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Traversing the Contours of Rationality and Embodied Consciousness in Amruta Patil's *Aranyaka*

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ABSTRACT

Graphic narratives, often considered under the purview of popular culture, demand serious consideration due to their multi-modal engagement with the visual-verbal dynamics of meaning-making. The semiotics of the graphic medium, which includes the lines, colours, panels, and gutters along with the verbal text, elevates its potential to communicate deeply complex and pertinent issues that are often difficult to articulate through text alone. Amrutha Patil's *Aranyaka* demonstrates the ability of this contemporary and popular medium to represent the phenomenological and embodied perception of the world. This is delineated through three powerful female figures: Katyayani (The Large), Maitreyi (The Fig), and Gargi (The Weaver), whose phenomenological awareness is contrasted with the rational perception of Yajnavalkya. Each one of them depicts an interconnected yet distinct embodied way of perceiving the world. Through a close reading of the three female characters, the paper argues that phenomenological perception is not a contrast to rational thought but a complementary and relational way of awareness of the self and the world. The paper further argues that the graphic medium, with its visual-verbal interplay, is integral to communicating the shift from abstract reasoning to embodied consciousness as an alternate way of apprehending the world.

Keywords: Embodiment, Perception, Phenomenology, Rationality, Ecofeminism

Introduction

The post-millennial years have seen a paradigm shift in visual narrative techniques. From the linear storytelling method, clear-line and colourful drawings that characterized the readerly texts such as *Amar Chitra Katha*, graphic narratives have evolved today as a multi-modal writerly medium that invites the reader's gaze to ponder over the layers of signification thrown open to discourse and deliberations. As observed by E. Dawson Varughese, visuality is in fact a dominant way of 'knowing' in the post-millennial world, particularly in the context of Indian visual culture (15). From billboards, serials, reels, stories to blockbuster films, seeing has become an intrinsic way of understanding and perceiving the world. However, unlike the photorealistic images seen in the mentioned artistic mediums, graphic narratives are wielded and controlled by skillful artists who can direct the reader's attention to the most essential and intriguing aspects of the work. As remarked by Hillary Chute, the visual-verbal images in graphic narratives are often nonsynchronous and require the back and forth of reading and looking at images to capture the complexity of the text (452).

Traditionally considered under the purview of popular culture, its ability to engage with serious experimental styles and its commitment to complex critical issues such as sexuality, class, gender, and environmental justice makes it an important vehicle of political intervention. The confluence of graphic narratives and ecocriticism has had profound implications for

narratives in the ecological domain. The sensory diegetic (depicting physical reality of the story world), non-sensory diegetic (outside the story world), and hermeneutic images (authorial commentary that influences interpretation) offer an insightful and deep commentary on ecological concerns that cannot be captured by the visual or verbal independently.

Amrutha Patil is India's first female graphic novelist. The author of *Kari* (2008) and the Mahabharata-based *Parva* duology –*Adi Parva* (2012) and *Sauptik* (2016), *Aranyaka* (2019) is the author's perception of human fear and hunger. The work was written in collaboration with Devdutt Pattanaik, a highly acclaimed mythologist who served as her script consultant. An author of around fifty books, his introspective intervention connecting mythology to modern times has found its way into many leading newspaper columns. 'Aranyaka' in Vedic philosophy stands for specific texts that bridge the Brahmanas (ritualistic texts) with the Upanishads (philosophical texts). Serving as a transitional text, Aranyaka connects the outer rituals with the metaphysical and reflective contemplation on the meanings behind the ritual performance. Aranyaka, etymologically meaning 'of the forest', was a Vedic text composed before the Upanishads (philosophical expositions) and contained nuggets of wisdom on the forest as a site of self-reflection and transformation. As noted by Pattanaik, "Vedic thought is essentially about what it means to be cultured and civilized: the journey from hunger and fear, through domestication, towards empathy" (161). Although broadly based on the Aranyaka tradition, the graphic narrative draws heavily on the 'Brihadaranyaka Upanishad' for its central characters and concepts. The graphic narrative thus turns out to be an exploration of the forest within and without the characters. Although the graphic narrative is based on the Vedic text, it is, in fact, an imaginative and graphic recreation of the text to ponder on issues such as gender equality, embodied knowledge, and eco-consciousness.

Existing studies on *Aranyaka* have explored the text from ecofeminist, eco-spiritual, and ecopedagogical perspectives, underscoring the deep and interrelated connections between the biotic and abiotic forms on earth. In "Towards a Graphic Ecopedagogy: An Ecofeminist Reading of Amruta Patil and Devdutt Pattanaik's *Aranyaka*" Malieckal and Nair interpret the text through the ecofeminist lens and emphasize the ecopedagogical potential of the narrative for the protection of nature and humankind (73–74). In "Whispers of the Forest: Reimagining the Sacred in *Aranyaka* by Amruta Patil and Devdutt Pattanaik," Khare brings to the forefront the voices of the marginalized and substantiates their role as carriers of ecological wisdom (120–26). In "Ecopoetics and Aranya in the Graphic Novel *Aranyaka: Book of the Forest*," Sharma and Rath attempt a critical analysis of the narrative and delineate how the complex interplay of the visual and the verbal reveals the concealed wisdom of the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* (1–2). Sohini Ghosh's "The Art of Revering in Amruta Patil and Devdutt Pattanaik's *Aranyaka: Book of the Forest*: An Analysis" discusses the intricate relationship between cosmos and the individual in the twenty-first century (27). Tanushree Ghosh, in her paper "An Eco-spiritual Reading of Amrutha Patil and Devdutt Pattanaik's *Aranyaka: Book of the Forest*" brings into dialogue the Indian understanding of nature with the theoretical perspectives of eco criticism (131). Sohini Naiya and Smriti Singh's "Deciphering the Forest: A Journey from an Intellectual Concern to a Lived Experience" explores the spatial dynamics and organizational dynamics inherent in the narrative (Naiya and Singh). While the studies mentioned have made significant contributions to the corpus of studies from ecofeminist, eco-spiritual, and ecopedagogical perspectives, the potential of the graphic narrative as a medium to understand consciousness as an embodied, sensory, and ecological process in self-realization has been insufficiently explored. Through the subtle visual-verbal dynamics, the paper argues that consciousness is always embodied and can foster ecological awareness and finally lead to self-realization.

The interdisciplinary theoretical framework for the study is provided by phenomenology, ecofeminism, and graphic narrative theory. Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) renders the central theoretical framework that consciousness is never pure but relies on embodied experiences to comprehend the outside world. Val Plumwood's ecofeminist critique in *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (1993) forms the theoretical background for critiquing the dualist oppositions inherent in the world and calls for a relational mode of engagement with nature. Hillary Chute's *Graphic Women* (2010) and

Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics* (1993) are also employed to decipher the potentiality of the graphic narrative medium to deliberate and convey complex ideas that are beyond the scope of either the visual or the verbal platforms.

The study aims to understand how Aranyaka subverts the dualistic oppositions inherent in the narrative; it analyses how the body is never a passive container of emotions and memory but an active site of meaning production; it explores how consciousness depends on embodied perception for actively negotiating with the world; and finally, the study investigates the suitability of the graphic medium to communicate this philosophical reinterpretation. The study adopts a qualitative and interpretative analysis of the primary text, focusing on close reading and the formal analysis of panels, gutters, and visuals in conveying the inherent and sometimes contradictory meanings.

The Anthropocene, which replaced the Holocene, witnessed Man as the centrifugal force that dominated and controlled the biotic and abiotic systems in the ecosphere. Ecocriticism, which emerged in the late 20th century with its triple allegiance towards an understanding, analysis, and political intervention for a sustainable world, poses a serious challenge to the Anthropocene era. The pivotal and groundbreaking works in this field were anchored by Lawrence Buell's The *Environmental Imagination* (1995) and Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm's *The Ecocritical Reader* (1996).

Ecofeminism, which is a corollary of Ecocriticism, further became a powerful force that upheld the nature/culture binaries put forward by the enlightenment ideals. Nature became a signifying presence, often associated with femininity, passion, body, primitivity and irrationality. This continued to operate to a disadvantage to both nature and women. Highlighting the devastating violence on women and nature by men, it was Francoise d' Eaubonne who coined the term ‘ecofeminism’ in 1974. The stereotypical depiction of women as earth mother or targets of patriarchal rage is symptomatic of a society that alienates nature from culture, rationality, intelligence and agency. Ecofeminism rallies for an alternative culture that can transcend the nature/culture binaries to effectively create an ecosystem that is nonhierarchical, inclusive and grounded on ecological justice, thus effectively dismantling the patriarchal structure that has dominated both women and nature for centuries.

The disembodied, intellectual knowledge of Yajnavalkya is dismantled by Amrutha Patil by introducing three powerful female characters – Katyayani (The Large), Maitreyi (The Fig) and Gargi (The Weaver). Each of the women characters represents a distinct epistemological stance and serves as ambassadors of ecological justice and gender inclusivity. Resisting the linear mode of narration, the narrative calls for intuition, interconnectedness, embodiment and plurality as ways of perceiving and understanding the world. The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad presents the conversation between Yajnavalkya and Maitreyi, where Yajnavalkya teaches the latter that self (Atman) itself is Brahman and this realization alone can affirm immortality (204). Extending this philosophy, Patil and Pattnaik in *Aranyaka* delineate how consciousness is always embodied and through verbal and visual interplay proposes that embodied perception can be the medium for self-realization.

Embodied Consciousness: Katyayani

The dualistic concepts such as reason/emotion, mind/body, culture/nature and man/woman that characterized the Enlightenment way of knowledge which prompted the ecofeminist scholars to challenge the binaries are discernible in the early pages of the narrative. Katyayani is shown as an outlaw who resists the hierarchical system of the village. She represents her village as a hive that is suitable for those who obeyed without question. The day she challenged the patriarchal authority by eating the food meant for gods, she was expelled from the village. 'This is a stone! It has no mouth! I'm alive! I'm hungry! Who needs food more?' (14). The transformation of Katyayani, the Large into diminutive form overridden by the countless patriarchal figures happens within a single panel page. The objectification of women and the subjectification of male authority happen simultaneously. As Val Plumwood notes, reason was considered the distinguishing quality that elevated humans from non-human world (15). By considering women closer to nature, she was parallelly marked irrational, embodied and polluted. Katyayani's expulsion from the village does not only reflect social ostracization, but also the

very operation of dualistic logic that creates hierarchies on the basis of binary oppositions.

Exile becomes inevitable for her and she is sent to the dark terrains of the forest to occupy a liminal space. For the young Katyayani, this becomes a rite of passage—an entry into the dark terrains of knowledge where the dichotomy of mind/body gets blurred and the body's engagement with the physical world becomes a rich source of embodied experience.

Katyayani's knowledge is visceral; it is entrenched in the body. Through the art of cooking and survival she learns the ways of nature. As Katyayani acknowledges 'Aranya doesn't mind you alive, it doesn't mind you dead. In fact, it doesn't care one way or the other. Here, it wasn't Katyayani the Large, but predator, prey, ally, rival, mate' (22). She becomes the Earth Mother, literally and symbolically feeding Yajnavalkya, the man in a termite mould who later becomes her life partner. Yajnavalkya symbolizes the mind, an intellectual enquiry into the world through renunciation and asceticism while Katyayani represents a more embodied knowledge, knowing nature through tactile experience, flowing and merging with other life forms. While Y tried to feed the minds of his disciples with philosophical discussions, Katyayani's irresistible aroma from the kitchen reminded them that it is impossible to philosophise over a hungry belly. As argued by Merleau-Ponty, perception is never pure, it is structured and contextualized from the very onset (4). As Patil demonstrates in the text, the kitchen becomes an epistemological space where the alchemy of textures, flavours and temperature acted as sources of rich, sensorial experience. Katyayani overturns the strict hierarchical oppositions and channels her embodied experience for understanding the rhythm of the natural world. Ecological wisdom is thus gained not through detached contemplation but through lived, bodily engagement with the natural world.

The symbolic order of human settlement once again finds its parallel in Aranyaka through the faceless figures of Y and his disciples. Here Katyayani's embodied knowledge takes on a visual representation—Katyayani merging and becoming one with nature. Her symbolic birth in the womb of aranya makes her a true aranyaka. Katyayani's transformative journey through the forest and the resultant kinesthetic and proprioceptive awareness brings in a renewed relationship between consciousness and the world around her. As Merleau-Ponty suggests, attention is never passive but has the power to restructure the entire perceptual field (33). Katyayani establishes a coherent, perceptual space in the forest and this is visualized by Patil by dissolving her and making her one with branches, trunks and elements of nature. The colour palette in these pages takes on rich earthly, green, mauve and ochre shades to suggest the organic integration of life in nature. This interrelatedness of all life forms is pointed out by Gary Snyder who affirms, "We are living so as to speak, in the midst of a great potluck feast to which we are all invited guests, and we also are eventually the meal" (34). The visual space of the narrative is indicative not just of the protagonist's ecological consciousness but is also indicative of the lived, embodied perception of the world around her.



