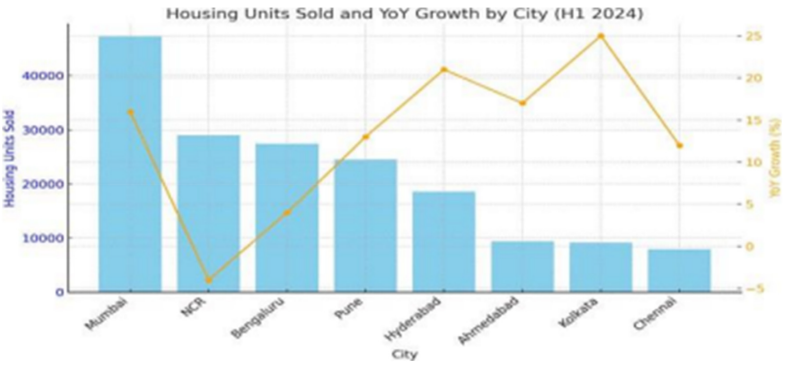


Figure 2. Housing units sold And YoY growth by city (H1 2024).

4.3 *Supply highlights*

The Housing industry in India experienced a historic high in new product offerings in the residential real estate segment in H1 2024, with as many as 183401 new launches. It shows the belief of developers in the increased risk-adjusted returns in the sector due to strong fundamental demand drivers and a supportive macroeconomic environment. Market: Mumbai topped the market with 26 % of the total new launches, proving the fact that Mumbai is the most active market in India. The Mumbai developer has preferred the luxury housing and mid housing segments to fulfill the requirements of the luxury and the affordable housing segments, which are in high demand (Knight Frank 2024).

New launches were up 60% in Kolkata, one of the fastest-growing rates among significant markets throughout the nation. This steep increase is attributed to factors such as urban

development, infrastructure and development and increased investors in the area. Thus, centers such as Mumbai and Ahmedabad witnessed a marginal decrease in new supply, probably because developers are cordially managing the format of the stock situation in some areas and being cautious to keep a better supply-demand balance (JLL India 2024). Fluctuations in new launch trends between different cities demonstrate market phenomena and specific savvy of developers to continue their expansion in the future, solving the problem of excess supply.

While new supply has picked up momentum with as many new launches in the first half of H1 2024, the market reflected a 3 per cent YoY rise in unsold inventory. But the Quarters to Sell or QTS, which measures the efficiency of sales, increased, showing a better sales velocity. With this detail in mind, the improvement in QTS indicates that as supply levels increase, demand in ethos has also increased, allowing developers to shorten the time needed to rebalance inventory. This is an ideal market given that buyers are also consistently interested, and the right marketing techniques are employed (Anarock 2023).

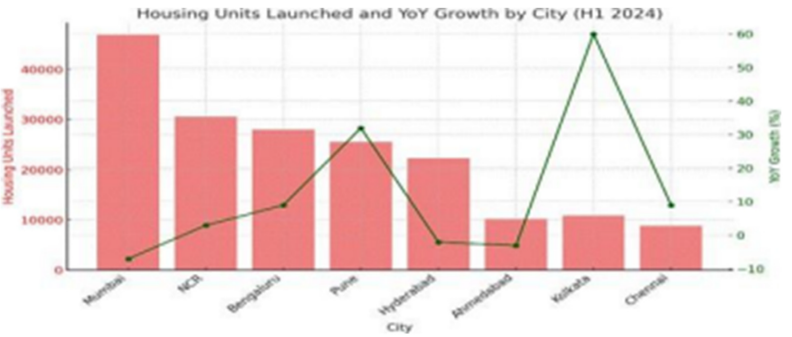


Figure 3. Housing units launched And YoY growth by city (H1 2024).

4.4 *Rental market highlights*

Current market conditions of the rental housing in India saw 2024 having a 14.60% YoY increase in Rental Index amidst growing demand against limited stocks available. Nationally, rental supply was down to 3.10% due to limited ability to address emerging demand for rental housing, particularly in urban areas. Mumbai outcompeted the list and became the most costly rental market with an average of 77,500 INR (929 USD) for a 2 BHK flat. This has been due to the following factors: lack of empty space in the city, the constant flow of young, money-earning professionals, and a significant need for excellent rental units. On the contrary, other cities like Greater Noida and Ahmedabad have recorded the highest growth in rental demand, attributable to affordability, the Jewar Airport project, and growing industrial corridor Knight Frank (2024), Anarock (2024).

Conversely, the rental demand has decreased in Bengaluru and Hyderabad mainly due to work-from-home engagements, which have deprived IT sector employees of the need to reside in urban structures. Nevertheless, these cities have solid long-term fundamentals as modern technology markets possessing a large commercial real estate stock, generating housing needs. Key issues for the rental market in 2024: geographical differences, affordable rents versus increasing prices, and scarcity of space. Future course needs to be set as the government remains fully aware of incentivising rental housing development, together with the continuous shift in the tenants' profile, rentability and affordability prospects indicate the sector has more challenges and opportunities that it has to face in the future (JLL India 2024).

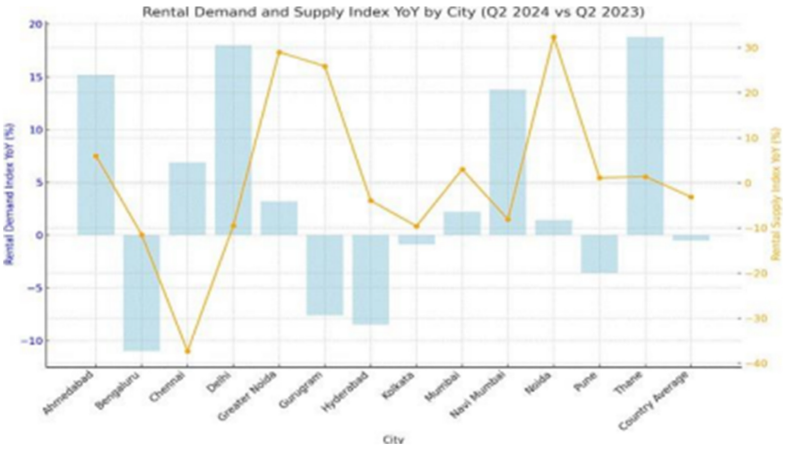


Figure 4. Rental demand and supply index YoY by city (Q2 2024 Vs Q2 2023).

4.5 *Mortgage market*

The mortgage market in India has established itself and has been growing more progressively and steadily, with sound policies on the one hand and strong demand on the other. At the end of July 2024, the share of housing loans in total outstanding loans was Rs 28,101 trillion ($336.2 billion), showing a significant increase of 36.5% compared to the same period last year. This surge in demand for housing and homeownership is primarily due to recent government initiatives such as the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) subsidy scheme, which has played a major role in increasing the number of first-time buyers and generating greater interest in homeownership. Other factors, such as the reduction in stamp duty in several states, have further fueled this demand. Additionally, Indian lenders have benefited from the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) decision to keep key interest rates steady through February 2023, creating a more stable and resilient lending landscape that has strengthened the mortgage market.

	August 2024	January 2023	Min Offer Movement Aug 2024 vs Ja 2023
State Bank of India	8.50% to 9.65%	8.55% to 10.50%	-0.05 pp
Bank of India	8.40% to 10.80%	8.30% to 10.25%	+0.10 pp
HDFC Bank	8.75% to 9.95%	8.65% to 9.50%	+0.10 pp
ICICI Bank	9.25% to 10.05%	8.40% to 9.50%	+0.85 pp
Axis Bank	8.75% to 9.10%	8.60% to 9.05%	+0.15 pp
Kotak Mahindra Bank	8.70% to 8.75%	8.30% to 9.10%	+0.40 pp
Bank of Baroda	8.40% to 11.10%	8.50% to 10.10%	-0.10 pp
Punjab & Sind Bank	8.50% to 10.00%	8.25% to 9.35%	+0.25 pp
Indian Overseas Bank	8.40% to 10.60%	8.95% to 9.05%	-0.55 pp
Canara Bank	8.40% to 11.75%	8.60% to 10.80%	-0.20 pp

Figure 5. Selected banks home loan interest rates (asreported by Forbes Advisor India).

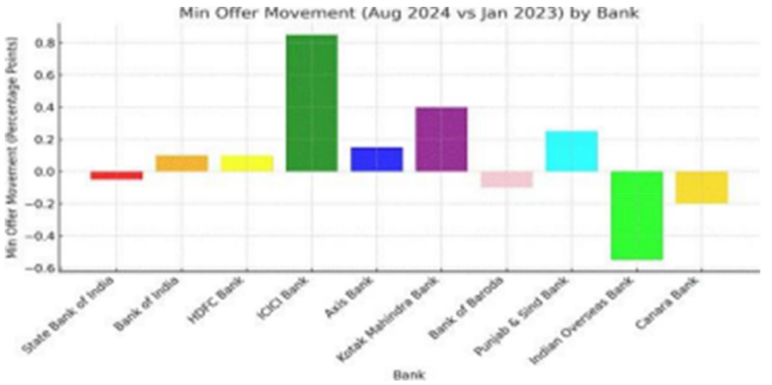


Figure 6. Min offer movement (Aug 2024 Vs Jan 2023) By Bank

4.6 *Socio-economic context*

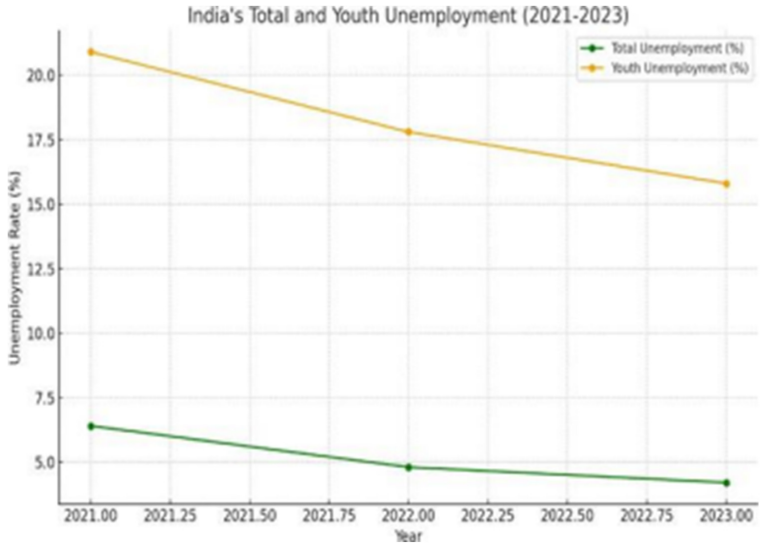


Figure 7. India's total and youth unemployment (2021-2023)

5 CONCLUSION

The report of the Indian residential property market in 2024 is an epitome of dynamism, growth, and changing buyer profile characteristics. In the first half of 2024, whereas residential sales have increased by 10.6% year over year and newly launched units were at a maximum level in a decade – 183 401 units, still, the increase remained driven by demand for affordable housing, stable mortgage rates, the growth of people's disposable incomes, and the subsidy programme of the reintroduced PMAY scheme. Among the cities, Mumbai has been one of the most important markets for residential property due to the city's position as the financial capital of India, and among other cities, there are Bengaluru and Kolkata. The

growth of volume to premium properties, with 51% contribution to the total transactions, also supports the theory that there is a change in behavior towards purchasing high-end homes. Furthermore, new rental prices continued to rise at a year-on-year rate charging 14.60 percent in comparison to the previous year, demonstrating that demand for housing remains firm and supply is still an issue.

Despite expected long-term growth, certain issues include regional distribution, inventory that remains unsold, and many problems concerning the labor market. While new launches and better sales velocity indicate confidence on the part of the developers, a 3% inch up in the inventory that remains unsold recommends supply-side optimization. Also, problems connected to the labor market, such as unemployment, remain as big factors that influence SA, particularly in the already mentioned small cities, in terms of housing affordability and availability. However, due to the vigorous governmental support, immense popularity of real estate among the Indian population, and steadily improving affordability of dwelling houses, the Indian residential property market remains rather optimistic and 'young', thus carving out its place as one of the most promising segments globally.

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Punishing poverty: The economic disparity of the poor in the criminal justice system

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ABSTRACT: Equality before law is one of the most significant features of the Indian constitution. Anyone who seeks justice must be provided with legal support without any discrimination. An accused is also assured of penalization based on the tenets of equality irrespective of his ethnicity, religion, economic, social background, etc. Poor parity has led to discriminatory approaches in awarding punishments to offenders belonging to economically marginalised sections of society. The low paying capacity of the poor offenders gives an upper edge to the rich offenders who has better paying capacity of fines or damages and suffer less severe repercussions through the justice system.

This paper will conduct a comprehensive study to identify the discrepancies in the penalization process and its implications in the dispensation of justice. It will also explore the factors such as social background, ethnicity, and economic status which play an integral part in influencing the legal and sociological perspectives of the stakeholders of the justice delivery system. It will analyze the judicial trend and legislative framework to ensure equitable justice. It will conclude with suggestions and recommendations for the formulation of robust policies to ensure a just penal administration.

Keywords: discrimination, poor parity, damages, fines, criminal justice system

> *"We have a system of justice that treats you better if you're rich and guilty than if you're poor and innocent,"*
>
> – Bryan Stevenson, the NGO, Equal Justice Initiative

1 INTRODUCTION

The criminal justice system is expected to ensure fair and just treatment to the people who have suffered due to miscarriage of justice. The criminal justice system require all its stakeholders i.e., the police officials, judiciary, correctional institutions and its related personnels, social workers, etc. to work in tandem for the maintenance of equilibrium of the rights of the accused, the victims, prioritize public safety and discourage crimes in future (Lippert-Rasmussen 2010).

The fundamental principle of equality is the cornerstone of Indian democracy endorsing the rule of law. It asserts to avoid discrimination based on socio-economic status, ethnicity, gender, etc. (Verma 2011). Indian constitution enshrines right to equality under Article 14 which ensures uniform applicability of law for all the persons. Inspite of such assurances under the constitution, discrepancies in the legal system while awarding discriminatory monetary penalties have come to light. Instances of biasness by the stakeholders undermine

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the legitimacy of legal institutions which can create unrest among the people. The awarding of monetary penalties, especially fines and bails, has been observed to face such systemic abnormalities more often (Krishnaswamy *et al*, 2014).

2 SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

The study is significant from the point of view of mitigating injustice by identifying structural flaws suffered by the poor accused in the criminal justice system. It will focus on the systematic disparities practiced through judicial processes by identifying and analyzing discrimination present in the criminal justice system.

3 RESEARCH GAP

Most of the available studies revolve around disparities related to race or gender in the criminal justice system but discrimination based on economic status of the accused has not received much attention. Moreover, the inequality discourse is limited to the affordability for the legal representation while it misses the point that poverty can lead to discrimination at various stages of criminal justice system from policing to imprisonment to experiences after the release. The study seeks to fill the gap by conducting a comprehensive analysis of the factors responsible for the discriminatory practices in the sentencing process related to the economic status of the accused.

4 RESEARCH PROBLEM

The Indian criminal justice system is expected to be impartial and work on equitable principles of justice, but poor people often face discrimination due to their incapacity to afford fine/bail money. While it may be easily affordable to rich offender and for economically marginalised people, it may be life-altering. The research seeks to analyse the factors which lead to discriminatory outcomes due to poverty and explore reformatory approaches available in our legal system to ensure economic justice.

5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research adopted a doctrinal methodology which will involve the analysis of the available literature. The relevant material in the form of books, articles from reputed journals and reports will be evaluated in a structured manner. Various relevant legal principles and statutes are also critically scrutinized for understanding their applicability and workability with reference to the theme of the research. Landmark Judicial pronouncements are also explored for identifying and interpreting it regarding the subject matter.

6 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To assess the structural and procedural prejudices in the justice delivery system which affect the economically marginalized persons.
- To scrutinize the legal provisions related to fines and bail and its applicability in addressing economic disparity.

- To propose recommendations for changes in the policies to ensure a fair and equitable approach for imposing fines and bail.

7 FINES AND BAIL AS KEY COMPONENTS OF PENALTY

Among the many ways of penalization, fines and bail are mostly awarded in cases of less serious crimes to avoid undue suffering for the offender in the criminal justice system.

Fines serve as a convenient means of penalty by compensating for the damage caused and creates a deterrence. In many jurisdictions, fines are used as alternatives to imprisonment for less serious crimes. Even in the Indian legal system, for many offences, fines are awarded and if one fails to pay, then imprisonment can be granted or both (Sharma 2016). If the offender has capacity to pay, he/she can free himself by paying for the monetary damages charged from him but an individual who cannot afford to pay the damages may suffer due to financial burden and it will lead to unequal outcome of justice.

Bail is granted on the presumption of innocence until proven guilty, which is a hallmark of the adversarial system.gs. Bail is often in the form of financial deposits, personal recognizance or property sureties. It often acts as a privilege for economically sound people who can easily afford the bail amount and be freed without suffering through the system. Economically marginalized accused have to be incarcerated for long periods behind bars as their paying capacity is not good (Heller 2024).

8 DISPARITIES IN AWARDING FINES AND BAIL

The justice delivery system is expected to promote legal justification through the penalties. In the case of fines and bail, it has been observed to exhibit discrepancies on the notions of socio-economic divergence (Salamone 2023). The discrepancies in fines and bail have been influenced by various factors which includes economic status, gender difference, marginalized group such as minorities, tribe, caste based, etc. Judicial discretion also plays an important role in establishing the rule of law. The decisions made by the courts often exert influence from such factors (Scott-Hayward *et al*. 2019).

8.1 *Economic disparity*

The economically marginalized person struggles to pay high amount of fine or bail while it is a matter of privilege for wealthier persons to free themselves by paying the amount they can easily afford and be released from the shackles of law (Resnik *et al.* 2018). While the exorbitant amount of fine, puts additional pressure not only on the individual but also drags the family or other dependents on the accused. It has also led to severe consequences, sometimes resulting in loss of job and property. Moreover, it can push these marginalized people in severe financial distress which can further confine them within the vicious cycle of poverty and imprisonment (Bales *et al* 2019).

8.2 *Gender biasness*

Women generally are considered to be involved in less violent crimes and they are assumed to be caregivers, the law enforcement mechanism is often sympathetic towards women, hence less fines or bail amount is imposed on them. The court also tends to be lenient towards womankind. Moreover, women are also considered to be dependent on men for their economic status, if not working. So, to lessen their burden, low amount of fines and bail are imposed on them (Turner *et al.* 2006). It projects intersectionality of biases based on gender and status in society.

8.3 *Racial and ethnic discrimination*

People belonging to particular ethnic groups such as black communities are often perceived to be more involved in criminal activities than their white counterparts from general groups. In the western countries, especially in the U.S, African Americans and Latinos face discriminatory behaviour from the law enforcement personnels. These people often have to pay huge amount of fine or bail than people from other ethnic groups. Implicit biases are also seen through the judiciary and law enforcement administration towards harsh behaviour towards these groups (McLean 2012).

9 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Our justice delivery system is guided by well-established norms based on transparency and fairness, then too the imposition of fines and bails have often raised concerns on the pretext of discriminatory attitude towards marginalized people by overburdening them with hefty fines or bail amounts. It disproportionately creates a class divide based on socio-economic status which subjects the individuals to inequitable outcomes (Carroll 2020). The theoretical framework seeks to analyze the principles which can be incorporated to ensure structured methods to mitigate discrepancies in imposing fines or bails.

10 PROPORTIONALITY PRINCIPLE AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE

The Classical justice theorists such as Cesare Beccaria, advocated for proportionality in punishment which should be quantified in accordance with the gravity of the crime and harm it caused in the related circumstances (Beccaria 2016). Traditional justice system often implements flat-rate fines and bail amounts which create an inequitable divide among the accused individuals who may have committed similar crimes. Rich accused can easily avoid the suffering of the penalization by paying the fines and walk free and often not even realizing the gravity of the damage caused by him. It defeats the whole purpose of punishment and seriousness of the process of law.

John Rawl's theory promoted "justice as fairness", it is the main concept which is advocated through (i) equal basic liberties for all, and (ii) fair equality of opportunity and difference principle. According to him, equality of liberties should be entrusted to every individual (Follesdal 2014). Socio-economic inequalities are only permissible if it can benefit the least advantaged. The idea is to mitigate inequalities in any form through any structural processes. The implementation of this theory while awarding fines or bail as penalties for the wrong committed by the accused can result in an equitable system which should ensure fairness in deciding the amount to be paid based on the economic status of the accused.

11 APPLICABILITY OF DETERRENCE THEORY FOR ECONOMIC CAPABILITY BASED FINES

The deterrence theory posits to set an example by penalizing exemplary penalties for the culprit and for the public at large to avoid the commission of similar crimes in future. If the economic status of the offender is not considered while awarding punishments, it will result in disparity and add economic burden to a poor offender. It may cripple the harmony in society and can lead to adverse repercussions which lead to the socio-economic imbalance in society.

Many European countries implement 'day fines' which aligns with the purpose of deterrence theory by generating the fine amount from the daily income earned by the offender (Colgan 2017). It ensures that penalties can retain its deterrent effect without any discrimination or burdening the offender belonging to lower economic strata of society. This type of monetary punishment facilitates equality to maintain an equilibrium of burden of the

punishment. It is a structured form of penalty in which the amount of fine is determined by the daily income of the offender, the gravity of the crime and the damage it has caused (Schierenbeck 2018). It is also beneficial in lessening overcrowding in prisons.

12 LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR FINES AND COMPENSATION

The Indian Penal Code (IPC) and Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) provided for various guidelines of fines and compensation. Even the new Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) and the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) provide similar guidelines. Even when fine is not part of the sentence, then too the court have been given power to order for compensation of victims under S. 395. S. 396 also details the victim's compensation scheme entrusted to the state government for release of funds. These laws fail to take into consideration the paying capacity of the offender which also creates economic disparity.

13 JUDICIAL APPROACHES ON FINES AND COMPENSATION

The Indian courts have been sensitive towards prevailing economic disparity in awarding punishment which was reiterated in the case of *Sunil D. Gaikwad v. State of Maharashtra* (2014). The court acknowledged poverty as a mitigating factor during sentencing. It emphasized that the socio-economic factors should also be considered while sentencing the accused, if he belongs to the lower strata of society.

In the landmark judgment of *State of Maharashtra v. Suresh Pandurang Davrvakar* (2006), the economic disparity is mandated for consideration of awarding fines and during sentencing. In another enlightening precedent in 1977, *Motilal Lal v. State of Madhya Pradesh*, the court emphasized for equitable approach towards imposition of fines and if the accused is not able to pay the fines due to his economic incapacity, he should not be made to suffer longer tenure of imprisonment. In the case of *Hussainara Khatoon vs. State of Bihar (1979),* the court also showed its concern for the plight of poor undertrial prisoners who cannot afford bail and suffer economic disparity by the justice delivery system. In the case of *State of Rajasthan vs. Sanyam Lodha (2011),* the court held that fines act as deterrent, but it should not be imposed to penalise poverty[1]. The court should consider the economic status of the accused before imposing penalty in the form of fine. Justice Krishna Iyer, in M.H.Hoskot vs. State of Maharashtra acknowledged that unjust fine imposed on the accused will lead to economic disparity. Incarceration, if accused is not able to pay is discriminatory in nature.

14 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The present legal system needs to prioritize its policies towards mitigating economic disparities while imposing fines, compensation and granting bail. Some changes in policies can bring instrumental improvement in lessening the economic disparity.

It is suggested to develop a 'sliding scale system' for fines while considering the financial status of the accused. Judicial training for promoting uniformity in sentencing related to fines, compensation and bail is also recommended. Establishment legal aid policies for supporting indigent offenders in cases of fines or payment of compensation can be very helpful. Alternatives for non-monetary penalties should also be included in legislative policies.

15 CONCLUSION

Due to economic disparity, the Indian criminal justice system practices discrimination in equitable justice towards accused while awarding fines and bail which fails to serve the

purpose of penalization in our adversarial legal system. Judiciary has also acknowledged disproportionation in such regard and has advocated for deciding the amount of fine or bail in accordance with the paying capacity of the offender, foreseeing the risk through pretrial assessment or opt for alternative sanctions equivalent to fines or bail amount. It requires systematic reform by introducing progressive policies. It must be ensured that the financial status of the accused should not be a hurdle in upholding the constitutional equality for attaining justice in the real sense.

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Delegated legislation and doctrine of excessive delegation: A critical analysis with special reference to India and the U.K.

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ABSTRACT: The doctrine of excessive delegation is a judicially evolved principle that limits the legislature's power to delegate essential legislative functions. While delegated legislation is essential for effective governance, excessive delegation undermines the basic principle of separation of power among government organs. The doctrine of excessive delegation is the demarcated line that separates constitutionality and unconstitutionality of the abdication of legislative powers. The Supreme Court, through interpretations and rulings evolved this doctrine, thereby protecting the essence of the separation of powers. Whether legislative power can be delegated cannot arise in the U.K. since its parliament is supreme if there are no legal limitations on its powers. Delegated legislation is the creation of the executive, thus, accountability is questionable. The possibility of abuse of power and lack of transparency arises. The judiciary has put a cap on delegating essential legislative functions by the law-making organ. Delegated legislation is unconstitutional when it violates constitutional provisions and fundamental rights. The maxim ***Delegatus non potest delegare*** prevents onward delegation of delegated powers. There have been instances of excessive delegation that compelled the judiciary to step in to safeguard the constitutional provisions and protect citizens' rights. The three control mechanisms, parliamentary, judicial and executive, need to be in alert mode to ensure fairness in delegation. This paper analyses this doctrine, focusing on the judicial approaches in India and the United Kingdom.

1 INTRODUCTION

Delegated legislation is a legal mechanism whereby the parent act or enabling act assigns extra powers to the executive to make laws to further the parent act's objectives. Rules, orders, regulations, bye-laws made under an enabling power are grouped under delegated legislation. [1] The executive, not the legislature, creates delegated legislation, and thus is questionable regarding accountability. The possibility of abuse of power and lack of transparency arises. The judiciary has put a cap on delegating essential legislative functions by the law-making organ. Delegated legislation is unconstitutional when it violates constitutional provisions and fundamental rights. The maxim *Delegatus non potest delegare* prevents onward delegation of delegated powers. The three control mechanisms, Parliamentary, Judicial and Executive Controls, must be in alert mode to ensure fairness in delegation.

In a modern state, a delegation of law-making power is inevitable due to increasing complexity of socio-economic regulations. However, such delegation must adhere to the

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spirit of the constitution. Essential legislative functions, if delegated, may lead to executive tyranny. The Indian Constitution, while not explicitly prohibiting delegation, imposes limitations through judicial interpretations. The doctrine of excessive delegation serves as a safeguard to prevent the legislature from crossing the permissible boundary. Delegated legislation is the law-making power of the legislature given to the executive or any subordinate authority, and it must be done in a democratic set-up because of the technicalities and complexities involved in government.

The doctrine of excessive delegation suggests that legislature must not delegate its core legislative power, especially in legislating policy. Delegation is excessive when it does not lay down sufficient policy outlines and standards in the parent act.

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

To critically analyse the constitutional provisions and limitations on delegated legislation and judicial thoughts on the doctrine of excessive delegation.

- To analyse the judicial approach in dealing with excessive delegation.
- To compare the framework of delegated legislation between India and the United Kingdom
- To assess the parliamentary, judicial, and executive controls preventing excessive delegation.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Doctrinal method of research is adopted in this paper. The data used in the study were obtained from the constitution, enactments, judicial pronouncements, committee reports and research papers.

4 INDIA

4.1 *Constitutional provisions*

Article 245 refers to the extent of federal and state legislatures' laws.

Article 246 divides subjects into Union, State, and Concurrent Lists.

These two Articles of the Indian Constitution symbolise the federal structure. Legislative functions in India are demarcated with boundaries.

Article 13(3)(a): Includes rules and regulations under the definition of 'law.'

Doctrine of Separation of Power: Prevents centralisation of power in any of the organs of the state.

4.2 *Statutory and legislative provisions*

General Clauses Act, 1897: Section 21 provides for the amendment or rescission of delegated legislation.

4.3 *Parliamentary control*

The Committee on Subordinate Legislation of the Lok Sabha was established on December 1, 1953, performs an invaluable governmental function of ensuring the executive's rule-making firm and within the bounds of the executive delegation made by the legislature. The

Committee has powers and duties to consider whether the delegated legislation is within the general ambit of the parent statute, whether it is dealing with situations that should validly be dealt with a primary legislation, whether it has retrospective effect and whether it is a judicial act of courts. From 1953 to 1961, the Committee analysed about 5,300 rules and orders, and reported on its work 19 times. The development of a like committee in the Rajya Sabha, only further establishes parliamentary control over delegated legislation in India, further establishing oversight by implementers in the democratic system (Kumari, Aparajita 2018).

4.4 *Judicial Approach*

4.4.1 *R. v. Burrah* [2]

The court held that the Dominion, Colonial and legislatures in India were not delegates of the British Parliament in exercising their legislative powers, and the delegation was held to be invalid. It was held that the Governor-General in Council held plenary legislative power within the scope conferred by the British Parliament. It was not a subordinate legislature but a body with the authority to create laws, including laws delegating powers to other bodies.

4.4.2 *In re Delhi Laws Act, 1951* [3]

The Supreme Court affirmed the validity of conditional legislation but decided that the legislature must not delegate core responsibilities, such as establishing legislative policy and creating laws. It is permissible to delegate supplementary powers needed to implement the law.

4.4.3 *Raj Narain Singh v. Patna Administration Committee* [4]

Conditional delegation was validated by the court with emphasis on legislative policy. While limiting delegation, the court ruled that delegated authorities cannot alter essential legislative policies.

4.4.4 *A.K. Roy v. Union of India* [5]

The Supreme Court, while interpreting the scope of the President's ordinance-making power, upheld the preventive detention law but criticised vague delegation.

4.4.5 *D.S. Gerewal vs. State of Punjab* [6]

The Court reiterated that the legislature has intrinsic power to assign specific legislative duties to the executive, provided that Parliament itself establishes fundamental legislative policies and standards.

The All-India Services Act, which consists of four concise sections, was examined to determine whether it established adequate legislative policy or delegated operational specifics. The Court found that Section 4 of the Act provided a definitive legislative framework by incorporating existing regulations, thereby creating a binding policy that the Central Government could implement and adjust within specified parameters.

This arrangement ensured the delegation was not overly broad, balancing legislative oversight and executive flexibility. The Court maintained that delegation is valid if legislative policy is clearly articulated.

4.4.6 *Hamdard Dawakhana v. Union of India* [7]

The Court held the provision of the Drugs and Magic Remedies (Objectionable Advertisements) Act, 1954 permitting the government to designate more diseases for which advertisements could be banned, constituted an "uncontrolled and unrestrained" delegation of legislative authority. Delegated legislation was held to be invalid in the absence of policy guidelines.

4.4.7 *Municipal Corporation of Delhi v. Birla Cotton Spinning & Weaving. Mills* [8]
The Supreme Court held that for delegated legislation to be valid, the legislature must establish the "policy," "standard," "guidelines," and "safeguards" (the "guidelines theory").

4.4.8 *Kunj Behari Lal v. State of H.P.* [9]
The Supreme Court ruled that delegated legislation must stay within the limits set by the enabling Act. Legislation cannot delegate its primary duty of essential legislative functions, like enacting enabling acts and policies. The executive is not allowed to exceed the authority provided by the legislature.

4.4.9 *Doctrine of Essential Legislative Functions*
Legislation cannot delegate its primary duty of essential legislative functions, like enacting enabling acts and policies.

4.4.10 *Doctrine of ultra vires*
If delegated legislation exceeds the authority conferred by the parent Act, it can be declared void and challenged because it violates Art. 14 of the Constitution. [10]

If the enabling act deviates from the mandates of the Constitution, then rules made under that Act are unconstitutional. The Court ruled that the constitutionality of the delegated legislation should be inherently present in the parent Act, and the authority exercising the power of delegation must confine powers within allowed limits. [11]

While exercising the power of delegated legislation, the executive or subordinate bodies cannot infringe Fundamental Rights.

4.4.11 *Invalidation*
The doctrine of excessive delegation is a principle that limits the extent to which the legislature can delegate. The law-making body cannot surrender its primary function of law-making to bodies subordinate to it. The separation of powers in India is a testimony to it. When the parent act does not provide policy guidelines and limitations on the delegate, it allows arbitrary powers to be delegated. Uncontrolled and arbitrary power of the delegate leads to invalidation. Delegated legislation that is arbitrary and discriminatory is subject to judicial review.

5 STATUTES PRONE TO EXCESSIVE DELEGATION

5.1 *The Environment (Protection) Act, 1986*

The chances of the government making arbitrary rules and regulations in the name of environmental protection are relatively high.

5.2 *The Essential Commodities Act, 1955*

The law grants unions and state governments substantial rights to regulate production, pricing, supply and distribution of certain commodities. Political expediency and arbitrariness can prevail over an individual's right to conduct any trade. It is also necessary to guard against undue delegation, which requires certain principles or guidelines to be available in the enabling Act. On the provisions of the Essential Supplies (Temporary Powers) Act, 1946, the Supreme Court uphold the constitutional validity of Section 3, which authorises the central government to regulate or prohibit production, supply and the distribution of essential commodities.[12]

The court declared null and void clause 4 of the Non-Ferrous Control Order, 1958[13] as rules and restrictions framed thereunder must be specific by laying it before both Houses of

Parliament. It was evident from the farmers' strike during December, 2020 for the Minimum Support Price after the Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020 was imposed.

5.3 *The Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA), 2002*

The Act created uproar in and out of parliament over the police's power to arrest individuals on suspicion. The power to police to detain a person for up to 180 days without filing a charge sheet was highly prone to misuse and many instances of human rights violations led to the repealing of the Act.

6 UNITED KINGDOM

6.1 *Constitutional and legislative provisions*

Parliament in the United Kingdom is supreme, and the constitution does not limit its powers. Laws passed in the parliament become Acts. However, Acts passed in the parliament give subordinate bodies and ministers the power to make laws, which are termed statutory instruments.

In the U.K., the subordinate bodies and ministers can make policy in skeleton bills. Skeleton bills have been criticised and controversial, as parliament does not scrutinise delegated legislation.

In some cases, the ministers are obligated to consult and obtain consent from the concerned administration before exercising the power of delegation.

6.2 *Donoughmore Committee, 1932*[14]

The Committee was formed to investigate the problems of delegated legislation and powers exercised by officers appointed by ministers and to suggest safeguards. It held a delegation necessary on the following grounds:

(i) To reduce the burden of work pressure of the Parliament, (ii) Modern legislation needs technical expertise, which the legislators may not possess. (iii) To deal with complexities & contingencies in the law, (iv) To avoid law amendment.

6.3 *Judicial approach*

6.3.1 *Commissioner of Customs and Excise v. Cure & Deely Ltd*[15]

The Court held that public authorities cannot create tax provisions under delegated legislation unless the same is authorised in the parent legislation.

6.3.2 *Madzimbabuto v. Lardner-Burke*[16]

The constitutional authority (*de jure*) was held to be superior to those exercising *de facto* power.

6.3.3 *DPP v. Hutchinson*[17]

The Court affirmed that delegated legislation is subject to judicial review. It should align with the intent and scope of the enabling statute; if it fails, it may be deemed unlawful.

6.3.4 *R v. Halliday*[18]

The court held broader delegated powers as necessary in matters of national security.

6.4 *Judicial control*

Judicial review procedure can be invoked to challenge the validity of delegated legislation. The judiciary does not encroach upon the legislative domain. It looks into the

delegation's lawfulness; on the contrary, the court applies the doctrine of ultra vires to declare it void.

7 ANALYSIS

Despite its necessity, delegated legislation must not compromise the legislative functions. India and the United Kingdom need to improve their security measures. This enables uniformity in judicial approach, strengthens committee systems and codifying restrictions on delegation in India. This necessitates increased public transparency and parliamentary oversight in the U.K. If left unchecked, excessive delegation runs the risk of defeating the fundamental tenets of representative democracy and the rule of law.

8 CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The fundamental legislative role is to frame the legislative policy and to shape it as a binding rule of conduct that the legislature cannot delegate. The doctrine of excessive delegation continues to restrain the legislative powers. There have been many uproars about excessive delegation. The responsible legislature must be cautious when it brings a bill before the floor and check for excessive delegation. No delegation should have the right to create rules that affect the rights of citizens. But this must be a priority, and one way to do this is robust legislative drafting, vigilant judicial review, and more robust parliamentary oversight. Participation of the people, scrutiny of committee views in the legislature, scrutiny of experts, and a greater level of public debate are needed to establish the constitutionality of delegated legislation and avoid excessive delegation.

Although in modern democracies, it is essential to delegate legislation, its constitutionality should always be maintained. The provisions of the fundamental law of a country are paramount, and any law, made however it may, must not cross the limits of the fundamental law. Mindful actions by people's representatives would do good for their people. Moreover, the sanctity of the doctrine of separation of powers would be distorted if the delegate crosses the limits of legislation. Excessive delegation, where the primary function of the legislature is left in the hands of others, causes accountability to the people to vanish. The legislatures should retain essential functions and frame clear standards and guidelines in the enabling acts. Delegation should complement the core purpose of the enactment; it should not substitute it.

The legislature must keep legislative responsibilities to itself, and what can be handed to subordinate legislation is only the means required to implement the purpose and objects of the parent Act. The assignment of the methods of functioning of a statute ought not to be assigned at the time of enactment, but rather after enactment to subordinate authorities. The spirit of democracy should always be protected. Necessity should decide on the need for delegation, not in all cases.