Fig. 1. Katyayani dissolves into the forest, her form merging with branches and undergrowth. (Patil and Pattanaik 45)

In Aranyaka, nature is projected as a sentient being and not as a passive stage drop for the events to unfold. Nature turns out to be a compelling force that orients the psychological and philosophical perspectives of Katyayani, Maitreyi and Gargi against the disembodied and rational understanding of Yajnavalkya. It provides an ecological perspective to suggest how geography becomes a determining factor in not just sustenance or livelihood but also in the emotional and poetic expressions.

Katyayani's philosophical reflections and deliberations are tactile and embodied; emerging from her close association with nature. Her proximity to blood, decay and food make her a polluted figure in the Brahmanical

discourse. From her liminal space, she challenges the dominant ways of knowledge by proving that knowledge can be sensual, visceral and tactile. Even in her role as the wife of Yajnavalkya and the cook of the large household, she asserts her agency. She says, 'To be unfettered and voluntarily feed others; this is love, not servitude' (58). Food is not just a commodity in the text, on the other hand it is an initiation into the abundant source of esoteric knowledge. The aromatic fragrance of roots in sizzling ghee or the essence of the turmeric leaf in the flesh of the river fish provided a visceral understanding of the cycles of nature or the rhythm of interconnectedness. Katyayani emphasizes 'Food demands violence, but violence is terrifying. Every part of a felled tree and culled animal satisfies a need' (83). Katyayani, through her silent communication with nature, embodies embeddedness in its purest sense. The very 'Nature' that was considered impure, polluted and inferior by the patriarchal order was transformed into a source of wisdom and knowledge by the female figure. The reversal echoes Plumwood's idea that overcoming dualism requires rejecting instrumentalization, recognizing others as independent beings with their own values and identity (143).

Relational Knowledge: Gargi

Unlike Yajnavalkya, who tries to transcend the natural world in his search for the infinite, his disciple Gargi yearns for a dynamic and fluid understanding of the cosmos. The weaver metaphor succinctly describes Gargi; the warp of the loom with its rigid, conservative and traditional ways of knowledge is contrasted with the weft that suggests the back-and-forth movement of questioning and introspection. Weaver thus becomes an interplay of fixed truth with dialogues, deliberations and debates. Like the forest without boundaries her search for infinitude is also non-linear and rhythmic. She is concerned with the knots and the layers of meaning it embodies, seeking the multitude of significations possible in each and every knot. Unlike other seekers of truth who shunned kitchen work, Gargi considered the place as a source of wisdom without either glorifying or shunning it. 'Her favourite kitchen implement was a grinding stone on which resistance was broken, truth extracted from grain, seed and fibre' (108).

Gargi reciprocates the lessons she learned from Katyayani's kitchen with a vibrant purple saree, a colour produced by mixing dry cochineal beetles with alum and lime. The transformative power of nature, dried beetles turning into a rich explosion of colour further underscores the interconnectedness of all life. Nature forms the edifice which sustains life and all its transactions. The muddy coloured dress of Katyayani is replaced with this beautiful grape-stained saree spun by Gargi. The mundane kitchen space here becomes a place of higher consciousness, wisdom and spiritual depth through its association with Katyayani and the connotations of purple.

The court of Janaka, which hosted the philosophical debates among the best minds display the gendered dynamics of knowledge prevalent in the society. Yajnavalkya who is revered as the preeminent intellectual in philosophical debate is here challenged by his own disciple, Gargi. The court turns out to be a battlefield where the best of minds engages in sharp, precise and unending intellectual debate. The linearity of Yajnavalkya's arguments was countered with the back-and-forth questions of Gargi who considered his answers as just filaments that needed further introspection and clarity. Her arguments are not just a challenge to Yajnavalkya but also against the rigid dominance of the phallocentric language of dominance and finality. Her modes of inquiry which are metaphorical and open-ended reflect the need to foreground ‘women's language’ by challenging the logocentrism of the male language. Once again, the need for blurring the boundaries between man/woman and mind/body is underscored through Katyayani. She says, “They could have fed each other instead of behaving like predators” (149).

In the initial phase of Gargi's association with Yajnavalkya, she was a seeker of metaphysical truth and far removed from the sensory, visceral or embodied form of knowledge. She was more focused on hair-splitting arguments that centered around the complex ideas of warp to attain a deeper understanding of the cosmos. Katyayani's kitchen acted as a point of departure and transformation in Gargi. She learned to get attuned to a new way of learning—through touch, smell and through the alchemy of ingredients in the kitchen. She turns out to be a philosophical inquirer in the truest sense, weaving the warp of laws and abstraction with intuitive, cyclical and rhythmic weft

gained by her ecological embeddedness in nature. Gargi's transformation from a rational seeker to a more ecologically tuned contemplator exemplifies how felt perception can have profound and everlasting effect on the thoughts and ways of living of the individual.

The colour progression in the narrative is a further indicator of the transformation to a deep, embodied consciousness in the female characters. From Patil's use of the earthly green, brown and ochre shade to indicate the embodied consciousness in Katyayani, the narrative takes on rich mauve and purple shades in the gift-giving scene of Gargi. The purple-stained saree spun by Gargi out of the dry cochineal beetles along with alum and lime is suggestive of the shared epistemological stance between the two female characters. Gargi's relational understanding of the world is at once philosophical and also an extension of Katyayani's lived experience of the body and this is effectively communicated through the visual register. As Hillary Chute has rightly remarked, graphic narratives are “cognitive mappings” as the combination of words and images help to decipher complex personal, historical and social realities that otherwise remain inexplicable (27).

Reflective Embodiment: Maitreyi

Unlike Katyayani, who represents the bodily understanding of the world or Gargi who interlaces rigid truths with metaphorical understanding, Maitreyi (The Fig) embodies a knowledge system that is rooted in nature. Contrary to popular belief, the fig is not a fruit but a syconium—a bulbous stem with many flowers and seeds inside. The metaphor aptly describes Maitreyi and her contemplative nature. It directs the reader's attention to the reflective and inward-looking aspect of Maitreyi whose inner evolution remains hidden to the outward eye. It also points to the non-hierarchical and a centered nature of interconnectedness of the ecosystem which is dynamic and resilient. Similar to the wasp-fig relation that thrives on symbiosis for its survival and reproduction, Maitreyi has a rhizomic relation with nature. She does not assert her presence on nature but is one in its dimensions in the ecology. The complexity of Maitreyi's wisdom which is deep and hidden is suggested in the lines, 'She resembled the subtle flowers of a fig, secret and hidden, pollination happening out of sight' (120). Like the fig-wasp metaphor, where the wasp has to sacrifice its wings to dive within the fruit, it requires effort and humility for one to enter her terrain of understanding.

Maitreyi's ability to stir different flowers and herbs together with an unerring sense of proportion is also suggestive of her non-linear, intuitive and subjective way of perceiving the world. The essence of knowledge is gleaned by this female sage not by transcending the world but by becoming one with it in the true Deleuzian sense. Subtly imbibing nature within her, she is never a passive entity but a powerful force to be reckoned with. The garland metaphor continues in the description of Maitreyi's receptive attention to the dialectical arguments between Yajnavalkya and Gargi. Unlike the masculine knowledge that asserts itself through dominance and argument, Maitreyi's epistemological stance based on rootedness and contemplative listening enables her to churn the arguments into a garland of great wisdom.

Visual Grammar and Semiotics

McCloud's understanding of comics as a sequential art form that constructs meaning not through individual panels but through the voluntary participation of the readers is particularly relevant in analysing Aranyaka (69). In many panels that depict women's embodied engagement with nature, the neat panel divisions are absent and the readers perceive a coherent, unified relation between the human and non-human life forms. However, in scenes depicting the philosophical engagement of Yajnavalkya with his disciples or with his brilliant disciple, Gargi there is the neat demarcation of visuals through panels. The visual grammar succinctly sums up two modes of perception; a relational, embodied engagement with the world in contrast to a rational, compartmentalized mode of thought. The graphic form, therefore not only illustrates the phenomenological perspective of knowledge but actively participates in the meaning-making process.



Fig. 2 & 3. Panel-free, unified visual space depicting embodied engagement with nature, contrasted with framed philosophical dialogue. (Patil and Pattanaik)

Conclusion

Aranyaka explicitly critiques the phallocentric mind/body dualism which prioritises the mind as the only rational site of knowledge, thereby relegating the body and by extension nature as a passive and a subordinate receptacle in the hierarchical structure. Through the depiction of three significant female characters—Katyayani (The Large), Maitreyi (The Fig) and Gargi (The Weaver), the narrative challenges the fixed binaries where the second term is always considered in opposition and in conflict with the first. The female figures exemplify a different epistemological stance that reiterates the idea that transcending the material world is just one of the many modalities of gaining knowledge. The text emphatically posits the idea that an ecological intimacy with nature is a conduit for profound understanding and knowledge. If Maitreyi internalizes nature and Gargi theorises it, Katyayani embodies nature by being a part of it. Further, nature becomes a powerful presence in the text by being inextricably intertwined with their thoughts and actions. Katyayani's pragmatic philosophy, shaped by her insights from nature, channels her relation with human and non-human entities. Katyayani's ecological wisdom is respected and internalized by both Gargi and Maitreyi. Gargi supplements her rational understanding of the cosmos with the sensory perceptions of the world, thus opening space for an intellectually rigorous but rooted epistemology.

If the women characters are perceptive to the receptive power of the ecosystem, it is not because they are closer to nature but because of their awareness of the human embeddedness in the earthly realm. Like the women sages, Yajnavalkya too was influenced by the transformative power of nature. However, instead of acknowledging the receptive power of nature he chose to transcend it through detachment and rational philosophical inquiry. The narrative does not vilify the sage but presents the gendered dimensions of philosophical inquiry, showing the coexistence of the rational and the abstract with a more embodied, earthly and visceral form of engagement with the world.

The visual-verbal interplay of the graphic text makes it an effective medium to deliberate on the complex and multifaceted aspects of knowledge and truth. The readers are left to contemplate the relationship between the logical and transcendental nature of the epistemic wisdom with a more eco-centered understanding of truth by highlighting the various modes of ultimate realization. The subtle interplay of gender, ecology, transcendence and materiality calls for a nuanced and rich, multilayered understanding in the pursuit of true intellectual awakening.

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Ashraf Hegemony and the Erasure of Caste: Towards a Pasmanda Literary Criticism in South Asian Fiction

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the persistent erasure of caste hierarchies among South Asian Muslims within canonical postcolonial literature. While sociological scholarship extensively documents the stratification of Muslim communities into Ashraf, Ajlaf, and Arzal groups, dominant literary representations consistently privilege elite Ashraf subjectivities. Through a comparative analysis of canonical novels by Ahmed Ali, Attia Hosain, and Mumtaz Shah Nawaz alongside the sociological interventions of Ali Anwar and Masood Alam Falahi, this study demonstrates how literary canon formation functions as a mechanism of cultural hegemony, homogenizing Muslim identity and rendering Pasmanda (marginalized) communities invisible. Even Progressive writers, while addressing class and gender, largely overlook systemic caste oppression. To address this epistemic exclusion, the paper proposes "Pasmanda Literary Criticism," an interdisciplinary framework integrating intersectionality, postcolonial theory, and the sociology of literature to recover neglected histories and challenge monolithic constructions of the South Asian Muslim subject.

Keywords: Pasmanda Muslims, South Asian Literature, Caste Hierarchies, Intersectionality, Cultural Hegemony

Introduction

The discourse on caste in South Asia has traditionally been situated within the framework of Hindu society, often rendering the persistence of caste-like hierarchies among other religious communities invisible. Although Islam is founded upon the theological principles of equality, fraternity, and the rejection of hereditary social stratification, the lived realities of South Asian Muslims reveal a markedly different social order. Across India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan, Muslim communities continue to be structured through hierarchical distinctions commonly categorized as Ashraf (socially privileged groups claiming foreign or high-status lineage), Ajlaf (occupational and artisan communities), and Arzal (communities historically associated with stigmatized occupations). These divisions have shaped access to education, religious authority, marriage, political representation, and economic opportunities, thereby

reproducing forms of exclusion analogous to caste-based discrimination (Falahi 23–27).

Despite the growing body of sociological and political scholarship, literary studies have seldom interrogated the relationship between Muslim identity and caste. Canonical South Asian Muslim fiction has predominantly represented Ashraf experiences, privileging narratives centered on aristocratic households, landed elites, urban middle classes, and the cultural nostalgia of declining Muslim nobility. Novels such as Ahmed Ali's Twilight in Delhi, Attia Hosain's Sunlight on a Broken Column, and Mumtaz Shah Nawaz's The Heart Divided have become foundational texts in postcolonial literary studies because of their nuanced explorations of colonialism, nationalism, Partition, and Muslim identity. Yet the Muslim identities they portray overwhelmingly emerge from socially privileged locations, while the lives of occupational, artisan, and Dalit Muslim communities remain conspicuously absent. Consequently, these texts contribute to the construction of a homogenized Muslim subject that obscures the internal hierarchies shaping South Asian Muslim society.

The marginalization of Pasmanda voices in literature reflects broader mechanisms of cultural production and canon formation. As Pierre Bourdieu argues, literary fields are structured by unequal distributions of cultural capital, determining which voices acquire legitimacy and which remain peripheral (37). The historical dominance of Ashraf intellectuals within publishing, education, and literary institutions has ensured that elite Muslim experiences have come to stand as representative of the entire community. Such symbolic dominance corresponds to what Antonio Gramsci conceptualizes as ‘cultural hegemony’ wherein dominant social groups naturalize their worldview as universal while suppressing alternative narratives (57–61). Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak famously argues that ‘marginalized groups are frequently spoken for rather than enabled to speak within dominant discursive structures’ (271–313). While Spivak's formulation emerged from colonial contexts, it provides a useful framework for understanding the literary invisibility of Dalit and backward Muslim communities too. Their exclusion demonstrates not only the politics of representation but also the epistemic limitations of postcolonial literary criticism, which has often treated Muslim identity as internally homogeneous. Consequently, proving that this is a systematic exclusion from the processes through which literary identity is produced and circulated.

Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality emphasizes that systems of oppression operate simultaneously rather than independently, producing complex forms of marginalization that cannot be understood through a single axis of identity (1244–45). Applied to South Asian Muslim communities, intersectionality reveals how caste discrimination persists within religious minorities despite shared experiences of communal marginalization. The experiences of Pasmanda Muslims thus occupy an intersection where religious minority status coexists with internal structures of caste oppression, complicating simplistic binaries of majority and minority politics.

By juxtaposing sociological studies of Muslim caste with fictional representations in Anglophone, Urdu, and selected regional literatures, this article examines how literature has participated in constructing a monolithic image of the "Indian Muslim." It further investigates the rare moments in which marginalized Muslim identities emerge within Progressive Urdu writing and regional literary traditions, demonstrating that these representations remain peripheral to the mainstream literary canon. The paper advocates for the development of a Pasmanda literary criticism that

integrates insights from caste studies, postcolonial theory, sociology of literature, and intersectionality to recover neglected histories and expand the scope of South Asian Muslim literary studies.

Research Gap

Although caste among South Asian Muslims has been extensively studied within sociology, history, and political science, its representation in literary texts remains significantly underexplored. Existing postcolonial literary criticism largely approaches Muslim identity as a homogeneous category, emphasizing religion, nationalism, colonialism, gender, and class while overlooking internal caste hierarchies. Furthermore, no comprehensive literary framework currently integrates Pasmanda Studies with postcolonial literary criticism to examine how canonical texts privilege Ashraf subjectivities and marginalize Pasmanda experiences. This study addresses this gap by bringing literary analysis into dialogue with sociological and historical scholarship on Muslim caste.

Research Objectives

The study aims to:

- Examine the representation of Muslim identity in canonical South Asian literary texts.
- Analyze the predominance of Ashraf perspectives and the marginalization of Pasmanda communities.
- Compare literary representations with sociological studies on Muslim caste.
- Propose Pasmanda Literary Criticism as an interdisciplinary framework for literary analysis.

Methodology

Research Design: The study adopts a qualitative, interpretative, and interdisciplinary research design. It combines close reading, comparative literary analysis, and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine the relationship between literary representation and caste-based social hierarchies.

Corpus: The study examines three categories of texts:

- Primary Literary Corpus
  - Ahmed Ali – *Twilight in Delhi* (1940)
  - Attia Hosain – *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961)
  - Mumtaz Shah Nawaz – *The Heart Divided* (1949)
  - Selected short stories by Ismat Chughtai
  - Selected short stories by Saadat Hasan Manto
- Sociological and Political Corpus
  - Ghaus Ansari – *Muslim Caste in Uttar Pradesh* (1960)
  - Imtiaz Ahmad (Ed.) – *Caste and Social Stratification among Muslims in India* (1978)
  - Ali Anwar – *Masawat Ki Jung* (2001)
  - Masood Alam Falahi – *Hindustan Mein Zat-Paat Aur Musalman* (2007)
  - Selected essays by Khalid Anis Ansari
- Secondary Corpus : The study also draws upon scholarship in postcolonial studies, sociology of literature, intersectionality, cultural studies, and Subaltern Studies to contextualize the analysis.

Sampling Technique: Purposive sampling is employed to select canonical literary texts that have significantly shaped dominant representations of Muslim identity, alongside foundational sociological works on Muslim caste and Pasmanda politics.

Methods of Analysis: The study employs four complementary analytical methods:

- Close Reading: Examination of characterization, narrative voice, dialogue, symbolism, spatial settings, occupational identities, and social

relationships to identify explicit and implicit markers of caste.

- Comparative Textual Analysis: Comparative reading of literary texts alongside sociological and historical studies to identify convergences and divergences between fictional representation and lived social realities.
- Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA): Analysis of how literary discourse constructs Ashraf identity as normative while marginalizing Pasmanda subjectivities through narrative strategies, silence, and exclusion.
- Contextual-Historical Analysis: Interpretation of literary texts within the historical contexts of colonialism, nationalism, Partition, and postcolonial nation-building to understand how these developments shaped literary representations of Muslim identity.

Scope and Delimitation: The study focuses on twentieth-century South Asian literary texts in English and Urdu. It does not seek to provide an exhaustive survey of Muslim literature but instead examines selected canonical texts that have played a significant role in shaping dominant literary representations of Muslim identity.

Discussion and Analysis

1. Ashraf Hegemony and the Construction of the Canonical Muslim Subject

The overwhelming majority of canonical Muslim texts privilege Ashraf subjectivities - those associated with Syeds, Sheikhs, Mughals, Pathans, landed aristocracy, and educated urban elites, thereby producing a homogeneous image of the "Indian Muslim." This homogenization is ideological for it naturalizes elite experiences as universal while simultaneously rendering invisible the lives of occupational, artisan, and Dalit Muslim communities. As Imtiaz Ahmad argues, ‘caste continues to regulate social mobility, marriage, and status among Indian Muslims despite the egalitarian ideals of Islam’ (Ahmad 18–20).

Ahmed Ali's Twilight in Delhi (1940) offers perhaps the most influential literary representation of Muslim identity in colonial India. Frequently celebrated as an elegy for the decline of Indo-Islamic civilization, the novel depicts the gradual disintegration of Old Delhi under British colonial rule through the experiences of Mir Nihal and his family, capturing how "it was the city of kings and monarchs, of poets and story tellers, courtiers and nobles. But no king lives there today... and the old inhabitants, though still alive, have lost their pride and grandeur under a foreign yoke" (Ali 8). Critical scholarship has traditionally interpreted the novel as a meditation on colonial modernity, cultural nostalgia, and the erosion of traditional values. However, the "Muslim" identity mourned throughout the novel is, in fact, a distinctly Ashraf identity rooted in aristocratic lineage, cultural refinement, and inherited social prestige. Mir Nihal's household embodies the values of elite Muslim respectability: mastery over Persianized culture, elaborate etiquette (tehzeeb), family honour, property ownership, and social exclusivity, as Mir Nihal increasingly retreats into "his own world, and in the atmosphere of alchemy and medicine, a world which was still his own" (33). His grief over the changing city is therefore inseparable from the decline of Ashraf authority itself. The narrative repeatedly equates the loss of Muslim civilization with the loss of elite Muslim culture, observing that "only the coils of the rope, when the rope itself has been burnt, remain, to remind us of past splendour" (9), thereby excluding the experiences of those Muslim communities whose histories were never defined by aristocratic privilege.

The novel's representation of Delhi is imagined through mansions, courtyards, mosques, poetry

gatherings, pigeon flying, and upper-class domestic spaces, all of which contribute to an aestheticized nostalgia for Mughal culture, a world where "the air was filled with the shouts of the pigeon-fliers who were rending the atmosphere with their cries" (Ali 17). The labour that sustains these spaces remains largely invisible. Servants occasionally appear within the narrative, but they are rarely granted interiority or independent social identities. Their occupations exist merely to facilitate the lives of elite characters rather than to reveal their own experiences, as seen when Begam Nihal summons her domestic help: "Dilchain, O Dilchain, get up. The master has come" (11). Such representational strategies are significant because, as Pierre Bourdieu observes, 'literary fields often universalize the worldview of dominant classes while marginalizing alternative social realities' (39).

Equally revealing is the novel's silence regarding occupational and hereditary communities that historically constituted a substantial proportion of Delhi's Muslim population. Communities such as Julahas (weavers), Qassabs (butchers), Dhobis (washermen), Halalkhors (sanitation workers), and numerous artisan groups remain almost entirely absent from the narrative despite their undeniable historical presence, reduced at best to background scenery where "men lay on their bare beds half naked, tired after the sore day's labour" (Ali 7). This omission cannot simply be attributed to authorial preference or narrative economy. Rather, it reflects what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak identifies as the epistemic exclusion of subaltern groups, whereby dominant discourses determine whose lives become narratable and whose remain outside the boundaries of representation (285–90). The absence of Pasmanda Muslims in Twilight in Delhi is therefore not an accidental silence but a consequence of a literary imagination structured by elite social consciousness.

Ali Anwar's Masawat Ki Jung, written more than six decades later, demonstrates that caste discrimination among Indian Muslims extends to marriage practices, access to mosques, educational opportunities, and political representation (Anwar 48–55). His work exposes a social reality fundamentally at odds with the harmonious Muslim community imagined in much canonical fiction. Whereas Ahmed Ali explores the decline of aristocratic dignity, Anwar's articulation of the Pasmanda movement reveals that the majority of Indian Muslims belong not to Ashraf elites but to historically marginalized occupational communities. The juxtaposition of these texts reveals that literature and sociology often narrate entirely different Muslim histories: one centred on elite cultural loss, the other on structural inequality and exclusion.

Attia Hosain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961) similarly exemplifies the predominance of Ashraf subjectivity within South Asian Muslim fiction. Set against the backdrop of late colonial India and the years surrounding Independence and Partition, the novel follows Laila, a young woman negotiating questions of gender, education, family authority, and political transformation. Despite its sensitivity toward gendered oppression, the novel remains largely silent on caste as a constitutive feature of Muslim social life. Laila's struggles unfold within the enclosed world of taluqdars, educated professionals, and aristocratic families whose conflicts revolve around inheritance, marriage, nationalism, and modernity rather than hereditary social exclusion. As Laila reflects on her sheltered existence within this elite echelon, she notes, "I had lived in a world of women, in a house governed by the strict, unquestioned rules of my grandfather, Baba Jan" (Hosain 14).

The novel's domestic spaces illustrate this classed and caste-marked perspective. Servants, cooks, attendants, and household workers frequently appear within the

narrative, but they remain peripheral figures whose identities are defined by their service to elite families. The text underscores this distance by describing domestic workers merely as those who "moved like silent shadows, knowing their place and keeping to it" (Hosain 31). Their voices, histories, and social locations receive little narrative attention. Even when the novel critiques feudalism, it does so primarily from the perspective of those who inherit its privileges rather than those whose labour sustains it. Laila herself recognizes this deeply entrenched structural divide, observing of the household staff that "their lives were bound to ours by generations of service" (Hosain 23). Such representational choices are particularly significant because, as Kimberlé Crenshaw argues, ‘systems of oppression cannot be understood through a single axis of identity alone’ (1245). Although Sunlight on a Broken Column successfully interrogates gender inequality, its failure to engage with caste demonstrates the limitations of reading Muslim identity solely through gender and class while overlooking intra-community hierarchies.

Mumtaz Shah Nawaz's *The Heart Divided* (1949) extends this representational tendency into the political sphere. Written in the immediate aftermath of Partition, the novel has frequently been interpreted as an important fictional engagement with the ideological debates surrounding the creation of Pakistan. The novel's principal characters belong to educated, affluent, and politically influential families whose anxieties revolve around constitutional reforms, national identity, education, and leadership. This elite vanguardism is articulated explicitly when the characters assert their political entitlement, declaring that "it is the educated classes who must guide the destiny of our people" (Shah Nawaz 87). Their debates implicitly assume that they speak for all Indian Muslims, despite representing only a socially privileged minority, while occupational and marginalized Muslim communities remain almost entirely absent from the narrative landscape. This absence is particularly striking because historical studies have shown that artisan communities, landless labourers, weavers, butchers, sanitation workers, and other occupational groups constituted a substantial proportion of the Muslim population in colonial India (Falahi 72–81). Nevertheless, these communities scarcely appear within Shah Nawaz's fictional world except as indistinct background figures. The marginalized masses are reduced to mere atmospheric spectacle, described broadly as the "nameless crowds that filled the streets" (Shah Nawaz 142). Such representational choices reinforce what Edward Said describes as ‘the production of “essentialized identities”, wherein internal diversity is subsumed under a singular and seemingly coherent category’ (65–68). While Said developed this critique in relation to Orientalist discourse, it is equally applicable to literary texts that erase internal differences by presenting one social group's experiences as universally representative.