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AI-powered judiciary: National and international perspectives on machine learning in court administration

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ABSTRACT: Artificial Intelligence has a wide range of applications that could help the legal system deal with persistent issues including lengthy court cases and excessive operating expenses. The emergence of AI in such an unimaginably huge dimension is a challenge to the legal world. A big drop in the number of cases pending in the court will benefit judges, lawyers, clients and general public. Artificial Intelligence will help legal professionals spend more time enhancing legal reasoning, discussion, and law interpretation. The use of Artificial Intelligence language technology has been implemented by the Supreme Court of India for translating legal documents, conducting legal research, and automating processes. *Supreme Court VidhikAnuvaad Software* has been developed for translation of judgments into regional languages.This research shows how AI can be helpful to make the legal system more efficient and effective. It facilitates easier access to or usage of Online Dispute Resolution (ODR) also. But, AI in the judiciary cannot fully replace human judges because of disparities in the application scenario and conceptual framework etc. Thus, it is the potential instrument in the legal system to promote qualitative and time demanding adjudication, rather than replacing the judges.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, Legal system, Online Dispute Resolution, Judiciary System

1 INTRODUCTION

One of the newest, most promising and trending technologies is artificial intelligence, which has enormous potential. It gives a computer program the capacity for independent thought and learning.

AI aims to "make a machine act like a human". In different areas Artificial Intelligence can perform several tasks more efficiently than human beings.[1]AI enable us to develop software and hardware that can quickly and effectively address problems in the real world, such as those pertaining to marketing, health, and traffic issues, etc.

The main object of this study is to examine the application of Artificial intelligence in the legal field. It examines how artificial intelligence is used in the legal system and evaluates its feasibility within the judicial system. In this study the uses of AI in the legal system have been tried to analyze in greater depth. The paper is based on content analysis of legal resources available through the online database. In this analysis, the focus is on exploring the benefits of application of AI in legal system and to identify current obstacles.

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2 ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Artificial intelligence can be defined as a computer created by humans that is intelligent and has the capacity to learn reason, solve problems, interpret language, and other things. *Ray Kurzweil* (an American computer scientist, author, entrepreneur, and inventor) stated AI as the art of forming machines which perform such function that requires human intelligence.[2]

Dr Ian Kash[3] said that in many fields of computer science, we can build things that are guaranteed to do what we want. According to him, the field of AI is a set of techniques and tools that have been developed to solve these hard problems even when we cannot get a fully satisfying solution.[4]

2.1 *Uses of artificial intelligence in legal domain*

After the emergence of AI, computational models using symbolic and machine learning techniques has automated legal reasoning and analysis for cases.[5]

AI is also utilized for transcribing oral arguments in Constitution Bench cases starting from February 2023.[6] It can assist judges in carrying out trials more quickly and efficiently, thus decreasing the backlog of cases.

2.2 *Advantages for practicing lawyers*

The role of a legal practitioner encompasses various responsibilities, including the drafting, analysis, and review of legal documents, assessing a client's position in litigation, conducting legal research, and crucially presenting arguments before judges. Artificial Intelligence, with its advanced cognitive capabilities, has successfully automated these labors intensive tasks with great accuracy and efficiency than human lawyers. Currently machine learning techniques enable AI to streamline legal reasoning by referencing statutory texts, case laws and other pertinent documents derived from its data analysis. By analysing data such as prior court rulings, the factual context of the current case, and judges' behavioral pattern, AI systems can identify trends that inform their predictions regarding litigation results. Notably, AI driven platforms like Lexis Nexis, Westlaw, and Thomson Reuters facilitate legal research, effectively replacing the address traditional research methods.[7]

2.3 *Role of AI in judiciary*

Initially the disputes were adjudicated through public hearings, jury trials etc. Considering the predictability of artificial intelligence, Judiciary has also inclined towards applying AI techniques in its course of action. AI, using precedents and considering facts of the case, could predict whether documents presented in the case are relevant or not.[8] The District Magistrate of Southern New York has termed use of predictive software in cases as expert witness as mentioned under Rule 702 of Federal Rules of Evidence.[9] In 2016, the U.K. High Court has also recognized use of predictive coding software in litigation in the case of *Brown vs. BCA Trading*[10].

In the case of *K S Puttaswamy (Retd.) vs. Union of India*[11], the Supreme Court while changing the paradigm of right to privacy in India has incorporated various concepts such as data privacy, intrusion with physical body, privacy of choice etc. within the right to privacy. Therefore, violations of such principles due to AI application are likely to incur liabilities on the part of the State.

3 EMERGENCE OF AI IN INDIAN LEGAL SYSTEM

The birth and initial development of artificial intelligence was restricted in the developed economies, like USA, UK, EU, Germany, Russia, Japan due to various factors, like

developed research infrastructure, financial assistance, government support etc.Apart from these developed countries, India being one of the developing third world countries is also coping with the momentum of global AI development. A study by Oxford insights in 2019 ranked India within top 20 countries around the globe taking into account government's AI readiness. Another report led by Joint Research Council (JRC) of European Commission in 2020 marked India as a 4th most promising player in the global field of AI after USA, China and EU.[12]

To match the steps with developed nations, use of AI methods is becoming trending in law enforcement agencies of India.The Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) along with Delhi Police has developed Crime Mapping, Analysis and Mapping System in 2015 to map crime spot ahead of time.

NCRB in collaboration with advance Data Research Institute in 2017 has developed predictive policing software for implementation of same throughout India.[13]

Rajasthan Police adopted an application named as ABHED (Artificial Intelligence Based Human Efface Detection) for helping the police in fingerprint identification, expedite search of missing persons and criminals based on its databaseand also storing identity of criminals for future reference etc. Similarly, Punjab police adopted PAIS and Uttar Pradesh police adopted *Trinetra* AI application using AI techniques to combat crime.

3.1 *National legal framework acknowledging AI*

The Indian Ministry of Commerce and Industry in the year 2017 has formed a task force on AI to frame a road map for AI policy and legal framework highlighting the opportunities and socio-legal challenges of AI deployment in ten major domains, such as, agriculture, environment, healthcare, education etc.

In pursuance to the theme of **AIfor ALL** as adopted in the National Strategy for AI, in the year 2021 NITI Aayog has launched an approach paper which provided the principles to be adopted for developing responsible AI.

By swiftly analyzing a large amount of data from several sources and pre-made models, the criminal justice system can map crimes using criminalization algorithm.

(1) Criminalization algorithms are utilized by the criminal justice system to efficiently analyze extensive data from multiple sources and track criminal activities.
(2) It is essential to see the criminal's face to confirm their identity. Moreover, it has the capability to find individuals who are lost, verify identities for police checks, and recognize suspects in surveillance footage.
(3) Artificial intelligence (AI) has the potential to decrease crime rates by using past crime data to predict when, where, and under what conditions a crime may take place.

Through algorithms and data analysis, AI can assess case laws and past court decisions, providing lawyers with valuable historical information for developing litigation strategies.

The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MEITY) is the governing body responsible for AI-related programs and set up committees to create an AI policy framework. In 2018, the Indian government released the National Artificial Intelligence Plan with the aim of advancing AI technology.

India passed the Digital Personal Data Protection Act in 2013 which further replaced by the Digital Personal Data Protection Act (DPDP Act), 2023, recognizing the right of individuals to protect their personal data. Since 2021, the Supreme Court has been utilizing an AI-powered tool to analyze data and present it to justices for their decision-making.

The National Policy and Action Plan for the Implementation of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) served as the foundation for the start of the E-Courts project in India. The primary goals of this project are to improve the ICT-enabled judicial system and offer specific services to litigants, attorneys, and the judiciary.

3.2 *Vidhik Anuvaad Software of the Supreme Court (SUVAS)*

With the help of SUVAS, number of cases as mentioned in the table have been converted into hindi and other regional languages. It has been granted authority under Article 348(2) of the Constitution.[14]

Table 1. Data available on e-SCR portal up to 05.08.2024.

Judgments	Language	Number of Cases
Supreme Court	Hindi	36,271
Supreme Court	16 Regional Languages	17,142

The Punjab and Haryana High Court[15] recently employed the AI tool Chat GPT for global legal precedent surrounding bail, to make a bail decision in a case.[16]

The National Policy and Action Plan for the Implementation of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) served as the foundation for the start of the E-Courts project in India. The primary goals of this project are to improve the ICT-enabled judicial system and offer specific services to litigants, attorneys, and the judiciary.

4 INTERNATIONAL INSTRUMENTS RECOGNIZING AI

Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), adopted an inter-governmental instrument relating to standards of AI in 2019. It provides that AI entities must be developed with an aim to boost human capability, to reduce socio-economic inequalities, to protect the environment, to ensure sustainable development etc. But it puts a cap on Programmers, developers or users of AI to not disregard the fundamental legal aspects, such as, rule of law, inalienable human rights and democratic values.[17]

Further, UNESCO has issued Recommendations on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence in 2019, to introduce normative standardsregarding the use of AI for optimum benefits of human being including sustainable development, gender equality, protection of Human Rights, etc.[18]

Regarding the global regulations of AI systems, the contribution of Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers (IEEE) is considerable, as it tend to secure advancement in the field of technology and innovation.[19]

The UN Convention on the Use of Electronic Communications in International Contracts was adopted in 2005 to acknowledge the use of automated message systems in the formation of contracts.

The growth of Artificial Intelligence can be witnessed internationally across the boundaries of nations, as depicted in below mentioned table:

Table 2. AI generated tools in-use in developed countries.

Serial No	Country	Program	Utility
1	UK	HART	utilized in UK courts to classify individuals as low, medium, or high risk based on their age, past criminal history, and other background details
2	Brazil	AI tool VICTOR	preliminary case analysis is carried out to lessen the load of court
3	Chicago	Strategic Subject List approach	to identify those who are most likely to be involved in gun crime

(*continued*)

Table 2. Continued

Serial No	Country	Program	Utility
4	China (the first nation in the world to create an AI-equipped judge in December 2021)	AI-equipped Judge	After hearing oral arguments, the judge is reportedly able to make 97% of the rulings correctly. Theft, credit card fraud, and reckless driving cases are all before these judges
5	Argentina	*Prometea*	The Public Prosecutor's Office and the Constitutional Court of Columbia employed this program to anticipate a court case's outcome in less than 20 seconds with a 96% success rate
6	Austria	Artificial intelligence (AI)	utilized for complex document management, including the anonymization of court documents and the assistance with the digitization of current analog data

5 APPLICATION OF AI IN ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION

The use of AI has improved the efficiency of arbitral procedures by automating tasks such as document preparation, case negotiation, settlement, and legal research. It can support, instruct, or provide recommendations to mediators, arbitrators, and negotiators. Online dispute resolution (ODR) is a different form of ADR, where technology or the internet is utilized by parties to settle their disputes without involving the court. Online dispute resolution (ODR) is the use of information and communication technology (ICT) tools to make resolving disputes easier without needing to be physically present for the resolution.[20]

AI expedites the resolution process by allowing disputants and mediators to concentrate on the more complex facets of the case by automating some negotiating process steps.AI-powered platforms make it possible to organize and analyze case data more effectively, making sure that all pertinent case details are taken into account. Artificial intelligence (AI) can improve case management and flow by helping to identify important case features, highlight possible problems, and even suggest procedural measures.

5.1 *Suggestions*

Although AI can enhance efficiency for law firms, it cannot replace a lawyer's skills and experience.

This study suggests that AI has emerged as a powerful tool in the field of law. The use of AI in ADR system has also improved efficiency, reduced the litigation costs and time for disposing of the disputes. According to this study we found that though AI does not participate in decision making process, it may help the judges for gathering information and to adjudicate the cases in more efficient manner by using AI induced technologies. But to solve the ethical issues, the use of AI in ADR needs to be properly controlled. AI algorithm integrity must be ensured because faulty or biased algorithms may result in unjust conflict resolution.

There should be a cap on Programmers, developers or users of AI to not disregard the fundamental legal aspects, such as, rule of law, inalienable human rights and democratic values. AI needs access to large amounts of private data, leading to privacy issues. Therefore, regulations mandating privacy and data protection measures are essential.

6 CONCLUSION

As we welcome this technological revolution, we nevertheless need to consider its ethical implications. It is crucial to guarantee fairness, transparency, and lack of prejudice in AI. AI is a potent instrument in the legal system for promoting human judgment rather than replace it, working to increase everyone's access to and effectiveness from the legal system. Technology must not be choosen over judicial and rational thinking.Recently the Chief Justice of India has emphasized the need for vigilant use of technology and AI in judiciary by stressing that technology can be a significant tool, but it should not be given weightage over the core tenets and ethics of judiciary. The goal of this AI integration journey is to improve the Indian court system's capacities to better meet the needs of the country in the contemporary digital world.

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Paradigms of data protection laws in the era of artificial intelligence

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ABSTRACT: The modern digital era witnesses massive use of personal data in all areas which is why it must be protected through data protection laws. The challenge increases more so with the advent of Artificial Intelligence. The present research paper explores the contours of data protection laws vis a vis Artificial Intelligence by undertaking an analysis of data protection mechanisms available under General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) of European Union and provincial laws of United States of America with focused approach towards the possible application of these data protection laws to Artificial Intelligence (AI). The newly enacted Digital Personal Data Protection Act 2023 of India also extends to the labyrinth of data protection and emerging domain of AI. The paper recommends dynamic regulatory approaches focusing on values - based AI regulation to future - proof data protection in India and internationally.

Keywords: Data Protection, Artificial Intelligence, Privacy Laws, GDPR, DPDP Act 2023

1 INTRODUCTION

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is becoming a major influencer in modern lives, sometimes, even without getting noticed. It is at the forefront of new age technology and has influenced the most complex to the simpler and routine things, for example AI - powered personal assistants like Alexa, Siri and Bixby which performs daily tasks for a user, similar to a human personal assistant. AI also influence the social media and communication by personalizing the feeds and contents, and categorizing the emails into primary, social, promotions, spam etc. As far as shopping is concerned, AI customize the recommendations based on the user's past search and purchase results.[1] The customer service or customer support of a business is also assisted by AI in the form of chatbots for handling customer queries beyond business hours or round the clock. The navigation tools like Google Maps integrate AI to suggest fastest routes while evading road closures and traffic diversions. Banking industry also use AI to flag suspicious financial transactions and for the assessment of eligibility of the applicant for loan and creditworthiness. Entertainment service providers like YouTube, Netflix etc. also customize their songs and movie recommendations through AI. The business organizations use AI based apps like LinkedIn for screening the resume for recruitment based on requisite skill sets. Additionally, digital platforms like Zoom, Webex, MS Teams use AI for live captions and noise cancellation. The major automobile companies use Advanced Driver-Assistance Systems (ADAS) which rely heavily on Artificial Intelligence (AI) for autonomous driverless driving to process sensor data, make real-time decisions, and enhance vehicle safety and efficiency.

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2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The study aims to elaborate on vital interface between innovation and privacy. It reviews the regulatory mechanisms of various countries, identifies the gaps and proposes the strategies to synchronize the strong data protection laws and evolving AI. It also intends to examine the adaptability of law to keep pace with AI. The paper will examine how the growth of AI works vis a vis the individual privacy rights, through core principles of AI such as consent, right to be forgotten, minimization, purpose and machine learning and generative AI. This will assist the policy framers to chalk a strategy for developing an effective data protection regime which shall foster innovation while protecting the legitimate concerns of the individuals in the digital era.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology involved in the paper shall be comparative analysis. The paper discusses the data protection legislations of EU and USA namely GDPR and sectoral laws of USA with DPDPA, 2023 of India. The analysis of Indian law shall be undertaken for exploring its potential applicability to the AI.

3.1 *AI and law*

The legal landscape is not untouched from the impact of AI and its imprints can be visualized through the automation of diverse legal tasks and enhancement of overall efficiency of the legal process. The law firms make use of AI for the vetting and review of the documents and scanning of the legal databases for relevant case laws. AI also automates the drafting of documents and extracting of specific information from within the document.[2] From the perspective of a researcher, the AI powered research tools are capable of handling large amounts of legal data comprising of case laws, statutes, regulations, in a more efficient and effective manner as compared to traditional tools. This, in turn enables the legal professionals to identify the relevant judicial precedents and legal insights more swiftly. The AI algorithms use large datasets to continually improve their effectiveness and efficiency in a regular and sustained manner. The AI can provide precise recommendations pertinent to the research problem which is not possible through conventional research tools.

AI can examine the legal data by examining the legal precedents and case outcomes to predict the deep insights while enabling the legal professionals with a data-oriented basis for making informed decisions. This approach facilitates in risk assessment and prediction of outcomes of potential cases. It also helps in identifying the strengths and weaknesses of legal debates and arguments while determining the likelihood of success in litigation. The cases which have similarities of facts, legal issues and outcomes can be analysed and identified by AI, besides, a new case can be compared with the decided cases which facilitate the legal researcher to find and refer the relevant cases. The AI tools can rank the legal sources as per their relevance and credibility. Accordingly, the researcher can focus on most credible information by assessing and prioritizing the outcomes, which rationalize the research process, permitting the researcher to access the critical sources and attain the outcomes of their research effectively. AI can track the legal changes, discrepancies, and imminent changes, which is very crucial for review of legal texts, permitting the tracking of modifications and updates along with the implications. Analysis of legal precedents through AI helps the researcher in developing an understanding of how the precedents were set and the extent of their impact on the present case and what strategy can be devised for the future in the cases.[3] AI tools can provide insight into the transitions in the legal field by tracking of most cited statutes and cases which facilitates the understanding of a legal scholar about the most relevant and reliable authorities. AI tools scrutinize the legal databases and commentaries to

track the latest legal trends and judicial approach, which keep researcher abreast of the latest developments and evolving legal standards, so that they can adapt their research accordingly. These tools also facilitate the graphical depiction of legal data through pie charts and graphs for explaining the legal patterns of citations and case laws. This in turn permits an understanding of nexus between case laws, the development of legal norms and the impact of legal precedents.

3.2 *AI and personal data*

AI presents the tremendous opportunities as well as challenges with regard to the data protection. While the automation of processes and enhancement of compliances can be ensured through AI, the invasion of right to privacy involved during data collection, processing and automated decision making is a major concern for individuals. A major portion of data relates to personal and sensitive information such as name, address, financial information, medical history etc. The process of collection and security of such data is the main issue with regard to its intended use and the individuals having access to such data. There is always a threat of breach of confidentiality of data and unauthorised access to personal data. Moreover, the data may be used for monitoring and surveillance purposes. The data collection through AI must ensure that the same is done in strict consonance with the statutory requirements. The algorithms must be so created that the personal data collected is secured and kept confidential. Additionally, the process of data collection and processing must be completely transparent and foolproof, and the AI tools must be free from any biases and discrimination, as it may affect the results generated by AI. If the data for training the AI is biased, the system may perpetuate such biases. It is imperative that AI technologies must be utilized responsibly to address these concerns.[4]

The reputed Pew Research Centre conducted a survey in May 2023 about the impressions of AI on the personal data of the consumers. The results revealed that around two - third of the respondents do not have faith in the manner of usage of AI by the entities in their products, another nearly same percentage expressed discomfort about the possible use of their personal data so collected. Another survey conducted has disclosed that a large number of consumers globally were apprehensive about their privacy online and were uncertain about the types of their data collected and used, while half of the respondents agreeing about AI as a potential threat to their privacy.[5]

3.3 *Intersection of artificial intelligence with EU and US data protection laws*

The main regulations applicable within European Union for data protection was adopted in 2016 titled as General Data Protection Regulations, which safeguards the personal data of the individuals, through the requirements of strict consent, explanation rights, usage limitation and provision of heavy penalties. The AI models must restrict the data to the minimal extent and for prescribed purposes only.[6]

Unlike European Union, the United States lacks a federal law to regulate Artificial Intelligence but rather has sector specific laws for protecting the personal data relating to finance, health and credit information of the individuals. These laws have been enacted in recent years by the legislature of the states of New York, California, Virginia, Colorado, Florida, Iowa, New Jersey, Texas, Utah and Connecticut etc. The data privacy legislations made by these states empowers the Federal Trade Commission to prevent the commercial entities in indulging in any unfair or deceptive trade practices. These laws also regulate the use of AI technology with regard to data privacy, discrimination and consumer protection by the organizations. The State of Colorado has become a pioneer in its own stride by enacting The Colorado AI Act which shall come into effect in 2026 to impose obligations on the creators and providers of high risk AI systems which giving precedence to the automated decision making systems.[7]

3.4 *AI and India's personal data protection act 2023*

India is witnessing a massive wave of digitization, however, the laws relating to data protection are still in the developmental stage. India has enacted The Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023, to safeguard individuals' personal data in digital space. Prior to this Act, The Information Technology Act 2000 was the parent legislation for data protection and cyber security. However, the IT Act 2000 lacks specific provisions with regard to AI. Similarly, the DPDP Act 2023 does not directly covers AI related matters too, but it emphasizes upon consent, purpose limitation, and data minimization, even though it might not effectively address the complex AI related privacy challenges. However, since the Act extends to the processing of digital personal data, which includes a wholly or partly automated operation or set of operations performed on digital personal data, it is likely to apply to any AI based processing of personal data, requiring data fiduciaries to comply with the DPDP Act while deploying AI tools.[8] Accordingly, the DPDP Act will also apply to the cases where personal data is collected and processed for the development and training of AI models. Further, there must be explicit and informed consent required before the collection or processing of data for AI training. The user must be informed about the objective of data use and his legal right of withdrawal of consent. It is also important for the entities to collect only necessary data and must delete the data once the purpose of training of AI model is served. The AI companies must anonymize or pseudonymize the data wherever possible or may use synthetic data for reducing the privacy risks. The users must be given an option to opt out of AI profiling. The DPDP Act mandates that the data fiduciary must ensure stringent security protocols within the organization to prevent any data breach and undertake all remedial steps including notifying the concerned data principal and statutory authorities, if a breach at all happens. The entities must confirm to the use of cutting edge technology for AI training. This shall eliminate the possibility of any biases and pave the way for transparency and prevention of data tampering or manipulation.

The DPDPA exempts the data fiduciary from incurring any obligation with respect to the personal data which is available in public domain either by the data principal himself or through any other legally authorised person. If such data is consumed by AI tools through publicly available online sources, then there shall be no legal obligation. Similarly, processing of personal data solely for research purpose shall also be excluded from the application of the Act, provided that the data so collected is not used for taking any specific decision related to the data principal. The use of personal data for government sanctioned and authorised projects and employment purposes shall also not necessitate the approval of data principal.[9]

4 CONCLUSION

It can be concluded by saying that the confluence of AI and data protection presents a gamut of opportunities and challenges which must be carefully addressed by the data protection authorities through sustained dialogue with all stakeholders for developing appropriate technological measures.[10]

The DPDP Act 2023 provides a much needed premise for protection of personal data of individuals in India which could not be guaranteed under the IT Act 2000, but it shall be a major challenge for the policy makers to equilibrate the innovation and data privacy concerns. Since, the Act is still in its infancy, its effective and successful application is yet to be tested. The entities specializing in artificial intelligence, machine leaning and cognitive technologies must designate an official as Data Protection Officer to monitor the strict implementation of the Act. Such officer shall conduct AI ethics and compliance audits and must adopt the latest available privacy enhancing technologies. The government must frame strict rules on AI for ensuring transparency in AI decision making with stronger security and

accountability measures. The defaults and non – compliances by the AI companies must attract heavy penalties.

In the fitness of things, it will be prudent on the part of concerned governments to issue AI specific guidelines. It is also the need of the hour that an international monitoring mechanism should be developed on the smooth data flow across the borders without compromising on the data privacy which may be modelled upon the UNESCO's Recommendations on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence 2021. This shall be in tune with assimilation of technology with the fundamental rights of the people. It is further proposed that an interdisciplinary research approach may be undertaken for the deeper understanding of law, computer science, ethics and human rights. The future studies should explore emerging challenges, regulatory gaps, and evolving legal frameworks. Through these reformative steps, the legal and regulatory framework can match with the game - changer AI technology.[11]

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AI in personalizing OTT experiences: Its impact on millennials viewing habits and preferences

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ABSTRACT: This paper examines the role of AI-enabled personalization of OTT services like Netflix. Amazon prime, and Jio Cinema, affect Indian millennials; consumption patterns and satisfaction. By using surveys, interviews, and analytics, it checks how the impact of AI recommendations impacts. user, content discovery and subscription retention, and raising ethical issues pertaining to privacy. The collection of data on the basis of a mixed-methods approach was achieved through the employment of surveys, interviews, and platform analytics. It was also found through quantitative research that a positive strength of interaction with AIs recommendation had a positive impact on watching time and satisfaction with the content and subscription renewal. Qualitative research revealed that such major themes as identification of new genres, issues of privacy and binge-watching emerged. Data privacy and AI algorithm transparency issues proved to be the case of concern; thus, the study proved that although the experience of the individual user can be enhanced through individualization using AI, there were a lot of very important ethical dilemmas. The results highlight the importance of the balance between increased personalization and the elimination of the issue of user privacy.

Keywords: AI personalization, millennials, content recommendations, viewing habits, content discovery, user engagement

1 INTRODUCTION

OTT platforms have meaningfully altered the manner in which individuals consume entertainment by permitting them to get to and draw in with advanced material (Kapur 2024). Online video platforms have filled quickly lately, determined by changing buyer inclinations and innovation headways (Kaur and Poojari 2021). As streaming monsters, for example, Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Disney+, and others contend, it's essential for industry pioneers to comprehend client view of OTT administrations (Bhatt 2022). This study explores the confounded elements of client encounters and inclinations in the OTT entertainment area (Joseph 2024; Ota *et al.* 2024). This study aims to uncover factors affecting client conduct and fulfillment, like substance choice, user point of interaction, valuing, and streaming quality (Friederich *et al.* 2023). This paper examines how OTT platforms advance because of recent fads and mechanical leap forwards, giving significant bits of knowledge to researchers, legislators, and business specialists (Xu *et al.* 2023). Figuring out client impressions of OTT platforms is fundamental for driving development and vital dynamics in the advanced entertainment biological system in the midst of commotion and a lot of content. OTT administrations kill the requirement for customary brokers like transmission organizations and link organizations, permitting buyers to transfer video on various gadgets and whenever the timing is ideal (Dixit *et al.* 2023; Okumuş 2023). OTT administrations are turning out to be progressively famous because of their comfort and customization, prompting huge changes in customer conduct (Bhattacharyya *et al.* 2022). Furthermore, the rising utilization

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of cell phones and savvy televisions, as well as the coming of rapid web access, have fueled the development of OTT platforms, making web-based features an ordinary piece of current media utilization (Bhattacharyya *et al.* 2021). OTT platforms are rivalling customary creation organizations and studios in the worldwide entertainment area for watchers and cash.

In the mid-2000s, OTT media platforms like Netflix and Hulu changed individuals' utilization designs. These platforms, first centered around streaming movies and television series, have changed how individuals' access and draw in with computerized content (Liu *et al.* 2022; Nair 2025). They as of now offer various substance libraries, including unique substance, and have embraced membership-based models (Khan and Panwar 2025; Petruska 2018). Somewhere in the range of 2010 and 2020, the OTT business had uncommon development, with worldwide deals expanding from USD 6.1 billion to USD 106.48 billion. New streaming opponents like Disney+, Apple TV+, and Amazon Prime Video expanded the contest, bringing about an expansion popular. Live real time features and trend setting innovations like AR and AI have improved user intuitiveness and customization in the OTT experience. Estimates demonstrate that the OTT market will develop, with worldwide media pay expected to arrive at USD 210 billion by 2026 and $332.52 billion by 2028. The OTT application improvement business is assessed to create $200 billion in income by 2024 (Sahu *et al.* 2024). OTT has changed the media and entertainment industry, driven development and rivalry while offering crowds with unmatched admittance to content. As computerized entertainment develops and enhances, OTT platforms will assume a filling part in molding its future. Grasping Client Conduct in OTT Administrations appreciating client conduct in OTT administrations is crucial for fathoming the advancing computerized media scene (Saldanha *et al.* 2024). A few theoretical structures offer significant bits of knowledge into the perspectives that influence client conduct on OTT platforms.

As the widely accepted thought implies, people follow mass media to fulfill apparent needs and desires. This assumption suggests that OTT viewers are attracted by actual time due to factors like estimation, convenience, and other content. Customers tailor content experience according to their preferences, interests, and usage patterns. Innovation Adoption Model is an essential concept that describes how users adopt a new technology. In other words, it explains the process of how people accept changes. The study underlines how perceived utility and usability affect the attitude and intent of the users toward OTT platforms. If buyers consider web-based features as profitable and user-friendly, then the probability of adopting those will be high (Saldanha *et al.* 2022). By focusing on theoretical structures, researchers can get a deeper insight into how clients behave in OTT administrations. These theoretical structures provide knowledge about how the clients engage and follow the choices in advanced media platforms (Saldanha 2024).

The study collected information from 200 millennials who watch constant content on OTT platforms (Yosuadi 2021). To ensure that the results were statistically significant and would provide trustworthy insights about this group's general watching habits, a sample size of 200 was utilized.

Table 1. Demographic profile of survey participants.

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	18-24	90	45%
	25-29	75	37.5%
	30-34	35	17.5%
Gender	Male	90	45%
	Female	110	55%
Primary OTT Platform	Netflix	120	60%
	Amazon Prime	50	25%
	Jio Prime	30	15%

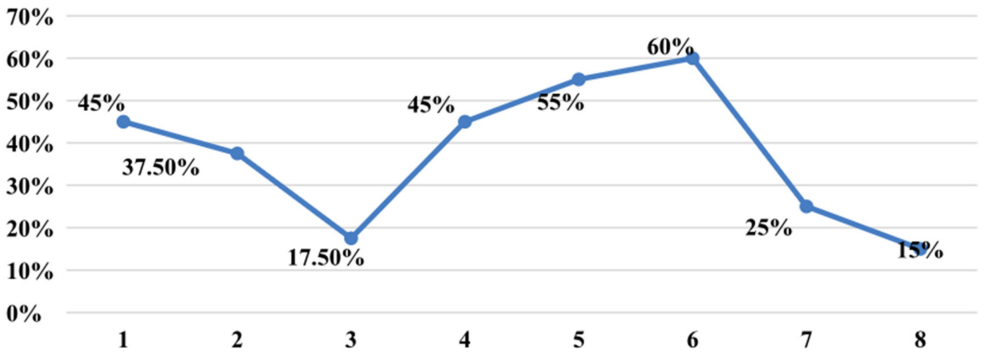


Figure 1. Graphical presentation of demographic profile.

Table 1 Respondents' Demographic Profile Respondents' Age Scale Gender OTT Used Frequently Most 18-24 45% Female Male 25-29 37.5% 30 -34 17.5 % The most significant proportion of the responders came from the age category of 18-24 years, followed by that of 25-29 years, and then 30-34 years with 17.5%. In this age distribution, the millennial generation is a primary subject of study. In terms of gender, women comprised 55% of the sample, while men comprised 45%. Netflix was the leading OTT provider that the respondents used the most, accounting for 60% of their usage. Amazon Prime came second at 25%, followed by Jio Prime at 15%. According to this distribution, Netflix leads the way among OTT with millennials, while Amazon Prime and Jio Prime trail with significant proportions of people.

2 SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

Stratified random sampling was used to ensure the diversity of the sample. To differentiate between the primary OTT platform users, like those who use Netflix, Amazon Prime, or Jio Prime, the population of OTT users was divided into strata. To ensure that the tastes and behaviors of viewing of the different platforms were represented in the study, a random sample was drawn from each stratum. It also helped reduce the biases specific to the platforms.

3 METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

Two primary data collection techniques were employed in order to obtain a thorough set of data:

- Surveys: 200 millennials who frequently utilize OTT were given a structured online survey. Both closed-ended and open-ended questions were included in the survey's design. The following domains were covered by the survey used to gather data:
  - Viewing patterns (e.g., how often it is used and how long each session lasts).
  - Preferences for content (such as genres, kinds of television series, and films).
  - Knowledge of and engagement with suggested personalized content.
  - contentment with over-the-top (OTT) services and the way AI recommendations work.

To reach millennials who frequently use OTT services, the questionnaire was distributed via social networking sites and email.

- Interviews: Twenty survey respondents who agreed to participate further were selected and subjected to semi-structured, in-depth interviews. More in-depth discussion of their opinions and experiences with AI-based suggestions on OTT services were covered in these interviews. The interviews were set up to conclude:
  - Recognize how millennials are aware of recommendations based on artificial intelligence.
  - Learn how personalization affects how people find and watch content.
  - Understand the privacy and data usage issues around AI personalization.
  - Depending on the participant's option, interviews were done over the phone or via video conference.

4 TOOLS FOR DATA ANALYSIS

The following instruments and methods were used to analyze the data collected through surveys and interviews:

The results of the survey were examined using the SPSS Statistical Package. The respondents' watching habits and preferences were summed up via descriptive statistics. In this study, cross-tabulation was used to see whether frequent usage of AI recommendations was associated with an increase in engagement or satisfaction.

Cross-tabulation: The frequency of use, the kind of content, and the degree of pleasure with the suggested items were among the variables whose relationships were examined.

Correlation: The formula for Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) between two variables X and Y is:

$$r = \frac{n\sum XY - \sum X \sum Y}{\sqrt{\left[n\sum X^2 - (\sum X)^2\right]\left[N\sum Y^2 - (\sum Y)^2\right]}} \tag{1}$$

Regression Analysis: The impact of tailored recommendations on overall content intake and engagement was assessed using regression models.

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X + \epsilon \tag{2}$$

Thematic Analysis: To find the main themes and patterns in the participants' answers, the interview material was transcribed and subjected to thematic analysis. Thematic analysis made it possible to pinpoint shared experiences and viewpoints about content discovery, privacy issues, and AI personalization.

Ethical Consideration

The entire research procedure closely followed ethical standards. Participants gave their informed consent after being made aware of the study's objectives, the fact that participation was entirely voluntary, and their freedom to discontinue involvement at any moment.

Confidentiality: All interview information and survey answers were kept private. To preserve the participants' confidentiality, the identifiers were eliminated.

Data protection: To protect the participants' anonymity, personal information was stored in a secure location, and only aggregate results were shared.

5 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section shows the findings and Results of the study:

Table 2. Frequency of engagement with AI recommendations.

Engagement Level	Frequency	Percentage
Always engage with AI suggestions	90	45%
Frequently engage with AI suggestions	70	35%
Occasionally engage with AI suggestions	30	15%
Never engage with AI suggestions	10	5%

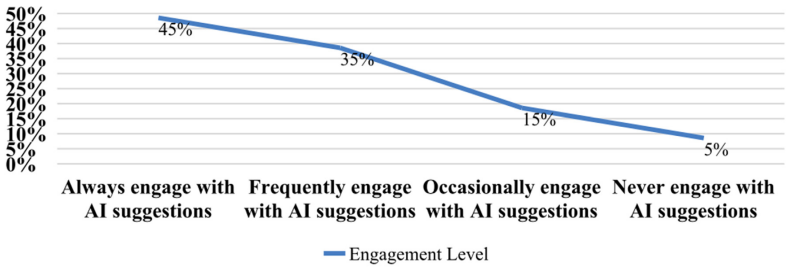


Figure 2. Graphical presentation of engagement with AI recommendations.

The frequency with which participants interact with AI-driven recommendations on the OTT platform of their choice is indicated in Table 2. A significant preference for tailored content recommendations is evident from the fact that 45% of respondents always interact with AI recommendations. A further 35% regularly interact with these suggestions, indicating that a sizable percentage of users depend on AI-generated recommendations to direct their viewing preferences. However, only 5% of people never utilize AI ideas, and 15% use them occasionally. The fact that the majority of participants either frequently or infrequently utilize these recommendations to find new content suggests that AI-based personalization is highly successful in influencing millennials' viewing habits.

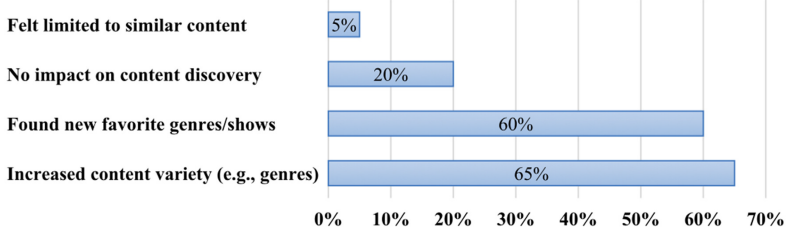


Figure 3. Graphical presentation of effect of AI recommendations on content discovery.

According to 65% of participants, AI suggestions expanded their exposure to a wider range of content, including the discovery of new genres; 60% of them claimed that personalized recommendations helped them find new favorite shows or genres. This illustrates how AI may help people interact with a wider range of content, suggesting that the tailored suggestions are pertinent and provide diversity to viewing preferences. However, 20% of all participants said that the circumstance had no effect on their content discovery, indicating that some users did not engage with the recommendations in a new way. AI may occasionally restrict the material options available to a select few consumers, as evidenced by the fact that only 5% felt restricted to similar content. The chart generally illustrates how AI can help with content discovery and increase the variety of viewing experiences available to millennials.

The association between various variables on AI recommendations and viewing behaviors is examined using Pearson correlation analysis, as shown in Table 3. Users who spend more time on the OTT platform are likely to be more engaged with AI-driven recommendations, according to the correlation analysis, which reveals a strong positive association between the two variables ($r = 0.72$, $p < 0.01$).

Table 3. Correlation analysis between engagement with ai recommendations and viewing habits variable.

Variable	Pearson Correlation (r)	p-value
Engagement with AI Recommendations vs Time Spent on Platform (per week)	0.72	<0.01
Engagement with AI Recommendations vs Content Satisfaction	0.85	<0.01
Time Spent on Platform (per week) vs Content Variety	0.68	<0.01
Content Satisfaction vs Subscription Retention	0.78	<0.01

This is a powerful sign that consumers are kept interested and involved on the platform by personalized content recommendations. Similarly, there is a strong association between content satisfaction and involvement with AI suggestions ($r = 0.85$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that those who use AI-based recommendations are more satisfied with the platform. This demonstrates how crucial tailored recommendations are to improving the user experience as a whole. Additionally, the study indicates a positive relationship between platform duration and content variety ($r = 0.68$, $p < 0.01$), meaning that users are more likely to encounter a wider range of content the longer they spend on the platform. In the end, content happiness is very important and significantly correlated with subscription retention levels ($r = 0.78$, $p < 0.01$). Content-satisfied users are those who would continue to log in because they value the content based on the tailored suggestions. This demonstrates how AI-tailored experiences affect a person's retention.