A comparative reading of Ahmed Ali, Attia Hosain, and Mumtaz Shah Nawaz reveals remarkable continuity despite their differing thematic concerns. While Twilight in Delhi mourns the decline of Indo-Islamic aristocratic culture, Sunlight on a Broken Column explores elite Muslim womanhood during the transition to modernity, and *The Heart Divided* examines Muslim political consciousness during Partition, all three novels share a common social location. Their protagonists inhabit households characterized by education, inherited prestige, cultural refinement, and economic privilege. In these narratives, the dominant perspective remains rigidly upper-class, rooted in homes where "the past was a living reality of power and prestige" (Hosain 19). None of these texts substantially engages with hereditary occupations, caste discrimination, mosque segregation, or social exclusion among Muslims.

Masood Alam Falahi's Hindustan Mein Zat-Paat Aur Musalman strengthens this critique by demonstrating that caste among South Asian Muslims possesses deep historical roots rather than being a recent sociological phenomenon. Through an examination of Islamic legal writings, Persian chronicles, medieval histories, and colonial records, Falahi argues that Ashraf-Ajlaf-Arzal distinctions have shaped Muslim society for centuries (93–104). These historical findings expose the inadequacy of canonical literary representations that portray Muslim society as internally unified. The absence of such information constitutes a form of selective representation that privileges elite experiences while suppressing uncomfortable social realities.

This pattern may be understood through Pierre Bourdieu's concept of "cultural capital". According to Bourdieu, literary canons emerge not simply because certain texts possess aesthetic merit but because particular social groups exercise greater control over institutions of publication, education, criticism, and cultural legitimacy (42–45). Applied to South Asian Muslim literature, this framework suggests that Ashraf writers occupied positions that enabled their narratives to define the cultural image of Muslim identity. Their novels subsequently entered university syllabi, postcolonial criticism, and the broader literary canon, while narratives emerging from Pasmanda communities remained comparatively invisible. Canon formation, therefore, cannot be separated from the unequal distribution of symbolic power.

Antonio Gramsci's notion of "cultural hegemony" states that 'hegemony operates by transforming the worldview of dominant groups into accepted common sense, thereby rendering alternative perspectives unnecessary or even unimaginable' (59–61). Canonical Muslim fiction demonstrates precisely such a process. By repeatedly depicting elite households as representative of Muslim life, these texts normalize Ashraf experience as the default expression of Muslim identity. Readers consequently come to associate Muslim culture with *Nawabi* refinement, Persianized etiquette, political leadership, and aristocratic nostalgia, while occupational communities remain absent from the literary imagination.

The findings of the present analysis indicate that the literary canon has participated in the symbolic production of a homogeneous Muslim identity by privileging Ashraf narratives and marginalizing caste-based diversity. This does not diminish the literary achievements of Ahmed Ali, Attia Hosain, or Mumtaz Shah Nawaz, whose works remain indispensable to South Asian literary history. Rather, it suggests that their narratives should be read critically, with attention to the silences that accompany their sophisticated portrayals of colonialism, gender, and nationalism. When these texts are placed in dialogue with the sociological interventions of Ali Anwar and Masood Alam Falahi, it becomes evident that the omission of Pasmanda Muslims is neither incidental nor insignificant. Instead, it constitutes a form of symbolic erasure that has profoundly shaped both literary criticism and public understandings of Muslim identity in South Asia.

2. The Erasure of Pasmanda Muslims: Reading Silence alongside Sociological Reality

Literary silence is never ideologically neutral. As Michel-Rolph Trouillot in *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (1955) argues, silences are produced through historical processes that determine what enters the archive and what remains excluded (49). Similarly, in literary production, omission often functions as a powerful narrative strategy that shapes collective memory by privileging certain histories over others. When canonical Muslim novels consistently foreground aristocratic

households while overlooking occupational and Dalit Muslim communities, they participate in constructing a selective version of Muslim identity that obscures internal structures of inequality.

Ali Anwar's Masawat Ki Jung provides one of the most significant interventions against this homogenized understanding of Muslim identity. Rejecting the conventional binary that divides Indian society into Hindus and Muslims, Anwar argues that caste constitutes the most decisive factor shaping the everyday experiences of Indian Muslims (43–48). The term "Pasmanda," literally meaning "those left behind," functions not simply as a descriptive category but as a political identity encompassing backward, artisan, and Dalit Muslim communities historically excluded from positions of religious, educational, and political authority. According to Anwar, the dominant leadership within Indian Muslim institutions has long been monopolized by Ashraf elites who have consistently presented their own concerns as those of the entire Muslim community (72–76). Consequently, issues such as Urdu, minority rights, personal law, and communal violence have received far greater public attention than questions concerning caste discrimination, hereditary occupations, educational deprivation, and social exclusion within Muslim society itself.

Masood Alam Falahi extends this critique by tracing the historical origins of caste among South Asian Muslims. In Hindustan Mein Zat-Paat Aur Musalman, Falahi refutes the common assumption that caste distinctions among Muslims developed solely through colonial administrative practices. Drawing upon Qur'anic commentaries, Hadith literature, medieval Persian chronicles, legal texts, and historical documents, he demonstrates that Ashraf-Ajlaf-Arzal distinctions evolved over centuries and gradually acquired institutional legitimacy within South Asian Muslim societies (Falahi 66–93). More importantly, Falahi documents how these hierarchies influenced marriage alliances, religious leadership, burial practices, and occupational mobility. Such evidence fundamentally challenges literary representations that depict Muslim society as internally homogeneous.

The significance of Falahi's intervention lies not merely in documenting caste but in exposing the ideological consequences of denying its existence. Canonical literature often reproduces this confusion. Characters are represented as members of a unified religious community facing colonial oppression, nationalist uncertainty, or patriarchal control, yet the internal inequalities that shaped their interactions receive little or no narrative attention. Such representations inadvertently reinforce the widespread belief that caste among Muslims is insignificant or exceptional rather than systemic.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's formulation of the subaltern offers an important theoretical lens through which to interpret this literary silence. In "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak argues that ‘structures of knowledge frequently produce representations of marginalized groups without enabling them to articulate their own experiences’ (275–86). This insight is particularly relevant to Pasmanda Muslims. Pasmanda communities have seldom appeared as speaking subjects possessing historical agency. Even when lower-class Muslim characters appear within fiction, they often function as servants, labourers, or background figures whose existence facilitates the development of elite protagonists rather than constituting independent centres of narrative consciousness.

In each of the canonical novels discussed earlier, readers encounter Muslim society through the consciousness of socially privileged characters. Their observations define the moral and cultural universe of the text, determining which experiences deserve sustained attention and which remain peripheral. The

everyday realities of artisan families, sanitation workers, butchers, weavers, washermen, and other occupational communities never become central narrative concerns because they exist outside the protagonists' social world.

This process also explains why the category of "Muslim literature" itself requires critical reconsideration. Rather than representing the diversity of Muslim social life, much canonical fiction reflects the worldview of those groups that historically possessed access to education, publishing networks, literary institutions, and cultural authority. The canon thus functions less as a transparent record of Muslim experience than as an archive shaped by unequal relations of power. Reading literary texts alongside the sociological interventions of Ali Anwar and Masood Alam Falahi therefore reveals not simply the absence of Pasmanda Muslims but the mechanisms through which that absence has been normalized.

Khalid Anis Ansari argues that one of the greatest limitations of contemporary Muslim political discourse lies in its inability to recognize caste as a constitutive dimension of Muslim social life. He observes that dominant Muslim institutions continue to foreground communal identity while marginalizing questions of caste-based inequality, thereby reproducing Ashraf privilege under the rhetoric of religious unity (114–18). This critique is equally applicable to literary studies. The repeated invocation of a unified Muslim subject within canonical fiction mirrors the political discourse criticized by Ansari, where internal social differences are subordinated to a singular religious identity.

Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality offers an additional framework for understanding why the absence of Pasmanda narratives has remained largely unchallenged. Crenshaw argues that systems of oppression rarely operate independently; instead, individuals experience multiple, overlapping forms of marginalization that cannot be adequately explained through a single category such as race, gender, or class (1244–49). Pasmanda Muslims occupy precisely such an intersectional position. They experience discrimination not only as members of a religious minority within India but also as lower-status communities within Muslim society itself. An intersectional reading reveals that Muslim identity cannot be understood solely through religion; it must also account for caste, occupation, class, and gender as mutually constitutive structures shaping lived experience.

The findings of the present study therefore suggest that the absence of Pasmanda Muslims from canonical South Asian literature should not be interpreted merely as a gap in representation but as a structural feature of literary production itself. Across Twilight in Delhi, Sunlight on a Broken Column, and The Heart Divided, the protagonists emerge from socially privileged Ashraf households whose experiences are repeatedly universalized as representative of Muslim society. Occupational communities, artisan groups, Dalit Muslims, and other Pasmanda identities remain almost entirely absent despite their historical presence. This absence is particularly significant because contemporary sociological studies by Ali Anwar and Masood Alam Falahi establish that caste has profoundly shaped Muslim social organization for centuries (Anwar 61–75; Falahi 93–104).

Another significant finding concerns the relationship between literary canon formation and social power. The study demonstrates that literary visibility is closely linked to cultural capital and institutional authority. Canonical texts did not become representative simply because of their aesthetic achievements; they also emerged from authors positioned within privileged social and educational networks. Their narratives consequently entered

academic syllabi, publishing circuits, and postcolonial criticism, thereby shaping successive generations' understanding of Muslim identity. Literary canon formation, therefore, has functioned as an important mechanism through which caste inequalities have been rendered culturally invisible.

Finally, the comparative reading undertaken in this study indicates that sociological and literary archives narrate fundamentally different histories of South Asian Muslims. While sociologists document hereditary inequality, occupational stratification, marriage restrictions, and social exclusion, canonical literature overwhelmingly emphasizes nostalgia, nationalism, elite domesticity, and Partition. These divergent narratives reveal that literature is not simply reflecting reality but actively participating in the production of historical memory. The erasure of Pasmanda communities from literary discourse has consequently shaped broader public understandings of Muslim identity, reinforcing the dominance of Ashraf perspectives within both literary criticism and cultural imagination.

3. Towards a Pasmanda Literary Criticism: Progressive Voices and Future Possibilities

Important departures from elite narratives emerge within the Progressive Writers' Movement, whose authors sought to expose the realities of poverty, exploitation, labour, and social inequality. Unlike the aristocratic settings of Ahmed Ali, Attia Hosain, and Mumtaz Shah Nawaz, Progressive Urdu writers frequently turned their attention toward ordinary people — workers, artisans, domestic servants, peasants, prostitutes, refugees, and the urban poor. Their commitment to social realism expanded the range of literary subjects and challenged many of the romanticized representations that had previously dominated Urdu literature. Their works represent an important transition rather than a complete break from Ashraf-centric literary discourse.

Among Progressive writers, Ismat Chughtai occupies a particularly significant position because of her uncompromising portrayal of social inequality within Muslim households. Her fiction consistently interrogates patriarchy, class privilege, sexuality, and domestic labour through sharply observed everyday interactions. Stories such as "The Quilt" ("Lihaaf"), "The Homemaker" ("Gharwali"), and "Roots" ("Jadein") expose the unequal relationships between elite Muslim families and the servants, maids, wet nurses, and labourers who sustain domestic life. Unlike earlier canonical novels, Chughtai allows these marginalized figures greater narrative visibility, revealing how class privilege is reproduced within intimate spaces. Domestic workers are not merely decorative background figures; they become active participants whose labour and emotional lives shape the social world of the narrative.

In "The Quilt," the servant Rabbo is indispensable to Begum Jaan’s physical and psychological survival, as Chughtai notes that "Rabbu had no other household duties... She sat on the bed massaging Begum Jaan's back, or arms, or legs" (12). Rabbo’s intimate presence disrupts the traditional domestic hierarchy, provoking resentment among the other servants who observe that "the witch! She ate, sat and even slept with Begum Jaan!" (Chughtai 13). Similarly, in "The Homemaker," the protagonist Lajo who is an unpaid maid who transitions into a mistress and wife subverts bourgeois morality. Chughtai highlights how Lajo’s illegitimate social standing grants her a degree of autonomy outside elite conventions: "Being a bastard served her in good stead! God forbid, if she had been the legitimate child of her parents, she would have faced the music now!" (94). Even when divorced and cast out, Lajo’s self-worth remains tethered to her domestic mastery over the household space: "Never

before in her life had she got the opportunity to become the mistress of a household. She missed the house... The place must be in a mess" (Chughtai 94). In "Roots," the matriarch Amma relies on the enduring labor and presence of domestic workers as she remains steadfast "like a banyan tree that stands upright" amidst Partition's devastation, agonizing over whether displaced families will ever "get the opportunity to develop their roots again" (Chughtai 138).