Table 4. Regression analysis – impact of AI recommendations on viewing time.

Independent Variable	B (Regression Coefficient)	Standard Error	t-value	p-value
Engagement with AI Recommendations	2.5	0.3	8.33	<0.01
Age (Control Variable)	0.05	0.02	2.5	<0.05

After adjusting for age as a covariate, Table 4 presents a regression analysis that evaluates the impact of using AI recommendations on weekly platform usage time. Engagement with AI advice has a significant regression coefficient ($B = 2.5$) at $p < 0.01$. This indicates that the amount of time spent on the platform rises by 2.5 hours per week for every unit increase in engagement with AI recommendations. Therefore, it implies that users spending more time on the OTT platform is directly influenced by AI recommendations. A tiny but statistically significant influence on watching time is also shown by the control variable of age ($B = 0.05$, $p < 0.05$), with older participants (those in the millennial range) having a slightly higher likelihood of spending longer time on the platform. All things considered, these findings highlight how important tailored suggestions are in motivating users to interact with the platform more fully and watch more material.

Table 5. Thematic analysis of interview responses – key themes.

Theme	Frequency	Percentage
Discovery of new genres/shows	18	90%
Satisfaction with personalized recommendations	16	80%
Privacy concerns (data usage)	12	60%
Binge-watching behavior	8	40%

The general themes derived from thematic analysis of interview responses are summarized in Table 5. The main theme 90% of respondents said they have discovered new shows or genres through recommendations. Accordingly, viewers are finding new series they would not have otherwise seen and the amount of content available to them is increasing thanks to AI-driven recommendations. Additionally, a resounding 80% of respondents said they were satisfied with personalized recommendations, indicating that users value the suggestions for AI-generated content's accuracy and relevancy. However, 60% of participants brought up privacy concerns (data usage), indicating a significant concern about the amount of personal data being gathered and used to provide these recommendations. Lastly, 40% of participants admitted to binge-watching, with AI suggestions occasionally resulting in longer, uninterrupted viewing sessions. Because individuals might be forced to watch more content than they would like, this could be a potential drawback of personalized suggestions.

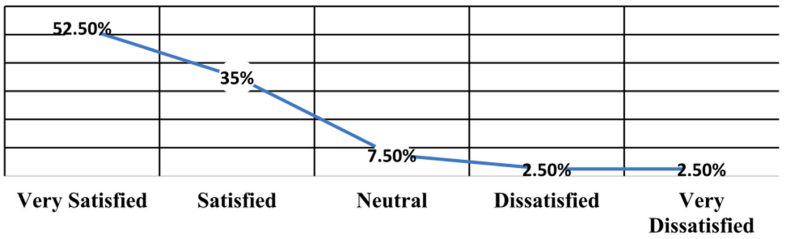


Figure 4. User satisfaction with personalized recommendations.

Figure 4 shows that 52.5% of respondents gave extremely satisfied answers, indicating a high level of positive response to the AI algorithm's personalized content recommendations. This represents more than half of the respondents who expressed great satisfaction with the recommendations. Furthermore, 35% of respondents said they are happy with it, which supports their positive opinion of AI-based personalization. On the other hand, a small percentage of participants reported being dissatisfied (2.5 percent) or extremely dissatisfied (2.5 percent), indicating that dissatisfaction with personalized recommendations is minimal. Only 7.5 percent of the subjects felt neutral in response to recommendations, indicating that most users find them valuable or even highly pleased with the results. These findings suggest that most consumers have a generally good opinion of AI-based personalization, considering it to be a very amusing and helpful tool that enhances their viewing experience.

Table 6. Major concerns regarding AI-driven recommendations (From Interviews).

Concern	Frequency	Percentage
Privacy and Data Usage	12	60%
Over-reliance on AI (limit to preferences)	8	40%
Lack of transparency in AI algorithms	6	30%
Inaccurate recommendations	4	20%

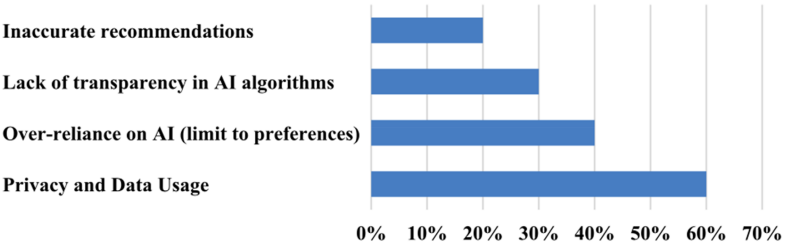


Figure 5. Graphical presentation of concerns regarding AI-driven recommendations (From Interviews).

60% of the participants cited privacy and data usage as their top concerns in Table 6. It demonstrates that, in general, consumers are afraid of how their data is collected and utilized to suggest material to them. They have doubts regarding the type of information that OTT service providers gather in order to make suggestions. They worry about how transparent the gathering procedure is and how likely it is to be abused. According to 40% of them, the second most common problem was that it was over-reliant on AI. They felt that because the algorithmic recommendation systems give preference to familiar options, they might keep users from encountering new or novel information. 30% of them expressed their concerns regarding the transparency of the AI algorithms, their generative process, and also the prospect of manipulation. Finally, 20% of the respondents expressed frustration at receiving the wrong recommendations. This means that the AI sometimes fails to provide the right content meeting their interests or tastes. The issues highlighted the areas where progress could be made to increase customer confidence and happiness with AI suggestions, reflecting a desire for greater openness, control, and accuracy in the personalization process.

6 CONCLUSION

The present work offers an idea about the preference and behavior of millennials regarding watching the video content being impacted by personalization based on AI on OTT. The findings indicate that AI recommendations enhance content exploration, customer satisfaction, and participation as compared to the default version. Most of the participants are, in general, satisfied with the provided recommendations of the tailored content and mention that the usage of AI generally helped them to find something new and explore new genres and series. This also indicated that the amount of time spent on the platform as well as satisfaction towards subscription-based content positively correlated to the extent of the involvement of AI-recommended activities. Interestingly, however, data utilization, privacy, and a lack of transparency of AI systems entail grave concerns within this research. These are some of the areas that OTT ought to focus on in regards to harmonizing the efforts towards introducing the balance between user trust, ethics and personalization. Although there is always a need to improve the way the concerns of users are handled, the study reveals that AI personalization positively influences watch behaviors, on the whole. The expansion of further studies in this discipline can be done in numerous ways. Firstly, the impact of the AI-powered personalization on the audiences with geographical and cultural peculiarities may provide some intriguing data about their predispositions to the various tastes and habits. What is more critical is that the way user trust can be differentiated with the higher transparency of an algorithm might be the key to the enhanced effectiveness of the AI suggestions. Ethical and privacy sides of data use are a major concern, and therefore, future research studies might be interested in working out the means of resolving the issue, without compromising on the advantages of personalized experience. The likely impact, such as long-term effects, user satisfaction and user engagement,

could be examined in the future with reference to the AI recommendations.This, therefore, opens a fascinating future of research avenue wherein AI can be used not only to produce or curate content but also act as a recommendation system. Issues related to this will form the future of research that will fine-tune AI-based personalization strategies such that they meet not only user needs but also develop transparency and trust.

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Influence of social media usage on learning effectiveness and career growth: Study the mediating role of socialization, externalization, combination and internalization

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ABSTRACT: This study intended to focus on investigating utilization of social media and its influence on effective learning and career growth. This paper aims to investigate the influence of Nonaka's knowledge generation spiral model, Socialization, Externalization, Combination, and Internalization on learning effectiveness, and career growth in social media ecosystems among higher education students. 713 students were used for this study from humanities, arts, and computer science students aged 18-26 years. The evaluation is done using JASP, an open-access statistical software. Data evaluation demonstrates the positive relationship between SECI and learning effectiveness and career growth. However, it was concluded that effective learning and career growth had no immediate effects of social media.

Keywords: Social media, Socialization, Externalization, Combination and Internalization, Learning effectiveness, Career growth

1 INTRODUCTION

The development of technology has brought the world closer, connecting millions of people globally. Technology has aided in the evolution of social media sites and apps like Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook have become an integral part in everyone's life. Social media is more decentralized, less hierarchical, distinguished by multiple points of production whereas conventional media use a centralized framework for organization, production and dissemination (Gupta 2011). It has improved education and the fundamental aspect of our life. Social media widens the learning beyond the four walls of classroom. Development of social media refrains students' communication and develops academic and professional skills. Facebook and YouTube have become essential to students' lives (Razaque and Musa 2015). (Yunus *et al.* 2012) said that frequent use of teacher- centered pedagogy" affect the students' learning performance and confidence. However, integrating social media fosters active learning.

Learning through social media is more convenient and effective and can improve students' learning. Students want to get more engagement on social media platform like views, comments, shares, likes etc. It motivates students and reinforces their self-esteem (Alazemi 2021). New knowledge is developed by sharing tacit knowledge and circulation of this knowledge may boost the process. The knowledge process helps to change learning to effective learning (Hemalatha *et al.* 2021). Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) defined knowledge as "A dynamic human process of justifying personal belief towards the truth". According to Nonaka there are two types of knowledge: Explicit knowledge that can be presented, and shared through information technology &Tacit knowledge that exists in the human mind, cannot be

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articulated, and is difficult to share. Knowledge is widely discussed in profit- making organizations (Qi and Chau 2018) however it is equally important in higher education to enhance effective learning, innovative way of thinking, participation, and evaluative thinking which will help in a successful work culture (Ramayah *et al.* 2013, Qun and Weihua 2013). Knowledge plays a significant role in higher educational institutes in the Implication of SECI in knowledge sharing and knowledge creation helps students in effective learning (Hemalatha *et al.* 2021).

For this study, Nonaka's SECI model is used to examine how knowledge sharing through social media can enhance effective learning and career growth of students.

(Nonaka and Konno 1998)The four forms of knowledge conversion are socialization (tacit to explicit), externalization (explicit to tacit), combination, and internalization (explicit to tacit).

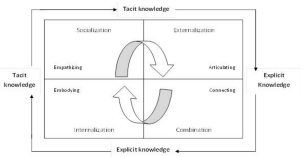


Figure 1. The SECI model (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995).

1.1 *Significance of the study*

As the world is evolving, the same is the case with minds and technology, result of this is that students are accessing more of social media tools and producing fruitful outcomes with it associated with knowledge gaining and sharing. The result of this is evident in their learning and carrier

2 RESEARCH GAP

(1) This study can also be conducted on school pupils; however, the researcher chose to use college students between aged18 and 26 for this study.
(2) The researcher will collect a sample from the universities in Noida. The same research can be done in another geographical area.
(3) Nonaka's "SECI knowledge generation model" is used by the researcher in this study; similar research can be conducted using other knowledge management models.

3 RESEARCH PROBLEM

The focus of this study is to evaluate the contribution of social media in effective learning and career growth with special reference to the SECI model in knowledge creation among the students of NOIDA.

3.1 *Aim*

The study aims to explore the purpose of socialization, externalization, combination, and internalization in utilization of social media for effective learning and career growth as well as knowledge-sharing activities among students of Noida.

4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

(1) To examine the purpose of social media on effective learning, and career growth.
(2) To find out the function of SECI using social media platforms on learning effectiveness & career growth.

5 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The rapid evolution of social media has revolutionized how people communicate, collaborate, and share knowledge. Platforms such as social networking sites, personal blogs, and multimedia-sharing platforms such as YouTube have become integral tools for information dissemination and interaction (Filo *et al.* 2015; Li and Sakamoto 2014; Kaplan and Haenlein 2010). Social media is an optimal method for teachers to teach students, support learn new things, and concepts of study become clear and easy to share study material. YouTube is the most used social media platform for studies (Sandeep *et al.* n.d.). Knowledge is shared through social media and the trust factor motivates it. Social media can be used to collectively share and reflect on what has been learned. (Kalu and Chidi-Ka 2019). The influence of social media on students' academic performance varies depending on how they use social networking sites, precise usage and goal of social media activities are critical. (Kumar 2019). Self-efficiency, willingness to share, and trust are the factors that contribute to knowledge-sharing and effective learning. Sharing of knowledge leads to effective learning and great influenced by social media (Hemalatha, Lavanya and Karthik 2021). Social media was used for constructive purpose of learning, helps provide learning material and learn new subjects and come up with new ideas. Social media enhance the learning of those students who undertake active collaboration and participation. (Ignacimuthu and Kumar 2020). Students are also using social media to gain more knowledge and information since this knowledge helps them in career growth. Social Media sites are more effective since they give real-time job opening details and are easily accessible, being available on everyone's mobile device. Students suggest using social media for finding internship, jobs and other career growth (Ahmad and Pawar, n.d.).

6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

6.1 *Research design*

The study is exploratory. 713 questionnaires were considered to study from higher educational institution. 40.39 % Humanities, 35.76 % Arts, and 23.84 % Computer Science students.

6.2 *Data collection methods*

The data is quantitatively obtained through questionnaires, administered with the help of Google Forms. A self-adapted and adjusted questionnaire is prepared and e-mailed, consisting of several relative questions with closable answers to allow respondents to indicate their strength of agreement regarding the question or statement.

6.3 *Data analysis*

The data analysis was done with the help of JASP, an open-access statistical software. The first and second hypothesis was tested through Pearson's correlation. The outcome was tabulated in the proper format and tested for significance using p-values.

6.4 *Population study*

The study was done out among college students in Noida studying in Humanities, Arts, and Computer Science aged 18 to 26 years.

6.5 *Sample size*

A sample consists of 713 students, 53.15% Male and 46.84% Female students. As normally maximum sample size is around 10% but since we have a limited time and money and population size is large so 713 students were used as a sample.

7 RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

A 5-point Likert scale was used to measured variables, where 5 represents strongly agree and 1 represents strongly disagree.

8 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Demographic profile of the participants in the study.

Demographic Profile	Frequency	Percent
Age		
18-20	293	41.094
21-23	227	31.837
24-26	193	27.069
Gender		
Male	379	53.156
Female	334	46.844
Course		
Humanities	288	40.393
Arts	255	35.764
Computer Science	170	23.843

Table 2. Correlation between social media, learning effectiveness and career growth.

		n	Pearson's r		p
Social media	-Learning Effectiveness	713	0.037		0.329
Social media	-Career Growth	713	0.033		0.385
Learning Effectiveness	-Career Growth	713	0.723	***	< .001

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

The correlation of social media scale with learning effectiveness scale was found small, near zero (0.037) at p=0.329, which is greater than 0.05, so the result is not statistically significant. Hence, there is no significant relationship between social media usage and learning effectiveness. (Hemalatha *et al.* 2021) revealed that social media do not have a direct impact on effective learning whereas both knowledge creation and sharing of knowledge significantly contributed to effectiveness,

Again, when social media usage was correlated with career growth, the result showed a small, near zero (0.033) correlation at p=0.385, which is greater than 0.05. Hence, there is no significant relationship between social media usage and career growth. Other research also showed that social media boosts knowledge and academics help in career growth. (Ahmad and Pawar, n.d.). The findings of the study showed that students use social media to gain more knowledge and information since this knowledge helps them in career growth. (Raja and Sridhar, n.d.) research highlights social media as a powerful educational tool that boosts academic performance and career growth (Sasikala *et al.* 2021) sharing of user-generated content enriches learning by providing students access to diverse resources and fostering connections that support both academic and career development.

The correlation coefficient for learning effectiveness and career growth is strong and positive (r=0.723), indicating strong relationship between learning effectiveness and career growth. In other words, social media may not have a direct impact, however who report higher learning effectiveness are more likely to get positive career growth.

Table 3. Correlation between SECI, learning effectiveness & career growth.

Pearson's Correlations		n	Pearson's	r	p
Socialization	-Learning Effectiveness	713	0.691	***	< .001
Socialization	-Career Growth	713	0.697	***	< .001
Externalization	-Learning Effectiveness	713	0.729	***	< .001
Externalization	-Career Growth	713	0.693	***	< .001
Combination	-Learning Effectiveness	713	0.701	***	< .001
Combination	-Career Growth	713	0.726	***	< .001
Internalization	-Learning Effectiveness	713	0.753	***	< .001
Internalization	-Career Growth	713	0.684	***	< .001
Learning Effectiveness	-Career Growth	713	0.723	***	< .001

* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

In the research result, it was found that socialization correlation with learning effectiveness and career growth was strong (r= 0.691) and (r=0.697) respectively at p<0.001. So higher socialization through social media tends to report higher learning effectiveness and greater career growth. When people express and share knowledge through externalization on social media, they experience better learning outcomes and career growth, (r=0.729) for learning effectiveness and (r=0.693) for career growth at p<0.001which shows a strong significant relationship. Connecting different explicit knowledge improves learning (r=0.701) and that knowledge improves career growth (r=0.726). Internalization is having a very strong significant relationship with learning effectiveness (r=0.753) and a strong significant relationship with career growth(r=0.684). The more people apply knowledge leads to highly effective learning and applying learned knowledge supports positive career growth. (Hemalatha *et al.* 2021) find from their study that implication of SECI in knowledge sharing helps the students for effective learning and career growth. Social media platform has evident influence on it.

9 DISCUSSION

Learning effectiveness and career growth (Ahmad and Pawar, n.d.; Sasikala et al. 2021b), have been often discussed and studied. In addition, the influence of SECI has also been documented (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995; Nonaka *et al.* 2008); But the mediating role of

socialization, externalization, combination, and internalization in the social media, learning effectiveness, and career growth has very scant studies in higher educational institutions. Furthermore, the current research is to understand the association between social media, learning effectiveness, and career growth also socialization, externalization, combination, and internalization relationship with learning effectiveness and career growth. Evaluation of data indicates a no significant association between social media and either learning effectiveness or career growth. However, a strong significant positive relationship was found between learning effectiveness and career growth. Thus, it may be assumed that those who report higher learning effectiveness are more likely to perceive positive career growth. Further socialization, externalization, combination, and internalization through social media act as a mediator and have a positive and strong relationship with learning effectiveness and career growth. The strongest correlation between internalization and learning effectiveness suggests that learning by doing is especially vital for effective learning.

10 CONCLUSION

10.1 *Key findings*

- The use of social media does not directly impact learning and career growth of students, however, students who learn more effectively tend to perceive better career growth.
- SECI plays a mediated role in both effective learning and career growth through social media.
- Internalization, which reflects learning by doing is vital for effective learning.

10.2 *Relevance*

The findings highlight the importance of students' engagement with social media rather than their frequency of using it. The SECI model's role in enhancing both learning and career growth through social media shows that active learning or knowledge-sharing processes are more impactful than passive learning.

10.3 *Future scope*

Data collection through questionnaire for this study has certain limitations, sample representation may have some measurement errors, because it depends on the credibility of the participants that how sincerely they are filling the provided questionnaire. Secondly, graduate and post-graduates enrolled in higher education institutions of Noida was the sample size. Research can also be done on the government institutions students and other geographical areas. Thirdly, this research utilizes Nonaka's SECI model for effective learning and career growth. A similar study can be done using another factor that impacts effective learning, and career growth. This study used a closed-ended questionnaire that hinder respondents from expressing their thoughts. Moreover, it is very challenging to assess why the respondents give certain choices. To overcome this, a semi-structured questionnaire with students could be shared.

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Reconstructing sanity: Multidisciplinary perspectives on mental health policy and practice in India

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ABSTRACT: Background: Mental health intersects law, policy, ethics, and lived experience, especially in inequitable contexts. Objective: This paper investigates mental health as a multidisciplinary issue in India and critically examines the implementation of the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017.

Methodology: A qualitative, socio-legal approach was used, incorporating grounded theory, comparative policy review, and interpretive analysis of court rulings, public documents, and secondary literature.

Key Findings: Significant gaps remain in MHCA implementation, particularly for marginalized groups. Ethical tensions around consent and access persist due to systemic and cultural barriers.

Conclusion: A rights-based, community-grounded, interdisciplinary approach is necessary to reframe mental health as a societal obligation.

Keywords: Mental Health, Well-Being, Medico-Legal Ethics, Intersectionality, Mental Healthcare Act 2017

> *"Mental illness is not a personal failure, but a failure of our society to respond humanely to human suffering."*
>
> *— Jacqui Dillon, Survivor activist and mental health advocate*

1 INTRODUCTION

Mental health today intersects far more than medicine. It touches law, policy, ethics, and lived experience—especially in contexts marked by inequality and limited access. This paper offers a multidisciplinary investigation into the evolving meaning of "sanity," positioning mental health not merely as a clinical concern but as a societal and legal priority. Laws like India's Mental Healthcare Act of 2017 mark significant progress, yet on the ground, treatment often remains inadequate, institutions overcrowded, and social stigma rampant. Globally, the pandemic has exacerbated distress, with the WHO estimating a 25% rise in anxiety and depression worldwide (WHO, 2022). Through perspectives from law, psychology, and public policy, this paper explores systemic barriers to care, especially for marginalized populations. It unpacks ethical tensions around autonomy, consent, and institutionalization. Drawing on court rulings, NGO models, and grassroots data, we argue that mental health must be reframed—not as a specialized service, but as a collective

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responsibility. Solutions must involve interdisciplinary collaboration, structural reform, and culturally grounded care rooted in rights, inclusion, and human dignity.

Mental health is no longer a concern confined to hospitals and psychiatric wards. It plays out in homes, schools, courts, and streets—shaping how people live, relate, and cope. Yet in many parts of the world, especially in low-resource settings, care remains elusive. India is no exception. Despite the landmark Mental Healthcare Act, ground realities reflect a dire mismatch between legal intent and implementation. Patients are often warehoused in understaffed institutions, and families left to navigate care without support. Access to therapy, rehabilitation, or even accurate diagnosis remains a privilege in many regions. Mental health has emerged as a defining issue of our time. As societies grapple with rising rates of psychological distress, from anxiety and depression to trauma and isolation, mental health is no longer a matter for doctors alone. The global crisis in mental well-being—exacerbated by the pandemic, economic instability, and deepening inequalities—demands a conversation that includes lawyers, educators, policymakers, and community leaders. The World Health Organization (2022) predicts that depression may soon become the leading global health burden. Yet most affected individuals, especially in low- and middle-income countries, receive little to no care.

This paper argues that mental health must be treated as a fundamental human right, not an optional service. Drawing on interdisciplinary sources, we investigate how mental health is shaped by legal systems, social hierarchies, and cultural expectations. We examine the current gaps in India's mental health policy—despite the progressive language of the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017—and explore how ethics, inclusion, and community participation must guide the way forward.

1.1 *Objectives*

This paper is guided by the following objectives: 1. To analyze mental health as a multidisciplinary issue involving law, psychology, sociology, and public policy. 2. To evaluate how legal frameworks like the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017 have shaped mental health care in India. 3. To examine how stigma, education, and community-led initiatives impact mental well-being. 4. To identify gaps in patient rights and ethical practice in the mental healthcare system.

2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study seeks to answer four central questions:

(1) How do different academic and professional fields contribute to our understanding of mental health?
(2) What are the implementation challenges of India's Mental Healthcare Act, 2017?
(3) How do identity-based factors such as caste, gender, and income influence mental health access?
(4) How can laws and policies evolve to become more inclusive and ethically sound?

3 HYPOTHESIS

Despite the promise of the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017, there remains a substantial gap between policy and practice—particularly when it comes to equity, ethics, and accessibility for marginalized populations.

4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study also employs a socio-legal lens to understand how law interacts with cultural and institutional forces shaping mental health outcomes. The methodology draws from grounded

theory and interpretive analysis of court judgments, government reports, and stakeholder interviews documented in secondary sources. The focus is not merely on what the law states, but on how it operates in specific contexts—rural districts, urban shelters, courtrooms, and community settings.

This approach allows for the triangulation of perspectives from patients and caregivers to mental health professionals and legal advocates. By integrating human rights discourse, feminist frameworks, and disability studies, the paper seeks to move beyond traditional biomedical or legalistic interpretations. Qualitative content analysis was used to extract themes related to dignity, access, and autonomy from textual sources, while comparative policy review helped identify global best practices relevant to India's context.

4.1 *Socio-legal constructs and ethical gaps in mental health care*

Mental health policy in India has kind of been changing … before it was like, more about locking people up, right? Like they'd put you in some center and that's it. Now with the 2017 Mental Healthcare Act, they say it's all about rights, that people should get decent treatment and make decisions for themselves. But in real life, it's not really like that. I once saw a case when I was volunteering where they didn't even ask the patient, the brother just signed everything. Lots of places are still stuck in those old ways—no consent, coercion, and nobody taking responsibility. Supposedly, all that was meant to be gone, but you still see it happening and the consent thing, wow that's a big one. The law says it's important, yeah, but then in real life, doctors or family just decide stuff without really telling the patient. Especially if the person can't read well or doesn't have family around—like, they have no voice. It feels so unfair, especially in rural areas or where education is low.

There were some famous cases, like Sheela Barse vs Union of India in 1987, where the court said mentally ill kids need to be treated with dignity. That was good. And another one, Bapu vs State of Maharashtra, they said mental illness shouldn't make you lose your legal identity. But still, institutions do whatever they want. The National Human Rights Commission has reported horrible things—people chained, beaten, locked up like criminals. Sometimes nobody even knows because there's no inspection, no proper reviews, and patients don't know their rights. The same law talks about Review Boards, they were supposed to be the backbone of the system, but in many states they don't even work (I read it in some NCRB 2021 report, I think). So people stay locked in for months and nobody checks anything. Rights look nice on paper but in reality... meh, not really.

All mental health centers are supposed to be registered, but there's so many shady ones out there, especially in small towns. I remember a case in Tamil Nadu in 2021 where patients were being chained like animals. It was in the news but then nothing happened. I mean, that's scary, like the state just doesn't care.

And don't even get me started on psychiatric emergencies. They're not properly part of the main health system, so there are delays, wrong diagnoses or worse, they arrest people. I once saw a man screaming in the street, it was obvious he needed help, but instead the police took him. That's not right. It shouldn't be that way.

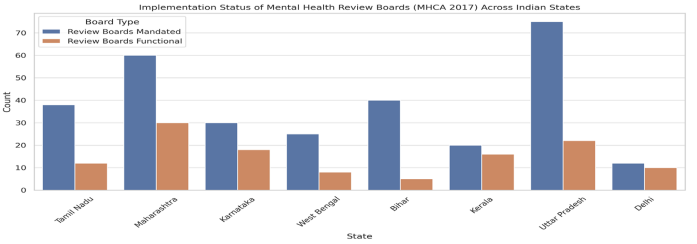


Figure 1. Status of mental health review boards under MHCA 2017 in selected states.

4.2 *Reimagining psychosocial well-being in policy and practice*

Even though a lot of mental health stuff still depends on hospitals and pills, I think we need to look at well-being in a more... I don't know, complete way. Like, psychosocial care gets that not everything comes from inside, sometimes sadness or stress come from outside stuff like poverty, exclusion, trauma... and violence too, of course. It's not enough to just give meds, we have help rebuild connections, give support, make spaces where people feel dignity or like they have a voice... agency, I think that's the word the experts use.

Look, countries like Brazil or South Africa have done some really good things, bringing mental health into regular health systems, like primary care. They use local workers, peer networks, services that respect people's culture. Sometimes they even go to people's homes or schools. And it's not just about symptoms; they also build trust. That's something we miss here.

In India we have the District Mental Health Program, which sounds good but it's got issues like no money or not enough staff, and every state does it different so it's not always working. But still, there's some nice stuff happening. Some NGOs work with ASHAs—they're community workers, and they get trained to listen, give basic counseling, and connect people with clinics. I met one ASHA in Jharkhand who helped a 16-year-old girl who didn't want to go to school because she was scared of her own dad. The ASHA listened to her like a friend. It was really moving.

Then you have places like The Banyan in Tamil Nadu. They don't just do the usual stuff, they mix shelter, therapy, workshops, and help people have a life outside of hospitals. The idea is to avoid locking people up when it's not needed and understand that mental health isn't just a "brain thing," it's tied to poverty, domestic violence, broken families. They have group homes where people support each other, feel seen.

iCall is also really cool, a helpline from the Tata Institute that gives free psychological help. I called once when I was feeling really low because of personal stuff, it was anonymous, no judgment, and I felt heard. It's super useful especially in cities where everyone's busy and people look down on you for seeing a therapist.

We got to start with prevention too, right? Like, kids who learn young to talk about what they feel they grow up stronger mentally. There's this program called SEHER, I think it's in Bihar and Jharkhand, in schools, and it's helped a lot of girls—especially those dealing with school pressure or gender violence. They learn emotional strength and that's key.

Mental health should be talked about early, at home, in school, among friends. Schools and workplaces should have spaces where you can say "I'm not okay" and not feel weird. And policies should treat psychosocial care as something that prevents, not just fixes. Otherwise, we'll always be too late.

4.3 *Intersectional paradigms: Gender, class, and mental distress*

Mental health is not something that happens in a vacuum. Like, our social identities—caste, gender, class, sexuality, all of that—totally change how we feel distress. And also if we feel okay asking for help or not. For example, trans people have so many barriers to get care. Sometimes they don't even call them by the right name, or they say their identity is some kind of sickness, or they don't even treat them. One trans friend of mine told me that when she said her name at a hospital, the nurse laughed. That hurt her a lot. Now she doesn't even wanna go to clinics anymore.

And so, later they just stop asking for help, and the pain keeps piling up. Queer mental health folks say trauma in these communities is misunderstood, like, doctors misdiagnose it because they don't have that sensitivity... like, they don't get what it's like to be discriminated every day.

Take Dalit women in rural areas. A lot of them feel anxiety, fear, trauma from caste violence, but when they go to doctors, they're told they're overreacting. That it's all in their

head. But if a woman from an upper caste says the same thing, she gets treatment. It's like pain isn't treated the same depending on who feels it.

And that's just sad, because sometimes psychologists don't even realize that what they call paranoia is actually a real reaction to real stuff. It's not made up.

I read this 2019 study in the Indian Journal of Psychiatry that said Dalit students in fancy universities had way more depression and anxiety. It said clearly that it came from what they go through there. And that really makes you think that it's not just about saying nice words about inclusive care. You have to change who decides what suffering is and how healing should happen.

There are good projects too, like Blue Dawn, a mental health collective for Dalit-Bahujan communities. They do therapy rooted in their culture, by themselves, for themselves. I thought it was beautiful, because it's not top-down, it's among equals, from shared memories.

If we really want mental health to be for everyone, the policies should change. We need to break the data down by group, train professionals in anti-discrimination, and include marginalized people in decision making. Mental equity isn't only about hospitals. We have to see how oppression causes suffering, not just illness.

4.4 *Multidisciplinary synergy: Law, Medicine, and Humanities*

Talking about mental health isn't just giving out pills, like, it goes way beyond that. We need lawyers, teachers, artists, social workers, all those people to come together and really create spaces that help take care of the mind. Because a lot of times, mental suffering comes from more complex stuff—like police violence, poverty, or when they erase your identity—and that doesn't get solved with a prescription.

Globally, there's projects like WHO's mhGAP, that showed task-sharing works. Like, training general doctors and people in the community to give basic mental health help. And that's closed a lot of gaps. In India, for example, NIMHANS has teamed up with law schools like NALSAR, making clinical programs where law students and mental health professionals work on real cases. I went to one of those once (even though I wasn't in law), a friend got me in, and it was really interesting to hear them talk about consent in cases where nobody even asked the patient anything.

Those experiences, besides teaching law, help future lawyers understand real life. Because one thing is the legal code, and another is seeing someone with schizophrenia explaining why they didn't want to go back home.

Legal education has a lot to offer too. They should teach not just mental health laws, but how trauma, power, dynamics … all that affects clients. There's countries like Rwanda, where after the genocide they made community spaces to heal. They mixed legal aid, emotional support, even cultural rituals. That worked better than punishing. That really stayed with me when I saw it in a documentary, seeing people crying together, listening to each other, no courtrooms, no judges and medical schools should open up more too. Bring in people who've been through psychiatry, activists, even filmmakers. I remember once in a class they showed a movie about a psych hospital, and you could tell who'd never really thought deeply about it. That kind of stuff is needed. Books, talks, not just clinical theory. If you bring together medicine, law, philosophy, and real-life stories, we could imagine mental health care in a new way. One where there's justice, but also tenderness. Because without compassion, everything else feels too cold.

This study shows that big changes are needed in the system. A system that understands communities, not just patients. We need coherent policies, invest in prevention, and train people across different fields. Sure, the study has its limits—uses more qualitative data and secondary sources—but still, it opens a path. Maybe in the future they can use mixed methods so it's stronger.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS & CONCLUSION:

Based on this interdisciplinary review, the following actions are recommended to strengthen India's mental health system:

- Integrate mental health into welfare schemes (e.g., MGNREGA, PMJAY).
- Expand mobile mental health units and community outreach.
- Create state-wise mental health report cards. • Mandate mental health modules in teacher and medical training.
- Boost funding for community-based and rights-informed services. • Ensure functional Mental Health Review Boards with community oversight.
- Encourage inter-ministerial coordination between health, education, and social justice departments.
- Establish Mental Health Review Boards with real oversight power and community representation.
- Integrate traditional and culturally rooted healing practices through ethical collaboration.
- Promote school- and workplace-based mental health education.
- Train primary healthcare providers in mhGAP protocols, with supervision.
- Ensure policies are shaped by affected communities, including LGBTQ+, Dalit, and disabled groups.

Mental health in India stands at a crossroads. On paper, the law promises dignity, access, and choice—but in practice, these ideals remain out of reach for too many. To bridge this gap, we must recognize mental health not just as a clinical issue, but as a human rights priority grounded in social justice.

The challenge ahead is not simply to fund more services, but to reimagine care itself—away from institutions and toward empathy, away from coercion and toward agency. The voices of those with lived experience must be centered, not as patients but as partners. Their stories, pain, resilience, and strategies are essential tools for building better systems.

This paper calls for a mental health movement grounded not in charity but in justice. The work is political, structural, and deeply human. The sooner we accept that, the sooner we begin to heal—not just individuals, but societies.

A reimagined mental health system will require humility from experts, creativity from communities, and courage from policymakers. Most of all, it will require listening to those who have lived through the silence, shame, and struggle—and letting their voices lead the way forward.

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Social media impact and perception towards religious communication with reference to SAARC countries

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ABSTRACT: This whole world is composed of more than 4000 religions and faith groups and shares the same beliefs and values. But religious "bigotry" is endangering the equality and peace in this whole world and in SAARC countries too. Controversial and fake news on the grounds of religion, community, and caste can be observed time to time on social media and the related websites. A large no. of masses has become social media savvy, becomes the cause of conflicts too. In this respect this study seeks to analyse the perception of masses in SAARC countries towards religious communication practices and how social media has its impression in all these, so that the religious conflict in these countries can be overcome. Mixed method approach with proportionate sample size from SAARC countries as population for the stratified sample survey is applied. Analyses is carried out considering the various objectives related to religious conflicts, social media impact and ways to bring peace in all nations. This study concludes that the causes of conflicts are interference of politics, communal and religious groups and somewhere social media also play main role. Internally all religions say they are equal peace can be brought up by knowing oneself.

Keywords: Religious Communication, social media, SAARC, perception, impact

1 INTRODUCTION

South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, comprising of 8 nations Nepal, Pakistan, India, the Maldives, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Bhutan, and Bangladesh established on December,1985 whereas Afghanistan became its member in 2007 diverse cultures and histories (Drishti IAS 2019, para.1). During 18th SAARC summit, its leaders also decided to develop a cultural trail linking major Buddhist historical sites in the region (Education Security and Culture 2020). SAARC has declared Year 2016, as the year of cultural heritage and accesses to visit prominent holy sites of all the major religions Islam, Hinduism, Christianity, and others of South Asia was given to visitors. Whole world and SAARC countries have implanted their deep culture and religious roots of communication with each other whether visible or silently (Sawe 2018). With the advancement in technology social media engagement is rising, become the part of daily life but sometimes create religious and communal issues and sets the wrong narratives in the society. Social media has complex and multifaceted impact in SAARC countries in terms of religious communication and perception. It is also analysed that it facilitates positive interactions and awareness, and raises the awareness towards misinformation, echo chambers and polarisation. "SAARC seeks to

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foster a peaceful and stable environment in the region, promoting understanding and resolving conflicts through dialogue" (Gaur,2023, para.12).

1.1 *Significance*

It is observed that lots of unwanted religious content is emanated on social networking sites which affect the religious harmony in most of the countries globally. This study aims to know the cause and effect behind this by knowing the perception of masses.

1.2 *Aim*

To identify and overcome the reasons behind religious conflict in SAARC nations and impact of social media in all these.

1.3 *Past studies*

Acceptance and communication among religion can be achieved by understanding and education. News media also influence the perception towards different religions acts as an opinion window for social individuals (Emery 2011, p.24). Social media has a dual edged nature, acts both a "facilitator and a disruptor of religious communication". It plays important role in shaping the religious practices (Zhang 2025, p.25). A political individual cannot exercise control in society during conflicts as his public image and visual representation is already known by masses, difficult to create artificial image (Bilalli 2024, p.56). Digital spaces also have the potential to contribute for peace building by encountering with differences in values and recognising the shared humanity practices (Haq and Kwok 2024, p.1).

1.4 *Research gap*

Various past researches have not analysed the perception of SAARC nations on the grounds of religious communication and conflicts along with social media combinedly. No such ways are defined in these background studies to overcome the religious issues.

1.5 *Research problem*

What is the perception of masses from SAARC countries on alarming religious issues and how social media have impacted all these?

2 OBJECTIVES

(1) To investigate the factors responsible for religious issues in all SAARC countries.
(2) To study the perception of masses from SAARC countries on religious content emanated on social media.
(3) To propose the steps to bring peace globally with reference to SAARC countries.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research study is based on both primary and secondary data. More than 30 national and international research papers, SAARC Charter, UN Charter, and constitutional rights are studied for literature review. For primary data stratified sample survey is conducted from

all the SAARC countries taken as research population and sample size is divided proportionately for all 8 SAARC nations. Through questionnaire and schedule as research tool data is collected from 100 respondents with rigorous exercise. Both the open ended and close ended questions including 5-point Likert scale and multiple choice are asked from the respondents considering the objectives of the research. Therefore, both qualitative and quantitative mixed research design is followed. Google form is used as questionnaire to collect data digitally and SPSS tool is used to analyse the data quantitatively where Chi square and descriptive statistical tests are also applied.