Despite this important intervention, Chughtai seldom identifies the caste locations of these characters. Servants and labourers are represented primarily through economic deprivation and gendered vulnerability rather than hereditary social status. This silence is particularly noteworthy because many occupations depicted in her fiction were historically associated with Pasmanda communities. When studied in light of Masood Alam Falahi's historical study of occupational hierarchies among Muslims, Chughtai's domestic workers can be understood as occupying social positions shaped not only by class but also by caste (118–24). Yet the narrative itself rarely names these structures explicitly.

Saadat Hasan Manto similarly redirected literary attention toward those excluded from respectable society. His stories are populated by prostitutes, refugees, labourers, beggars, pimps, mentally ill individuals, and victims of Partition whose lives challenge bourgeois notions of morality and civilization. Manto's achievement lies in restoring dignity to individuals whom society had dismissed as disposable. In "Hatak" ("The Insult"), Manto illustrates the everyday humiliations experienced by women pushed to the margins of respectable social life. When the sex worker Sugandhi is rejected by a wealthy client with a disgusted "Oun!", she experiences an existential awakening, feeling as though "someone had struck her across the face with a whip" (Manto 52), which ultimately compels her to cast out her parasitic lover Madho and reclaim her autonomy.

Manto's celebrated Partition stories showcase the devastating human consequences of communal violence rather than nationalist triumphalism. In "Toba Tek Singh," the absurdity of political borders is embodied by the lunatic Bishan Singh, who collapses in the no-man's-land between two nations: "There, behind barbed wire, on one side, lay India and behind more barbed wire, on the other side, lay Pakistan. In between, on a bit of earth which had no name, lay Toba Tek Singh" (Manto 14). In "Khol Do" ("Open It"), Manto exposes the horror of sexual violence through Sakina, a traumatized young refugee. When the doctor attending to her unconscious body instructs her father to "[t]he window, open it!", Sakina's conditioned reflex causes her to mechanically respond: "With lifeless hands she slowly undid the knot of her waistband and lowered her shalwar" (Manto 76). Her father, Sirajuddin, screams with tragic joy, "She's alive! My daughter is alive!", while "the doctor broke into a cold sweat" (Manto 76). Similarly, "Thanda Gosht" ("Cold Meat") lays bare the dehumanizing effects of communal violence when Ishwar Singh confesses his inability to perform sexually after abducting a Muslim girl during a riot, realizing only after the act that "she was dead... cold flesh" (Manto 88).

Yet Manto's radical humanism remains predominantly grounded in class and existential suffering rather than caste. His marginalized characters frequently exist outside structures of social respectability, but the specific historical experiences of Pasmanda communities remain largely unarticulated. The artisan, butcher, weaver, washerman, or sanitation worker rarely appears as a character whose hereditary social identity becomes central to the narrative. Instead, marginalization is represented as a

consequence of poverty, displacement, gender, or political violence. This emphasis reflects the ideological priorities of Progressive literature, which interpreted social inequality primarily through Marxist analyses of class exploitation. Although immensely valuable in exposing economic injustice, such an approach often overlooked the persistence of caste as a distinct form of social organization within Muslim communities.

Nevertheless, even within these socially conscious texts, caste among Muslims seldom becomes an explicit object of literary inquiry. Characters experience deprivation because they are poor, displaced, or exploited, but the historical structures that organize Muslim occupational communities remain largely unnamed. This absence does not diminish the progressive achievements of these writers; rather, it reveals the intellectual horizons within which they were working. The Progressive Writers' Movement emerged in response to colonialism, capitalism, feudalism, and fascism, with Marxism providing its dominant analytical vocabulary. Consequently, class frequently overshadowed other forms of structural inequality. Contemporary Pasmanda scholarship demonstrates, however, that caste cannot simply be subsumed under class, since hereditary status, endogamy, and ritual exclusion continue to shape Muslim social life independently of economic conditions (Anwar 63–70).

Ahmed Ali, Attia Hosain, Mumtaz Shah Nawaz, Chughtai, and Manto, collectively broadened the representation of Muslim life in important ways. Yet none of them possessed the conceptual vocabulary later developed through the Pasmanda movement to identify caste as a central category of analysis. It is precisely this gap that contemporary literary criticism must address by bringing sociological knowledge into dialogue with canonical texts rather than treating literature and social history as separate intellectual domains.

The foregoing discussion demonstrates that the absence of Pasmanda Muslims from mainstream South Asian literature cannot be explained solely by the literary preferences of individual authors. Rather, it reflects a broader intellectual tradition in which Muslim identity has predominantly been conceptualized through religion, nationalism, class, and gender, while caste has remained either invisible or insufficiently theorized. The emergence of the Pasmanda movement in the late twentieth century fundamentally challenges this tradition by insisting that Muslim society cannot be understood without acknowledging the historical realities of Ashraf dominance and the structural marginalization of Ajlaf and Arzal communities. Consequently, the present study argues for the development of Pasmanda Literary Criticism as a distinct interpretative framework capable of re-reading canonical texts through the lens of caste. Such a framework does not seek to replace existing approaches within postcolonial literary studies but rather to extend them by incorporating a dimension of social experience that has long remained neglected.

Pasmanda Literary Criticism begins from the premise that literary representation is inseparable from social power. Every narrative privileges certain experiences while marginalizing others, and the construction of literary canons is itself a political process shaped by unequal access to education, publication, and cultural authority. Following Pierre Bourdieu, literary production must therefore be understood as a field structured by competing forms of symbolic capital rather than as a neutral repository of aesthetic achievement (Bourdieu 37–45). Elite Muslim experiences acquired cultural legitimacy not merely because of their artistic sophistication but because they emerged from social groups possessing greater

institutional influence. Pasmanda Literary Criticism consequently shifts attention from what literature represents to what it excludes, treating silence itself as an object of critical inquiry.

Such an approach also necessitates a reconsideration of the relationship between literature and history. Literary texts have frequently been treated as transparent reflections of historical reality, particularly in studies of colonialism and Partition. Ahmed Ali's nostalgia for Mughal Delhi, Attia Hosain's portrayal of aristocratic domestic life, and Mumtaz Shah Nawaz's engagement with Muslim nationalism each illuminate important dimensions of twentieth-century Muslim history. Yet these narratives remain incomplete because they exclude the everyday realities of artisan communities, hereditary occupations, and caste-based discrimination documented by Ali Anwar and Masood Alam Falahi (Anwar 61–75; Falahi 93–104). Such an interdisciplinary methodology enables scholars to identify the ideological assumptions underlying literary representation and to recover histories obscured by canonical discourse.

The framework further benefits from the insights of intersectionality. Kimberlé Crenshaw's argument that systems of oppression intersect rather than operate independently is particularly relevant to Pasmanda communities, whose experiences cannot be reduced either to religious minority status or to economic deprivation alone (Crenshaw 1244–49). Pasmanda Muslims frequently negotiate multiple structures of exclusion simultaneously: they encounter discrimination as Muslims within a majoritarian society while also experiencing caste-based marginalization within their own religious community. Gender further complicates these experiences, as Pasmanda women often confront the combined effects of caste, class, patriarchy, and communal discrimination. An intersectional Pasmanda framework, by contrast, recognizes that identities are historically constituted through overlapping systems of power, thereby enabling more nuanced analyses of character, narrative voice, and social space.

The implications of this framework extend beyond the specific texts examined in the present study. Future research may recover neglected representations of Pasmanda life within regional literatures written in Urdu, Hindi, Bengali, Malayalam, Tamil, Kannada, Punjabi, Kashmiri, and other South Asian languages. Equally important is the study of contemporary Dalit Muslim autobiographies, oral histories, memoirs, and digital narratives that challenge the cultural authority of established literary institutions. Such texts have the potential to reshape the existing canon by introducing voices historically excluded from mainstream publishing and academic criticism. In this regard, Pasmanda Literary Criticism is not merely an analytical method but also a critical intervention into the politics of canon formation.

Another important implication concerns the teaching of South Asian literature within universities. Current curricula frequently include novels such as Twilight in Delhi and Sunlight on a Broken Column as representative texts of Muslim experience in colonial India. While these works undoubtedly deserve their canonical status, they should be taught alongside sociological writings by Ali Anwar, Masood Alam Falahi, and Khalid Anis Ansari so that students can recognize the distinctions between literary representation and social reality. Such an approach would encourage critical engagement with the internal diversity of Muslim communities rather than reinforcing the assumption of cultural homogeneity.

The findings of the present study therefore suggest that Pasmanda Literary Criticism has the potential to make a significant contribution to postcolonial studies, comparative literature, and South Asian

literary criticism. The objective of Pasmanda Literary Criticism is neither to reject the existing literary canon nor to diminish the artistic achievements of canonical Muslim writers. Rather, it seeks to expand the boundaries of literary inquiry by incorporating voices, experiences, and histories that have long remained outside dominant frameworks of interpretation. Recognizing these silences allows literary criticism to move beyond essentialized notions of Muslim identity and toward a more inclusive understanding of South Asian literature—one that acknowledges not only religion and nation but also caste, occupation, labour, and social inequality as fundamental categories of analysis. Such a reorientation is essential if literary studies are to engage meaningfully with the complex realities of Muslim life in South Asia and to ensure that the "missing narrative" of Pasmanda Muslims is no longer excluded from the region's literary imagination.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the marginalization of Pasmanda Muslims in mainstream South Asian literature is not an incidental omission but a structural consequence of Ashraf dominance in literary production and canon formation. A comparative reading of Ahmed Ali's Twilight in Delhi, Attia Hosain's Sunlight on a Broken Column, and Mumtaz Shah Nawaz's The Heart Divided alongside the sociological works of Ali Anwar and Masood Alam Falahi reveals a clear divergence between literary representation and social reality. While sociological scholarship consistently documents caste as a defining feature of Muslim social organization, canonical fiction largely presents a unified Muslim identity shaped by aristocratic culture, elite domesticity, political leadership, and middle-class respectability. The histories and lived experiences of artisan communities, hereditary occupational groups, and Dalit Muslims remain largely absent from these narratives.

The study further argues that this absence is sustained through the unequal distribution of symbolic power and cultural authority. Drawing on the theoretical insights of Pierre Bourdieu, Antonio Gramsci, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Kimberlé Crenshaw, it shows that literary canons are shaped not only by aesthetic value but also by the social locations from which narratives emerge and acquire legitimacy. The exclusion of Pasmanda communities therefore reflects broader processes of cultural hegemony that normalize Ashraf experience as the representative expression of Muslim identity while obscuring the diversity and inequalities within South Asian Muslim society.

The analysis also identifies important departures within the Progressive Writers' Movement. Writers such as Ismat Chughtai and Saadat Hasan Manto, redirected literary attention toward labour, poverty, displacement, and social marginalization. Yet their critique remained largely confined to class, patriarchy, and economic exploitation, without consistently recognizing caste as an autonomous structure shaping Muslim social life. Their writings expanded the social landscape of Urdu fiction but did not substantially challenge the invisibility of Pasmanda identities.

A central contribution of this study is the formulation of Pasmanda Literary Criticism as an interdisciplinary framework for reading South Asian Muslim literature. Integrating insights from Pasmanda Studies, postcolonial theory, Subaltern Studies, intersectionality, and the sociology of literature, this framework treats caste as an essential category for literary analysis and reads silence, omission, and selective representation as meaningful forms of cultural production. Rather than displacing canonical texts, it invites their re-evaluation by placing literary

narratives in dialogue with historical and sociological scholarship. Such a reading reveals the ideological assumptions embedded within canonical representations and broadens the understanding of Muslim identity beyond religion, nationalism, gender, and class to include caste, occupation, and social hierarchy.

Future research should extend this inquiry to Urdu, Hindi, Bengali, Malayalam, Tamil, Kannada, Punjabi, Kashmiri, and other regional literary traditions, where the experiences of marginalized Muslim communities remain insufficiently examined. Greater attention should also be given to Dalit Muslim autobiographies, oral histories, memoirs, contemporary fiction, and digital narratives that articulate Pasmanda experiences from within the community. Such scholarship can contribute to a more representative literary archive and encourage a critical reassessment of the processes through which canons are constructed and sustained.

Recovering the "missing narrative" of Pasmanda Muslims is therefore not simply a matter of expanding literary representation; it requires rethinking the assumptions that have shaped South Asian literary criticism itself. A critical engagement with caste exposes the limits of homogenized conceptions of Muslim identity and offers a more historically grounded understanding of South Asian Muslim society. Recognizing these internal diversities opens new possibilities for postcolonial literary scholarship and moves the discipline toward a more inclusive and analytically rigorous interpretation of the region's literary traditions.

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Culinary Capital: The Intersection of Food and Neoliberal Governance in Asako Yuzuki's novel *Butter*

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ABSTRACT

This article examines Asako Yuzuki's novel *Butter* through the frameworks of biopolitics and neoliberalism, focusing on the main characters, Rika and Kaji. The analysis demonstrates that neoliberalism extends beyond economic considerations, significantly influencing societal norms surrounding diet and body image. Rika embodies the internalisation of these neoliberal demands, grappling with her identity amid societal pressures for self-optimisation. In contrast, Kaji serves as a figure of resistance, questioning the normalisation of body management as a moral imperative. The dynamic between these characters highlights the intricacies of individual agency within the constraints imposed by structural inequalities. *Butter* critiques the biopolitical imperatives that women face, underscoring the tension between the pursuit of pleasure and bodily autonomy in a competitive environment. By employing theories of biopolitics and neoliberal governance, the novel prompts readers to reflect on the pervasive forces that shape their lives and self-perception.

Keywords: Biopolitics, Neoliberalism, Governance, Resistance, Self-optimisation

Literature Review

Existing scholarship and criticism on Asako Yuzuki's Butter have focused almost entirely on questions of body image, food and gender. Reviewers and critics have read the novel primarily as a feminist critique of Japan's beauty standards, highlighting the double standard by which cooking is praised as a leisurely hobby for men but treated as an unpaid duty for women. Manako Kajii's character sketch is typically read as a figure of bodily transgression. Critics note that the public is fixated on her body rather than her crimes, revealing a broader stratification of women along a spectrum of aesthetic types for male consumption.

This body of commentary treats the body itself as a symbol within a cultural discourse of beauty and femininity. What this existing commentary has not examined is how these bodily standards function as a mechanism of power in the first place, and that it stops at the level of representation rather than asking what kind of governing logic produces gender expectations.

This paper turns to Foucault's essay titled *Security, Territory and Population* (1977-1978) and *The Birth of Biopolitics* (1978-1979) as its analytical lens. *Security, Territory and Population* apply the concept of governmentality to portray power that operates not through direct command but by shaping the field of choices available to a subject, along with the related concept of counter-conduct, which describes resistance that redirects a power structure's logic from within rather than rejecting it outright. *The Birth of Biopolitics* extends this framework specifically to neoliberal economic rationality, theorising the modern subject as an entrepreneur of the self who continuously invests in and manages their own body and behaviour as a form of capital.

Foucault's lectures withhold any explicit verdict on neoliberalism, never stating whether this mode of governing is to be resisted or accepted. This paper also relies on Berend van Wijk's article, "Beyond the Entrepreneur Society: Foucault, Neoliberalism and the Critical Attitude" (2021), to interpret that ambiguity productively. Van Wijk argues that Foucault's genealogy does not render any judgement on neoliberalism but cultivates in the subject a critical attitude, which is an ongoing, non-programmatic practice of questioning one's governability.

Reading *Butter* through this lens allows us to move beyond the existing oppression/liberation binary. Kaji's transgression can be read as counter-conduct, a redirection rather than a rejection of the feminine nurturing role she is expected to perform. In comparison, Rika's arc can be read through the critical attitude, a genealogical, non-moralising process of self-questioning that produces only local, limited refusals of her own governess, rather than a wholesome liberation. In this way, the paper extends the existing body of food, gender, and body scholarship on Butter into a properly biopolitical register, asking not only what the novel says about beauty and gender but also how power itself operates through and on the bodies at its centre.

The term "neoliberalism" entered widespread political and economic discourse in the late twentieth century to describe a set of policies that reoriented governments towards deregulation, privatisation and market-driven governance. Over the following decades, however, scholars across political theory, sociology, and cultural criticism began to argue that this narrow economic definition failed to capture the full scope of neoliberalism's effects. David Harvey, in *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, reframed it as a political project that aimed to restore and consolidate elite-class power under the guise of market freedom. Further, Wendy Brown in his work *Undoing the Demos* argues that neoliberalism does not merely deregulate markets, but it installs market rationality as the organising logic of nearly every domain of life, that is reshaping education, family and even democratic citizenship according to the metrics of competition, investment and return.

It is Michel Foucault, however, who gives the analytically precise account of this expanded understanding of neoliberalism, which is not simply an economic policy but a distinctive mode of governing subjects and populations. Foucault's lecture series at the Collège de France 1978-1979, delivered the rationality that would come to organise late-capitalist societies, a mode of power that governs not through direct command, but by shaping the total field of incentives within which individuals calculate their own choices and that reconceives that the self not as a fixed identity but as a form of capital to be continuously invested in and optimised.

Theoretical Framework

This paper utilises two of Foucault's lecture series, *Security, Territory, Population* (1977-1978) and *The Birth of Biopolitics (*1978-1979) to develop its

theoretical framework. Foucault introduces governmentality as a dominant power form that focuses on security and population management, which operates by shaping environments and norms rather than through direct authority. He traces this modern governance back to pastoral care, where the duty to nurture individual lives evolved into the state's responsibility to manage population health and knowledge, ultimately framing human existence as investable capital within the context of neoliberal rationality. Additionally, Berend van Wijk's recent analysis of Foucault's nuanced stance on neoliberalism is examined.

The paper focuses on highlighting the risks of concealing authentic moments of pleasure and resistance, particularly in the characters Rika and Kaji. This perspective suggests that individuals are mere passive subjects who are dominated by neoliberal forces that subvert genuine agency. However, this paper argues that Kaji's transgression constitutes forms of counter-conduct that reflect resistance to societal norms. Similarly, Rika's self-questioning exhibits her active engagement with her own governmentality that allows her personal fulfilment. Acknowledging these nuances enriches the discourse on agency, which shows that even while power structures are prevalent, they also enable individuals to express pleasure and resistance.

This paper employs a close reading of the English translation of *Butter*, abided by governmentality theory to explore the various facets of neoliberalism and biopolitics in the text. The critical analysis primarily works through Polly Barton's translation, which allows an intricate examination of the characters in the novel without direct references to the original Japanese version.

In the novel *Butter,* feeding and culinary care operate on such pastoral technology. We find in the novel these repeated frames of cooking for men as a duty that organises the societal ecosystem and renders certain feminine behaviours legible as virtuous and necessary. The domestic setting is not merely an apparatus of governmentality, but a site where norms about bodies, appetite, and gender are taught and performed so that women's labour sustains social reproduction.

Counter-Conduct: Kaji's Resistance to Neoliberal Norms

Manako Kaji embodies this pastorate's paradox, where she tends to men through food with intense attention and expertise, yet in the end, her pursuits are ambiguous, uncanny and ultimately destructive as much as nourishing. Foucault states that governmentality operates through institutions and social arrangements that tend to make certain behaviours rational or expected rather than positing them as direct orders. This way of projecting shows the trajectory of how sovereign command has changed to biopolitical management of the population. In society, feminine functions like feeding and caregiving act as micro-technology of governmentality. They regulate roles and social order and all objects of biopolitical concern.

In the lecture, the term counter-conduct is used by Foucault to describe a form of resistance that does not say an absolute no, but resists certain aspects to have autonomy. In the article, "From Counter-Conduct to Critical Attitude: Michel Foucault and the Art of Not Being Governed Quite So Much", Daniele Lorenzini states that counter-conduct is not a simple rebellion but an absolute refusal "to be conducted like that" (9), and it exerts a demand to be conducted differently, by other methods and towards other ends.

In the article, Daniele Lorenzini states that if conduct is a theatrical performance, counter-conduct would not be merely walking off the stage, but rather the refusal to interpret the assigned role as prescribed,

instead interpreting it differently. Kaji, in the novel, performs her role similarly by not rejecting the feminine role of feeding and domestic performance. Still, she refuses the disciplined version of womanhood that the societal script demands of her.

> One day, out of the blue, they just became too much. The faces of people who thought nothing of making endless demands, of being constantly given things. The way they sat at the table simply waiting to be served, not lifting a finger…don't get the wrong idea. I like serving men and giving them pleasure. Women who don't deserve the name. But being with just one man, a changeable woman like me gets bored.
>
> (Yuzuki 300)

Butter turns the feminine care into a theatrical performance of counter-conduct, where Kaji inhabits the role that is assigned to women, but at the same time, she is altering the purpose by revealing that domestic nature is a socially scripted form of governmentality rather than a natural feminine truth.

Asako Yuzuki's novel portrays neoliberalism not as an abstract economic backdrop but as a mode through which governmentality is operating on the bodies, appetites and self-understanding of the characters. This can be seen through the protagonist Rika, who embraces and is operated by this ideology. Applying Van Wijk's distinction between counter-conduct and the critical attitude to this novel allows us to analyse the novel beyond the resistance versus oppression framework that dominates much popular commentary on the text.

At the beginning of the novel, Rika embodies the identity of a homo economicus, as Foucault states in *The Birth of Biopolitics.* The individual is not simply a worker or consumer but an entrepreneur of the self who is continuously investing in themselves as a business. In her limited time between work and private life, she optimises herself to thrive within a competitive social field. She treats food as biological maintenance rather than pleasure, as she subsists largely on convenience store meals while working long hours in a male-dominated workspace. This is not the result of any explicit rule that has been given to her nor by any single authority figure demanding that she do.

> Her slim physique ensured that, despite not being a remarkable beauty, she would still be complimented, and that the fast fashion items she chose haphazardly suited her figure just fine. Rika was in an industry were maintaining one's appearance tended to be rewarded with professional success.
>
> (Yuzuki 9)

This makes the self-denial appear to be simple, but her body functions in this sense as a form of human capital. An asset to be maintained, monitored and protected from depreciation. In the article "Beyond the entrepreneur society: Foucault, neoliberalism and the critical attitude", Van Wijk describes the neoliberal subject as someone who "continuously weighs their options, calculating how to optimally invest scarce resources like skills, time and energy in their well-being" (Wijk 12). Even her relationship with her boyfriend, Makoto, operates within this same calculative logic. Her worth within the relationship becomes measurable in terms of appearance and self-discipline, which echoes the way human capital theory treats not only labour but the entirety of a life as a portfolio of investable, gradable attributes.

This dynamic intensifies once Rika begins gaining weight under Kaji's culinary influence. Her boyfriend's open criticism of her changing body and her colleagues' anxiety that her altered appearance might compromise her professional credibility reveal how thoroughly her physical self has been absorbed into a calculus of investment and return. And this precisely is the mechanism by which, as Van Wijk notes, neoliberal government "shape[s] the environment wherein economic action can take shape"(Wijk 13), that is, managing populations not through direct coercion but through incentive structures that make certain self-presentations more rational, more socially and professionally advantageous, than others.

Notably, no single character in the novel comments on Rika's need to remain thin; rather, the accumulated weight of professional judgment, romantic disapproval, and internalised cultural expectation performs this governing function collectively and diffusely. For Foucault, the security model of power operates on a population rather than the older disciplinary model operating on individual bodies through direct rule.

The novel also stages the moralization of consumption that biopolitical governmentality produces. Rika's growing culinary education, which she uses to select fine ingredients, to distinguish subtle flavours, to prepare elaborate dishes under Kaji's influence, becomes a form of self-investment in a different register. It turns into cultural and experiential capital rather than professional capital. Even her turn toward pleasure and indulgence remains legible within a broader neoliberal habit of self-evaluation through taste, acquisition, and refinement, suggesting that escaping one economy of optimisation, that is, career and maintaining a desirable body type, does not necessarily mean escaping the underlying logic of self-improvement altogether but only redirecting it toward a new domain.

Meanwhile, the media's fixation on Kaji's body size is treated by the tabloid press and the reading public as more shocking, more damning, than her alleged crimes themselves, that dramatizes what Foucault calls the security model of power operating at the level of population management. It is not a direct prohibition against fatness, but a diffuse, that is, statistically inflected moralization of body size as a matter of individual responsibility and self-management rather than social or economic circumstance.

Rika: The Struggle for Self-Optimisation in a Neoliberal Landscape

Rika's transformation in the novel should not be read as a simple triumphant escape from neoliberal governmentality but as an instance that demands a critical attitude**.** It can be analysed as a genealogical, non-moralising process of local self-questioning rather than a wholesale rejection of her prior life. She does not abandon her career or her ambitions, but she begins instead to interrogate her specific expectations placed upon her, such as the aesthetic demands of society and her own habit of treating food as mere function. This matches exactly what Foucault describes as the aim of critique that is not opposing governmentality as a totalizing whole, but asking, "how not to be governed like that, by that, in the name of those principles, with such and such an objective in mind and by means of such procedures, not like that, not for that, not by them." (Wijk 9).