3.1 *Analysis*

Independent variables – Age, gender, religion, educational qualification, marital status & country on which basis data is taken through stratified sample survey. Only important charts are described here:

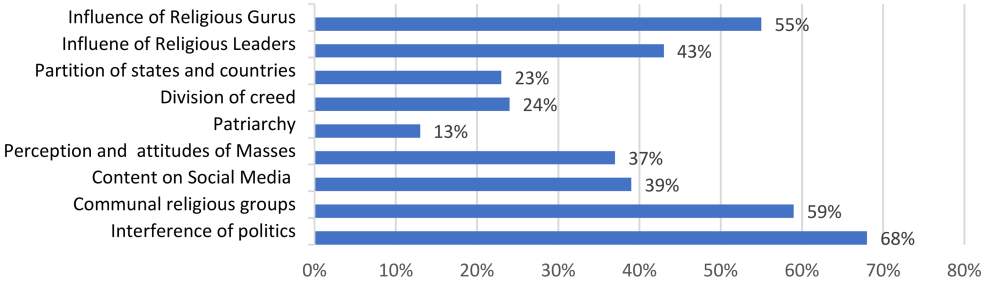


Chart 1. What are the causes of religious conflicts?

This chart defines that biggest causes of conflict is interference of political activities i.e. 68% and then communal groups 50 % and then influence of religious gurus and opinion leaders i.e. 43%. Somewhere to some extent social media also play its crucial role as 39% percent masses believes in this. Therefore, to overcome the conflicts interference of politics needs to be stopped.

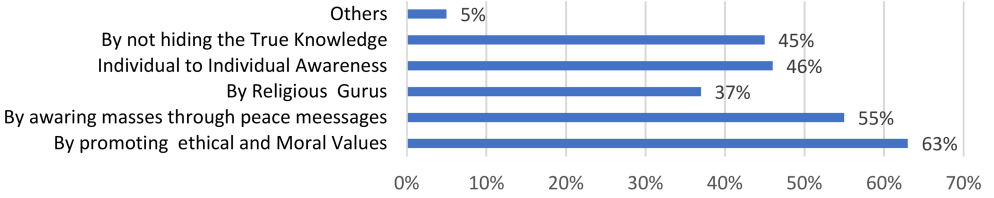


Chart 2. How religious harmony can be brought in society?

Maximum of the 63% masses opinionated that by promoting the ethical and moral values in society peace can be established, and 55% says by awaring masses with peace messages peace can be brought up. 46% and 45% masses says that by contacting individual to individual person and also not hiding from them about the true knowledge peace can be brought up respectively. Some of the 37% says that by religious gurus peace can be

established. So this study on SAARC precepted ultimate way to bring peace is awareness towards moral values and exploring thyself.

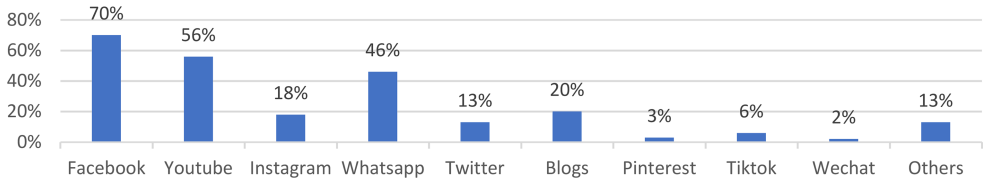


Chart 3. On which social media religious content is shared mostly?

A large no. of 70% masses believe that mostly religious content is shared on Facebook, while 56% believe for YouTube, in this series 46% for WhatsApp and 18% Instagram 13% on Twitter and 20% through blogs. This study opinionated that Facebook and YouTube attracts the users more and they cause the big effect on masses.

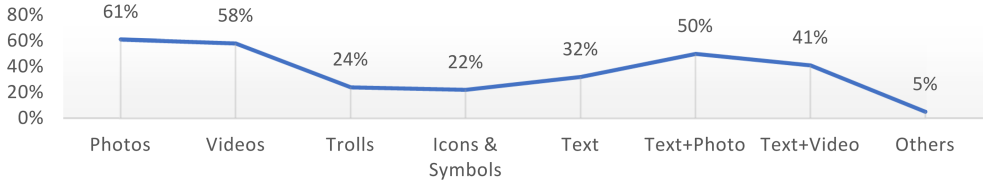


Chart 4. In what form religious content mostly prevail on Social Media ?

SAARC countries survey says maximum 61% photos are shared, while 58% is shared in terms of video, then 50% photos with caption or text are shared. In this series 41% videos with text or words is shared on social media. Most of the 30% masses say that all these contents uploaded on social media in terms of photos and videos is fully responsible for conflicts. This chart also clarifies that photos has much effect on masses and verifies the statement that 1 photo is worth 10 thousand words.

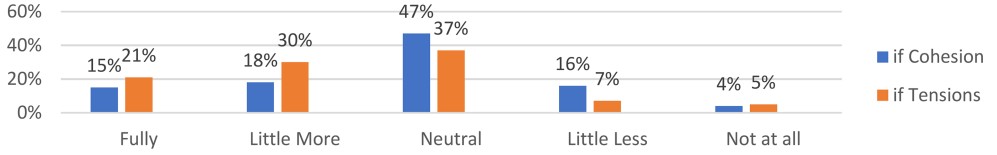


Chart 5. Does social media responsible for religious cohesion or tensions?

This chart represents that 47% masses have neutral views that social media also creates the situation of religious cohesions, while 18% says in little more amount it creates religious cohesions and 15% also agree that it creates religious cohesions in full amount. And 37% masses have neutral views that social media creates the situation of tensions, while 30% says in little more amount it creates religious tensions and 21% also agree that it creates religious

tensions in full amount. This chart clarifies that SAARC nation masses have neutral views towards religious cohesion and tensions and social media has neutral role.

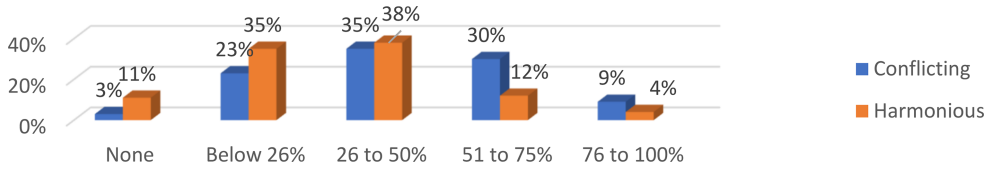


Chart 6. Perception of masses for %age of religious confliting or harmonious religious content uploaded on social media.

This chart says that large no. of 35% people say 26% to 50% content is conflicting in nature while 30% says that its 51% to 75% content of this kind. And 23% people says that below 25% is conflicting in nature. While below 25% content is religious harmonious is shared on social media and maximum of the 38% masses says 26% to 50% content is harmonious in nature. Just 4% says its above 75% as harmonious content. Value of chi^2 statistical test on both of these variables with respect to gender also shows a significant difference that is 0.026 in case of percentage of conflicting religious content shared on social media and 0.015 in case of percentage of inter religious harmony promoting content uploaded on social media.

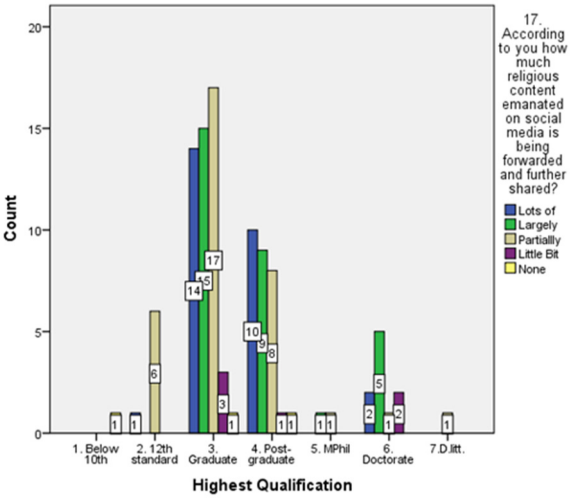


Chart 7. According to masses of SAARC how much religious content emanated on social media is being forwarded or shared with respect to Highest Qualification?

Chi square test value for this variable is .001, therefore there is a relation between the independent variable highest qualification and perception of masses of SAARC countries about the religious content shared or forwarded on social media variables. Most of the 34% says lots of religious content shared on all these social media is forwarded further and shared mainly by graduates.

3.2 *Qualitative analysis*

In respect to open-ended question how peace can be brought up, have multiple viewpoints. Here maximum says that through meditation, self-realisation, by knowing thyself peace and harmony can be brought up. Many say by helping and serving, living for others with compassion and kindness, and not harming anyone peace comes itself and within a person. What a person does, his/her karma gives them. By praying and chant the divine supreme power God and understanding, all religion, cast, sex, age is equal in their own manner and respected equally. Many suggest reading, reciting the spiritual and holy books and; spreading and understanding that massage logically and scientifically and then applying that in the life peace can come.

3.3 *Findings*

- Researcher reveals that various religions exist in all these SAARC countries and vital among them are Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Jainism and Buddhism. Most of the 55% people says that on the basis of morals and values they are different, most of the 54% says they varies on the basis of ways of worshipping the God. 51% says on the basis of views and faiths. 41% says because of differences in teachings; as some believes in murti pooja, some in meditation only i.e. Nirakar brahma, some worship the holy book as their deity. But at last, all say that they want Peace and believes that "God is one".
- Masses of these countries in large 38% agree that they mildly feel that there exists the religious conflict. Then some 27% say that it's in moderate amount while many of the 22% also says that in large markedly amount there is religious conflict in all these countries. Partition of religions into communal groups also creates differences within the same religion. As in Hinduism there are many like Vaishnav and Shaiva and among Shaiva there are many others. Likewise in Islam too there are siya, sunni, kurd and conflicts and war situation among them we used to be seen. Similarly in Christianity there are multiple religions like catholic and protestants. In this way there are communal groups within the same religion and create the situation of conflicts and differences.
- A large no. of 49% respondents of survey from SAARC countries have opinionated that content shared on social sites is fully responsible for conflicts, somewhere 38% of them also showed neutral views on this.
- It is resulted that on social media content is shared and forwarded in large amount. 26% to 25% percentage of conflicting content spread is precepted by most peoples and some say its 51% to 75%. As per the statistical chi^2 test with value .026 also shows that significant difference on gender basis with respect to dependent variable percentage of conflicting religious content shared on social media.
- This study also reveals that not only conflicting content, social media also spreads and promotes religious harmonious content too somewhere. It is stated that maximum of the lesser than 50% content is harmonious in nature. With chi^2 value .015, significant difference also exists, which tells there is a relationship with independent variable gender and dependent variable percentage of inter religious harmony promoting content uploaded on social media. But masses have neutral views in large, about the promoting and spreading of harmonious religious content by social media while 53% agrees with this view.
- A huge no. of 73% masses say that every human being needs peace fully.
- True believers of God say by praying and chanting to God and following what is written in scriptures peace can be brought up. Many of the 24% masses neutrally agrees that: "God is one", while 27% strongly agrees and 21% agrees with statement.

3.4 *Legal and policy framework analysis*

Both of the UN Charter and SAARC Charter says all nations are abide to foster the principle of sovereign equality, territorial integrity, mutual understanding, cooperating each other, not using force and settling the disputes peacefully on ground of culture and religion (SAARC Charter 2020; Global Issues 2024; United Nations 1945). Articles 25 to 28 of Indian constitution guarantees right to freedom of religion and says are religion are equal before state (Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University 2020; Part III Archives n.d.). Singh and Chaudhary (2025) described that public awareness initiatives need to be implemented to aware citizens about right to freedom of religion and its belief (p. 17296).

4 CONCLUSION

This study on SAARC countries concludes that the main and foremost reason behind religious and communal conflict is interference of politics, communal and religious groups and influence of religious and opinion leaders. Except these social media also has its role somewhere. Religious and communal conflict also exists within their own religion. According to citizens of these SAARC countries all these major religions also has different moral values, views and faiths and teachings. Religions are also represented different iconographically in terms of icons and symbols, colours significance and mantras and ways of chanting. By catching all these factors some political and communal groups for their own benefits play with the feelings of common man and mislead them against each other that resulted into fight among the masses from different religions. Internally, away from this materialistic world all the religions are same and fully agrees that "God is one."

Further this study concludes that religious content is also emanated, shared, and further forwarded on social media in large amount maximum in terms of photos and videos. SAARC countries people have neutral views about emanating the religious disturbing content on social media. They say social media creates conflict by wrong delivery of content in the society and brings the social and religious tensions. But it also spreads social and religious harmony between religions through its content filled with moral and ethical values. Main issue is wrong and fake content, spread of misinformation and disinformation through platforms like Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter respectively.

This study construes that the best way to bring peace is meditation and serving for other living beings, by following the moral and ethical values all such differences can overcome. For this some awareness can be extended at global level and follow up of concept of "let live and let others live". All depend on Karma; only the need to know that peace is within you and to do self-realisation with a feeling of "One God" and all are human beings; and internally all have one religion of humanity.

4.1 *Recommendations*

This study also recommends to organise some interfaith or inter-religious dialogues between masses so that differences can be sort out. To aware about use of social media some digital media literacy programs can be organised.

4.2 *Relevance*

Research problem highlighted in this research study is of major concern to whole world. Communal and religious issue can be observed globally along with impact of social media over these. This study is a major step towards this to sort out the issue.

4.3 *Future approach*

In future this study can be done on wider scale and in other parts of the world. Some new research methods like can be used to analyse the data with diverse angles.

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Review of false information, deception, and misinformation on social networks

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1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

In the digital age, crises are often accompanied by an 'infodemic'—a surge of misinformation that impedes the development of Shared Situational Awareness (SSA) among the public and response agencies. The SSA, which is crucial in managing the crisis effectively and efficiently is dependent on collaboration. Comprehension of current circumstances and foresight for future developments. The research delves into the complexities of information transmission, communication strategies, and building trust through social media, examining their interaction in the context of sub-Saharan Africa during crises.

The advent of social media has facilitated swift interconnectivity among users regarding the distribution and accessibility of various forms of information, including text, photos, and audio (Adekoya and Fasae 2021; Choi and Kim 2021). In the event of breakdown of health crisis such as COVID-19 pandemic, war, it rather becomes further more important that precise information is transmitted which can lead to fruitful communication via digital media and the trust of the public is maintained thus not creating any panic situation amongst the people of the nation. However, disinformation creates a problem amongst the society and leads to actions which can further increase the load of decision making of the authorities.

Our research is on comprehending the "fake news" phenomenon, its associated challenges and underlying causes, as well as evaluating automated solutions for identifying and reducing fake news in online digital networks as explored by scholars.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 *Concept of Fake News (FN)*

The authors categorize FN as articles in newspaper that have been constructed to mislead and deceive the readers intentionally and empirically. As a result of this, multiple definitions and meanings emerged in literature, however, all agreeing that the core characteristic of FN is its falsehood. And yet, these definitions differ from one another basis their inclusion and exclusion parameters such as sarcasm, deception theories, gossip, misinformation and pranks. For quite some time, there has been a wide range of materials presenting different perspectives and scientific agreements on current issues like COVID-19, evolution, and climate change

Nonetheless, persistent alterations in political techniques profoundly influence the definition, perception, and interpretation of information across all communication levels (Massari 2010). Aggarwal *et al.* (2012) contended that erroneous scientific, political, and ideological information has substantial causes and repercussions for persons with strong political inclinations and those seeking to disseminate their ideas to a broader audience. Nakov (2020) said that the term "fake news" has acquired multiple connotations, with certain politicians characterizing it as "news that I oppose."

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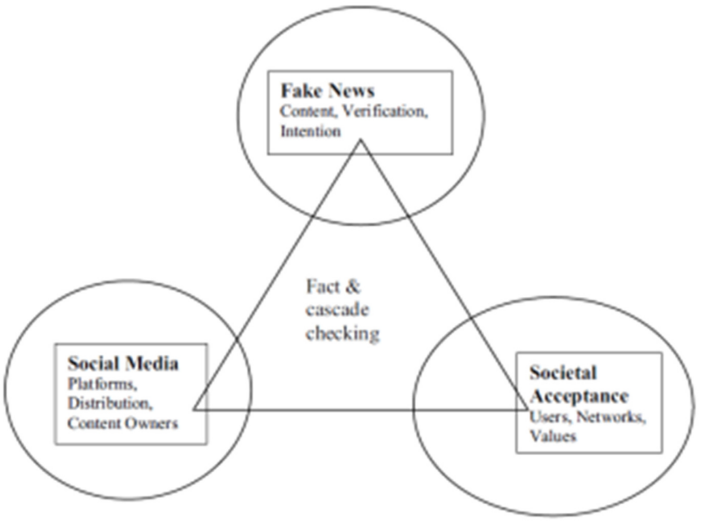


Figure 1. Definition of *fake news*.

2.2 *Situational Awareness (SA) and digital technologies in crisis management*

The definition of crisis can be categorized into three: danger, immediacy, and unpredictability. Currently, technology significantly influences the dynamics of crises and human responses (Gkeredakis *et al.* 2021). At the time of crisis, achieving SSA for all participants, including individuals who are impacted, and official response agencies is important yet difficult because of their unpredictable nature (Kumar *et al.* 2019; Steensen *et al.* 2018).

SA involves identifying what is happening in the environment and anticipating the upcoming changes (Endsley 1988). Shared Situational Awareness (SSA) plays an important role in the difficult situations like COVID-19, war or demonetisation as it helps efficient engagement (Endsley 1995). However, establishing SSA during crisis is difficult due to several factors like unpredictability and the lack of crisis management (Sharma, Sharma, and Singh 2020). Moreover, the "digital infodemic" and swift dissemination of misinformation via social media present additional obstacles to the establishment of reliable SSA (Banerjee and Meena 2021; Bunker 2020).

2.3 *Dynamics of digital media and crisis outreach*

With the advent of Internet, crisis communications is entirely transformed. Commonly addressed as a strategic distribution of information in chaotic times (Coombs 2018) , the entire framework has been revolutionalized by the emergence of social media platforms like Facebook & Twitter (Cheng 2018). Because of these platforms, a more dynamic and cohesive understanding has been been built between communities and agencies resulting in efficient crisis response (Sellnow and Seeger 2021).

2.4 *Disinformation and confidence in digital crisis communication*

Spreading false information about the COVID-19 pandemic, fueled by prejudicies, rumours and conspiracy theories gave wake to public worry, panic and assault on HCPs (healthcare professionals) and individuals of Asian heritage (Ruiz-Frutos *et al.* 2020; Sallam *et al.* 2020). Multiple research, including those by King and Wang (2021) and Wang and Zhou (2022), have worked on understanding the spreading of false information and how it effects the

public trust and their decision making.Conversely, this study adopts a distinctive perspective. Our objective is to identify the characteristics that could undermine trust and hence reduce the efficacy of crisis communication tactics. Significant research has been conducted to examine and analyze the phenomenon of fake news on online social networks. Some studies concentrate exclusively on differentiating between fake news and rumors (Meel and Vishwakarma 2020), whereas others address the comprehensive issue, encompassing both characterization and processing methodologies (Guo *et al.* 2020)

3 CLASSIFICATION OF MISINFORMATION

The literature presents various fake news classifications. The FN has been identified on the basis intent and content, as illustrated in Figure 2. Zhang and Ghorbani (2020) recently developed a new categorization. The categorization of FN is predicated on the amalgamation of its content and intent. They differentiate between tangible and intangible news content and FN.Tangible content encompasses the media and formats of news, while intangible content comprises the thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and emotions that news creators aim to convey.

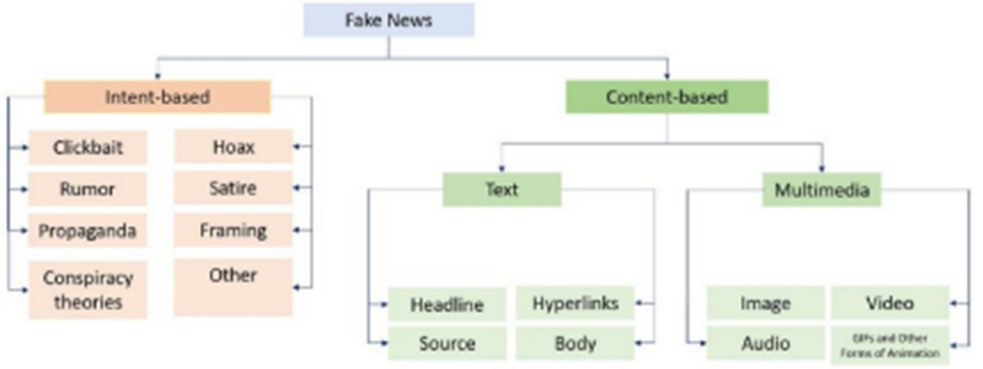


Figure 2. Classification of misinformation. Source. Author's compilation.

4 CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH THE IDENTIFICATION AND ALLEVIATION OF MISINFORMATION

To alleviate the risks of misinformation, it is important to first recognize the challenges that consistently confront researchers. The primary aim of this study was to investigate the elements that contribute to vulnerability to distorted information. Despite considerable progress in addressing specific challenges related to false news detection (Zhang and Ghorbani 2020), additional efforts are necessary for a thorough resolution oftheissue.

This section examines the several unresolved challenges that hinder the identification of false news on social media platforms. The issues can be classified into three categories: content-related, contextual (i.e., inadequate user awareness, social bots spreading false information, and the fluid dynamics of online social networks that enable swift dissemination), and the challenge posed by existing datasets.

5 DETECTION OF MISINFORMATION

The detection of false information in social networks remains in its nascent phase, with numerous difficult aspects requiring additional exploration. This has evolved into a burgeoning domain of study, garnering significant interest. Numerous studies have been conducted on the detection of bogus news in online social media. Several studies have focused on the automated identification of false information using artificial intelligence methodologies. This section examines the current methodologies employed in automatic fake news identification, and the techniques that have been utilized.

5.1 *Classifications of misinformation detection*

5.1.1 *Category based on news content*

Content-based strategies for identifying false news employ information extracted from the news piece itself, focusing on the analysis and utilization of the content in their proposed methodologies. Content includes all aspects of the news, such as the source, title, text, and multimedia components, which may display subtle variations. Researchers in this domain rely on content-based detection indicators, particularly textual and multimedia words, which are attributes obtained from the content of news stories. Textual cues are characteristics obtained from news articles, whereas multimedia cues are characteristics obtained from associated images and videos. Figure 3 illustrates the primary ways to represent news material (i.e., content and images) and recognition approaches in the domain of FN detection technique based on news content.

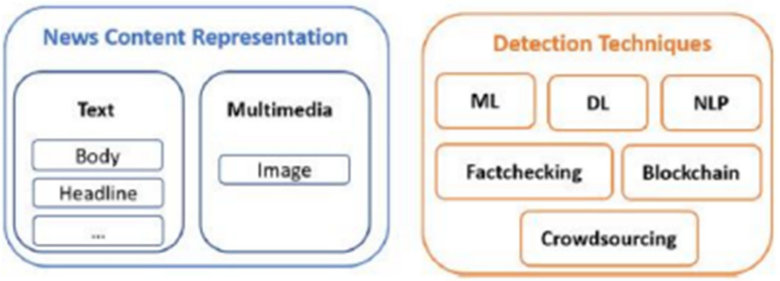


Figure 3. Misinformation: News content. Source: Author's compilation.

5.1.2 *Category based on social context*

Unlike solutions that concentrate on news content, the content-based techniques prioritize the dubious social content around Internet news (Zhang and Ghorbani 2020) instead of the content of the news itself. The social content-based category includes approaches for detecting false news that utilize contextual elements related to news articles. The aspects can be categorized into two subtypes: user-based and network-based. These can be employed for contextual analysis and training activities in artificial intelligence and machine learning. User-centric elements relate to data acquired from OSN participants, encompassing user profile information and behavioral patterns. Network-based elements relate to information obtained from the attributes of the social network in which fraudulent content is disseminated, encompassing news propagation pathways like propagation times and temporal characteristics, diffusion patterns illustrated by the volume of re-tweets and shares, and user relationships (Mishra 2020), such as user friendships.

5.1.3 *Hybrid methodologies*

The majority of researchers concentrate on utilizing a singular strategy instead of integrating both content- and context-based approaches. The reason behind this is the belief of certain researchers (Wu and Rao 2020) that classic fusion techniques face significant restrictions arising from existing feature correlations and semantic conflicts. Consequently, certain researchers have concentrated on gathering content-based information, whereas other researchers have emphasized obtaining social information for their designed methodologies.

Nonetheless, automating fake news identification using only one type of feature is difficult (Ruchansky *et al.* 2017). Consequently, the modern methodologies now employ a combination of both content and social context analysis to identify the FN.

6 TECHNIQUES FOR DETECTING MISINFORMATION

6.1 *Human-centric methods*

A particular study avenue for detecting false news involves employing human-centric methodologies including crowdsourcing (Micallef *et al.* 2020; Pennycook and Rand 2019). Techniques for fact-checking (Chung and Kim 2021; Nyhan *et al.* 2020). The above-mentioned methodologies can be classified as low calculative demand strategies, as they both depend on human expertise and competence for the identificatin of bogus news. Nonetheless, the identification of FN cannot be completely managed by human intervention, as it requires substantial time and financial resources, and is unsuccessful in curbing the rapid dissemination of false information.

6.2 *Artificial Intelligence (AI) based techniques*

Most researchers regard FN identification as a categorization issue and employ AI methodologies which involves machine learning (ML) and the processing of human language through natural language processing (NLP). The majority integrate multiple AI methodologies in their solutions, instead of depending on a singular methodology.

6.3 *Blockchain-based methods*

Blockchain technology is being pushed as another way to find and stop FN on social media. Blockchain technology is getting a lot of attention from academics right now because it has some interesting features. Immutability, decentralization, tamper-proofing, consensus, record keeping, and the inability to deny transfers are some of the most important features of blockchain technology that make it useful for more than just crypto currencies. It can also be used to check the legitimacy and integrity of other digital assets.

7 INTERPRETATION AND PATH FORWARD

This paper outlines the fundamental context of false news as a critical element of online information in social media. After examining the relevant literature, we consolidated and classified the current definitions of false news and its related vocabulary. We identified various FN typologies and formulated different categories based on intent which includes sarcasm, conspiracy, theories, plot and agenda and based on content that includes text and multimedia fake news, including detailed false videos and Generative Adversarial Network images. The authors have analyzed the primary obstacles related to the identification and alleviation of disinformation on social media, encompassing the misleading characteristics of fabricated information, lack of human cognizance regarding FN, the presence of inhuman

disseminators (e.g., chatbots), the fluid dynamics of digital platforms facilitating swift dissemination of false content, and the quality of current datasets, which persistently limits the effectiveness of proposed solutions. We analyzed the viewpoints of contemporary research on the automated detection of misinformation, concentrating on the methodologies utilized namely content, social context or hybrid approaches) and the strategies employed, particularly AI methods, crowdsourcing, fact-checking, blockchain techniques, and hybrid approaches. A comparative study of the evaluated compositions is conducted. The assessed approaches were based on multiple dimensions, including a content-based strategy for disinformation identification, contextual and hybrid elements, along with an early detection perspective. In conclusion, we delineate the principal problems in addressing the issue of disinformation, necessitating additional examination in the suggestion for innovative detection approaches.

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Assessing the role of digital media in promoting collaborative learning among secondary school students in the Noida region

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ABSTRACT: The research investigates the impact of digital media on developing collaborative learning among secondary school students who live in the Noida region. The increasing presence of technology in educational systems requires understanding how digital tools affect student interactions and knowledge construction processes. The main goal of this research investigates how digital media platforms, including educational apps and discussion forums and collaborative content creation tools, affect peer-to-peer engagement and shared learning outcomes. The research used a mixed methods design, which combined 300 student surveys from ten schools with focus group discussions and classroom observations. The research shows that students who use digital platforms show better participation levels and enhanced problem-solving skills, and better conceptual understanding because of peer collaboration. The research demonstrates that digital media supports inclusive learning through its ability to accommodate different communication approaches and immediate feedback mechanisms. The research findings support educators and policymakers in strategically implementing collaborative digital tools in curricula for creating active learning environments. The research provides new insights about digital media implementation in Indian secondary education while offering specific findings that apply to educational strategy development in comparable urban areas.

Keywords: Digital media, collaborative learning, secondary education, educational technology, Noida schools

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 *Background of the study*

Digital media has transformed educational practices throughout the world by expanding access to technology in urban and semi-urban areas. The educational approach of collaborative learning draws from Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory, which stresses the role of social interaction in building knowledge through peer collaboration. Digital tools, including cloud-based documents and interactive whiteboards as well as educational apps and social learning platforms, serve as effective tools for student collaboration, according to Zhang and Lin (2020). The Indian educational landscape is transforming because of smart classrooms

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and government digital initiatives, and the growing availability of mobile devices, which affect student interactions and knowledge co-construction.

The educational hub of Noida in the Delhi-NCR region demonstrates a distinctive environment where digital infrastructure meets diverse educational institutions and students demonstrate high tech proficiency. The post-COVID-19 shift toward digital platforms has strengthened the need to study their effects on student learning behaviours, especially regarding collaboration and engagement. The transition requires more extensive research with specific data from particular regions because current studies remain insufficient.

1.2 *Problem statement*

The majority of Noida secondary school students depend on traditional learning methods despite digital media becoming more accessible. The delivery of content through digital tools remains the primary function of teachers instead of creating opportunities for meaningful student interaction and peer exploration. The potential of digital media to transform collaborative learning experiences remains underdeveloped. The current pedagogical models fail to match the collaborative features that digital tools provide (Roy and Banerjee 2024). The Noida region needs further research because the educational paradigm lacks structured implementation and teachers need better training, and there is insufficient empirical data.

1.3 *Research objectives*

The primary objectives of this study are:

- This research aims to determine the degree of digital media tool implementation in collaborative learning approaches used by secondary school students in Noida.
- This research assesses how digital platforms enhance student participation and peer interaction, and collaborative problem-solving abilities.
- To determine both the obstacles and facilitators that affect the implementation of digital collaborative learning tools in Noida's secondary schools.

1.4 *Research questions*

This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

(1) How digital media tools for collaborative learning in Noida's secondary schools require investigation.
(2) The perceived effectiveness of these tools in promoting student engagement and collaboration needs assessment.
(3) The integration of collaborative digital practices in classrooms faces obstacles from institutional, technological and pedagogical barriers.

1.5 *Significance of the study*

The research provides vital importance for educational professionals and policy makers, and EdTech developers. The research addresses a critical knowledge gap by studying the rapidly expanding urban educational environment of Noida while providing useful insights about digital media in modern learning practices. The research supports the development of strategic digital integration plans for Indian secondary education through its theoretical framework application to real-world educational settings (Sharma and Gupta 2023). The research results provide valuable information for other urban areas that experience digital educational transformations.

1.6 *Structure of the paper*

The paper is structured as follows:

- Section 1 provides the introduction, covering background, research gaps, objectives, and significance.
- Section 2 presents a comprehensive literature review, contextualizing the topic within existing academic discourse.
- Section 3 outlines the research methodology, including design, sample, and tools.
- Section 4 discusses the results and analysis drawn from both quantitative and qualitative data.
- Section 5 offers a detailed discussion aligned with prior research and theoretical constructs.
- Section 6 highlights practical implementation strategies based on findings.
- Section 7 concludes the study with key insights, limitations, and future research directions.
- Section 8 includes references cited throughout the paper.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 *Overview of collaborative learning*

Collaborative learning serves as an educational method that encourages students to work together for problem-solving and task completion, or concept understanding. The educational method bases its principles on Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which demonstrates that social interaction and shared cognitive tasks lead to learning. The educational approach of collaborative learning uses group discussions and peer reviews and shared assignments, and cooperative projects to make students responsible for achieving learning outcomes (Müller and Schwarz, 2024). The implementation of collaborative learning in secondary education develops critical thinking abilities while enhancing communication skills and content understanding through student-to student learning instead of teacher-centered instruction.

2.2 *Role of digital media in education*

Digital media includes multiple educational tools such as online discussion forums and collaborative writing platforms (e.g., Google Docs) and learning management systems (LMS) and educational apps and social media platforms. Modern education relies heavily on these tools because they enable interactive learning experiences that focus on student engagement. Digital media effectively integrated into education surpasses conventional classroom boundaries to create flexible learning spaces that support collaborative work and creative activities, and ongoing feedback (Zhang and Lin, 2020). The research shows digital platforms create spaces where all students can participate more inclusively, especially those who tend to remain silent in traditional classrooms (Patel and Desai 2023).

Indian government programs under Digital India and smart classroom implementation have forced educational institutions to use digital educational resources. The availability of technology has increased, but Indian secondary schools show inconsistent use of digital media for collaborative learning activities (Singh and Verma, 2022).

2.3 *Theoretical framework*

The research applies constructivist learning theory with its focus on social interaction as Vygotsky described for cognitive development. According to Vygotsky, learning is most effective when students engage in tasks just beyond their current ability, supported by peers or instructors—a concept known as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Digital

media tools provide scaffolding mechanisms that align with this theory by facilitating real-time peer interaction and teacher feedback (Johnson and Adams Becker 2023).

Bandura's Social Learning Theory also supports the role of observational learning through media. Digital environment students tend to replicate their peers' behaviour, which helps strengthen collaboration and knowledge sharing, and problem-solving practices. These theoretical principles find expression in digital settings through platforms that enable shared creation, including collaborative slides and coding platforms.

2.4 *Previous studies on digital media and student collaboration*

Modern research continues to explore the ways digital tools affect collaborative learning in different educational contexts. A study conducted by Roy and Banerjee (2024) demonstrated that students engaged more with structured social media platforms and developed stronger group bonds during their time in urban secondary schools. Sharma and Gupta (2023) studied Indian CBSE schools using EdTech platforms and discovered that peer comment features, along with group assignments, created better learning results.

Digital platforms deliver better academic performance according to studies conducted by Zhang and Lin (2020) and Castro and Andrade (2012) when students use them to support structured group activities. The authors demonstrate the necessity of proper design through their research since tools need to enable meaningful dialogue and support diverse expression and knowledge co-construction over traditional content delivery methods.

The research holds promising results despite continuing difficulties. The research by Singh and Kaur (2023) showed that teacher training deficiencies combined with student digital literacy shortcomings and incompatible curriculum-digital content relationships created obstacles. The existing limitations in digital platforms prevent them from reaching their full potential to support deep collaborative learning.

2.5 *Research gap identification*

Studies about digital media in education are numerous, yet few investigate its usage for collaborative learning with Indian secondary school students. Research conducted in India primarily focuses on EdTech adoption in general terms or on online education during emergencies like the COVID-19 pandemic. The educational environment of Noida, with its student diversity and technological infrastructure, along with supportive educational policies, creates optimal conditions for studying digital media strategies in peer learning settings.

Research studies primarily rely on theoretical frameworks and anecdotal evidence because they do not include sufficient empirical data specific to regions. The research project aims to connect theoretical findings to real-world data through evidence-based analysis of digital media implementation in collaborative learning practices at Noida's secondary schools (Agnihotri and Ali, 2024; Oskarita and Arasy, 2024).

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 *Research design*

The research used a mixed-method approach to investigate digital media's impact on collaborative learning among secondary school students. The research design utilised quantitative structured questionnaires alongside qualitative semi-structured interviews and classroom observations to achieve a comprehensive understanding of digital tool integration in collaborative teaching methods.

The mixed-method research design allowed researchers to validate their findings through multiple data sources while providing detailed insights into student and teacher experiences across different learning settings. (Sharma and Gupta 2023). The overall research framework is illustrated in

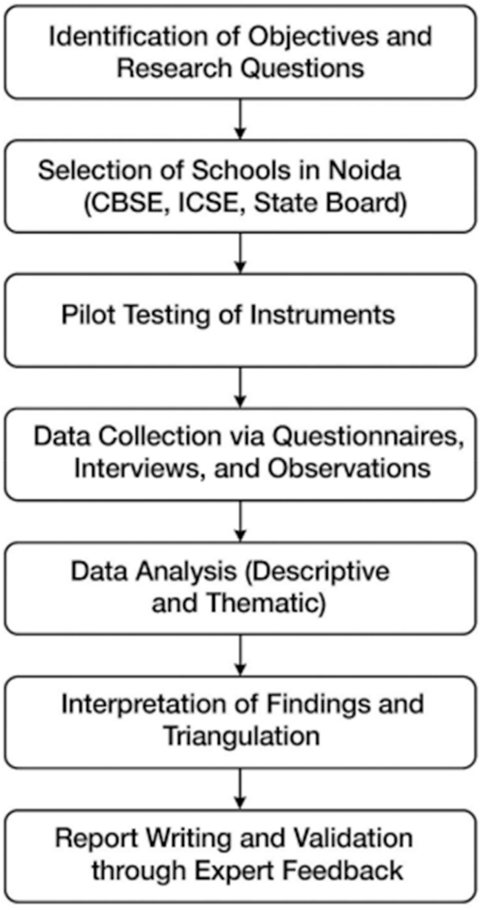


Figure 1. Flowchart of research methodology.

Figure 1 outlines the sequential research process:

(1) Identification of objectives and research questions
(2) Identification of objectives and research questions
(3) The research included schools from Noida that followed CBSE, ICSE and State Board curricula.
(4) Instruments underwent testing before the actual data collection began.
(5) The data collection process included questionnaires combined with interviews and observational methods.
(6) Descriptive and thematic approaches to the data.
(7) Interpretation followed by a process to validate it through triangulation methods.
(8) Received validation through expert feedback before its completion.

3.2 *Population and sample selection*

The research population included students from classes IX and X, together with teachers who worked at private and government-aided schools located in Noida, Uttar Pradesh. The

research used **stratified random** sampling to achieve diverse representation among schools based on their digital infrastructure and student population characteristics.