Food serves as a primary mechanism for the construction of neoliberal subjectivity, by functioning not merely as a biological necessity but as a central site for the exercise of biopolitical governance and the formation of the entrepreneurial self. So, within this framework of neoliberalism, economic rationality

extends beyond market transactions to permeate all aspects of human life, thereby transforming individuals into enterprises responsible for the continuous optimisation of their own human capital. So, in this context, food consumption and dietary practices have become strategic investments in one's physical and social value, where every meal is subjected to cost-benefit analysis regarding health, aesthetics, and productivity

The role of food in the neoliberal subjectivity is thus characterised by the internalisation of market logic, where the body is managed as a project of self-improvement, and dietary choices are moralised as indicators of personal responsibility and civic virtue. So, the concept of biopolitics as articulated by Michel Foucault's later works provides us with the theoretical foundation for understanding how food regulates populations and individual bodies under neoliberal regimes. Biopolitics refers to the administration of life at the level of the population, focusing on techniques that manage health, hygiene, and longevity to ensure the productivity and stability of the state.

Further, the role of food in this neoliberal subjectivity is reinforced through the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, where adherence to specific dietary norms determines social belonging. Neoliberal regimes often employ strategies of normalisation that marginalise those who do not conform to the established standards of productivity and health and thus create a hierarchy of desirable and undesirable subjects. In this context, food choices become symbolic cats that signal those who are in alignment with the values of efficiency, discipline and self-control. And those who fail to meet these standards are often subject to public shame and judgement, which further reinforces the pressure to comply with the normative expectations.

The critical attitude towards these neoliberal demands can be understood through the potential for resistance and counter-conduct, where individuals refuse to be governed in specific ways and assert alternative modes of existence. While neoliberalism seeks to standardise behaviour through the promotion of specific dietary ideals, there are opportunities for individuals to challenge these norms by embracing practices that prioritise pleasure, community, and bodily autonomy over optimisation and efficiency.

However, such resistance is often co-opted by market forces, which commodify alternative lifestyles and reintegrate them into the logic of consumer choice. Thus, the role of food in neoliberal subjectivity remains a contested terrain, where the tensions between individual agency and structural constraints are continuously negotiated through everyday practices of eating and drinking. Food plays a pivotal role in the formation of neoliberal subjectivity by serving as a medium through which biopolitical governance is enacted and the entrepreneurial self is constructed. Through mechanisms of self-responsibility, biopolitical differentiation, and normalisation, dietary practices are transformed into moral imperatives that reinforce existing inequalities and regulate individual behaviour.

Wendy Brown, in her work *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution,* argues that under neoliberal reason, "all conduct is economic conduct; all spheres of existence are framed and measured by economic terms and metrics, even when those spheres are not directly monetised." (Brown 9). Brown insists that economisation does not require literal monetary exchange; instead, fields, persons, and practices become economised simply by being evaluated according to metrics of optimisation and competitive value. For Rika, her food-as-fuel existence is never presented as a financial transaction, yet it is thoroughly economised in Brown's sense, governed by calculations of value, appearance, and return rather than pleasure.

Rika's early convenience-store meals and her calculated dietary routine are built on the premise that thinness proves self-worth. It is not an isolated personal habit but an instance of the diet program as a technology of human capital, in which her body becomes an asset whose value must be continuously monitored, appreciated, and protected against depreciation. Brown states that the goal of the neoliberal individual is always present and pervasive, whether they are studying, interning, working, planning for retirement, or reinventing themselves in a new phase of life; this goal is to approach each activity with an entrepreneurial mindset, recognise their own worth, and enhance their evaluation or status. Rika's existence functions precisely according to this principle that is evaluated and assessed by her boyfriend, her peers, and the wider marriage and workplace environments.

Brown observes that a subject constituted as human capital "is at persistent risk of failure, redundancy and abandonment through no doing of its own, regardless of how savvy and responsible it is" (Brown 36) and that this jeopardy "reaches down to minimum needs for food and shelter, insofar as social-security programs of all kinds have been dismantled by neoliberalism" (Brown 36). This plays a crucial role in how the novel addresses Kaji's victims. Their susceptibility to her manipulation is not merely a reflection of individual loneliness, as is often portrayed in popular analyses of the novel, but rather a systemic result of the disassembly that Brown describes: men deprived of the umbrellas of protection previously provided by stable jobs, community ties, or pensions, left with marital or domestic relationships as the only discernible harbour against economic and social instability. Therefore, Kaji's exploitation of these men is not just a matter of preying on vulnerable individuals, but rather taking advantage of a structural gap created by neoliberal economic policies that she misleadingly presents as the only form of social harbour that the novel implies still holds some cultural validity.

Rather than treating unequal social outcomes as a correctable injustice, Brown argues that under human-capital logic, "inequality, not equality, is the medium and relation of competing capitals" (Brown 37), such that "a democracy composed of human capital features winners and losers, not equal treatment or equal protection"(Brown 37). This reinterpretation of the public's intense reaction to Kaji suggests that what people found most disturbing, more than Kaji's lack of conventional beauty, was her failure to be thin. Instead of viewing it as an unusual display of misogyny external to the societal framework, it is seen as the normal, anticipated functioning of a social structure where individuals deemed losers in terms of body shape are viewed as inherently deserving of disdain. In this context, Kaji's fatness identifies her as a deficient participant in the realm of self-presentation, and the harshness of public criticism is understood not as an overreaction, but as consistent with the system.

Brown's framework also clarifies how we can interpret Rika's transformation. Her increasing enjoyment of cooking under Kaji's influence should not be confused with a complete departure from economisation. While she moves away from the thinness-optimisation economy, her newfound skill in using quality ingredients and techniques has the potential to reinforce a different, albeit less harsh, form of self-cultivation and distinction, which is, after all, Brown's concept of economisation that can operate without being financial. The change lies not in Rika escaping the logic described by Brown, but in her beginning to adopt, in van Wijk's terms, a critical perspective on a specific aspect of her own governed behaviour by rejecting the particular calculation that linked thinness to value, while not discarding the notion of self-cultivation altogether.

Critically analysed through the lens of Foucault's governmentality, van Wijk's critical attitude, and Brown's human capital theory the article allows to read *Butter* not merely as a novel about body image, but as a sustained meditation on how thoroughly economization has restructured food, desire, and intimacy themselves and on how uneven access to critique, security, and social harbour determines who can survive that restructuring and who becomes its casualty.

Conclusion

Asako Yuzuki's *Butter* presents a nuanced exploration of the intersection between neoliberal governance and individual subjectivity, particularly through the characters of Rika and Kaji. This paper draws on the theories of Michel Foucault, Wendy Brown, and Berend van Wijk to examine how biopolitics operates within contemporary society, shaping women's identities and their complex relationships with food and the body.

Utilising Foucault's concepts of governmentality and biopolitics, the study reveals how power operates not through overt control but by shaping the choices available to individuals. Rika's character embodies a critical attitude, in line with Foucault's notion of ongoing self-examination, allowing her to question and navigate the governing logics that define her existence. In contrast, Kaji's actions serve as counter-conduct, illustrating a redirection of the imposed feminine nurturing role while challenging societal norms. This approach transcends traditional binaries of oppression and liberation, emphasising the multifaceted ways individuals negotiate societal expectations.

Wendy Brown's insights deepen the analysis by framing neoliberalism as a governing logic that extends beyond economic practices to influence personal identity and societal values. Her critique of how neoliberalism converts individuals into entrepreneurial subjects resonates with Rika and Kaji's experiences as they grapple with the pressures of self-optimisation and body management. This connection underscores how neoliberal governance permeates the personal domain, intertwining with broader structural inequalities that shape women's lives.

Furthermore, Berend van Wijk's interpretation of Foucault's ambivalence towards neoliberalism highlights the importance of cultivating a critical stance toward the structures of power that govern our lives. By applying his insights, this analysis reveals the tension that exists between individual agency and systemic constraints, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of how personal choices are influenced by larger governing forces.

Ultimately, *Butter* compels readers to reflect on the pervasive impact of neoliberal ideologies on personal identity and everyday choices concerning food, body image, and social roles. By foregrounding the tensions between autonomy, pleasure, and the demands for self-improvement, Yuzuki's novel encourages a critical examination of the power structures that shape our experiences. This multilayered engagement with Foucault, Brown, and van Wijk invites an ongoing dialogue about the implications of neoliberal governance for individual and collective subjectivity in contemporary culture, urging us to consider how we might navigate these complex intersections in our own lives.

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Faith across Borders: A Study in Shaila Abdullah's *Saffron Dreams*

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ABSTRACT

This paper brings out the critical situations of the Muslim community in America after the destruction of September 11, 2001. It shows the identity, culture, faith, hijab and assimilation. The author Shaila Abdullah highlights the protagonist Arissa Illahi, a Pakistani Muslim woman who loses her husband Faizan in the destruction of the twin towers on September 11, 2001 and who faces an identity crisis, culture and faith. She confronts personal tragedy, cultural alienation and a redefinition of her identity in an atmosphere of prejudice. At the same time, her eventual removal of the hijab does not signify a complete rejection of her cultural identity. Rather, it represents a complex negotiation between faith, memory, motherhood, survival, and belonging. At last, she assimilates to the culture of America by concealing her own culture in order to take care of her son who suffers from various ailments.

Keywords: Identity, Culture, Faith, Hijab, Assimilation and Resilience

Introduction

Shaila Abdullah's *Saffron Dreams* signifies the consequences of September 11, 2001. The novel focuses on the personal and cultural significance of the attacks and examines how Muslim immigrants negotiate their identities in a society increasingly influenced by fear. This incident changes the livelihood of Muslims in America and also forces them to accept their ethno-religious identity. Based on the host society's reactions, they evaluate their own traditions and cultures. This makes the Pakistani Muslim woman writer bring significant changes to her fiction. While comparing the literary works of Pakistani diasporic writers, the writers who write about the aftermath of September 11, 2001 represent numerous ethnic and cultural changes.

South Asian women writers also explore the position of women from various corners and attitudes in their writings from the view of within or without diasporic locations. Lisa Lau in *Making the Difference* states that diasporic women writers "... are different, very different, from their Western and South Asian counterparts" (241). These writers prefer to bring out the position of women in their culture, their uniqueness in the host country, and the difference in following their culture. South Asian diasporic women writers narrate the distance between the cultures of East and West.

Scholars have scrutinized different aspects of *Saffron Dreams*. Chandio and Sangi read the novel in relation to Muslim female agency and argue that Muslim women negotiate their agency within the "third space" of the host country. Ghasemi, Dashtpeyma, and Alavi Shooshtari examine trauma and recovery in the novel and emphasize the relationship between Arissa's traumatic experiences and the formation of her identity. Atar, in her study of Muslim women's post-9/11 novels, considers *Saffron Dreams* in relation to Muslim masculinities and identifies Faizan as an innocent Muslim victim of the attacks. These studies establish the significance of agency, trauma, and

Muslim identity in Abdullah's novel. This reading adds to the existing symbolism of the hijab, tracing Arissa's larger movement from traumatic victimhood towards a negotiated form of identity.

Identity of Muslim American Women

The September 11, 2001 attacks produced profound social and political changes in the United States. For Muslim communities, the aftermath included heightened suspicion, categorization, discrimination, and public scrutiny. Abdullah represents these effects through Arissa's personal experience. Her Pakistani Muslim identity becomes increasingly visible in a society in which Muslim appearance and cultural practices are interpreted through the framework of terrorism. Arissa, as a Pakistani immigrant, follows the cultural practices associated with her family and marriage. Her life changes dramatically after Faizan's death. The novel presents her as a woman inhabiting several identities simultaneously: widow, mother, Pakistani immigrant, Muslim woman, and American resident.

Abdullah therefore does not portray identity as fixed. Instead, identity is frequently reshaped by social circumstances. Foucault's concept of "dividing practices" is useful in understanding this process. Geoff Danaher, Tony Schirato, and Jen Webb explain that Foucault understood the process through which people are distinguished on the basis of perceived normality. In the novel, Muslim identity is subjected to precisely such a process. Names, appearances, religious practices, and forms of dress become signs through which individuals are categorized. Abdullah uses Arissa's experience to demonstrate how a personal religious practice can become a public marker through which the individual is treated as an "Other".

Hijab as Cultural Identity

Abdullah indicates in the novel the cultural affliction in the life of Arissa. Being a Pakistani immigrant, she follows her culture according to the wish of her husband. In an interview with *Readers View*, Abdullah says that the construct of cultural identification extends the individual's sense of belonging with their culture. Abdullah provides the inter-cultural and intra-cultural affiliations and affinities through the character in the novel. She highlights how the Pakistani Muslim American experience differs from other South Asian immigrant experiences in America. Being Muslim, she also becomes emblematic of another cultural and religious identity in America. The author brings forth Muslim women's struggles with their personal issues in the aftermath of September 11, 2001.