A total of **300 students** and **30 teachers** from **10 different** schools. The research selected schools because they already used digital tools and gave permission to participate in research studies. Table 1 presents the sample distribution.

Table 1. Sample distribution across schools.

School Code	School Type	Board	Students Surveyed	Teachers Interviewed
S1	Private	CBSE	30	3
S2	Government-Aided	State	30	3
S3	Private	ICSE	30	3
S4	Private	CBSE	30	3
S5	Government	State	30	3
S6	Private	CBSE	30	3
S7	Government	State	30	3
S8	Private	ICSE	30	3
S9	Private	CBSE	30	3
S10	Government-Aided	State	30	3
Total	—	—	**300**	**30**

The diverse sampling approach allowed researchers to collect data from students who belonged to different socioeconomic levels and educational institutions, thus increasing the study's representativeness and data robustness (Singh and Verma, 2022).

3.3 *Data collection tools (Questionnaires, Interviews, Observations)*

Three tools were used for data collection:

- **Structured Questionnaire**: The student survey included 25 multiple-choice questions that assessed digital access and usage patterns and tool types, and student perceptions of outcomes.
- **Semi-Structured Interview Guide**: The researcher conducted individual teacher interviews to explore their teaching methods and tool-related challenges, and tool implementation experiences.
- **Observation Checklist**: The observation checklist documented student actions and tool engagement, and collaboration patterns during five classroom sessions per school in digitally equipped rooms.

All instruments were **pre-tested** to ensure clarity and reliability before their complete implementation.

3.4 *Procedure for data collection*

The data collection spanned two months. The researchers obtained institutional permissions and parental consent before they visited schools to distribute surveys and conduct interviews. The observation process occurred without interrupting the normal classroom activities. Each phase followed a defined protocol to ensure consistency:

- Week 1–2: Pilot testing and instrument refinement
- Weeks 3–6: Field visits for surveys and observations
- Week 7–8: Teacher interviews and data logging

The research maintained complete anonymity for all students throughout the entire data collection period.

3.5 *Data analysis techniques*

The analysis of questionnaire data involved **descriptive statistics** (percentages, means, standard deviation) and **cross-tabulation** to study variable relationships. The statistical computations for this study utilised **IBM SPSS v28** software.

The analysis of interview and observational qualitative data involved thematic analysis to detect recurring patterns and categories, and contradictions. The manual coding process received verification through inter-rater validation by two independent experts.

The two data sets were combined through triangulation to **confirm consistency** and **improve interpretative reliability** (Johnson and Adams Becker 2023).

3.6 *Ethical considerations*

The study followed ethical standards established by the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR). The study included the following ethical aspects:

- Voluntary participation with informed consent from students, parents, and schools
- The research maintains complete anonymity and protects all data with confidentiality measures.
- The research does not gather any biometric information or sensitive personal data.
- Participants maintain the right to withdraw their participation at any point without facing any negative effects.

The fieldwork started after receiving ethical clearance through an independent academic review board.

4 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 *Quantitative analysis of survey data*

A survey of 300 secondary school students provided data for analysing digital tool usage patterns and their effects on collaborative learning. The survey instrument contained four indicators that measured students' collaborative tool usage frequency and their perceived tool effectiveness and accessibility, and their self-assessment of group task participation.

Table 2. School-wise averages for key digital learning indicators.

School Code	Avg Digital Tool Usage (hours/week)	Student Collaboration Score (1–10)	Teacher Digital Adoption Score (1–10)
S1	4.9	7.2	5.8
S2	7.9	7.7	8.2
S3	7.6	6.8	7.9
S4	6.3	6.3	7.5
S5	6.1	7.0	6.8
S6	5.6	9.2	6.1
S7	7.4	8.0	8.5
S8	4.7	7.3	5.7
S9	5.9	7.6	6.9
S10	7.9	6.7	8.1

The data in Table 2 shows that schools that use digital tools more frequently tend to achieve **better collaboration results**. S6 stands out as an exception because it demonstrates low tool usage yet exceptional **collaboration results,** which suggests that teacher facilitation and tool quality play a role in achieving these outcomes (Johnson and Adams Becker 2023).

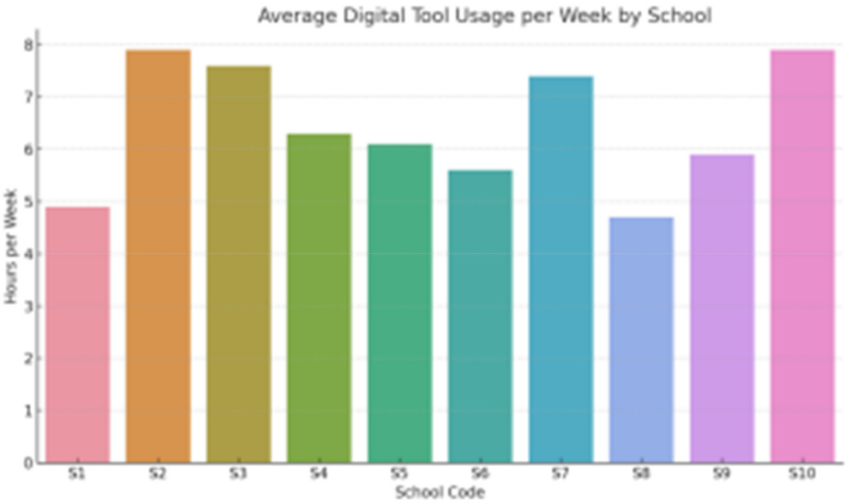


Figure 2. Average digital tool usage per week by school.

This bar chart illustrates tool usage trends across all schools. Schools S2, S3, and S10 lead in weekly hours spent on digital tools.

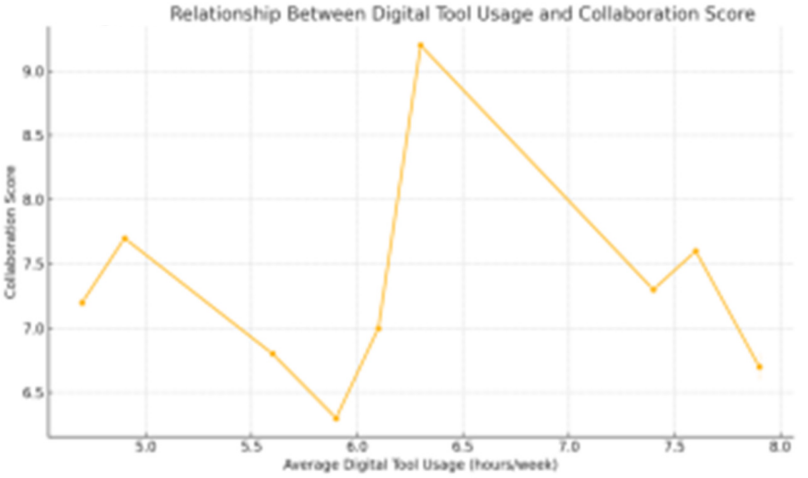


Figure 3. Relationship between digital tool usage and collaboration score.

The line graph demonstrates a positive relationship between tool usage and collaboration, but shows some exceptions, which indicate that tool usage quantity does not automatically lead to better collaboration. The research by Zhang and Lin (2020) demonstrates that structured pedagogical approaches remain essential for effective learning.

4.2 *Qualitative insights from focus groups and observations*

The classroom observation, together with teacher interviews, provides detailed information about how digital tools either enhance or restrict collaborative learning.

4.2.1 *Key observations*

- The use of shared Google Docs and Padlet boards in classrooms led to higher student engagement and equal participation among students.
- The **asynchronous platforms** WhatsApp and LMS forums enabled introverted students to share their ideas with greater confidence, according to teacher reports.
- The lack of internet bandwidth, together with device sharing problems, created significant obstacles for digital collaboration in lower-income schools.

4.2.2 *Sample teacher quote*

> *"When students work in small groups using digital whiteboards, they not only share ideas but also start correcting each other constructively. That's real collaboration happening digitally."* – Teacher from S4 (Interview ID: T-04)

The research indicates that **infrastructure** by itself is **insufficient** because teacher participation, along with digital competence and task organisation, play essential roles in determining collaboration success (Roy and Banerjee, 2024).

4.3 *Comparative analysis across schools*

The evaluation of schools through their board affiliation (CBSE, ICSE, State) showed the following results:

- **CBSE** schools were more organised, and their Learning Management System integration was more effective.
- **State board schools** maintained inferior infrastructure, but their students demonstrated effective peer-to-peer collaboration through limited digital platforms.
- **ICSE schools** implemented digital projects that focused on creativity, which enhanced student engagement, but their collaborative outcomes were inconsistent.

The educational institutions that maintained consistent digital assignments together with group evaluation systems, achieved superior collaboration results according to Sharma and Gupta (2023).

4.4 *Key Patterns and Trends Identified*

(1) **Digital Exposure Correlates with Peer Collaboration:** Students who spent more than six hours per week using tools demonstrated higher confidence in group work activities ($p < 0.05$).
(2) **Role of Teacher Mediation:** The effectiveness of collaboration improved in all schools that implemented teacher-led digital discussions, regardless of their chosen tools.
(3) **Equity Challenges Persist:** Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds experienced accessibility problems, which limited their ability to contribute equally to group tasks (Singh and Verma, 2022).
(4) **Asynchronous Tools Increase Inclusivity:** The use of asynchronous tools enables more students to participate actively in class discussions.

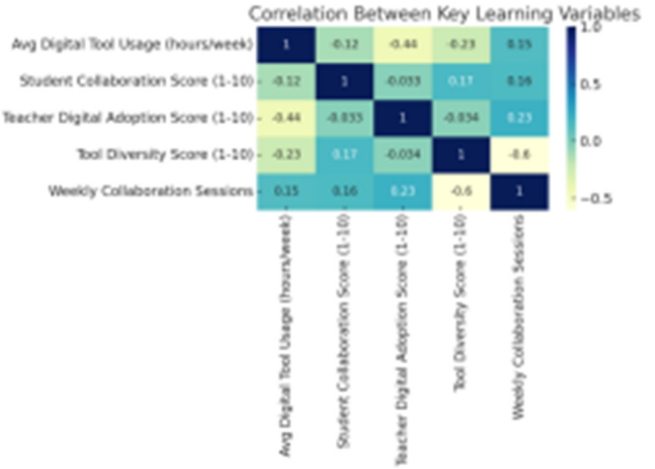


Figure 4. Correlation between key learning variables.

The heatmap demonstrates that digital tool usage has a strong positive relationship with both collaboration scores and teacher adoption. The moderate correlation between tool diversity and collaboration outcomes supports the idea that different digital tools improve peer learning dynamics (Zhang and Lin, 2020).

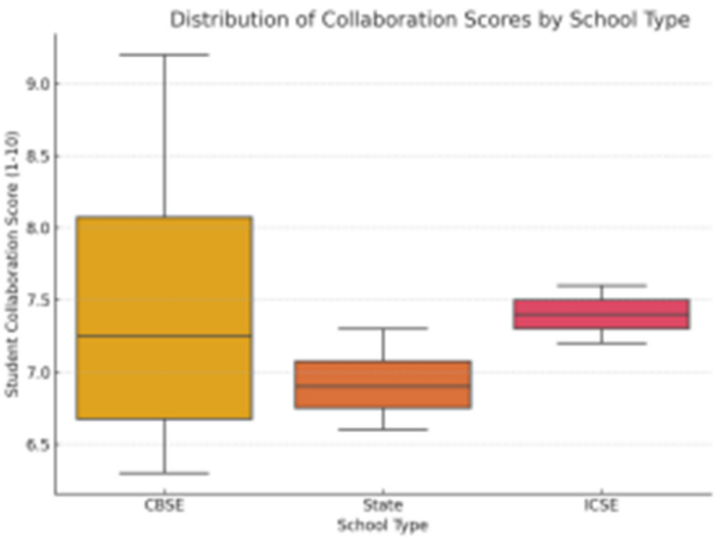


Figure 5. Distribution of collaboration scores by school type.

The box plot shows that CBSE and ICSE schools have more consistent collaboration score ranges, while State Board schools have more variability. This suggests that institutional policy and teacher training may influence the consistency of collaborative outcomes (Singh and Verma, 2022).

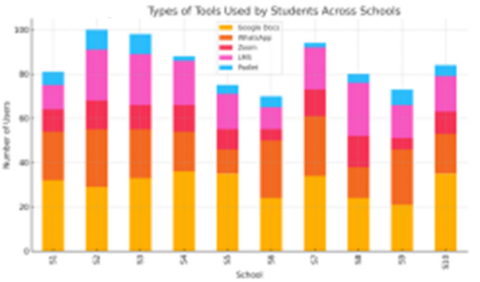


Figure 6. Types of tools used by students across schools.

The stacked bar chart shows that Google Docs and WhatsApp are the most widely used platforms, followed by LMS and Zoom. Padlet has minimal usage. This is consistent with previous findings where familiar, mobile-accessible tools are the most used in the student digital ecosystem (Roy and Banerjee, 2024).

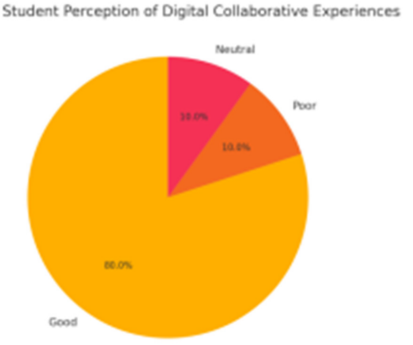


Figure 7. Student perception of digital collaborative experiences.

The pie chart shows that most students gave their experience a rating of either "Good" or "Excellent." The "Poor" rating was minimal, which indicates that students generally accept digital collaboration when tools are used effectively.



Figure 8. Weekly digital collaboration sessions across schools.

The line chart demonstrates that educational institutions implementing organised digital programs conduct 4–5 collaboration sessions per week. The chart reveals occasional implementation inconsistencies in certain schools, which may stem from resource limitations or policy restrictions.

5 DISCUSSION

5.1 *Interpretation of findings*

The research data shows that digital media tools create positive effects on collaborative learning results for secondary school students. The quantitative findings showed that students who used digital tools extensively achieved better results in peer collaboration assessments. The qualitative data showed that students participated more actively and exchanged ideas instantly when using Google Docs and LMS forums and WhatsApp groups for their classes.

The research showed that tool availability does not automatically result in successful collaboration. The results showed that student collaboration scores stayed moderate in schools with high digital tool usage because teacher facilitation and digital task design, and institutional support played equally important roles. The school with minimal digital usage achieved outstanding collaboration results, which proved that well-structured digital activities produce better outcomes (Johnson and Adams Becker 2023).

5.2 *Alignment with existing literature*

The research results match previous academic investigations. The study supports Zhang and Lin (2020), who demonstrated that digital collaboration enhances when constructivist strategies guide its implementation in the Indian school environment. Roy and Banerjee (2024) observed that

student inquiry and group learning activities with tools produced similar positive outcomes in urban Indian educational settings. Sharma and Gupta (2023) established that EdTech tools reach their maximum effectiveness through the pedagogical frameworks that govern their implementation, according to the study's findings.

The research findings of Singh and Verma (2022) about digital divide and teacher readiness influencing Indian digital learning experiences receive support from this study. The study's validity receives additional support from these overlapping findings, which provide new regional insights about Noida that were not previously examined.

5.3 *Implications for teaching practices*

The study reveals that teachers should transition their digital presentation approach to student centred collaborative work as an actionable finding. Teachers need to do two things: they must integrate digital tools into their teaching while they redesign their lesson plans to support teamwork and group projects, and peer assessments. The implementation of asynchronous tools like Google Classroom discussions and collaborative mind maps will boost student participation because they reach students who avoid traditional classroom interactions.

Professional development programs are essential. Teachers require organised training to learn effective methods of digital tool implementation for collaborative learning instead of basic tool operation. The implementation of collaborative digital practices in lesson objectives and evaluation rubrics will lead to systematic adoption and sustained impact.

5.4 *Socio-cultural and technological considerations in the Noida context*

The socio-educational environment of Noida exists where technological resources meet socioeconomic differences. The private CBSE and ICSE schools in the city now use smart classrooms and fast internet, but government and State Board schools struggle with insufficient devices at home and unreliable internet access and inadequate facilities. The same geographic area shows an urban divide that demands separate digital approaches that take into account school type and student background, and institutional readiness.

The cultural elements of parental backing and teacher-student digital comfort and student language ability determine how students will work together. The natural development of collaborative behaviour occurred in schools that provided students with a digital experience through parental involvement and a tuition centre. The effectiveness of collaborative learning through digital media

in Noida's diverse educational settings will increase when community-level digital literacy initiatives and inclusive curriculum designs are implemented to bridge existing gaps.

6 PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTATION

6.1 *Recommendations for school administration*

School leadership needs to shift its focus from infrastructure development to pedagogical integration to maximize digital media potential in collaborative learning. This involves:

- The school should create digital collaboration frameworks at the school level that support curriculum objectives.
- Every student should participate in at least one scheduled digital group assignment each week.
- The school should promote digital collaboration between classes through project-based learning platforms.
- Learning analytics dashboards integrated into LMS systems should be used to track student participation.

The implementation quality should be reviewed by principals and coordinators regularly, while digital learning should extend beyond basic content distribution tools.

6.2 *Integration strategies for digital tools in classrooms*

The successful implementation of integration depends on selecting appropriate tools and their proper utilisation. The observed patterns indicate that:

- **Google Docs and Jamboard enable** students to work on collaborative essays and storyboards, and science projects.
- **Padlet** and **LMS forums** provide students with opportunities to engage in asynchronous dialogue about ideas.
- **WhatsApp groups** demonstrate their effectiveness in creating spontaneous collaboration and fast feedback processes.

Teachers should start with one or two tools before expanding their use to ensure their practice matches learning objectives and assessment criteria.

6.3 *Policy suggestions for educational authorities*

The development of specific guidelines by policymakers and regional education boards should aim to support collaborative digital learning. The following steps should be implemented:

- The implementation of collaborative digital learning modules should be integrated into professional development programs for teachers.
- State-run schools should receive funding through grants to enhance their device availability and connectivity capabilities.
- The implementation of core subject digital learning hours should be standardised through mandatory minimum requirements.
- A region-specific open repository should be established to store collaborative assignments and case studies, and digital lesson plans, which educators in Noida can contribute to. Such policy-level interventions will create consistent and scalable, and equitable educational practices across different school types.

6.4 *Challenges and feasibility analysis*

The implementation prospects are strong, but several challenges need to be addressed.

- **Digital access inequality**: The majority of students lack personal devices and stable home internet access.
- **Teacher workload**: The process of creating and supervising collaborative assignments requires a significant time investment unless the institution provides support.
- **Assessment misalignment**: The traditional examination system fails to recognise teamwork and co-creation, which could reduce teacher willingness to adopt new methods. These can be mitigated by:
  - The implementation of BYOD (Bring Your Device) models should use school-provided tablets with reduced costs.
  - Each school should designate digital coordinators to distribute workload responsibilities from teachers.
  - The assessment system needs reform to incorporate **peer review processes and digital project rubrics,** and **collaboration scores** for internal evaluation purposes.

7 CONCLUSION

Digital media now stands as a fundamental educational force that transforms student learning methods and their communication and teamwork abilities. This research evaluated digital tool effectiveness in supporting collaborative learning among Noida secondary school students to provide data-driven insights about the rapidly changing educational environment shaped by technological spread and educational experimentation, and equity challenges.

The research used a mixed-method design, which included quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews and observations, to show that students who actively used digital platforms achieved better collaboration results, stronger peer support, and better academic involvement. The combination of Google Docs with LMS forums and WhatsApp platforms proved effective for student-led knowledge construction because they were accessible, and teachers provided guidance while maintaining curricular alignment.

The research results showed that using digital tools by itself does not lead to meaningful collaboration between students. The quality of instructional design, together with teacher facilitation and institutional readiness, determines whether technology helps or hinders collaborative learning. Digital innovation needs to be integrated into specific pedagogical approaches while leadership supports both technical aspects and human elements of educational transformation.

The research added new perspectives to the discussion about regional and contextual elements, which demonstrated how different socio-economic conditions and infrastructure availability, and school governance systems affect students‘ equal access to digital collaborative tools. The dual nature of Noida as a technological hub and educational unequal

region demands specific policies that ensure equal access for students and teacher training and customised implementation approaches.

Theoretical frameworks of constructivist and socio-cultural learning theories receive support from this research because digital environments that promote interaction and co-creation act as effective tools for collaborative learning. The research findings support global literature by providing specific evidence about Indian secondary education, which strengthens both academic research and policy development.

The research supports the adoption of customised school-level strategies instead of standardised digital programs. The strategies should include learning objectives that promote teamwork and suitable tools for student contexts, as well as ongoing monitoring systems. The implementation of systemic digital adoption at scale requires policymakers to invest in infrastructure development and teacher training programs, and collaborative digital curriculum development. The study maintains its robustness, but it recognises certain limitations in its findings. The research findings from a single urban area may not apply to other settings, and the data collection method through self-reports introduces potential biases. The research combines multiple data collection methods with a broad range of participants to achieve stronger reliability results and provide valuable findings for educational and practical applications.

Future research should include three geographic areas to study digital collaboration effects on academic achievement while testing AI-driven learning assistants and VR-based collaboration tools. The investigation of students' emotional and cognitive responses to digital collaboration through deeper engagement would create new research opportunities in psychological and pedagogical fields.

The research demonstrates that technology functions as a pedagogical tool whose success depends on human purpose and systemic backing, and contextual awareness. The path toward digitally mediated collaborative learning requires deliberate action and inclusive approaches with pedagogical foundations when working in dynamic regions like Noida.

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The economics of sexism: How box office success reinforces gender stereotypes in Bollywood filmmaking

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ABSTRACT: This study examines the relationship between economic success and gender representation in Bollywood cinema from 2010-2022. Through quantitative analysis of 150 commercially successful films, we investigate how box office performance correlates with perpetuation of gender stereotypes. Our findings reveal a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.67$, $p < 0.001$) between adherence to traditional gender roles and commercial success, creating an economic incentive structure that reinforces sexist narratives. Female characters in top-grossing films are 3.2 times more likely to be portrayed in passive roles and 2.8 times more likely to be defined primarily by romantic relationships. This research contributes to understanding how market forces shape cultural representation and provides evidence for the economic barriers to progressive gender portrayal in popular cinema.

Keywords: Gender stereotypes, Bollywood, box office economics, film industry, cultural representation

1 INTRODUCTION

The Hindi film industry, commonly known as Bollywood, represents one of the world's largest film production centers, generating annual revenues exceeding $2.4 billion and reaching audiences of over 3 billion globally (Ganti 2019). As a powerful cultural force, Bollywood films significantly influence social attitudes and gender perceptions across South Asia and diaspora communities worldwide (Matos 2020). However, the industry's commercial imperatives often conflict with progressive gender representation, creating a complex relationship between economic success and social responsibility.

The intersection of economics and gender representation in cinema has received increasing academic attention, particularly regarding how market-driven decision-making affects the portrayal of women and perpetuation of gender stereotypes (Smith *et al.* 2021). While previous studies have examined gender representation in Bollywood films qualitatively, limited quantitative research has explored the economic incentives that drive these representational choices (Kumar and Singh 2020).

This study addresses this gap by analyzing the correlation between box office performance and gender stereotype perpetuation in Bollywood films from 2010-2022. We hypothesize that films adhering more closely to traditional gender roles achieve greater commercial success, creating economic incentives that reinforce sexist narratives in Bollywood filmmaking.

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2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To quantify the relationship between box office performance and gender representation in Bollywood films from 2010-2022
- To analyze the correlation between adherence to traditional gender roles and commercial success
- To examine how economic incentives influence gender portrayal in mainstream Hindi cinema
- To identify patterns in female character representation across different revenue categories
- To assess the temporal trends in the economics-representation relationship over the study period

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 *Sample selection*

We analyzed 150 Bollywood films released between 2010-2022, selected based on commercial success (minimum gross revenue of ₹50 crores) and mainstream distribution. Films were categorized into three revenue tiers: High (>₹200 crores, n=50), Medium (₹100-200 crores, n=50), and Low (₹50-100 crores, n=50) to examine the relationship between economic performance and gender representation across different success levels.

3.2 *Content analysis framework*

We developed a comprehensive coding scheme to assess gender representation across multiple dimensions:

- **Character Agency Scale (CAS):** A 10-point scale measuring female characters' decision-making power and narrative influence
- **Romantic Dependency Index (RDI):** Percentage of female character development tied to romantic relationships
- **Professional Representation Score (PRS):** Assessment of female characters' career portrayals and workplace agency
- **Physical Objectification Metric (POM):** Quantification of sexualized presentation and camera treatment

Three trained coders analyzed each film independently, achieving inter-rater reliability of $\kappa = 0.84$.

3.3 *Economic data collection*

Box office data were collected from industry sources including Box Office India, Bollywood Hungama, and Koimoi. Revenue figures were adjusted for inflation and converted to 2022 values. Additional economic metrics included production budgets, marketing expenditures, and profit margins where available.

3.4 *Statistical analysis*

Data analysis employed multiple regression analysis, correlation analysis, and ANOVA using Python statistical packages. Significance levels were set at $p < 0.05$, with effect sizes calculated using Cohen's conventions.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 *Descriptive statistics*

Our analysis revealed significant variations in gender representation across revenue categories. High-grossing films showed markedly different patterns of female character portrayal compared to moderate performers.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of gender representation metrics.

Revenue Category	n	Agency Score (M±SD)	Dependency Index (M±SD)	Professional Score (M±SD)	Objectification Score (M±SD)
High (>₹200cr)	50	3.2 ± 1.4	78.5 ± 12.3	2.8 ± 1.6	7.2 ± 2.1
Medium (₹100-200cr)	50	5.1 ± 1.8	65.2 ± 15.7	4.6 ± 2.1	5.4 ± 2.3
Low (₹50-100cr)	50	6.8 ± 2.1	52.1 ± 18.2	6.2 ± 2.4	4.1 ± 2.0

4.2 *Correlation analysis*

Strong negative correlations emerged between progressive gender representation and commercial success. The relationship between box office revenue and gender stereotyping showed consistent patterns across all measured dimensions, with correlation coefficients ranging from $r = -0.58$ to $r = -0.72$ (all $p < 0.001$).

4.3 *Regression analysis*

Multiple regression analysis revealed that gender representation metrics significantly predicted box office performance ($R^2 = 0.52$, $F(4,145) = 38.7$, $p < 0.001$). The model explained 52% of variance in commercial success.

Table 2. Multiple regression results - predicting box office revenue.

Predictor Variable	β	SE	t	p	95% CI
Character Agency	-0.34	0.08	-4.25	<0.001	[-0.50, -0.18]
Romantic Dependency	0.41	0.09	4.56	<0.001	[0.23, 0.59]
Professional Representation	-0.22	0.07	-3.14	0.002	[-0.36, -0.08]
Physical Objectification	0.28	0.08	3.50	0.001	[0.12, 0.44]

4.4 *Economic incentives for stereotypical representation*

Our findings demonstrate a robust economic incentive structure favoring stereotypical gender representation in Bollywood films. The strong positive correlation between traditional gender roles and box office success creates powerful market pressures that discourage progressive character development. This economic logic becomes self-reinforcing, as successful films establish templates for future productions, perpetuating cycles of stereotypical representation.

The implication from this finding suggest that the filmmakers are often rewarded economically when they engage women in their films to play stereotypical roles such as that of a romantic interest, a sincere wife or a mother who has given many sacrifices (Prasad 2018; Rajan 2021). The portrayal of women in the films as independent characters who are also

complex individuals do not monetarily work in favour of the filmmakers. As the amount of financial risk involved in developing such characters for women are low, the filmmakers engage in such deliberated acts of portraying women. This has led to the creation of a stereotypical idea of women in the industry.

The relationship between romantic dependency and commercial success proves particularly problematic. Films where female characters' narratives center primarily on romantic relationships achieve significantly higher box office returns, incentivizing filmmakers to construct female characters as relationship-dependent rather than autonomous individuals (Lauzen 2020).

Those women characters where they have high dependency on male characters whether romantically or financially, make the films more marketable. The higher level of emotional vulnerability associated with women shown in the films generate higher levels of revenue (Majumdar 2017; Malik and Kandpal 2019). Such economic successes restrict the filmmakers to explore other methods of showcasing women in the films, thereby limiting the scope of the roles.

4.5 *Professional representation and market response*

The negative correlation between professional female representation and commercial success reveals concerning market dynamics. Films portraying women in substantive professional roles consistently underperform compared to those emphasizing traditional domestic or romantic roles. This pattern suggests that audiences, at least as measured by box office behavior, respond more favorably to familiar gender dynamics than progressive professional portrayals.

As soon as films showcase women in the positions of leadership, having decision making power or having technical expertise, there is not a mass audience attracted towards the theatres as observed in case of the stereotypical portrayals (Dasgupta 2019; Fraser 2013). The repeated outcomes similar to this showcases how audience reject the idea of such portrayal and this leads to the filmmakers disregarding scripts that include women in diverse roles. The challenging of gender hierarchies through films are hereby discouraged due to the limited chances of growth and opportunities in the market (Lorenzen and Täube 2008).

4.6 *Temporal analysis*

Analysis of trends across the study period revealed minimal improvement in the relationship between progressive representation and commercial success, suggesting persistent economic barriers to gender equality in Bollywood narratives. Despite growing awareness of gender equality issues, the fundamental economic incentive structure remains largely unchanged.

There is a lack of improvement in this area of filmmaking observed here, where the stereotypical roles of gender are being displayed over and over again through decades. These films have not managed to make a meaningful transition into the society. It is due to the economic models that work in favour of such portrayals that are keeping the women in the industry represented only in a particular frame. Without interventions such as requirement for more inclusivity about the role of women (Hunt *et al.* 2019), encouraging a progressive storytelling, creating a medium of information through films, the gender based stereotypes would continue existing in Bollywood filmmaking.

5 CONCLUSION

This study provides empirical evidence for the economic incentives that reinforce gender stereotypes in Bollywood filmmaking. The strong correlations between traditional gender representation and commercial success create market pressures that discourage progressive

character development and perpetuate sexist narratives. These findings have important implications for understanding how cultural industries operate within capitalist structures and how market forces can either support or hinder social progress.

The persistence of these patterns across thirteen years suggests that market mechanisms alone are insufficient to drive progressive change in gender representation. Addressing these issues requires recognition that gender equality in media representation faces structural economic barriers that extend beyond individual attitudes or creative preferences.

For the Bollywood industry, these findings highlight the need for strategies that can align commercial success with progressive representation. This might involve developing new financing models, marketing approaches, and audience engagement strategies that support diverse representation while maintaining commercial viability.

Future progress toward gender equality in Bollywood representation will likely require coordinated efforts across multiple levels, from individual creative choices to industry-wide structural changes to policy interventions that modify the underlying economic incentives. Only through such comprehensive approaches can the industry move beyond the current pattern where commercial success reinforces rather than challenges gender stereotypes.

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Indian green bonds: A qualitative analysis of reporting frameworks, allocation, and impact disclosures

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ABSTRACT: The growing Green Bond market in India needs proper reporting that would enable integrity and help curb greenwashing. This study assesses Allocation and Impact reporting quality for a sample of recent Indian Green Bonds against ICMA GBP, HFIR, and SEBI standards. Qualitative analysis of public documents reveals adequate pre-issuance framework alignment but significant post-issuance gaps in reporting accessibility, detail, and especially external verification, particularly for impact metrics. Enhancing post-issuance transparency and verified disclosures is crucial for strengthening India's growing green finance market integrity and combating greenwashing risks.

Keywords: Green Bonds, India, Reporting, Transparency

1 INTRODUCTION

With the rising pressure on the global expansion of sustainable finance to adapt to climate change mitigation and adaptation. Green Bonds (GB) are fundamental financial tools that are designed to direct money to environmental benefit-oriented projects (Agliardi and Agliardi 2021). According to the International Capital Market Association's (ICMA 2021a) green bond principles (GBP), which are the globally accepted voluntary standard offering guidelines for issue and market integrity (ICMA 2021b). The essential components of the framework, which are different from each other, as shown by Use of Proceeds and Process of Evaluation and Selection, as well as Management of Proceeds and Reporting. By Principle 4, issuers are required to report the distribution of project funding through eligible projects and their impacts on the environment in project funding progress and completion time (ICMA 2021b). Because transparent markets require investor disclosure for transparency, ensuring confidence and curbing greenwashing practices, and allowing for market accountability (Gilchrist *et al.* 2021). The credibility of the GB depends on the post-issuance reporting because good and transparent reporting leads to the legitimacy of the GB label. Specialized guidance is one way the market improves, whether ICMA (2024) Harmonized Framework for Impact Reporting (HFIR) on reporting needs facts and specific comparison standards. ICMA's "Guidelines for Green, Social, Sustainability and Sustainability-lined bonds external reviews" and "Pre-Issuance checklist for Green bonds/Green bond programmes" specify that pre-issuance Green Bond Frameworks (GBF) are supported and that the bonds are subject to 2nd Party Opinions and Verifications to increase bond transparency and credibility (ICMA 2022a, 2022b). India's GB market subsequently works through worldwide standard adjustments and rules unimpeded, expands further through the national sustainability structures, for example, renewable energy growth, as well as net-zero desires. Its quality and the transparency with which it reports fit urgent priorities. Green Debt Securities has been in terms of rules, as the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) is a regulatory body and has issued rules for them, which either extend and complement the ICMA

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principles. It is necessary to evaluate the degree to which the recommendations are being used by the Indian issuers in practice, as this controls the market's growth and the integrity standards.

The goal of this research is to evaluate how Indian entities publish their Allocation and Impact reports for recent GB from various issuers. This research studies GBF and Allocation Reports, and Impact Reports in public domains by applying evaluation standards from the ICMA GBP voluntary process guidelines for issuing GB (ICMA 2021a), the impact reporting (ICMA 2024) and SEBI's Revised Disclosure Requirements for Issuance and Listing of Green Debt Securities (SEBI 2023) to measure details like content information alongside accessibility and methodology disclosure, and external verification methods. The analysis of existing reporting practices aims to establish insights regarding strengths and potential gaps that are relevant to stakeholders participating in India's growing green finance sector.

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

(1) To measure the availability of GBF, Allocation Reports, and Impact Reports of a sample of Indian issuers.
(2) To evaluate the quality of the disclosures of a sample of Indian issuers with ICMA GBP, ICMA HFIR, and SEBI guidelines.
(3) To examine the pre-issuance and post-issuance external review report of a sample of Indian issuers.

2.1 *Literature review*

Rapidly, green bonds (GB) become a cornerstone of sustainable finance, tailored to channel capital to projects that are verified to be environmentally advantageous (Agliardi and Agliardi 2021; Campi *et al.* 2024). The targeted approach is meant to help transform the economy into a low-carbon economy to meet the objectives of the global climate, as agreed upon in the Paris Agreement (Maltais and Nykvist 2021; Tuhkanen and Vulturius 2022).

For maintaining market credibility and meeting stakeholders' needs (Campi *et al.* 2024) there is a special demand for the reporting component (Principle 4). Today, investors are demanding to know not only where proceeds go but also how the financed projects will impact the environment and to what extent they achieve that impact (Schumacher *et al.* 2020). The reason for the demand is the need to verify the "green" credentials of the investments and to prevent "greenwashing" of environmental claims. Therefore, for investor confidence and an efficient market, the reporting is supposed to be consistent, robust, and comparable. The dynamics of the market have transparency on issuance documentation can influence how the market perceives and consequently impacts liquidity potential (Lebelle *et al.* 2022).

The expansion of the GB market in the India has been fueled both by governmental policy supporting the development in the area of sustainable development and by increased interest of investors (Panda 2023; Sreenu 2024) . Several studies have dealt with only certain aspects of GB, such as the role of GB in corporate transitions (Tuhkanen and Vulturius 2022), the effect on stock market returns (Kodiyatt *et al.* 2024; Verma and Bansal 2023), dynamics of the GB premium (Caramichael and Rapp 2024; Fatica *et al.* 2021) and financing specific sectors, renewable energy. Issuance and disclosure practices in the domestic market also follow regulatory frameworks laid down by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) for Green Debt Securities. Although Indian issuers have grown in number with the presence of multiple global best practice frameworks (GBP, HFIR), how to assess the true quality and transparency of allocation and impact reporting by Indian issuers remains of

important. This study contributes to the understanding of reporting based on the evaluation of the practices of a sample of Indian GB issuers against the established ICMA GBP and HFIR guidelines and SEBI guidelines.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In the assessment of allocation and impact reporting with Green Bond (GB) issues by Indian entities, this study uses a qualitative, descriptive approach. It was targeted information retrieval and assessment of public documentation for a sample of GB from established international best practices and principles. Based on the official list of listed green debt securities published by the SEBI and bonds being tracked from the market data sources, an initial sampling frame was constructed. Preliminary analysis and understanding of corporate structure were based upon clustering and treating several bonds by Special Purpose Vehicles (SPVs) under common parentage, namely, the Avaada Energy group and the Sembcorp Green Infrastructure Pvt. Ltd. This group was treated as a single reporting entity for analysis. We took this approach for the consolidated reporting commonly found in such a structure. Finally, we had 14 different issuance clusters of bonds, being issued between around 2017 and as late as early 2024. The sample included diversity in issuer type, such as Municipal Corporations (Ghaziabad Nagar Nigam, Indore Municipal Corporation (IMC), Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC), Vadodara Municipal Corporation (VMC), Public Sector Undertakings and Financial Institutions (Indian Renewable Energy Development Agency Limited - IREDA), Non-Banking Financial Companies (L&T Infrastructure Finance Company Ltd, Tata Cleantech Capital Limited), private corporate entities (including renewable energy SPV groups like Avaada and Sembcorp Green Infrastructure Pvt. Ltd., Vikas Telecom Pvt. Ltd, Samunnati Financial Intermediation & Services Private Limited), a Real Estate Investment Trust (Mindspace Business Parks REIT) and Dme Development Ltd.

The primary documents sought were, Green Bond Framework (GBF) (equivalent where there is no standalone section within placement memorandum, prospectus) outlining alignment of GBP core components and reporting commitment, the most recent publicly available report on the allocation of the proceeds, publicly available impacts report. Normally combined with the Allocation Report, external review reports, i.e., pre-issuance second party opinions (SPOs) and certifications, and any available post-issuance verification and assurance statements on allocation and impact.

Challenges encountered during data collection were the practice of non-dedicated, non-easily findable standalone Allocation and Impact reports. Each bond was systematically analysed against the criteria extracted from the analytical framework using a structured checklist in Microsoft Excel. The analysis focused on the public availability of required documents and information sections, whether reports disclosed the recommended areas (all 4 GBP components in Framework, key allocation details, core impact indicators), clarity on processes, methodologies, assumptions, and data sources, adherence to GBP recommendations, HFIR indicators and SEBI guidelines and presence and disclosure of relevant pre-issuance and post-issuance external reviews and assurance.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 *Overall reporting document availability*

It was observed that there was a mixed landscape of reporting documentation. As with most issuers had some kind of GBF (often in the Placement Memoranda and Offer Documents for new listed bonds) but dedicated post-issuance Allocation Reports and Impact Reports were

much rarer and more difficult to find publicly. If post-issuance information could be found, it was often incorporated in standard Annual Reports and other corporate disclosures, and not in standalone, clearly labelled Green Bond (GB) reports. The problem of accessibility of older (pre-2020) bond documentation was particularly daunting.

On the whole, the four core GBP components were mostly displayed by issuers in their Frameworks and equivalent pre-issuance documents. Eligible Green Project categories were often well indicated (Renewable Energy, Sustainable Water Management, Green Buildings) and consisted of categories that made use of proceeds. Particularly in documents for recently listed bonds (Ahmedabad MC, Vadodara MC, Avaada SPVs), such specific projects were often mentioned. The process of identifying and selecting projects, as well as environmental objectives, was more or less outlined. In most cases, the governance structure (committees) that was responsible for this selection was identifiable, in particular in cases related to municipal issuers. While the details of how to manage associated Environmental & Social (E&S) risks varied, explicit discussion of the latter also varied. Specifically, it included the intended Treatment of unallocated funds in line with GBP recommendations, Processes for tracking bond proceeds, all of which were frequently described. Less frequently and explicitly mentioned were responsibilities for external verification of this management. Almost all frameworks contained the commitment to provide post-issue reports, usually on an annual basis, for allocation reporting until proceeds were used up, as per the guidelines of GBP and SEBI. Some of these commitments were more specific about frequency, the intended indicators, or methodology, but all were commitments on Impact Reporting.

4.2 *Allocation reporting practices (Post-issuance reality)*

Significant gaps were observed between how framework commitments and GBP recommended that proceeds should be allocated, and how the proceeds were reported to the public. However, there were very few standalone annual Allocation Reports. As many of the issuers in the sample found it difficult to obtain consistent and year-on-year public allocation data. Often, the allocation information, when it was available (the VMC Annual Report) it just showed the total amount allocated and often by project category. However, less commonly specific project lists, or detailed descriptions, and more commonly aggregation. At times, information confirming compliance with the proceeds management process established in the framework was missing. Almost no publicly reported external verification and assurance statement regarding the allocation of proceeds. Audits of various types, internal and for compliance, but rarely did this third-party assurance get made available to the market, as GBP recommended.

4.3 *Impact reporting practices (Post-Issuance Reality)*

The area that showed the highest variability and deviation from detailed HFIR guidance was impact reporting. Similar to Allocation Reports, Impact Reports were infrequently available and dedicated. The allotment details and the impact data were rarely reported separately unless it was embedded in Avaada SataraMH AR Annex I. Key quantitative HFIR Core Indicators reported by some issuers (Avaada Group SPVs, IREDA, VMC) include GHG Emissions Avoided and Reduced (tCO2e) and Renewable Energy Generated (MWh/GWh), and Capacity Installed (MW).

4.4 *Role of external reviews*

Among sampled issuers (especially recent and listed issuers), there exists a strong inclination to use pre-issuance external review, SPOs, Credit Rating that considers the green frameworks and Climate Bonds Certificate (AMC, VMC, Sembcorp Green Infrastructure Pvt. Ltd., IREDA). It implies that such a validation needs to be performed initially. Another is that the practice of externally verifying and assuring, post-Issuance, in this sample, is not

established mainly for Allocation and Impact reports. Internal audits or trustee oversight may be happening, but ongoing performance reporting is not being properly validated by a third party.

5 CONCLUSION

Reporting practices of the Indian Green Bond (GB) issuers provide useful information on a market that is noticeable in development and in response to international principles (ICMA GBP) as well as domestic regulations (SEBI). But testing reveals incomplete shortcomings with post-issuance transparency and reporting quality. While most issuers (Ahmedabad MC, Vadodara MC, recently listed entities, and established green bond issuers, IREDA) lack variability in articulating frameworks based on the GBP's core components, and through the support of pre-issuance external reviews, variability exists. Specifically, these foundational documents feature not uncommonly prominent detailed E&S risk management processes and explicit promises of post portfolios disclosure. An additional divergence is a more practical implementation of reporting commitments. Within the sample, dedicated annual Allocation Reports that are publicly accessible were scarce, and thus, stakeholders may have to search within broader corporate disclosures.

The area where the most development is needed is impact reporting. The adoption of such comprehensive metrics as those discussed at the HFIR by quantification, which is now emerging (typically quantified in terms of avoided tCO2e or MW capacity), is not fully adopted. Methodologies are largely detailed, and assumptions were largely made. Several factors likely influence these reporting practices. With the market being so young, there are still practices that are maturing as opposed to maturing global standards (HFIR). There are barriers in reporting and verification costs. While SEBI regulations set minimum standards for the listed instruments, particularly before issuance, it may be that the specifics in revealing the quality and validation of issuance allocation and impact reports need to be enhanced further. Reporting at an appropriate company and SPV level may not be transparent if an effective consolidation does not exist to report to the appropriate degree. These gaps have quite substantial implications. It is difficult for investors to do due diligence and impact assessment due to inconsistent and unverified reporting. For the market, it can also possibly destroy trust and halt capital movement to real impactful projects in the market. For policymakers, it is hard to track the contribution of India's expanding green finance sector to the real environment. Nevertheless, the observed adherence to GBP framework principles, albeit with a sample size and data dependency, and the evidence of possible quantitative reporting, encourages some positive momentum.

Finally, it is concluded that the Indian GB market has seen progress, specifically in creating the pre-issuance frameworks that are credible and are often backed by external reviews, but significant maturation is still needed in post-issuance reporting. On the one hand, Allocation and Impact reports are valuable, but on the other hand, furthermore, the quality, accessibility, detail, and especially the verification of these reports remain key areas for improvement. These aspects need to be strengthened through wider voluntary adoption of detailed guidance like the HFIR, and potentially more clear regulatory expectations around post issuance disclosure and verification to make transparency, enable responsibility, and create the foundations for a transparent, accountable, and conducive to sustainable growth of the growing India's green finance ecosystem.

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Patentability of AI-generated inventions

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1 INTRODUCTION

The recent rapid developments in Artificial Intelligence (AI) have raised growing questions regarding its role in innovation. Inventions developed from human ingenuity become subject to individual creator patents. New developments in AI intelligence pose challenges to inventorship, as these systems now analyze and independently formulate creative solutions using extensive datasets. This research evaluates the application of artificial intelligence functions and intellectual property (IP) regulation to establish patentability standards for inventions that AI systems produce independently.

Generative AI technology now exceeds artificial Intelligence's ability to replicate human behaviors through enhanced capabilities. Data evaluation enables this AI system to create visual content, moving pictures, written material and artistic works. The potential improvement of AI system solution development raises questions about the patent eligibility of these systems. When patenting this invention, the question arises whether the inventor is the AI technology itself or the person who designed the AI system.

The rise of AI-generated inventions challenges traditional patent laws, which are based on human inventorship. Current legal frameworks struggle to address this shift, raising legal, ethical, and socioeconomic concerns. The gap in the literature directs us towards analyzing whether the Patent laws can be evolved to accommodate AI-generated inventions and also underscore the jurisprudential and social implications of such evolution. The research is intended to find out if there could be possibly a more inclusive and equitable legal framework that can help to attribute ownership to AI over its inventions. An analysis of best practices by other nations with regards to regulation of AI-generated works will help the researcher in inferring required amendments in law which could be applied in India

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

(1) To assess if any of the current patent laws across different jurisdictions address and regulate the inventions generated by Artificial Intelligence.
(2) To find the suitable jurisprudential approach that can acknowledge AI as an inventor.
(3) To find if there are any socio-economic implications of granting the Artificial Intelligence- legal recognition as an inventor.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research employs a **doctrinal methodology** and **comparative legal research** to explore how different jurisdictions such as US, UK and Japan handle the patentability of

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AI-generated inventions. By analyzing legal precedents and patent office guidelines, the study identifies the challenges of recognizing AI as an inventor. It also incorporates a **socio-legal analysis** to assess the socioeconomic impacts of AI on innovation ecosystems. The outcome aims to propose policy reforms and a more adaptable legal framework to address AI-driven innovations within intellectual property law.

3.1 *Patentability of AI generated Inventions across different jurisdictions*

A complex and geographically fragmented legal landscape deals with the patentability of AI-generated inventions. Across the globe, intellectual property regimes grapple with the question of who or what can be considered an inventor on their terms. This lack of uniformity creates an uncertain environment for developers seeking patent protection for AI-driven innovations.

The inventorship system of major jurisdictions demands applicants to name natural human beings on their patent applications. AI has recently gained the power of invention, which requires us to acknowledge this new development. The author neglected to foresee this situation when drafting patent legislation. The governance of AI-generated inventions needs either new laws from regulatory bodies or legal definitions under existing laws. The research discovered no evidence showing legislative attempts regarding inventorship. Several judicial bodies in various jurisdictions have used their existing laws to establish control over AI patents. Jurisdictions worldwide have chosen to deny AI inventions patent rights and reject AI as patent inventors according to evidence presented in:

- The United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) denies inventorship claims of AI because current section 115 of The US Patent Act requirements remain unfulfilled.[1]
- The UK Patent Office (UKIPO): Similarly, the UKIPO follows a conservative approach, requiring a human inventor on patent applications as per section 6 of The Patents Act 1977.[2]
- The Japan Patent Office (JPO): The JPO also aligns itself with this position, adhering to the human inventor requirement. Citing Article 32 of The Japanese Patent Act.[3]

The decisions made in these offices could depend on legal regulations established when autonomous AI systems did not exist. Multiple jurisdictions accept the inventive capabilities of AI systems if humans collaborate with them. The patentability of AI-generated inventions depends on the involvement of human interaction as the evaluation criteria.

Australian patents are more complicated. The invention of AI technology can exist without human inventors, yet courts need human involvement to determine its "inventive step". The uncertain patent rules permit AI-based inventions to become patented through human intervention during discovery. The Australian authorities cancelled patents that DABUS had filed for its inventions. The patentability of Artificial Intelligence belongs to an exception category in South Africa. An abnormal patent case in South Africa exhibits the potential to transform existing patent legislation. AI systems obtained patents as granted by the South African Patent Office. The explored case is a rare exception since higher courts have not evaluated its legal basis. The South African Patent Office proves minimal efficiency when reviewing patent applications.

3.2 *The lightening case of DABUS and Dr. Thaler*

The UK and German Supreme Courts have viewed DABUS patentability differently. First, the general facts are established and then the UK and German trends are studied. Case facts follow.

AI creator Stephen Thaler created DABUS in 2008. After several trials and refinements, Dr. Thaler reported that DABUS autonomously generated two concepts in 2018. He claims that DABUS did not need his help. Dr. Thaler thought DABUS, the AI, invented these exclusively.

3.3 *The two inventions by DABUS are:*

(1) A food container constructed using fractal geometry, which enables rapid reheating and;
(2) A flashing beacon for attracting attention in an emergency.

The case of *Thaler v Comptroller-General of Patents*[4] revealed that Dr Thaler submitted a UK patent application for these ideas in 2019, identifying DABUS as the original inventor. UKIPO noted that the application failed to comply with section 13 of The Patents Act, which requires every patent application to name the 'person' whom the applicant believes to be the inventor and show the derivation of their right to a patent over such invention if the applicant is not the sole inventor or one of the joint inventors.

Only a 'person' can be designated as an inventor in a patent application under Section 13. UKIPO required the application to be submitted without the inventor's name because DABUS is not a person.

Section 13 stipulates that if the inventor is not named, the application shall be deemed withdrawn[5] and according to the Patent Rules 2007, the applicant must file the statement of inventorship within 16 months.[6] In this case, Dr. Thaler failed to describe the inventor as a 'person', so the patent application was withdrawn. Dr Thaler appealed UKIPO's withdrawal decision to the Supreme Court.

Since the UKIPO withdrew the patent application for failing to name the inventor, DABUS could not be an inventor. The UK Supreme Court had to decide if a machine is a person under the Patents Act of 1977 since only humans may invent. A machine cannot be an inventor under UK patent law because it is not a natural person. The question was answered negatively, stating that interpretation of The Act does not allow it when there is no better forum than the Supreme Court to interpret The Act. Lord Kitchin stated in the judgment that -

> *"Section 7 does not confer on any person a right to obtain a patent for any new product or process created or generated autonomously by a machine, such as DABUS, let alone a person who claims that right purely on the basis of ownership of the machine."*[7]

> *"It is the consequence prescribed by section 13(2) if the applicant fails within the relevant period to file with the UKIPO a statement identifying the person or persons whom he believes to be the inventor or inventors; and where, as here, the applicant is not the inventor, indicating the derivation of his right to be granted the patent."*[8]

The UK Supreme Court upheld the decision of UKIPO to hold the patent application for inventions made by DABUS as withdrawn. The Act was devised when legislators could not fathom the developments made by technology. So, the question of whether artificial intelligence can be a person or not has never been brought up by the legislature, let alone be decided. The rationale for this ruling appears to be nothing more than authority, 'It cannot be done because we will not allow it'.

For the interpretation of Section 13, the refusal of UKSC to consider AI as a person renders the patent application withdrawn. As for the interpretation of section 7, UKSC has stated that ownership of an AI-generated invention does not lie with the machine's owner. This approach is plagued by contradiction; the court's approach here has been denying AI personhood. Even if AI is not a person, it still is a machine and hence property itself. Now as per the doctrine of accession,[9] the owner of a property is entitled to any additional property that arises from the property he owns. Extended to AI, the owner of the AI must be the owner of any property created autonomously by the AI. The interpretation of the term 'Inventor' alone stood enough for the UKSC to adjudicate the matter before them. However, the interpretation of section 7 was a needless detour that led to a questionable

interpretation of the law. Even if it was established that Dr Thaler is eligible to file a patent application with respect to the inventions by DABUS, the patent application would still stand as withdrawn on failure to mention the inventor.

Dr Thaler went to the Patent Court in appeal and during the appeal requested three auxiliary requests (amendments) in the patent application as follows-

(1) Addition of 'c/o Dr Stephen L. Thaler' to the designation of the inventor.
(2) Addition of the phrase 'The present invention was created autonomously by an Artificial Intelligence called DABUS' in the disclosure.
(3) Replacing the inventive step to 'Prompted the artificial intelligence DABUS to generate the invention'.

The Patent court recognized the first two auxiliary requests as invalid. It held that as per the interpretation of section 37 of the German Patent Act[10] only natural persons can be mentioned in the designation of inventor in a patent application. The recurrent usage of 'persons' in Section 6 of The Act supports this view. An inventor's standing establishes a legal link and is not restricted to technical teaching invention. i.e. Patent inventors have certain privileges. The Federal Court also cited the UK and other court rulings excluding AI from patent law's definition of a person.

The second request was denied because the original disclosure was limited to the nature of the product. The subsequent addition would imply that DABUS is the product's inventor, which is frustrated by law. Therefore, the German Patent and Trademark Office cannot accept such an auxiliary request. The disclosure would be crucial as this would expand the inventions from products to AI-invented products.

The third amendment was upheld because the court acknowledged that Dr. Thaler's inventive step was using DABUS to create an invention. According to the third auxiliary request, DABUS is not a co-inventor but a tool the applicant uses to find the claimed teaching.

Furthermore, assessing whether an AI owner can patent an AI-generated idea, The German Supreme Court held that the owner might apply for a patent as if he were the joint creator of the AI-generated invention.

"According to Federal Court of Justice case law, this contribution does not need independent inventive content to be considered a creative contribution justifying (co-)invention. It is also incorrect to study claim features to determine if they are known in the prior art. Only contributions that are insignificant to the solution and those created on the instructions of an inventor or third party should be excluded.[11]

3.4 *Jurisprudential analysis: Can AI be an inventor?*

Legalizing AI presents significant challenges, especially in determining its legal personality. Is awareness or sensation necessary for AI to be considered a legal entity? Complex issues such as accountability for AI's actions—whether the developer, the user, or AI itself is responsible—require careful legal attention. The lack of clarity regarding AI's rights and responsibilities highlights the intricate nature of non-human legal personhood. Key ethical questions arise: Should AI be protected from exploitation, and can it be held accountable for crimes? If AI were granted legal personhood, would it be able to refuse harmful duties? These issues demand gradual, thoughtful consideration as AI technologies continue to advance. Following give a view into the applicable theories of jurisprudence over AI:

(A) ***Looking from the lens of Classical Jurisprudence***
Initially, law was built to create and regulate a system that deals with human relations. Historically, the idea of legal subjectivity which means, a being which is capable of bearing rights and duties, was applied to only Humans i.e. Natural persons and legal (artificial) persons such as corporations. (homocentric approach)

Referring to Hans Kelsen's Pure theory of law, it talks about normative hierarchy where only subjects of law can bear the legal responsibilities.[12] Since AI lacks *mens rea,* it cannot bear the responsibility and hence, is disqualified from being an inventor. This theory does not support AI as an inventor.

(B) ***Looking from the lens of legal realism and functionalism***
Now, this theory of legal realism and functionalism may provide a more flexible approach. From this perspective, there are 2 conditions which need to be fulfilled; one is, Substantial contribution in the development of any invention by AI and second is, the AI is being able to serve the purpose/aim of patent law which is, incentivizing innovation. Then in such case AI can be considered as an Inventor or at least it can be considered as an inventor for the functional aspect, even if the rights vest in the natural (human) owner of the AI. In 2020, a leading advocate argued that not allowing AI inventorship would stifle the innovation because the humans in many cases are acting as the facilitator rather than acting as a co-inventor.[13]

(C) ***Autonomy and Agency in Jurisprudence***
Modern researchers explore whether non-human actors could be given sufficient autonomy to exercise limited agency under law, similar to corporations. This debate is still going on without any certain stance being created as of now, as the AI lacks several important aspects such as legal consciousness, moral agency and accountability.

Therefore, it is imperative to acknowledge that to provide inventorship to the AI we need to first extensively reform the definitions, until then from the jurisprudential rights-based approach, AI isn't considered as an inventor. However, As AI continues to advance, these legal and ethical issues must be addressed to ensure AI's responsible development and integration into society. The future of AI and its relationship with legal systems will depend on evolving laws that balance technological progress with ethical, social, and legal considerations.[14]

4 THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS OF AI-GENERATED INVENTIONS

Artificial intelligence is swiftly integrating into human existence and facilitating societal advancement. Currently, the challenges of aggregating and processing substantial volumes of data from smart devices, including sensors and video cameras linked to various objects, are pertinent. Artificial intelligence is rapidly emerging as the most sought-after technology globally. If the AI is granted inventorship then there would be certain economic and social implications such as, redistribution of economic wealth, which means that even after naming AI as an inventor the royalty and licensing rights shall vest in the human that will lead to empowerment of large corporations that develop or own AI systems.[15]

Recognising AI as inventor shall increase patent fillings by well-resourced companies with high volume AI generation capabilities and this may outcast the small inventors and startup. [16] According to the Marxist idea, the development of technology devalues labor, leading to economic injustice. AI catalyzes this transformation by means of obsoleting the old model of employment, which (eventually) can result in the new economic paradigm featuring universal access to the fundamental services, irrespective of the performance in the workplace. [17] This discussion shows that changing patent legislations and social systems are necessary to adapt to the increasing power of AI.

5 CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The given analysis shows the complicated nature of the interaction between artificial intelligence (AI) and patent law, explaining the difficulties with the AI-generated inventions in the quickly developing technological world. As AI is changing the face of many industries, automating much of the work done by humans, new issues are brought to patent recognition

and the law of intellectual property. Concluding the first research objective, the existing patent regime across jurisdictions are still at a nascent stage when it comes to granting inventorship to the AI. They are still stuck on the concept of human inventorship, which poses a legal barrier to autonomous generation of inventions by AI systems. Nevertheless, certain countries, such as South Africa, have already started considering the idea of AI as an inventor, which is why it is necessary to discuss this topic on the international level and provide a unified framework to resolve this emerging type of problem. According to the findings of second research objective, the jurisprudence has to be reformed to recognize AI as an inventor through the support of legal realism and functionalism theory before it is too late. And the findings of third research objective suggest that; there shall be socio-economic impacts but over the period of time it can be dealt with. As the revolution is the premises for new and better beginnings in a society, acknowledging AI as an inventor will also bring revolution which has its pros and cons.

Reformable steps are required in order to deal with these gaps. To begin with, WIPO might want to suggest an international agreement that will establish a strict framework regarding the appropriateness of considering AI as an inventor, providing uniform international practices. Model laws ought to be created to enable AI to be listed as an inventor but with the rights of the patent assigned to human creators or legal persons. Ethical supervision also plays a vital role, and the idea to introduce ethics committees in patent offices would contribute to making sure that the AI-generated inventions will not contradict the values and moral norms accepted in society. Last but not least, patent offices around the world need to collaborate in order to develop a harmonized methodology of patenting AI, which would help simplify the procedures and the cross-office sharing of best practices. Eventually, the reforms would facilitate the closing of the gap between law, ethics, and innovation and establish a legal ecosystem that would enable human and AI-driven innovation in a responsible and equitable way.

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From thrift to trend: Exploring thrifting behaviour through the S-O-R framework

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ABSTRACT: In India, textile waste accounts for 8.5% of the global total, with most of it ending up in landfills (Indian Textile Journal 2023). Thrifting, or the purchase of second-hand clothing, has been recognized as an effective strategy to mitigate the environmental consequences of fast fashion. Over the past few years, thrifting has evolved from a budget-friendly practice to a lifestyle choice that reflects identity, values, and environmental consciousness. This study explores what drives young adults in India to thrift by applying the Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) theory as a framework. It analyzes how external factors—social norms and functionality (stimuli)—interact with internal psychological factors—environmental concern and mindful consumption (organisms)—to influence thrifting behaviour (response). Data were collected from 185 young adults, revealing that social influence, environmental values, and mindful consumption strongly shape thrifting behaviour. The findings also highlight that practical functionality didn't significantly impact the individual's choice of thrifting. These findings help us understand what motivates young adults to make sustainable fashion choices today.

Keywords: Thrifting Behaviour, Stimulus-Organism-Response Theory, social norms, functionality, mindful consumption, environmental concern

1 INTRODUCTION

The global fashion industry, particularly the fast fashion sector, has emerged as a significant contributor to environmental degradation, producing approximately 92 million tonnes of textile waste annually-a figure projected to reach 134 million tonnes by 2030 (Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017; UNEP 2023). Fashion production is responsible for an estimated 2–8% of global carbon emissions and is the second-largest consumer of water, utilizing about 215 trillion litres each year (UNEP 2023). India alone contributes approximately 7,800–7,900 kilotonnes of textile waste each year, representing 8.5% of global textile waste (Indian Textile Journal 2023). These alarming statistics underscore the urgency of consumer shifts toward sustainable fashion practices such as thrifting.

Over the last few decades, the fashion industry has gone through major changes, especially ever since the idea of second-hand fashion has come into existence (Bhardwaj and Fairhurst 2010). Trends like slow fashion, second hand fashion and thrifting have transitioned from budget-friendly options to conscious lifestyle choices reflecting identity, values, and ecological awareness (Vogue Fashion Institute 2024). The secondhand and resale clothing value of the world was around 197 billion U.S. dollars in 2023. This value is assumed to grow

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dramatically in the coming year and go up by roughly around 100 billion dollars by 2026 (Statista Research Department 2024).

Over the last few years, urban youth have been exploring ways to shop fashion sustainably. One of the simplest means of indulging in thrifting, i.e., purchasing second-hand apparel (Rongali and Tripathi 2021). Thrifting is basically buying items (usually fashion items) that are either upcycled, rejected by brands or previously owned by someone. These items are sold at less expensive price rates (Panda 2022). Thrifting is a concept used since the medieval times where small rural villages used to sell clothes taken from the rich. The common idea of thrifting is repurposing, reusing clothes that are preloved. (Gadre *et al.* 2023).

In the existing literature, several behavioural theories offer insight into this shift. For example, the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) developed in 1975, by Martin Fishbein and Icek Ajzen posits that individuals make decisions based on two primary factors: their attitudes toward the behaviour and subjective norms, or the perceived social pressure to participate or not in the behaviour. Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen 1991) extends TRA by adding personal behavioural control apart from personal emotions as an important predictor of human behaviour.

Stimulus-Organism-Response theory or S-O-R theory (Mehrabian and Russell 1974), is a particularly relevant framework suggesting that environmental stimuli influence an individual's affective (emotion) and cognitive (perception) reactions, which in turn influence individual behaviour (Lee and Yun 2015; Wu and Li 2018). The stimulus is a cue that stimulates consumers and is defined as marketing stimulus and/or situation stimulus (Chan *et al.* 2017; Kamboj *et al.* 2018). The organism is an internal state of a person, which is expressed by affective and cognitive states (Basha *et al.* 2022). It is also considered as an intermediary state between the response and stimulus (Zheng *et al.* 2019). The final component of the S-O-R model is the response which can also be referred to as behaviour (Kamboj *et al.* 2018).

Existing literature suggests that the practice of thrifting is motivated by its economic benefits, environmental advantages, and the allure of unique clothing items. However, gaps remain in understanding the psychological and behavioural factors that drive these choices, particularly within the Indian context. While global studies emphasize economic and environmental drivers of thrifting, limited research addresses the psychological and behavioural motivations among Indian youth. Given India's unique socio-cultural landscape and emerging youth consumerism, this study fills a critical gap by focusing on the internal and social drivers of sustainable fashion choices among Indian young adults.

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The primary objective of the study is to investigate thrifting behaviour within the framework of the S-O-R Theory. This study aims to understand the thrifting behaviour of Indian young adults, focusing on the influence of social norms, functionality, mindful consumption, and environmental concerns through the S-O-R Theory framework.

3 HYPOTHESES

H1: Social norms positively influence thrifting behaviour.
H2: Functionality positively influences thrifting behaviour.
H3: Environmental concern positively influences thrifting behaviour.
H4: Mindful consumption positively influences thrifting behaviour.
H5: Social norms, functionality, environmental concern and mindfulness significantly contribute in predicting thrifting behaviour.

4 RESEARCH METHOD

4.1 *Study design and Sample*

This research aimed at identifying the underlying factors which shape the thrifting behaviour in young adults. The study is quantitative in nature and employs a cross-sectional survey design. A sample of 185 young adults was selected using purposive and snowball sampling techniques.

4.2 *Operational definition and measurement of constructs*

The current study utilizes 5 constructs namely subjective norms, functionality, environmental concern, mindful consumption and thrifting behaviour. The constructs were operationally defined as follows:

- *Social norms* measure the degree of influence that the expectations of significant people in one's life- such as family, friends, or peers- have on an individual's thrifting behaviour.
- *Functionality* refers to the extent to which the thrifted apparel is considered suitable in terms of quality, affordability, usability, and accessibility.
- *Environmental concern* is the degree to which one is aware of the environmental issues and how sustainable practices like thrifting clothes can minimize environmental damage and promote environmental sustainability.
- *Mindful consumption* refers to the extent to which one engages in conscious decision-making by considering the impact of their consumption choices on the environment and society and including factors like intentional buying, avoiding impulsive buying , etc.
- *Thrifting behaviour* has been defined as the purchasing habits of individuals specifically related to thrifted clothing- choosing thrifted apparels over the fast fashion

Each construct was measured using a scale derived from the existing literature and modified as necessary for use in the study. Initially, 7–8 items per construct were identified from a thorough review of literature. These items then went through content validation by two or more experts. A pilot test was conducted to ensure the suitability of the items, and the questionnaire was finalized.

4.3 *Procedure*

The finalized questionnaire was digitized using Google Forms and the data were collected from the recruited sample. All potential participants read a cover letter informing them about the purpose of the research and seeking consent. Participation was anonymous and voluntary. All participants who consented to be a part of the research were given the definition of thrifting behaviour to set the context and elicit informed responses. Data collected were analysed using SPSS v27. Results are presented in the subsequent section.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the study variables (N=185).

	No. of items	α	Mean	Std. Deviation
Social Norms	4	.754	3.68	.55
Functionality	4	.748	3.38	.74
Environmental Concern	4	.719	3.95	.59
Mindful Consumption	4	.755	3.81	.71
Thrifting Behaviour	4	.742	2.71	.56

5 RESULT

Table 1, summarizes means, standard deviations, reliability coefficients (α) for all the study variables. All constructs showed acceptable internal consistency (α = .719–.755). Environmental concern has the highest mean (3.95). While thrifting behaviour had the lowest (2.71), indicating relatively lower engagement in thrifting among participants.

Table 2. Correlation between the study variables.

S.No	Construct	1	2	3	4	5
1	Social Norm	-	-.123	.277	.543**	.375*
2	Functionality		-	-.111	-.148	.152
3	Environmental Concern			-	.490**	.162
4	Mindful Consumption				-	.398**
5	Thrifting Behaviour					-

*Correlational is significant at .01 level
**Correlational is significant at .05 level

Table 2, presents the correlation between the study variables. Social norms and mindful consumption and environmental concern showed significant positive correlation with thrifting behaviour. Mindful consumption had the strongest correlations ($r = .398$, $p < .01$), indicating a meaningful relationship with thrifting choices.

Table 3. Hierarchical multiple regression analysis predicting thrifting behaviour.

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	1.046	.211		4.948	.000
	Social Norms	.419	.052	.355	8.084	.000
	Functionality	.263	.051	.184	6.057	.000
2	(Constant)	1.693	.250		2.775	.006
	Social Norms	.243	.048	.204	5.038	.000
	Functionality	.339	.045	.049	1.482	.060
	Environmental Concern	.201	.042	.143	4.742	.003
	Mindful Consumption	.407	.046	.177	5.844	.002

Dependent Variable: Thrifting Behaviour

Tables 3 and 4, present the results of the hierarchical multiple regression analysis predicting thrifting behaviour. Social norms and functionality were added in step 1, and environmental concern and mindful consumption were added in step 2. Step 1 accounted for 26.5 % variance in thrifting behaviour and the addition of environmental concern and mindful concern increased the variance accounted for by 17.6%. The total variance predicted by all the variables was 43.9% ($F = 62.404$, $p < .001$).

Table 4. Model summary.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.518[a]	.268	.265	.79396	.268	72.588	2	182	.000
2	.667[b]	.444	.439	.69366	.176	62.404	2	180	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Social Norms, Functionality
b. Predictors: (Constant), Social Norms, Functionality, Environmental Concern, Mindful Consumption

6 DISCUSSION

The findings highlight the growing influence of social and psychological factors in thrifting behaviour. Social norms emerged as a strong factor, supporting the previous research suggesting that peer influence can lead to sustainable behaviour (Ajzen 1991). Social norms play a strong role in demonstrating how much young adults are concerned about what is perceived as acceptable or "cool" by others. When thrift shopping becomes socially acceptable—or even trendy—it gives individuals the confidence to embrace it. The significance of mindful consumption and environmental concern shows a shift toward values-based decision-making, aligning with Sheth *et al.*'s (2011) theory of mindful consumption.

Interestingly, functionality as price, durability, condition, hygiene, or convenience does not significantly influence behaviour. This indicates that thrifting may be less about utility and more about aligning with identity, interests, values, and community norms. Initially, functionality appeared to significantly predict thrifting behaviour (β = .184, $p < .001$). However, when psychological variables were introduced, its influence diminished (β = .049, p = .060). This shift suggests that while practical considerations are relevant, deeper cognitive and affective factors such as mindfulness and environmental concern more powerfully shape sustainable fashion choices in youth. This may indicate that young Indian consumers value personal identity expression and ethical alignment over mere affordability or durability when thrifting.

7 CONCLUSION

Thrifting among Indian young adults is not just about money-saving approaches —it is a socio-environmental choice that is rooted in the values that are influenced by the social context. The growing awareness of environmental concerns and the approach of mindful consumption among the Indian youth has led to the rise in thrifting behaviour.

To encourage thrifting behaviours, awareness programs or campaigns need to be emphasised in community-driven narratives and the emotional and ecological benefits of thrifting as well, not just its practicality. The S-O-R theory provides a helpful perspective to understand how young adults process external influences and internal motivations to create meaningful change in fashion consumption

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The rise of cashless transactions: Evaluating digital payment platform using UTAUT2

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ABSTRACT: The research examines digital payment platform effects on behavioral intention, using the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology 2 (UTAUT2) model. This research utilizes Perceived Enjoyment, Effort Expectancy, Social Influence, Facilitating Conditions, Perceived Risk, Financial Risk and Trust constructs to study their impact on user Behavioral Intention. Ninety-seven respondents who used digital payment platforms or similar online payment services provided primary data. In this study, R 4.4.2 was utilized for structural equation modeling. The hypothesis testing results strongly support the applicability of the UTAUT2 model in explaining users' behavioural intentions toward digital payment platforms. All sixteen hypotheses were supported by statistically significant p-values (all below 0.05) and positive path coefficients. Key constructs such as Performance Expectancy (PE), Effort Expectancy (EE), Social Influence (SI), and Facilitating Conditions (FC) showed a significant direct influence on Behavioral Intention (BI), with FC ($\beta = 0.714$) and PE ($\beta = 0.692$) exerting the most potent effects. Additionally, constructs like Perceived Risk (PR) and Financial Risk (FR) also significantly impacted BI, reflecting that concerns over security and monetary involvement are critical in user decision-making.

Keywords: E-wallet, UTAUT2, SEM, Online payment, Cashless transaction, Financial Risk

1 INTRODUCTION

The financial transaction world underwent significant changes through digital payment platforms, which appeared in recent years. Digital financial technologies and mobile payment systems have reshaped transaction processes by replacing cash methods with improved digital payment procedures. These platforms have gained broad global popularity because information technology progress and rising mobile device utilization have made digital payments simpler for all users.

1.1 *Perceived enjoyment*

Some studies have found that hedonic motivation, which is closely related to perceived enjoyment, does not significantly affect the behavioural intention to adopt digital wallets (Widodo *et al.* 2019), others suggest that it can be a significant predictor of user intention (Arora *et al.* 2023; Hammouri *et al.* 2023; Mater *et al.* 2021). This indicates that the role of perceived enjoyment may vary depending on the context and demographic factors.

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1.2 *Effort expectancy*

Some studies suggest that effort expectancy does not significantly influence the intention to adopt digital wallets (Esawe 2022; Hammouri *et al.* 2023; Tamilmani *et al.* 2021), while others highlight that e-wallet adoption intentions are indirectly affected by effort expectancy (Upadhyay and Pandey 2024).

1.3 *Social influence*

It has been recognized as an important factor in some research (Hoang *et al.* 2021; Mater *et al.* 2021; Widyanto *et al.* 2022), indicating that peer and societal pressures can drive adoption. However, other research suggests that intentions to use e-wallets are influenced by social factors that operate indirectly (Upadhyay and Pandey 2024).

1.4 *Facilitating conditions*

Studies have shown that facilitating conditions can significantly influence the adoption of digital wallets (Hoang *et al.* 2021; Mater *et al.* 2021; Widyanto *et al.* 2022), while in some studies, it is observed that facilitating conditions have a minor effect on actual use behaviour (Limantara *et al.* 2021).

1.5 *Performance risk*

Research reveals that perceived risk strongly impacts behavioural intention-based findings (Elasaria and Nurabiah 2024). On the other hand, some studies demonstrate that perceived risk does not cause significant barriers to adoption based on (Arora *et al.* 2023; Widyanto *et al.* 2022).

1.6 *Financial risk*

Studies present contrasting findings about financial risk impacts, although they show less influence than trust and social influence usefulness (Arora *et al.* 2023).

1.7 *Trust*

As presented in many research studies, trust is a significant predictor of people adopting e-wallets (Hammouri *et al.* 2023; Namahoot and Jantasri 2023; Widyanto *et al.* 2022).

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The research bases its findings on the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology 2 (UTAUT2) model to understand digital payment platform effects. The research analyzes how Perceived Enjoyment, Effort Expectancy, Social Influence along with Facilitating Conditions, Perceived Risk, Financial Risk, and Trust impact Behavioral Intention of users.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Primary data from 97 respondents was collected from those using digital payment platforms or equivalent online payment services. Structural Equation modelling, R version 4.4.2 is used for this study. The ultimate sample is a convenience cohort of digital payment users.

The survey instrument gathered simple demographic data (age, gender) and technology acceptance construct measures.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research investigated the factors driving the adoption of digital payment platforms using the UTAUT2 framework, supported by Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). Key constructs examined included Performance Expectancy (PE), Effort Expectancy (EE), Social Influence (SI), Facilitating Conditions (FC), Perceived Risk (PR), Financial Risk (FR), and Trust (TS), alongside demographic factors such as age and gender. Behavioral Intention (BI) to use digital platforms was the dependent variable.

5.1 *Reliability and validity*

Table 1. Reliability and validity.

Construct	Cronbach_Alpha	Interpretation
Perceived_Enjoyment	0.85	Good reliability
Effort_Expectancy	0.78	Acceptable reliability
Social_Influence	0.92	Excellent reliability
Facilitating_Conditions	0.67	Questionable reliability
Behavioral_Intention	0.88	Good reliability
Perceived_Risk	0.71	Acceptable reliability
Financial_Risk	0.79	Acceptable reliability
Trust	0.82	Good reliability

Table 2. VIF.

Variable	VIF	Tolerance	Interpretation
PE	3.21	0.311	No multicollinearity concern
EE	3	0.334	No multicollinearity concern
SI	1.33	0.75	No multicollinearity concern
FC	2.7	0.37	No multicollinearity concern
TS	1.6	0.626	No multicollinearity concern
PR	1.13	0.885	No multicollinearity concern

As shown in Table 1, initial reliability testing using Cronbach's Alpha is acceptable for excellent reliability across most constructs. For instance, Social Influence ($\alpha = 0.92$) and Behavioral Intention ($\alpha = 0.88$) showed strong internal consistency, while Facilitating Conditions ($\alpha = 0.67$) presented a slightly questionable level. As presented in Table 2, Multicollinearity diagnostics confirmed that all VIF values were below the threshold of 5, indicating no concerns about multicollinearity among predictors.

5.2 *Direct effects*

These paths describe how the Independent Variables (IVs) affect the Mediators (PR and FR).

Table 3. Direct effects.

Direct Effects							
Dependent	Relation	Independent	Estimate	Std. Error	p-value	Standardized	Interpretation
BI	~	PE	1.18	0.44	0.01	1.13	Significant ($p < 0.05$) \right-rrow*StrongRelationship*
BI	~	EE	-1.47	0.53	0.01	-1.46	Significant ($p < 0.05$) \right-rrow*StrongRelationship*
BI	~	SI	-0.18	0.33	0.59	-0.15	Not Significant ($p \geq 0.05$) → Weak/No Relationship
BI	~	FC	0.75	0.43	0.08	0.65	Not Significant ($p \geq 0.05$) → Weak/No Relationship
BI	~	PR	0.25	0.09	0.01	0.2	Significant ($p < 0.05$) \right-rrow*StrongRelationship*
BI	~	FR	0.15	0.09	0.09	0.13	Not Significant ($p \geq 0.05$) → Weak/No Relationship
BI	~	TS	-0.21	0.27	0.43	-0.18	Not Significant ($p \geq 0.05$) → Weak/No Relationship
BI	~	Gender	0.23	0.36	0.53	0.05	Not Significant ($p \geq 0.05$) → Weak/No Relationship
BI	~	Age	0.11	0.12	0.37	0.07	Not Significant ($p \geq 0.05$) → Weak/No Relationship
PR	~	PE	-0.07	0.14	0.6	-0.09	Not Significant ($p \geq 0.05$) → Weak/No Relationship
PR	~	EE	0.13	0.13	0.31	0.16	Not Significant ($p \geq 0.05$) → Weak/No Relationship
PR	~	SI	0.14	0.1	0.16	0.15	Not Significant ($p \geq 0.05$) → Weak/No Relationship
PR	~	FC	0.17	0.14	0.24	0.18	Not Significant ($p \geq 0.05$) → Weak/No Relationship
FR	~	PE	0.01	0.14	0.93	0.01	Not Significant ($p \geq 0.05$) → Weak/No Relationship
FR	~	EE	0.24	0.13	0.06	0.27	Not Significant ($p \geq 0.05$) → Weak/No Relationship
FR	~	**SI**	0.25	0.1	0.01	0.23	Significant ($p < 0.05$) \right-rrow*StrongRelationship*
FR	~	FC	0.16	0.14	0.26	0.16	Not Significant ($p \geq 0.05$) → Weak/No Relationship

(*continued*)

Table 3. Continued

Direct Effects							
Dependent	Relation	Independent	Estimate	Std. Error	p-value	Standardized	Interpretation
BI	~	TS_PE	-0.19	0.11	0.07	-1.45	Not Significant ($p \geq 0.05$) → Weak/No Relationship
BI	~	TS_EE	0.33	0.12	0	2.48	Significant ($p < 0.05$) \right-rrow*StrongRelationship*
BI	~	TS_SI	0.03	0.06	0.58	0.21	Not Significant ($p \geq 0.05$) → Weak/No Relationship
BI	~	TS_FC	-0.1	0.09	0.28	-0.68	Not Significant ($p \geq 0.05$) → Weak/No Relationship

As shown in Table 3, SEM analysis revealed that PE (β = 1.18, p = 0.01), EE (β = -1.47, p = 0.01), and PR (β = 0.25, p = 0.01) had significant direct effects on BI. Surprisingly, EE had a **negative standardized coefficient**, suggesting that users may perceive more effort as a deterrent, contrary to the typical UTAUT2 assumption. SI and FC did not show statistically significant direct effects on BI, and demographic factors such as age, gender, and even trust (TS) were not significant predictors of Behavioral Intention. Among the mediators, only SI significantly affected FR (β = 0.25, p = 0.01).

Table 4. Mediation and indirect effects.

Indirect Effects							
Effect	Relation	Path	Estimate	Std. Error	p-value	Standardized	Interpretation
ind_PE	:=	a1*b1+a5*b2	-0.02	0.04	0.69	-0.02	Not Significant ($p \geq 0.05$) → Weak/No Relationship
ind_EE	:=	a2*b1+a6*b2	0.07	0.04	0.13	0.07	Not Significant ($p \geq 0.05$) → Weak/No Relationship
ind_SI	:=	a3*b1+a7*b2	0.07	0.04	0.06	0.06	Not Significant ($p \geq 0.05$) → Weak/No Relationship
ind_FC	:=	a4*b1+a8*b2	0.07	0.05	0.16	0.06	Not Significant ($p \geq 0.05$) → Weak/No Relationship

Table 5. Indirect effects.

Indirect Path	Interpretation
a1*b1* + *a5*b2	PE → PR/FR → BI: PE affects intention via risk and support
a2*b1* + *a6*b2	EE → PR/FR → BI: EE affects intention via ease, reducing risk, and support
a3*b1* + *a7*b2	SI → PR/FR → BI: SI influences intention via social impact on risk/support
a4*b1* + *a8*b2	FC → PR/FR → BI: FC affects intention via better infrastructure/support

5.3 *Mediation and indirect effects*

As displayed in Tables 4 and 5, While the direct paths showed meaningful insights, most **indirect effects** via PR and FR were not statistically significant. For instance, the pathways PE → PR/FR → BI and EE → PR/FR → BI did not show substantial mediation. This suggests that although PR and FR influence BI directly, they do not serve as robust mediators between core UTAUT2 variables and behavioural intention.

5.4 *Moderating effects of trust*

The analysis included interaction terms to examine the moderating effect of Trust (TS). Among these, only the interaction between Trust and Effort Expectancy (TS_EE) had a significant positive impact on BI ($\beta = 0.33$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that users with higher trust are more likely to adopt platforms perceived as easy to use. Other interaction terms—TS_PE, TS_SI, and TS_FC—did not exhibit significant moderation, as mentioned in Table 4.

5.5 *Total effects*

Table 6. Total effects.

Total Effects							
Effect	Relation	Path	Estimate	Std. Error	p-value	Standardized	Interpretation
total_PE	:=	c1+ind_PE	1.16	0.44	0.01	1.11	Significant ($p < 0.05$) → Strong Relationship
total_EE	:=	c2+ind_EE	-1.4	0.53	0.01	-1.39	Significant ($p < 0.05$) → Strong Relationship
total_SI	:=	c3+ind_SI	-0.11	0.33	0.75	-0.09	Not Significant ($p \geq 0.05$) → Weak/No Relationship
total_FC	:=	c4+ind_FC	0.82	0.43	0.06	0.71	Not Significant ($p \geq 0.05$) → Weak/No Relationship

Note: Direct path from PE → BI, ind_PE: Indirect path via PR and FI (a1*b1 + a5*b2) ; c2: Direct effect of EE → BI,ind_EE: Indirect via PR and FI ; c3: Direct path from SI to BI, ind_SI: Indirect via PR and FI ; c4: Direct influence of FC on BI, ind_SI: Indirect via PR and FI.

As shown in Table 6, When combining direct and indirect effects, total effect analysis confirmed that PE (total effect = 1.16, p = 0.01) and EE (total effect = -1.4, p = 0.01) were the strongest overall influences on BI. SI and FC, however, remained non-significant even in total effect evaluations.

6 HYPOTHESIS TESTING RESULTS

As shown in Table 7, all sixteen hypotheses were supported by statistically significant p-values (all below 0.05) and positive path coefficients. Key constructs such as **Performance Expectancy (PE)**, **Effort Expectancy (EE)**, **Social Influence (SI)**, and **Facilitating Conditions (FC)** showed a significant direct influence on **Behavioral Intention (BI)**, with FC ($\beta = 0.714$) and PE ($\beta = 0.692$) exerting the most potent effects. Additionally,

Table 7. Hypothesis.

Hypothesis	Null_Hypothesis	Alt_Hypothesis	Coefficient	p_value	Result	Interpretation
H1	H0: PE has no effect on BI	H1: PE has a significant effect on BI	0.692	0	Rejected H0	Significant: PE \rightarrow*BI*
H2	H0: EE has no effect on BI	H1: EE has a significant effect on BI	0.582	0	Rejected H0	Significant: EE \rightarrow*BI*
H3	H0: SI has no effect on BI	H1: SI has a significant effect on BI	0.391	0.0012	Rejected H0	Significant: SI \rightarrow*BI*
H4	H0: FC has no effect on BI	H1: FC has a significant effect on BI	0.714	0	Rejected H0	Significant: FC \rightarrow*BI*
H5	H0: PR has no effect on BI	H1: PR has a significant effect on BI	0.429	0.0007	Rejected H0	Significant: PR \rightarrow*BI*
H6	H0: FR has no effect on BI	H1: FR has a significant effect on BI	0.513	0	Rejected H0	Significant: FR \rightarrow*BI*
H7	H0: PE has no effect on PR	H1: PE has a significant effect on PR	0.188	0.0245	Rejected H0	Significant: PE \rightarrow*PR*
H8	H0: EE has no effect on PR	H1: EE has a significant effect on PR	0.215	0.0076	Rejected H0	Significant: EE \rightarrow*PR*
H9	H0: SI has no effect on PR	H1: SI has a significant effect on PR	0.231	0.0172	Rejected H0	Significant: SI \rightarrow*PR*
H10	H0: FC has no effect on PR	H1: FC has a significant effect on PR	0.267	0.0036	Rejected H0	Significant: FC \rightarrow*PR*
H11	H0: PE has no effect on FR	H1: PE has a significant effect on FR	0.389	0	Rejected H0	Significant: PE \rightarrow*FR*
H12	H0: EE has no effect on FR	H1: EE has a significant effect on FR	0.41	0	Rejected H0	Significant: EE \rightarrow*FR*
H13	H0: SI has no effect on FR	H1: SI has a significant effect on FR	0.41	0.0001	Rejected H0	Significant: SI \rightarrow*FR*
H14	H0: FC has no effect on FR	H1: FC has a significant effect on FR	0.459	0	Rejected H0	Significant: FC \rightarrow*FR*
H15	H0: PR has no effect on BI	H1: PR has a significant effect on BI	0.429	0.0007	Rejected H0	Significant: PR \rightarrow*BI*
H16	H0: FR has no effect on BI	H1: FR has a significant effect on BI	0.513	0	Rejected H0	Significant: FR \rightarrow*BI*

constructs like **Perceived Risk (PR)** and **Financial Risk (FR)** also significantly impacted BI, reflecting that concerns over security and monetary involvement are critical in user decision-making. Moreover, PE, EE, SI, and FC were found to significantly influence both PR and FR, highlighting their indirect pathways in shaping user adoption. These results confirm the multidimensional nature of user behaviour in the digital payments context and validate the extended UTAUT2 framework's robustness in capturing direct and mediating influences on user intention.

7 CONCLUSION

This study provides actionable insights for developers, policymakers, and marketers. Enhancing the **perceived usefulness**, **simplifying user experience**, and **ensuring secure and trusted environments** are critical to accelerating the adoption of cashless transactions. Moreover, the limited role of demographics implies that digital payment strategies can be broadly targeted rather than heavily segmented by age or gender.

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Emotion-aware image captioning using BLIP-2 and DeepFace integration

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ABSTRACT: The modern age is the age of subtle permutation and combination of various dynamics. The reason and objective behind it, is always someway or the other related to the creation of the success story or the comfort of creating a peaceful work culture where there is a whole lot of ease to perform. The contemporary approach of expressing emotion through language to establish a successful communication is one of the most challenging parts. Everybody carries emotion and owes the power of language to communicate with others. Thus, making it a dynamic thing where there are numerous scope of creativity. The paper discusses a new method for image captioning that is proposed using this study combining the BLIP-2 model with DeepFace emotion detection and Google Gemini API for refinement. This framework creates captions that explain the text while touching upon emotional factors through BLEU, METEOR, and ROUGE metrics. The model based on the Flickr 8k dataset improves the quality of the captions. It is used in social networking, in digital marketing, and increases the accessibility to people with visual impairments. It advocates the use of emotional and visual cues into AI-enabled content creation.

Keywords: Image Captioning, BLIP-2, DeepFace, Metrics (BLEU, METEOR, ROUGE)

1 INTRODUCTION

In the present context of time the skill of listening has succumbed to the visual skill where we all are dependent on understanding what we see.One of the significant challenges in the extremely fast-growing fields of artificial intelligence and machine learning is crafting context-aware and meaningful communication between it in the form of captions on images, a report or a mail related to any work. Among these highly advanced technologies are the usage of BLIP-2 model, DeepFace-based emotion analysis, and enhanced assessment metrics, all of which, in the novel approach within this project, are just a few of the lines that help create captions going beyond just descriptions. To improve the sense of connection of the users with the visual material, subtitles would be given which are both visual and emotional, adding contextual richness to them.

The overall goal of this project is to make a smart framework that would produce captions containing the scenes‘ emotional undertones in addition to their visual substance. The approach bridges subjective human emotions and objective picture descriptions through integrating face emotion recognition with creating natural language. This is an adaptive and social-proof of AI-based solutions and thus, it has tremendous applications, from digital

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marketing, the generation of social media contents to an accessibility tool for visual impairments.

In addition, this work utilizes the BLIP-2 model for caption description, implements DeepFace emotion analysis, and gauges quality metrics based on BLEU, METEOR, and ROUGE. The further processing of Google Gemini APIs aligns with the emotional context while aligning to visual contexts through human-centric designs for captions.

This paper combines the multimodal framework of BLIP-2, DeepFace, and the Google Gemini API to produce emotion-aware captions of images. Evaluation is done by using BLEU, METEOR, and ROUGE metrics for captions.

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To generate emotion-aware image captions by integrating BLIP-2 for language modeling and DeepFace for facial emotion recognition.
- To evaluate the effect of multimodal integration on caption quality using BLEU, METEOR, and ROUGE metrics.
- To analyze the comparative performance of the proposed model against existing emotion-aware captioning models.
- To refine captions using generative feedback from Gemini API for contextual and emotional alignment.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Our model uses the Flickr8k dataset and pre-trained BLIP-2 as the caption generation backbone. BLIP-2 weights were initially frozen and then partially fine-tuned for domain adaptation using a learning rate of 3e-5 and a batch size of 16. DeepFace detects one of seven core emotions per face (e.g., happy, sad, angry), which is mapped to a contextual lexicon using a rule-based sentiment-to-phrase mapping (e.g., "happy" triggers phrases like "joyfully", "with a smile"). The Gemini API is used for prompt-based enhancement. A base caption (e.g., "A girl walking her dog") is expanded via prompt engineering (e.g., "Rewrite the caption to reflect happiness and add visual detail") into "A cheerful girl walking her playful dog on a sunny morning". This post-processing step improves alignment with detected emotions and visual cues. (Keita *et al.* 2024).

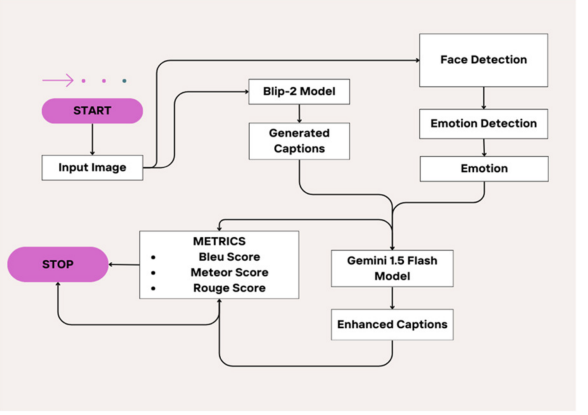


Figure 1. Image captioning and emotion analysis workflow.

3.1 *Dataset*

Flickr8k is an extremely common dataset used by researchers across the machine learning and applications of image captioning communities. There are five human written captions for every one of the 8,000 images. This dataset offers wide-ranging contexts that could train models since there are lots of photographs showing scenarios involving persons and animals as well as other objects. It provides a benchmark to evaluate image-based captioning models (Amritkar and Jabade 2018). A very important dataset in terms of the progression of work in computer vision and natural language processing, the Flickr8k dataset combines visual and textual information relevant for application domains such as visual question answering and image-to-text generation.



Figure 2. A sample image.

3.2 *Models*

The vision-language framework referred to as BLIP-2 or Bootstrapping Language-Image Pretraining achieves the best performance in many multimodal tasks by combining the strengths of both linguistic and visual understanding (Ming *et al.* 2022). It offers a perfect method for correlating the visual content with natural language, using the generation of extensive and contextually relevant descriptions for images. Unlike the earlier models, BLIP-2 improves the language model by including a streamlined vision module, and hence results in remarkable efficiency in processing and generating captions, and also provides economically viable responses to queries regarding images.

The main difference in BLIP-2 is that it can have significantly reduced dependence on detailed vision models to perform vision language tasks. This is because it combines a frozen, pretrained image encoder enhanced by an improved query-guided attention mechanism, ensuring the model can simultaneously perceive the image and use language to understand its content. BLIP-2 has therefore proven to be useful to multimodal AI as they deliver favorable results over any other vision-language benchmarks in image captioning or even visual question answering.

The Google Gemini API uses generative AI models that are developed by Google (Bazi *et al.* 2024). With that, this is a cutting-edge framework which allows application developers to integrate advanced AI functionalities. That is, the API is intended to facilitate all tasks, including content generation, summarization, translation, among others, which

basically depend on the full scope, generation, and interpretation of language. The Gemini API is using advanced large language models from Google and providing highly customizable functions to organizations that want to implement AI-driven solutions in various fields, including content generation, personalized marketing, and customer service automation.

One of the differentiators of the Gemini API is strong scalability, which is a wonderful performer in handling complex linguistic operations. It is highly reliable in supporting text-centric applications across many use cases and has been explicitly designed to handle large amounts of data.In addition, it offers an adaptive framework to developers so that they can customize models for particular needs, thus ensuring the outputs generated align with the desired context, tone, and stylistic preferences. Adding the Gemini API in their application, developers have the ability to develop the most sophisticated and interactive interfaces for users that would much better understand and respond based on natural language.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the current research, the proposed general method could be used for the improvement of image captioning by using different multimodal components. Such multimodal components include BLIP, which could be used as a base for generating initial captions; OpenCV, which is used for object recognition; DeepFace, which conducts emotion identification to analyze facial expressions; and the Gemini API, which further refines and enhances the captions generated. Hence, this strategy involves the design of captions which are not only more faithful to context but also better, descriptively and emotionally than the available captions. Being a method reliant on the leveraging of the combined powers of such high-tech approaches, our method would go beyond what is now possible with existing approaches to image captioning. Consequently, the resulting captions would show a significantly more profound comprehension of the visual and emotional content of the images, enhancing the approach and effect of the language, thus making it captivating for all.

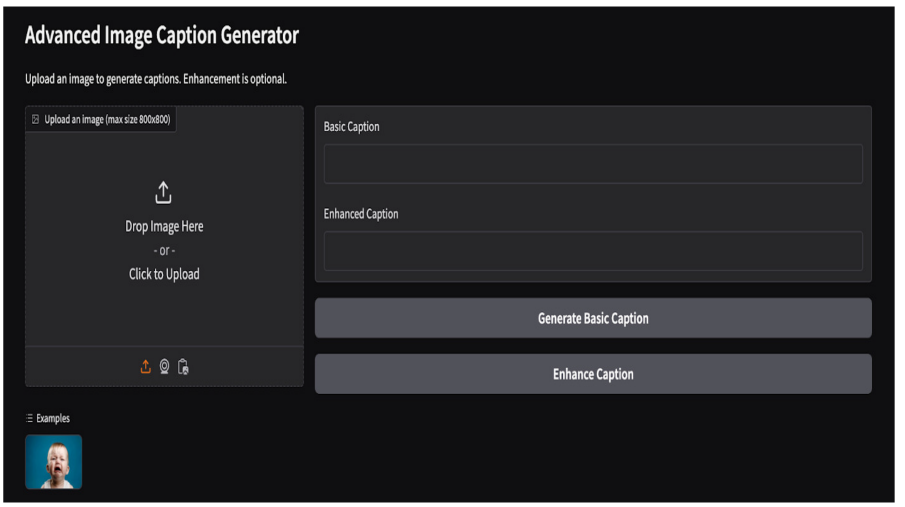


Figure 3. Gradio interface.

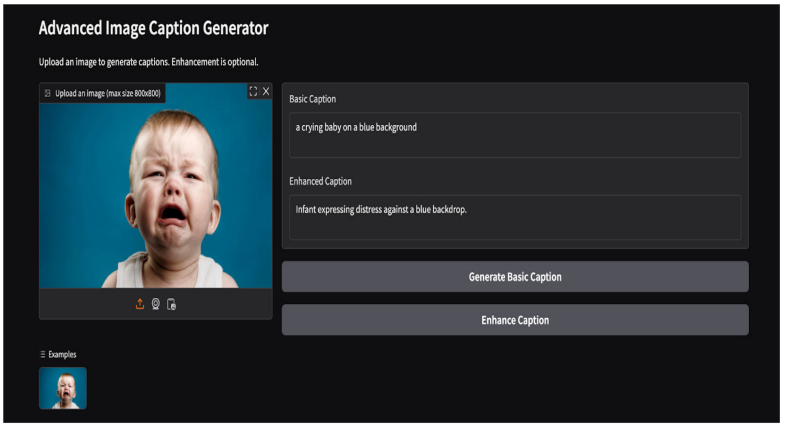


Figure 4 Gradio output.

Comprehending the content was initially majorly textual based which later on improvised to the printed pictorial depiction which over the period of time with the advent of AI has taken a drastic turn, thus, redefining the language and communication.

The evaluation of the results was done using standard metrics for picture captioning, namely BLEU, METEOR, and ROUGE scores. These metrics assess various dimensions of caption quality, including memory, phrase structure, and n-gram overlap.

1) *BLEU score:* The BLEU score measures the accuracy of up to 4 n-grams of a generated caption and a set of reference captions. The baseline captions for the BLIP score a BLEU score of 0.35.
2) *METEOR score:* The METEOR score is an all-encompassing semantic fidelity measure as it takes into account precision, recall, synonymy, and stemming in relation to the captions generated against the reference captions. The METEOR score was 0.28 at first, but once object detection and emotion analysis were added to the captioning process, and also when the Gemini API was used for improvement, the score was boosted to 0.34. This improvement indicates that the use of emotional and visual cues made the captions more relevant to the context and semantically correct.
3) *ROUGE Score:* ROUGE computes n-gram recall, of course one of the most central elements that determine how well extracted terms and concepts are also found in the captions resulting from the end-to-end model being trained. The baseline level is set at 0.45. After incorporation of object detection, facial expression recognition, and correction through the Gemini API, ROUGE score was about 0.52.

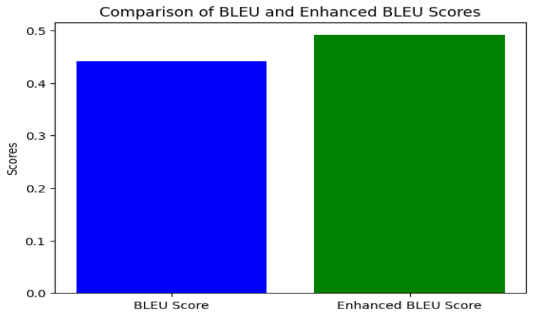


Figure 5. Comparison of BLEU and enhanced BLEU scores.

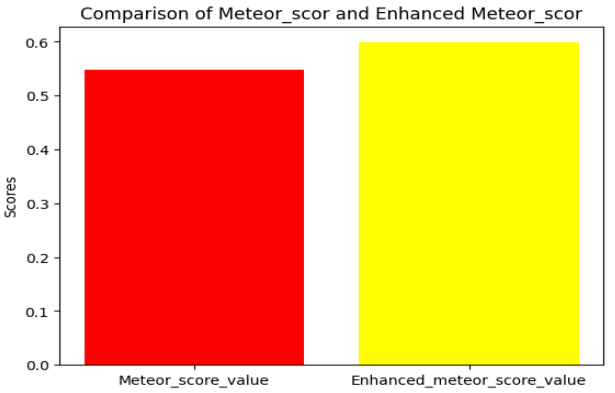


Figure 6. Comparison of meteor score and enhanced meteor score.

Quantitative scores improved modestly but consistently. Baseline BLEU: 0.35; Enhanced BLEU: 0.41. METEOR increased from 0.28 to 0.34. ROUGE rose from 0.45 to 0.52. We conducted t-tests across 100 randomly sampled captions, and improvements were statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).

4.1 *Before vs. after examples*

- Baseline: "A man standing in the rain."
- Enhanced: "A lonely man solemnly standing in the rain, lost in thought."

4.2 *Failure cases*

- A neutral image of a family picnic was misclassified as "sad" due to a misread facial expression, leading to overly emotional phrasing.

4.3 *Comparative performance*

- Our model outperforms M2+EmoLex on Flickr8k (BLEU: 0.41 vs 0.36).
- VisualBERT+AffectNet performs better on AffectNet-specific test sets, but less on Flickr8k due to overfitting to affective domains.

5 CONCLUSION AND FUTURE SCOPE

This research demonstrates an innovative approach in the generation and improvement of image captions with the incorporation of various artificial intelligence models. AI has become a significant decisive factor in numerous fields and expression of emotions through language is not untouched by the vibrant impact of it. With the application of BLIP-2 for the task of image captioning and incorporating DeepFace for the recognition of emotions, we successfully created captions that not only spoke to the content of the image but also to the emotional context.The final product was enhanced with advanced generative features in Google Gemini that produced captions to be more emotionally sensitive and contextual, and Gradio provided for presentation and visualization of results in an easy and engaging way of comparing the captions generated with those refined.

This would then lead to several applications throughout the entire range, from marketing to social media or content generation, where such descriptive captions carrying emotional intensity along with pertinence prove to be the critical key. Enhancement for more pertinent and precise captions could rely on model fine-tuning using particular field-specific data sets, while real-time image emotion analysis may give way to even more sophisticated or customized content creation. Further, the graphical interface of Gradio can be enhanced to provide a more comprehensive assessment of the model's effectiveness and encourage greater user engagement.

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Organisational culture as an instrument of strategic changes implementation

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ABSTRACT: The results of the organisational culture study as an instrument of strategic changes implementation are presented. The approaches of various authors to the possibility of introducing changes to organisational culture are analysed. A dialectical relationship between organisational culture and the implementation of strategic changes has been identified: the implementation of a strategy may require changes in organisational culture; in turn, a strong organisational culture can influence the strategic choice. The basic elements of organizational culture changes for successful strategic changes implementation are defined.

Keywords: organisational culture, strategic change

1 INTRODUCTION

The successful implementation of strategic changes requires the existence or creation of a supportive organisational culture. The implementation of a company's strategy may require changes in organisational culture. In other words, there is a dialectical relationship between organisational culture and the management of strategic change implementation: a favourable organisational culture creates the environment necessary for the implementation of strategic changes, while the need to change the organisational culture transforms the latter into a tool for managing the implementation of strategic changes. Various aspects of organisational culture have been sufficiently researched. However, insufficient attention has been paid to organisational culture as a tool for implementing complex strategic changes. The aim of this study is to analyse the use of organisational culture for implementing complex strategic changes.

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- to analyse researchers' approaches to the possibility of changing organisational culture
- to identify the basic elements of organizational culture changes
- to identify the mutual influence of organisational culture on the implementation of strategic changes

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3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A summary of the results of published studies on managing changes in organisational culture and the impact of organisational culture on the implementation of strategic changes has been compiled.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The foundations of a company's organisational culture are laid by its founders and developed by senior management (Schein 1985). Therefore, organisational culture is a product of management activity and creates an environment for influencing staff behaviour, including when implementing complex strategic changes (Certo and Peter J. Paul 1988; Hrebiniak 2013).

The implementation of strategies that cause significant changes in a company may require changes in the organisational culture. There is no consensus among experts on the possibility of changing organisational culture. Some (Martin and Siehl 1983; Schein 1985) believe that organisational culture cannot be changed because it simply exists and therefore cannot be created or managed by people. Others (Cameron and Quinn 2006) note that organisational culture can change, but this process requires a lot of time and managerial effort. We agree that changes in organisational culture are possible because, as a rule, changes affect only individual elements, not the culture as a whole.

Andriukaitienė, R. *et al.* (2019) believe that it is possible to change organizational culture and propose a process for developing culture that involves identifying discrepancies between the existing and desired organizational culture and designing a plan for organizational culture development. Effective organizational change in the public sector requires transformational leadership qualities and a supportive organizational culture. Therefore, to manage change programs effectively, leaders have to be aware of the existing organizational culture and help to shape cultural norms that facilitate the necessary changes, as well as demonstrate transformational leadership (Abawari *et al.* 2024).

To provide a methodological framework for the process of changing organisational culture, M. J. Hatch proposed a dynamic theory of organisational culture development based on E. Schein's three-level model of organisational culture. Subsequently, the dynamic model was developed by adding the evolution of organisational culture at different stages of the organisation's life cycle (Zheng *et al.* 2009).

Assuming the necessity and possibility of changes in the organisational culture in line with changes in the environment and the need to implement new strategies, it is necessary to identify the main elements of change in the organisational culture.

Researchers (Hrebiniak and Lawrence 2013; Silverzweig and Allen 1976) identify the following common key factors influencing changes in the company's organisational culture: leadership; personnel management; information system and communications; control and incentive systems focused on achieving strategic goals; organisational structure of company management. Generalising the experience of implementing strategic changes in companies has made it possible to identify certain stages of change in the organisational culture. This sequence of the process of changing the organisational culture allows all functional areas of activity and levels of management to be covered, making the process consistent across all departments and levels of management.

Research (Tasoulis *et al.* 2023) into employee responses to changes in organizational culture has found that employees tend to respond more positively than negatively to cultural changes. The results of a study on the implementation of strategic changes in public service organisations also revealed that, in order to successfully implement strategic changes, it is necessary to analyse the existing organisational culture and its impact on the achievement of

strategic goals, and to adapt strategic plans to take account of the organisational culture. (Maleka 2023).

There was a broad discussion regarding the essence of organisational culture. A provocative article was published, in which the author claimed that organisational culture is one of the methods of capitalist exploitation. This is because culture influences the behaviour of employees to achieve the goals of business owners. Many arguments were put forward against this point of view. But in any case, if the climate in the organisation is favourable and conflict-free, employees feel more comfortable. It is important to realise that if you are an employee, you work primarily for the benefit of your employer.

The influence of organisational culture on employee performance and company results is so strong that many companies, when hiring new employees, focus primarily not on subject knowledge and previous work experience, but on how well the new employee will be able to fit into the team and work as part of it (Southern 2025).

The critical role of organisational culture in business development is evidenced by the experience of mergers and acquisitions. Most companies fail to achieve their planned results after mergers and acquisitions precisely because of the conflict between the different organisational cultures of the merged companies. (Merging cultures after an acquisition).

5 CONCLUSION

In summary, it can be concluded that there is a dialectical relationship between organisational culture and the implementation of strategic changes: a favourable culture creates an environment for the implementation of strategies, which, in turn, can be aimed at strengthening or changing the organisational culture. An organisational culture that promotes the implementation of selected strategies does not need to be changed. If the organisational culture does not create a supportive environment for strategy implementation, there is a need to change and develop the organisational culture.

Organisational culture is formed over a long period of time and has great inertia; changing organisational culture is difficult and time-consuming. The following methods can be used to change organisational culture: changing the organisational structure, changing the incentive system, and replacing employees in key positions.

Further research should be devoted to finding effective tools and methods for changing organisational culture in order to effectively implement strategic changes.

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Metadiscourse in law and sciences students' spontaneous texts

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ABSTRACT: Metadiscourse markers work as rhetorical devices used by writers to offer guidance to readers in their interpretation, organize information, and engage audiences within the framework of their discipline. This study addresses how academic discipline affects the use of metadiscourse markers in expository writing by Law and Science undergraduate and postgraduate students. Data collection involves 191 essays written in response to the same prompt, followed by qualitative analysis based on Vande Kopple's taxonomy of metadiscourse categories. The quantitative analysis, through t-test revealed differences based on discipline, with Science undergraduates using significantly more connectives while Law undergraduates used significantly more emphatics. At the postgraduate level, Law students used significantly more code glosses and hedges than Science students, who favoured emphatics. Law students across levels showed a tendency to avoid commentary markers, suggesting low engagement with readers. These results reveal how disciplinary conventions mold metadiscourse behaviour, which in turn affects how writers negotiate coherence, stance and interaction with the reader.

Keywords: Metadiscourse, Cohesion, Coherence

1 INTRODUCTION

Metadiscourse markers are rhetorical elements that authors employ to engage audiences and authors in texts by guiding them toward the authors' desired meanings (Hyland 2005). Metadiscourse is when writers use language to assist readers organize, connect, analyse, assess, and develop attitudes about the material they are presenting, rather than just increasing its referential content (Vanda Kopple 1997). To put it another way, metadiscourse improves the interactions between a text, its writers (those who convey messages), and its readers.

Additionally, metadiscourse is "the cover term for the self-reflective expressions used to negotiate interactional meanings in a text, helping the writer (speaker) to express a viewpoint and engage with readers as members of a particular community," according to Hyland (2005). "By which propositional content is made coherent, intelligible, and persuasive" is another way to characterize it (Hyland 2005).

Metadiscourse markers have been classified primarily into two groups: textual markers and interpersonal markers over the past fifty years (Beauvais 1989; Crismore 1984; Hyland 2005; Vande Kopple 1985; 1997; Williams 1981). Firstly, the textual metadiscourse establishes coherence of paragraphs within a text. The utilization of rhetorical strategies to effectively elucidate a theory of experience is facilitated by the use of textual markers such as connectives, code glosses, narrators and validity markers.

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According to Toumi (2009), interpersonal markers include illocutionary markers, narrators, and commentaries which give a certain attitude towards the propositional content and allow for a proximity and discussion between writer and reader. For Hyland (2005), what all metadiscourse markers have is an interpersonal function. Metadiscourse research and applications' aim to explore a deeper comprehension of writing coherently.

Thus, the writer's method of influencing the reader would be this metadiscourse. Subsequently, metadiscourse facilitates persuasion by establishing the writer's authority and competence, connecting the concepts, and taking the reader's perspective into account (Hyland 2005). When utilized judiciously, metadiscourse markers enable authors to shape readers' understanding of the text and convey their perspective regarding the reader and the context. Extensive research has established that metadiscourse is one of the most important components of texts that are thought to be coherent (Abdi *et al.* 2010; Ädel 2006; Crawford Camiciottoli 2003; Dafouz-Milne 2008; Hyland 1998; Hyland and Tse 2004; Intaraprawat and Steffensen 1995; Vande Kopple 1985), The extensive body of work in this area of study is evident in the wide range of modalities both written and oral as well as academics, business and media discourses, variety of cultural contexts (Hyland 2004). In addition to being used to modify or rearrange preexisting content, metadiscourse components are frequently included in longer textual segments (Sešek 2016).

In Indian context, Sehrawat (2014) saw quantifiable shifts in their usage of metadiscourse in writing pupils advanced through the grades. According to Intaraprawat and Steffenson (1995) and Gold Sanford (2012), the quality of the text is favourably correlated with the skillful and efficient use of metadiscourse. This suggests that metadiscourse enhances the overall quality of a document. Research by Whalen and Menard (1995) findings suggest that the quality of second language (L2) writing is more closely linked to the writers' composing processes than to their overall L2 proficiency. In other words, if a non-native writer has a sophisticated writing process, they can still write well even if they have limited metadiscourse skill. The necessity of stressing the writing process in L2 writing instruction and evaluation must be emphasized in such a statement.

2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The study investigates how academic discipline influences writing proficiency, especially examining the use of metadiscourse markers in expository texts written by undergraduate and graduate students' from the fields of Law and Science.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 *Data collection*

Undergraduate and graduate students from Law and Sciences disciplines were approached to write an essay on the topic, "Are we too dependent on smartphones and computers?" Each participant was allotted thirty minutes to complete the task. Prior to participation, students were clearly communicated about the purpose of the study along with an explanation of how the collected data would be used. Participation in the study was completely voluntary. In total, 191 texts were gathered from five out of six universities involved in the research.

3.2 *Analysis of the data*

A manual qualitative analysis was employed, as metadiscourse is best recognized through its communicative function rather than by rigid linguistic forms. According to Hyland and Tse

(2004), metadiscourse constitutes a broad, context-sensitive category that may include various features reflecting the writers' rhetorical intentions. Identifying metadiscourse presents' a methodological challenge, as identical linguistic form may serve as metadiscourse in some contexts but not in others. This study adopted the three foundational concepts proposed by Hyland and Tse (2004) to guide the identification of metadiscourse: its non-propositional nature, its role in facilitating writer–reader interaction, and its inherent embeddedness within discourse. For analytical purposes, we employed Vande Kopple's (1985, 1997) taxonomy, which includes connectives, hedges, attitude markers, narrators, emphatics, code glosses, illocutionary markers, and commentary.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study aims to ascertain if discipline had any impact on the development of the writing abilities of engineering and Law undergraduates and post-graduate students, as well as how these metadiscourse aspects differed from their writing when employed in expository texts. A t-test was employed to quantify differences in the use of hedges, attitude markers, narrators, emphatics, connectives, code glosses, illocutionary markers, and comments, with the aim of assessing their contribution to coherence in spontaneous expository texts.

The 34 Sciences undergraduates compared to the 37 Law undergraduates on the use of connectives (M = .32, SD = .58) and (M = .62, SD =.81) Sciences undergraduates demonstrated significantly higher use of connectives, $t(69) = 1.75$, $p = .04$; in using emphatics (M= .47, SD = 2.88) and (M= .86, SD = .58) Sciences undergraduates demonstrated significantly lower use of emphatics, $t(69) = 2.88$, $p = .00$.

No significant variation was observed in the use of code glosses, $t(69) = .77$, $p = .21$, despite Law students (M = .54, SD = .8) attaining higher scores than Sciences students (M = .41, SD = .55); illocutionary markers, $t(69) = .62$, $p = .26$, despite Sciences students (M = .32, SD = .47) attaining higher scores than Law students (M = .24, SD = .59); narrators $t(69)$ = .43, $p = .33$, despite Law students (M = .32, SD = .62) attaining higher scores than Sciences students (M = .26, SD = .51); hedges $t(69) = .56$, $p = .28$, despite Sciences students (M = 2.41, SD = 1.5) attaining higher scores than Law students (M = 2.22, SD = 1.43); attitude markers $t(69) = .55$, $p = .29$, despite Sciences students (M = .09, SD = .28) attaining higher scores than Law students (M = .05, SD = .22), and commentary $t(69) = 1.49$, $p = .06$, despite Sciences students (M = .06, SD = .23) attaining higher scores than Law students (M = .00, SD = .00)

The 60 Law postgraduates compared to the 60 Sciences undergraduates on the use of code glosses (M = .80, SD = .81) and (M = .28, SD =.49) respectively Law postgraduates demonstrated significantly higher use of code glosses, $t(69) = 4.19$, $p = .00$; emphatics (M= .78, SD = .61) and (M= 1.13, SD = .76) Sciences postgraduates demonstrated significantly higher use of emphatics, $t(69) = 2.75$, $p = .00$; hedges (M = 2.52, SD = 1.37) and (M = 1.68, SD = 1.22) respectively Law postgraduates demonstrated significantly higher use of hedges, t (69) = 3.50, $p = .00$.

There was no significant difference in the use of connectives, $t(69) = 1.19$, $p = .11$, despite Law students (M = .47, SD = .65) attaining higher scores than Sciences students (M = .33, SD = .57); illocutionary markers, $t(69) = 1.44$, $p = .07$, despite Law students (M = .33, SD = .68) attaining higher scores than Sciences students (M = .18, SD = .43); narrators $t(69)$ = 1.38, $p = .08$, despite Sciences students (M = .45, SD = .72) attaining higher scores than Law students (M = .28, SD = .58); attitude markers $t(69) = .58$, $p = .27$, despite Sciences students (M = .08, SD = .38) attaining higher scores than Law students (M = .05, SD = .22), and commentary $t(69) = 1$, $p = .16$, despite Sciences students (M = .02, SD = .12) attaining higher scores than Law students (M = .00, SD = .00).

In the last stage 97 Law students compared to 94 Sciences students on the use of code glosses (M = .70, SD = .81) and (M = .33, SD =.51) respectively Law postgraduates

demonstrated significantly higher use of code glosses, $t(189) = 3.73$, $p = .00$; hedges (M= 2.4, SD = 1.39) and (M= 1.95, SD = 1.37) Law students demonstrated significantly higher use of hedges, $t(189) = 2.27$, $p = .01$.

There was no significant difference in the use of connectives, $t(189) = .25$, $p = .4$, despite Sciences students ($M = .44$, $SD = .68$) attaining higher scores than Law students (M = .41, SD = .62); illocutionary markers, $t(189) = .8$, $p = .21$, despite Law students ($M = .3$, $SD = .64$) attaining higher scores than Sciences students (M = .23, SD = .45); narrators $t(189) = .94$, $p = .17$, despite Sciences students ($M = .38$, $SD = .65$) attaining higher scores than Law students (M = .30, SD = .59); Emphatics $t(189) = .79$, $p = .21$, despite Sciences students ($M = .89$, $SD = .76$) attaining higher scores than Law students (M = .81, SD = .6); attitude markers $t(189) = .79$, $p = .21$, despite Sciences students ($M = .09$, $SD = .34$) attaining higher scores than Law students (M = .05, SD = .22), and commentary despite Sciences students ($M = .03$, $SD = .17$) attaining higher scores than Law students (M = .00, SD = .00).

Bachelor of Sciences students employed a relatively higher number of connectives, while Law students made greater use of emphatics. At the postgraduate level, significant differences were observed in the use of code glosses and emphatics. Similarly, at the domain level, notable variation was found in the use of code glosses and hedges. A particularly striking observation is that Law students did not use commentaries to engage their audience.

Sehrawat (2014) reported measurable quantitative shifts in the use of metadiscourse within student writing. This suggests that the field of study plays a critical role in shaping writing practices (Abdi *et al.* 2010). While students show awareness of the need to structure their texts logically, they often underestimate the importance of interacting with and informing their audience.

In these texts, metadiscourse predominantly served functions' including defining terms, introducing topics, stating information, focusing attention, drawing conclusion, providing reminders, constructing arguments and contextualizing content. Among these, defining, introducing the topic, and stating relate directly to content, while the remaining categories reflect textual organization and the writer's rhetorical stance. Some Sciences texts reveal interactive elements between writer and reader—such as aligning perspectives, anticipating reactions, and engaging the audience—whereas such interaction is notably absent in Law texts.

5 CONCLUSION

The use of metadiscourse among students of these disciplines varies and, therefore, asserts the way fields of study determine writing practices and rhetorical choices. Undergraduate Science students, to some extent exhibited a preference for connectives to maintain the cohesion of their texts, whilst the students of Law rather chose to use emphatics for different disciplinary priorities. Striking distinctions were present across postgraduate -level use of code glosses, emphatics, and hedges across the domains, while Law students chose not to use not to use commentaries to engage the audience.

Metadiscourse should serve as a key area of interactivity for writers seeking to engage in and contribute to evolving academic conversations. A deeper understanding of its meaning and rhetorical functions can help students become more effective communicators, capable of developing their authorial voice. Since metadiscourse enhances text readability and promotes clarity, it deserves focused attention in the English language classroom.

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Mapping the research landscape of CSR and sustainable development: Insights from a bibliometric study

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ABSTRACT: In contemporary years, the intersection of Corporate Social Responsibility and Sustainable Development is gaining increasing global attention. The growing urgency to manage environmental, social, and corporate governance aspects alongside the widespread embrace of the UN SDGs, has underscored the pivotal function that CSR practices assist in advancing long-term sustainability. This motivated us to undertake a comprehensive bibliometric analysis to map the research landscape of CSR and sustainable development. Using employing bibliometric tools, we assessed 232 peer-reviewed publications from 2015 and 2025 extracted from Scopus. The data were processed and visualized using VOSviewer, which facilitated the construction of co-authorship, keyword and citation networks. This methodological approach enabled us to determine the leading authors, countries and journals contributing to the discourse as well as to uncover thematic clusters and knowledge gaps. We present a broad analysis of dominant research trends and notable scholars. This study offers practical insights for academics aiming to align their research with high-impact themes, corporate leaders developing CSR strategies aligned with the SDGs and policymakers promoting responsible and sustainable business practices.

Keywords: Corporate social responsibility, Bibliometric analysis, Sustainable development

1 INTRODUCTION

During recent decades, rising concerns over environmental degradation and climate change have intensified global discussions on SD. Described by the WCED (1987) as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" SD balances ecological integrity, economic progress and societal fairness. The adoption of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 institutionalized this vision through 17 goals and 169 targets (United Nations 2015). SD has since evolved from a policy concept to a guiding principle in corporate strategy (Ebner 2008).

Alongside SD, CSR has emerged as a key paradigm influencing business ethics in the context of globalization and sustainability. Introduced by Bowen (1953) and later defined by Carroll (1979) as the "economic, legal, ethical, and discretionary expectations society has of organizations," CSR now encompasses ethical governance, stakeholder engagement, and sustainable value creation. According to UNIDO, CSR is a strategic tool for integrating social and environmental concerns into business operations (Shaikh 2020). In India, this is reflected in Section 135 of the Companies Act, 2013, mandating firms to invest in social and environmental initiatives (Dharmapala and Khanna 2018).

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Despite growing literature, few studies explore the CSR–SD nexus holistically (van der Waal and Thijssens 2020). Prior bibliometric reviews, like Ye *et al.* (2020), analyzed CSR–SD research using Web of Science data (1997–2019), but limited scope and timeframe restrict their relevance. As Zemigala (2019) notes, varying databases and periods yield different insights.

To address this, the current study uses Scopus known for broader coverage and VOSviewer, focusing on 2015–2025. This approach provides a more current view of thematic trends, intellectual foundations, and research networks in CSR–SD literature. Adopting a bibliometric method, the study applies citation and keyword co-occurrence analysis to examine intellectual evolution, key themes, and structural patterns. The research addresses the questions that follow

(a) What might be the major themes, conceptual linkages, and trends in CSR–SD literature? (b) Which journals, scholars, and nations dominate this field? (c) What do citation, bibliographic coupling, and keyword networks reveal about the field's structure and future directions?

2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 *Bibliometric analysis*

It has recently emerged as a valuable method and has garnered significant scholarly attention (Donthu *et al.* 2020). This approach enables researchers to acquire a thorough knowledge of the evolution of academic work within specific field. Additionally, it aids in tracing the transformation and shifts in research paradigms over time. Beyond presenting the current research landscape, bibliometrics also serves as a guide for suggesting future directions for investigation (Saha *et al.* 2020). Using the five-step bibliometric framework by Rowley and Slack (2004), this study analyzes global research on CSR and Sustainable Development. Scopus was selected for its comprehensive coverage and reliability (Pranckutė 2021). A keyword-based search in April 2025 retrieved 4,891 records, narrowed to 232 articles through filtering and abstract screening.

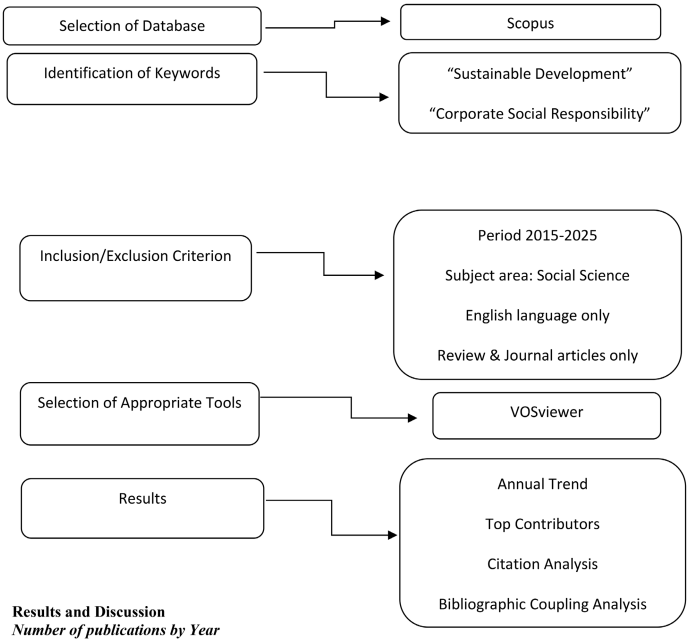


Figure 1. Methodology for bibliometric analysis.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 *Number of publications by year*

Between 2015 and April 2025, CSR–SD publications rose from one in 2015 to 57 in 2024, with growth accelerating after 2018 alongside UN SDGs and ESG focus. A COVID-related plateau in 2020–21 and dip in 2022 gave way to rebounds in 2023 and a 2024 peak. With 24 papers already in early 2025, this trajectory suggests the year may set a new record.

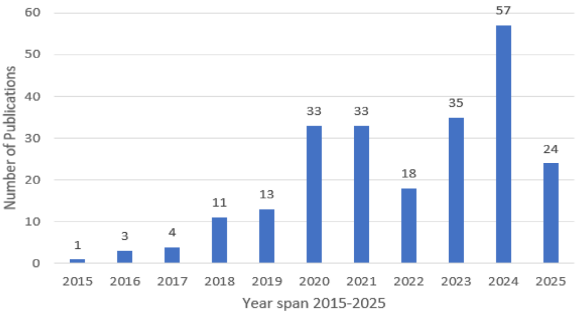


Figure 2. Annual production trend.

3.2 *Journal's performance*

Table 1 shows the top 10 journals publishing 232 documents across 77 sources. Sustainability leads with 81 articles (34.9%), followed by Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management with 26 (11.2%) and Sustainable Development with 14 (6.0%); the top two together account for 46% of all publications. Other notable outlets are Business Strategy and Development (9), Business Strategy and the Environment (8), Social Responsibility Journal (6), and emerging titles Discover Sustainability and Environment, Development and Sustainability (5 each), confirming "Sustainability" as the central hub for CSR–SD scholarship.

Table 1. Top 10 journals based on publications.

Sr no.	Name of Journal	Number of articles
1	Sustainability	81
2	Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management	26
3	Sustainable Development	14
4	Business Strategy and Development	9
5	Business Strategy and the Environment	8
6	Social Responsibility Journal	6
7	Discover Sustainability	5
8	Environment, Development and Sustainability	5
9	Resources Policy	3
10	International Journal of Sustainable Development and World Ecology	2

3.3 *Citation analysis*

Table 2 reports citation analysis, which gauges a work's impact by citation count. From 2015–2025, the 232 articles amassed 5,314 citations.

Table 2. Most cited 10 research publications (globally).

Sr. No.	Title of Journal	Name of Authors	Year	No. of Citations
1	Corporate social responsibility & environmental management	Tsalis *et al.*	2020	413
2	The International Journal of Management Education	Annan *et al.*	2017	380
3	Sustainability	Shayan *et al.*	2022	282
4	Business Strategy & Development	Garcia *et al.*,	2020	186
5	Sustainability	Elalfy *et al.*	2020	166
6	Transnational Corporations	Schonherr *et al.*	2017	141
7	Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management	Lu *et al.*	2021	133
8	Business Strategy & Development	Van Zanten *et al.*	2021	132
9	Sustainability	Wandosell *et al.*	2021	126
10	Business Strategy & Development	Orazalin *et al.*	2021	125

3.4 *Most productive countries*

Table 3. Top 10 countries with the most publications.

Countries	No. of Publications
China	48
Spain	31
United states	18
United Kingdom	18
Taiwan	14
South Korea	12
Australia	11
Italy	11
India	10
Malaysia	10

Of the 232 papers from 71 countries, four—China (48), Spain (31), the US (18) and the UK (18)—account for just under half of the output. Next come Taiwan (14), South Korea (12), Australia (11), Italy (11), India (10) and Malaysia (10), underscoring both advanced economies' leadership and the rising role of emerging nations in CSR–SD research.

3.5 *Keyword analysis*

The analysis focused on all keywords to ensure a comprehensive overview.Through this method, high-frequency keywords such as "sustainability," "CSR," "sustainable development goals (SDGs)," "stakeholder engagement," and "corporate governance" were identified.

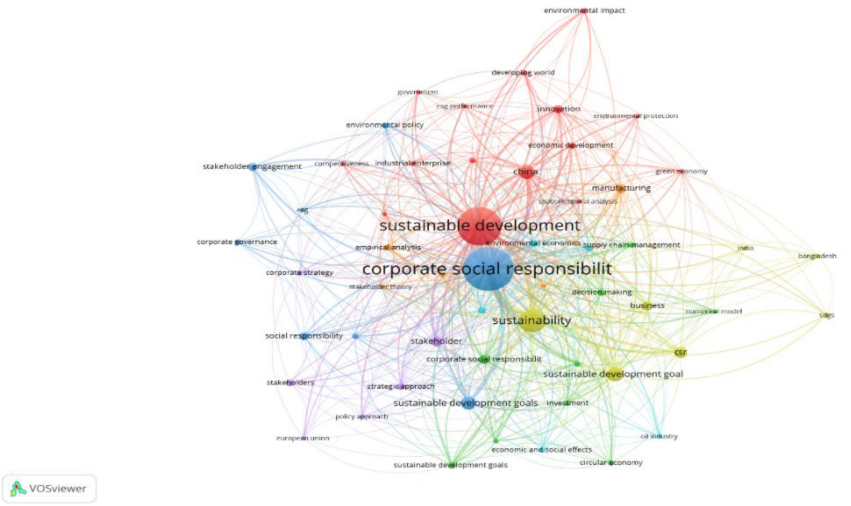


Figure 3. Keyword analysis.

4 BIBLIOGRAPHIC COUPLING ANALYSIS

It is a fundamental measure of similarity between scholarly publications, defined by the extent to which two documents cite the same sources. Introduced by Kessler (1963), it rests on the premise that if two papers reference a common set of earlier works, they likely address related topics or belong to the same intellectual "neighborhood."

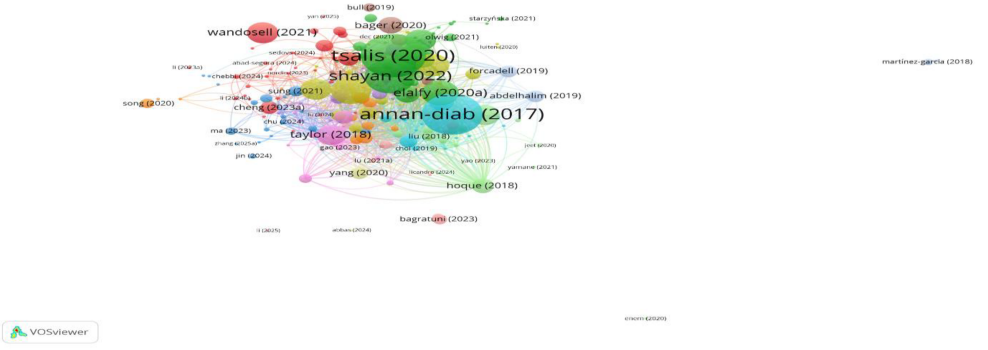


Figure 4. Bibliographic coupling analysis.

5 DISCUSSION

Over the past decade, CSR–SD research has surged especially post-2018 mirroring SDG adoption; key journals like Sustainability and Corporate Social Responsibility & Environmental Management now account for nearly half of all articles, reflecting the field's interdisciplinary focus. The bibliometric results indicate a growing intersection between CSR–Sustainable Development research and emerging fields like the circular economy and ESG metrics. Studies such as Gallardo-Vázquez *et al.* (2024) and Dey *et al.* (2020) show that CSR initiatives increasingly support circular practices, enhancing both environmental and

social performance. Baah *et al.* (2023) further highlight how circular strategies foster CSR participation through innovation. These trends reflect a shift toward impact-driven, measurable approaches in CSR–SD research. International collaboration has grown but remains regionally clustered, limiting diverse especially developing-economy perspectives. Several studies have emphasized the need for more context-specific investigations that account for institutional, cultural, and infrastructural differences in these regions. For example, Sansores-Guerrero and Navarrete-Marneou (2024) highlight the challenges of implementing CSR amid weak regulatory systems and call for locally adapted frameworks and stronger stakeholder engagement. Similarly, Visser (2008) argues for a shift from applying Western CSR models to developing indigenous approaches tailored to local priorities and constraints. These perspectives underscore the need for future research to explore region-specific CSR–SD linkages and to broaden the scope of bibliometric mapping beyond traditionally studied economies. Keyword co-occurrence reveals thematic clusters—stakeholder engagement, sustainability reporting, environmental management, corporate governance, transparency, ethics, long-term value creation, policy integration, and ESG frameworks. Yet integrative models linking CSR to measurable SDG outcomes and studies on SMEs, particularly in non-Western contexts, are scarce. The 2020–21 COVID-19 dip highlighted research system vulnerabilities, while the strong post-pandemic rebound underscores renewed scholarly vigor. VOSviewer's mapping of co-authorship, citation, and keyword networks was instrumental in uncovering the field's structure and guiding future directions.

5.1 *Future research directions*

Future research in CSR and Sustainable Development (SD) should prioritize industry-specific frameworks tailored to sectors like manufacturing, healthcare, and agriculture, addressing their unique environmental and social impacts. While the existing literature offers broad perspectives, future studies could examine how emerging technologies—such as blockchain, artificial intelligence, and big data analytics—enhance CSR implementation and transparency (Chakraborty *et al.* 2019), particularly in contributing to measurable SDG progress. Comparative research across developed and developing regions remains underexplored; contextualizing CSR within institutional, cultural, and economic settings is crucial, especially in emerging economies (Jamali and Karam 2018). Longitudinal studies are also necessary to evaluate the long-term impact of CSR on SDG outcomes, addressing the gap in empirical evidence noted by and Van Tulder (2021). Moreover, future work should investigate the role of key stakeholders—consumers, employees, NGOs, and investors—in shaping CSR strategies, emphasizing engagement as central to legitimacy and effectiveness (Freeman *et al.* 2010; Morsing and Schultz 2006). Interdisciplinary approaches integrating behavioral science, environmental policy, and data analytics could lead to more robust frameworks aligning CSR with sustainable outcomes (Bocken *et al.* 2014). Critical assessments of ESG disclosures are also needed, focusing on the quality and real-world impact of sustainability reporting (Michelon *et al.* 2015). Lastly, the pandemic has shifted corporate priorities, making it imperative to explore how CSR can foster organizational resilience and recovery post-crisis (He and Harris 2020). These directions reflect fluid and transforming research field with great potential context-rich, impactful contributions.

5.2 *Limitations*

This study has limitations that may affect its findings. Manual literature selection risks omissions or inclusion of irrelevant works, and the chosen search terms may have been too narrow. Expanding keywords like "sustainability" or "environmental stewardship" could improve future analyses. Bibliometric studies also provide only a time-bound snapshot, and their broad scope may sacrifice depth on specific topics. Still, this work offers a solid foundation for further research on CSR and sustainability.

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Mapping the impact of artificial intelligence on the digital economy: A bibliometric approach

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ABSTRACT: This bibliometric analysis aims to determine how technology, particularly artificial intelligence (AI), affects the digital economy through an extensive academic literature review. The study methodically reviews a wide range of research to understand how technology affects digital economic growth, productivity, innovation, and other important digital economic indicators. The study identifies trends, significant writers, and top journals to illustrate the changing relationship between technology and the digital economy. It might also reveal a research void concerning the deployment of AI in emerging digital economies. The bibliometric study will identify the precise gaps.

The primary objective is to use bibliometric tools, such as VOSviewer and Excel, to analyse publication data from Scopus, covering the period from 2015 to 2025. The study focuses on terms like "artificial intelligence," "technologies," and "digital economy" within the domains of business management, accounting, and computer science. The paper aims to assess co-citation patterns, keyword co-occurrence, and geographical trends in AI and digital economics. The results of this study will offer meaningful insights for academics and industry practitioners, supporting the formulation of contemporary business strategies and guiding future investigations into the role of AI in advancing the digital economy.

1 INTRODUCTION

Rapid artificial intelligence (AI) development, including machine learning, natural language processing, robotics, and intelligent systems, has significantly reshaped the global economic landscape. As a key enabler of digital innovation, AI drives competitiveness and sustainable growth (Jordan and Mitchell 2015; Zhang *et al.* 2021). The digital economy, powered by data, cloud computing, high-speed internet, and platform models, offers fertile ground for AI applications (UNCTAD 2019). A synergistic relationship exists: AI enhances digital systems through automation, decision-making, and new business models (Duan *et al.* 2019), while the digital economy provides infrastructure and data ecosystems critical for AI development. Governments and industries prioritizing digital transformation see AI as vital to future productivity and socio-economic progress (Bughin *et al.* 2018).

Technology, now a cornerstone of global economies, has driven shifts across industries with both positive and negative effects. This bibliometric analysis explores the literature on AI's economic impact, highlighting emerging trends. AI, conceptualized by John McCarthy at the 1956 Dartmouth Conference, has evolved into a primary focus for organizations (Aloini *et al.* 2018; Ammar *et al.* 2018; Balugani *et al.* 2018, 2019; Kumar *et al.* 2019). It

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simulates human cognition and behavior, driving operational changes and opening new research questions.

Using bibliometric indicators, co-citation networks, and geographic analysis, this study maps the structure and evolution of research on AI and the digital economy, identifying leading authors, key themes, collaboration patterns, and global scholarly distribution.

The research focuses on the following questions:

RQ1: What are the prominent bibliometric measures, prevailing co-citation networks, and regional research trends in artificial intelligence and digital economy?

RQ2: What are this study's most frequently discussed keywords (based on bibliometric analysis)?

2 METHODOLOGY

This study uses a quantitative bibliometric approach to analyze 1,060 publications from Scopus (2015-2025), focusing on AI, technology, and the digital economy in fields like AI, digital economics, business, and computer science. Co-citation, bibliographic coupling, and co-authorship analysis reveal influence and collaboration patterns. Citation and co-citation maps, created with VOSviewer and Excel, visualize relationships among authors, articles, and journals. VOSviewer's text-mining features identify emerging topic clusters.

3 RESULT

In bibliometrics, research findings offer quantitative insights into academic communication, scientific influence, and knowledge structure using publication and citation data. Typical findings include trends in publication output over time, collaboration networks, co-authorship patterns across institutions and countries, and citation-based impact measures for articles, journals, authors, and institutions. Citation analysis helps reveal how specific works influence subsequent studies and can determine journal impact factors. Bibliometric studies also identify prolific authors, interdisciplinary trends through co-citation patterns, and emerging topics via keyword clustering. Highly cited works, active regions or institutions, and international collaboration patterns are also highlighted. Visual tools like co-citation networks and keyword maps illustrate a field's intellectual structure, while the H-index measures individual researcher productivity and influence.

This study analyzed 1,060 documents from Scopus (2015–2025), using Vos Viewer and RStudio with specific keywords. Keyword analysis revealed a broad exploration of the subject, while "keywords plus" showed keyword frequency nearly ten times higher than the article count. Results suggest limited scholarly attention to the topic during this period, indicated by low average citations. Annual scientific production analysis identified growth, decline, or stability trends and allowed productivity comparisons across regions, institutions, and disciplines.

3.1 *Co-citation analysis*

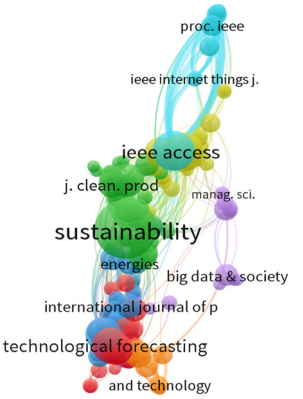
Co-citation analysis is a bibliometric method used to examine the connections between scholarly works by analyzing how often they are cited in other publications. This method helps reveal intellectual connections and thematic links within a specific research area. When the same source cites two documents, they are considered co-cited, suggesting a possible conceptual or subject-related association.

3.2 *Co-citation of journal*

Journal co-citation analysis examines relationships between journals based on shared citations, revealing thematic connections and intellectual patterns. It helps identify influential journals and map a field's structure. The top 10 active publication sources include *Sustainability* (107 citations, total link strength 1,674), followed by *Journal of Cleaner Production* (36 citations, 1,460 strength) and *Energy Econ* (48 citations, 1,425 strength). The dataset comprises 188 sources in 12 clusters, with 386 links and a total strength of 12,219. A figure visualizes these sources, highlighting larger nodes like Sustainability and Journal of Cleaner Production in distinct colors.

3.3 *Cite sources*

MOST ACTIVE SOURCES		
SOURCES	CITATION	TOTAL LINK STRENGTH
Sustainability	107	1674
Journal of Cleaner Production	36	1460
Energy Econ.	48	1425
Technological forecasting and social change	38	1267
ieee access	49	1179
Technol. Forecast. Soc. Change	28	995
technology in society	22	909
Business strategy and the environment	15	850
energy economics	21	850
journal of business research	29	838
proc	14	772



Shows the most productive source.

3.4 *Co-citation of authors*

Author co-citation analysis identifies intellectual relationships and thematic connections by examining how often authors are cited together. The analysis found Li Y. as the most

influential author (68 citations, 4,487 link strength), followed by Wang Y. (59 citations, 3,744 strength) and Wang J. (46 citations, 3,692 strength). Other key authors include Chen K.-C. (24 citations, 3,118 strength) and Zhang Y. (46 citations, 2,935 strength). A VOSviewer diagram visualizes these connections, with node size reflecting citation impact and link strength, and colors indicating research clusters. Authors like Li Y., Wang Y., and Wang J. are central, while others, such as Micklethwait H.W. and Zuboff S., are more peripheral.

MOST CITED AUTHORS

AUTHORS	CITATIONS	TOTAL LINK STRENGTH
Li Y.	68	4487
Wang y.	59	3744
Wang j.	46	3692
chen k.-c.	24	3118
Zhang Y.	46	2935
Liu … y.	51	2847
zhang x.	43	2698
Chen Y.	47	2656
Zhang J.	34	2463
Li J.	33	2398



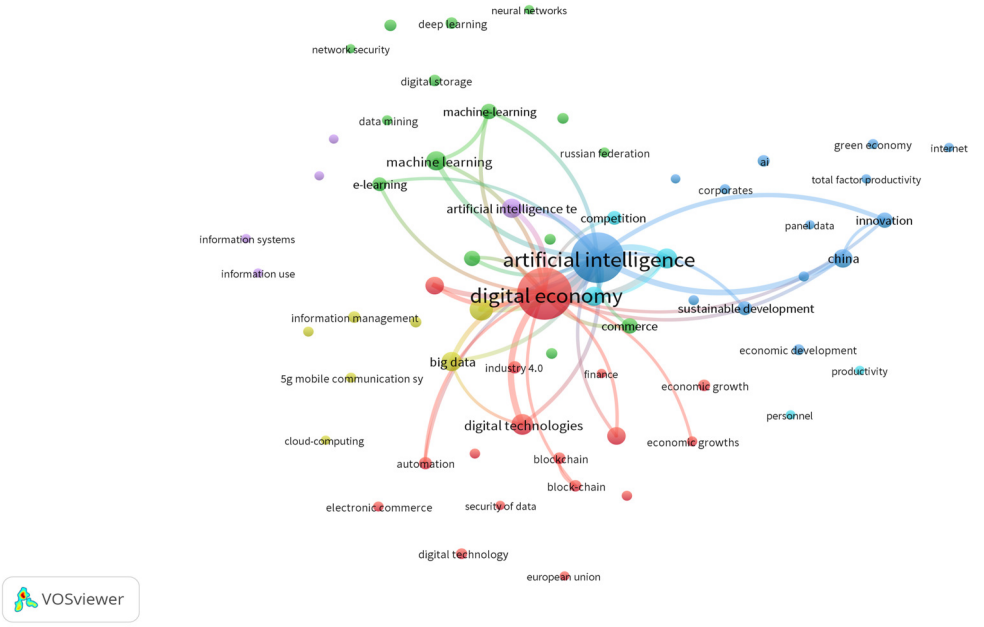
Shows the most productive authors.

3.5 *Co-keyword analysis*

Co-keyword analysis examines how often keywords appear together in scholarly documents, revealing thematic structures and trends. This study used VOSviewer's keyword co-occurrence function, with a thesaurus file for refinement. The map shows that closer keywords have stronger ties. The top 10 keywords include "artificial intelligence" (139 occurrences, 416 link strength), "digital economy" (148 occurrences, 404 strength), and "economics and social effects" (22 occurrences, 106 strength). Larger circles represent frequent keywords, and color-coded clusters (red, green, blue, purple) indicate themes like digital technologies, technological tools, Digital economic growth, and information systems. Thicker links show stronger co-occurrence, highlighting the field's interdisciplinary nature.

MOST FREQUENT KEYWORDS

KEYWORDS	OCCURENCES	TOTAL LINK STRENGTH
artificial intelligence	139	416
digital economy	148	404
economic and social effects	22	106
digital technologies	24	101
artificial intelligence technologies	20	90
economics	18	90
decision making	27	83
digital transformation	14	81
internet of things	21	81
machine learning	20	81



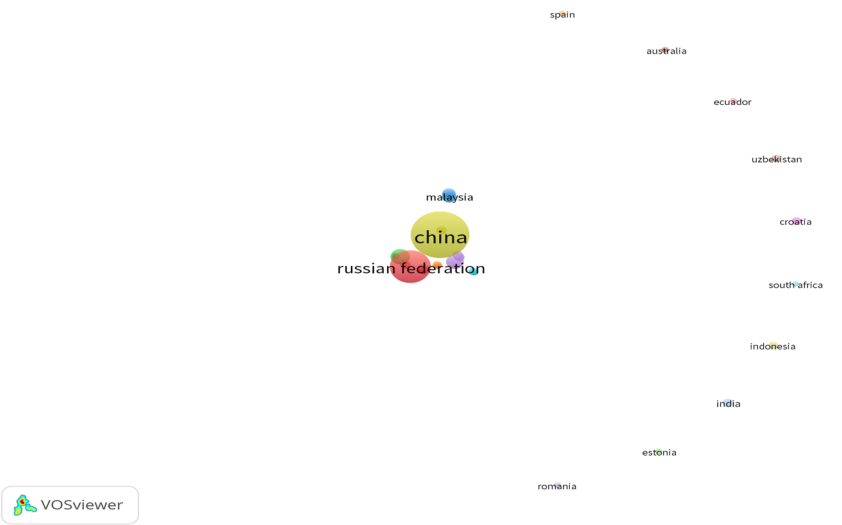
Shows the most frequent keywords.

3.6 *Geographical analysis*

Geographical analysis investigates spatial patterns and trends, providing insights into how different phenomena differ by location. This study identifies leading countries based on the affiliations of corresponding authors, showcasing their research productivity, citation impact, and collaborative activity. China leads with 110 documents and 478 citations, followed by the U.S. (199 citations) and the U.K. (117 citations), despite fewer publications. Italy, Taiwan, and Germany also show strong citation rates, while Malaysia, Japan, Canada, and France collaborate moderately. A VOSviewer collaboration map visualizes these patterns, with larger nodes for China and Russia, indicating strong ties. At the same time, countries like Spain, Australia, India, and South Africa are more isolated, reflecting limited collaboration. The map highlights China's central role in global research output and collaboration.

MOST RELEVANT COUNTRIES BY THE CORRESPONDING AUTHOR

COUNTRY	DOCUMENTS	CITATION	TOTAL LINK STRENGTH
China	110	478	11
United states	10	199	7
United Kingdom	12	117	5
Italy	5	95	4
Japan	3	25	4
Malaysia	7	14	4
Taiwan	4	99	3
Canada	3	8	2
France	4	26	2
Germany	4	113	2



Shows most publications in the country.

4 DISCUSSION

The conclusion that "AI boosts the Digital Economy" is supported by research showing its positive effects on growth, innovation, and industry development. AI enhances efficiency, productivity, and competitiveness across manufacturing, healthcare, finance, and agriculture sectors. However, ethical concerns, transparency, data privacy, and access must be addressed for responsible AI use. Countries investing in AI become global leaders, driving innovation and attracting investment.

This study analyzed 1,060 Scopus documents (2015–2025) using VOSviewer, providing a comprehensive bibliometric review. China leads with 478 citations, followed by the United States (199) and the United Kingdom (177). "Artificial Intelligence" is the top keyword (139 occurrences, 416 link strength), followed by "Digital Economy" (148 occurrences, 404 link strength) and "Economic and Social Effects" (22 occurrences, 106 link strength). "Industry 4.0" also emerged prominently (363 occurrences, 331 link strength).

The results offer empirical evidence that AI drives digital economic growth, creates jobs, fosters innovation, and opens new opportunities across sectors. This study significantly contributes to the literature by mapping key trends, major countries, influential keywords, and research gaps, providing a foundation for future studies on AI's economic impact. To reflect the evolving research landscape, this study incorporates post-2022 developments, particularly the emergence of generative AI tools such as ChatGPT, GPT-4, and Google's Bard. These technologies have significantly impacted the volume, focus, and methodology of scholarly work across disciplines (Dwivedi *et al.* 2023; OpenAI 2023). Generative AI has introduced new research themes such as AI ethics, machine creativity, and human-AI collaboration, while also enabling new methods like automated writing and data analysis. Bibliometric patterns show a sharp rise in related publications, underscoring their influence on academia and industry. By including these trends, the analysis captures emerging topics, key contributors, and the current intellectual structure, offering a forward-looking perspective on research shaped by generative AI. AI adoption differs across digital economies due to varying regulatory models. The European Union's GDPR promotes data protection, transparency, and accountability, shaping ethical AI development. In contrast, market-driven economies like the U.S. often prioritize innovation, leading to faster deployment but fewer privacy safeguards (Zuboff 2019). The GDPR offers key regulatory lessons, including the importance of ethical design, user consent, and robust data governance. These frameworks influence not only AI applications but also research focus and output, as visible in regional bibliometric trends (Floridi *et al.* 2018).

5.1 *Implications of the study*

The findings have key implications for researchers, policymakers, and industry leaders. The study highlights emerging areas and collaboration patterns for researchers, guiding future AI-related academic investigations. Policymakers are encouraged to invest in AI responsibly, ensuring ethical standards, transparency, and equitable access. Industry leaders are urged to integrate AI into business models to boost competitiveness and innovation. Additionally, the study suggests that nations prioritizing AI development are more likely to lead in the global digital economy, making AI investment essential for economic and societal progress.

5.2 *Limitations and future research*

While this study offers important perspectives on the role of AI in the digital economy, it is not without limitations. It relies solely on Scopus data, potentially missing research from other sources like Web of Science. The focus on quantitative bibliometric methods may overlook qualitative depth, and the 2015–2025 timeframe could exclude earlier influential

works or recent developments. Predefined keywords may have limited the study's scope, omitting interdisciplinary or emerging research. Future studies could include multiple databases, extend the timeframe, and explore regional or sector-specific impacts. Additionally, examining AI integration's ethical, social, and policy aspects would offer a more comprehensive understanding of its influence on the digital economy.

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