After the calamity of the twin towers in the United States, Muslims become a target for Americans. The critics Geoff Danaher, Tony Schirato and Jen Webb reiterate the words of Foucault in their work *Understanding Foucault*. According to Foucault, the world is subject to dividing practices, a "... process of distinguishing people on the basis of their perceived normality" (60). The incident constricts the sense of normalcy and heightens tension. The names, features, and attire of Arabs or Muslims are scrutinized. The problem shifts the situation from normal to subjective.

Arissa, being a Pakistani Muslim woman, experiences significant changes in her life. In the aftermath of September 11, the number of Muslim women who wear the hijab as a marker of identity increases. Some immigrant Muslims, before the terrorist attack, had assimilated into American culture. The Muslim women who once thought of the hijab as an old custom now undertake it to assert their identity. Katherine Bullock in *Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil* says that "the hijab had become an integral part of revolutionary and anti-colonial struggle, illustrated most vividly in Algeria in the 1950s and Iran in the 1970s" (87). The aftermath of September 11, 2001 leads many young Muslim women to wear the hijab as a symbol of American Islamic identity. One Muslim leader observes that the hijab makes Americans recognize that these are American Muslims.

The veil becomes a point of contention between Muslims and their detractors. Many Muslims feel harassed by a new crusade. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, in the journal "The Post-9/11 'Hijab' as Icon," discusses this tension. Some Muslim women who wore the hijab before September 11, 2001 remove it as a precaution to avoid harassment. Other Muslim women are convinced that wearing a headscarf is not prescribed in the Quran. Rather, they argue it is a matter of personal choice. In *Quran*, chapter 24, verse 31, the importance of the hijab is described: "And tell the believing women to restrain their looks, ... and not display their beauty except what is apparent thereof ... and they should not strike their feet to draw attention

... And repent to Allah, all of you believers, so that you may succeed" (131). This sacred word of the Quran impels the Muslim woman to wear the hijab as a witness of faith.

Arissa's hijab becomes crucial for her in the United States. The hijab becomes a marker of identification in the life of Muslim women. It indicates their culture and also entraps them within it. But for Americans, it represents both religion and ethnicity. After the collapse of the twin towers on September 11, the hijab becomes a symbol of hostility. Arissa declares: "Some choices are never yours; your life's events choose them for you, and you merely obey, whether you agree or not.... the veil that I had worn since the day we got married had performed the role of that scarlet letter he'd marked on my chest... was associated with supporting the acts of the attackers" (SD 106).

The hijab reveals to society that Arissa is a Muslim, and that marks her as an "other." She defines herself as culturally different from the prevailing beliefs of America. After the ruin of September 11, she says, "... the biggest loss of my life to where I am now. It is a tale of grief and happiness, of control and losing control, of barriers and openings, of prejudices and acceptance, of holding on and letting go. It is about turning my heart inside out, mending it, and putting it right back ...trapped in time" (SD 6). After the death of her husband Faizan, she takes control of her own life. She has not expected her life to fall into such disarray. Unlike other victims of September 11, 2001, she has not received any sympathy from the society around her because of her culture and religion.

The protagonist Arissa faces violence for wearing the hijab. After she loses her husband in the catastrophe of the twin towers, she feels lonely at home. "It had been just 41 days. My iddat, bereavement period, was over" (SD 58). In order to recover from the departure of her husband, she takes a walk near the subway station. At this time, four angry and frightened teenagers begin to chase and attack her. The veil provokes them to seek revenge for the September 11, 2001 attack. The blond guy grabs her chin, cups it in his palm, and shouts at her: "You race of murderers… The veil that you wear," he continues, pulling out his knife and aiming the point at her hijab. "It's all a façade. You try to look pure, but you are evil inside. You are the non-believers, not us" (SD 61-2). These teens continue to assault her and attempt to stab her with the knife. At that moment, the boys hear the footsteps of a man. They abandon her, collapsing onto her knees, and fail to stab her because of the stranger's arrival. As a result, the baby inside her womb has been seriously affected. The medical report indicates that the baby will be born with "... heart defect, urinary tract malformations, kidney abnormalities, cleft lip" (SD 67). Perhaps, if Arissa had reasoned with the four young men before they attacked her, this might have been avoided — or if the terrorists had not struck and destroyed the twin towers, the Muslim community might have been freer and safer.

Arissa's hijab becomes an emblem that provokes others to pursue her wherever she goes. Eventually, she comes to feel that removing the hijab after her husband's death would be a kind of betrayal. She feels "... that he was gone, losing the hijab meant losing a portion of our time together" (SD 58). She does not want to permanently relinquish her husband's wish.

Hijab as the Symbol of Faith

The hijab stands as an emblem between Arissa and Faizan. Arissa is not able to change her culture according to her own wish. For her, the veil or hijab is the symbol of being a Muslim woman, and it recalls her past life with her husband, Faizan. Losing her hijab feels akin to losing her husband and the life she shared with him. As she decides to remove it, she reflects: "*Who was I bidding farewell to*? I wondered: the age-old tradition or the husband I had kept alive in my heart?" (SD 3). She never wants to relinquish her husband's wish. It is not only her husband's wish but also that of her mother-in-law. When Arissa decides to give up the veil, her mother-in-law questions her, "How do you let a tradition go, or justify it to people?" (SD 106). Losing the veil is the saddest event in Arissa's life. Without the veil, she "... felt naked, like a prostitute... [and] longed for the veil" (SD 116). In a state of confused mourning, she continues her life's journey. Nawal El Saadawi observes, "The woman's struggle is twofold—against her society and against herself" (43).

This reveals the true character of Muslim faith. Arissa's mother-in-law, Ma, submits herself entirely to Allah. She knows that everything happens according to God's wish, and Muslims accept this. Ma trusts God and says: "Allah knows I prayed for the safety of my child every

day! . . . The truth is that there is a time reserved for each one of us. When it comes, we have no say, no power to stop it" (SD 109). Arissa looks at Ma (her mother-in-law) in wonder. She is unable to find answers to the question that arises within her: "Why didn't I have her ability to absolve others, her conviction, her clarity of vision? Does that only come with age?" (SD 109). Ma's belief in God unsettles Arissa. Though Ma lost her only beloved son and is surrounded by grief and hardship, she retains the confidence that God will console and guide her.

Abdullah deliberately suggests that Pakistani Muslim women do not easily discard their culture or tradition, because they have learned, followed, and obeyed the words of their God, their traditions and their culture. Americans might not have known the true culture of Muslims. They might have assumed that Muslims and terrorists were the same. Arissa "... winced. Don't they know that terror has no religion? That religions don't preach terror?" (SD 155), as analysts continue to interpret the connection between religion and violence.

Assimilation and Resilience

Through Arissa, Abdullah reveals the essential step of thinking about the future. The novel seeks to keep the past alive while focusing on a better future. Memory is the link that enables one to build a bridge between the present and the future. Arissa and other Muslim immigrants are not only confronted with aggression and exclusion but also perceive themselves as targets of betrayal and distrust.

Arissa's decision to remove the hijab is not born of fear, but a means of freeing herself from this burden. She decides to remain in America solely for the betterment of her disabled child. In Pakistan, she cannot obtain adequate treatment for her child:

> *Raian had nine surgeries in a span of five years, including an open-heart surgery to repair a large ventricular defect when he was three weeks old, a gastrostomy to assist with feeding at one month, and removal of adenoids due to recurrent obstructive sleep apnea at age two.... At age five, he was still tube-fed... went to the Children's Hospital once a week for swallowing therapy. (SD 174-175)*

Despite all these challenges, she remains a diligent mother. Arissa chooses assimilation as the best strategy in American society for the sake of her disabled child. She assimilates into American culture. Though she loses her veil, she remains in touch with her culture. Every day she "... got dressed for work and kissed the folded veil on the bureau before [she] left" (SD 179). Finally, she is ready to call this new place her homeland: "I had survived, I realized with a degree of pride. I had not succumbed to the pain of my loss" (SD 162). Arissa secretly preserves her culture within herself while, to the outer world, she presents herself as American.

Conclusion

Abdullah demonstrates in this novel that Muslims are directed to live in peace, harmony, love, humanity and forgiveness. The attacks reshape the social environment in which Muslim Americans live and transform cultural markers such as the hijab into objects of suspicion.

The hijab occupies a particularly significant position in Arissa's story. It represents religious identity, Pakistani culture, marriage, memory, and belonging, while also exposing her to prejudice and violence. Abdullah therefore presents the veil as a contested symbol whose meaning changes according to social context.

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From Commodity to Catalyst: Tracing the Evolution of the Daughter Archetype in Indian Fiction Across Eras

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the evolving representation of daughterhood in Indian literature, emphasizing its intricate relationship with themes of family, gender, marriage, and social obligation. The figure of the daughter is often caught between emotional belonging and societal expectations, historically evaluated through her connections to marriage, reproduction, domestic values, and family honour. Analyzing the works of Munshi Premchand's *Godaan* (1936), Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954), and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997), the paper asserts that the literary portrayal of the daughter does not follow a linear trajectory from oppression to empowerment, but rather demonstrates a gradual change in narrative significance.

In *Godaan*, daughterhood is linked to economic vulnerability and familial duty. Conversely, in *Nectar in a Sieve*, it serves as a platform to critique gendered expectations about marriage, fertility, and female respectability. By the time of *The God of Small Things*, daughterhood is increasingly tied to themes of memory, personal subjectivity, and a critical examination of familial and social frameworks. The paper employs feminist literary criticism and postcolonial feminist theories to illustrate the shift in the daughter's role from a mere "commodity" within familial exchanges to a "catalyst" that highlights and interrogates these very structures. This transformation indicates a change in narrative agency, although it stops short of claiming full emancipation for the character. The study posits that the evolving representation of daughters in these texts marks a significant cultural commentary on the agency and significance of women in South Asian literature.

Keywords: daughterhood, Indian fiction, feminist literary criticism, patriarchy, female agency, domesticity, South Asian literature

Introduction

The daughter plays a complex and often paradoxical role in representations of Indian family dynamics, embodying both connection to her natal household and anticipation of her eventual departure. She is depicted as a source of affection and emotional intimacy, yet also exists within societal norms that dictate her marriage, domestic responsibilities, reproduction, and family honour. This duality makes the concept of daughterhood a rich lens through which Indian literature explores the intersection of familial spheres and broader social power structures.

Literary portrayals of daughters transcend mere childhood or kinship, serving as a focal point for discussions surrounding class, caste, gender, sexuality, economic fragility, and social respectability. Daughters often find their futures negotiated by parents, their bodies subject to societal reproductive norms, and their marriages framed as family matters, all while their personal choices are filtered through dominant expectations of femininity. Nonetheless, contemporary literary narratives increasingly imbue daughters with agency, allowing for critical examination and negotiation of these societal constructs.

This analysis delves into the evolving portrayal of daughters in three key works of Indian fiction: Munshi Premchand's *Godaan* (1936), Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954), and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997). Each text, though distinct in historical context, literary style, linguistic background, and narrative techniques, interrogates themes of family and gender within wider social power dynamics. Premchand addresses issues of rural poverty, caste, and social obligations through a lens of social realism. Markandaya explores women's experiences amid the intertwined challenges of poverty, marriage, and the transitions of rural life during industrialization. Meanwhile, Roy employs a fragmented, nonlinear narrative to probe themes of childhood, memory, caste, gender, sexuality, and family life in twentieth-century Kerala, centering on the twins Estha and Rahel alongside their mother, Ammu, and grandmother, Mammachi.

These texts collectively offer valuable insight into daughterhood as a fluid literary construct, revealing the daughter's role as an object of familial concern, a subject shaped by social regulation, a bearer of reproductive expectations, a witness to familial strife, and a voice negotiating inherited legacies (Premchand 379; Markandaya 63; Roy 32, 134).

The central thesis of this paper posits a noteworthy evolution of the daughter archetype in Indian fiction from the early to the late twentieth century, emphasizing that this change should not be perceived merely as a linear progression from oppression to liberation. Rather, it highlights a shift from the objectification of daughters within the family context toward a growing narrative subjectivity.

In the literary work *Godaan* by Premchand, the daughter's existence is heavily shaped by economic and marital frameworks, illustrating how these structures confine her identity and agency. Conversely, *Nectar in a Sieve* by Kamala Markandaya depicts daughterhood as a pivotal point through which themes such as marriage, fertility, and female vulnerability are critically explored. In Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, the narrative further evolves as daughterhood is linked to concepts of memory, perception, identity, and the challenging of established social boundaries.

The terms “commodity” and “catalyst,” outlined in the title, are intended to be conceptual. “Commodity” indicates how the social value of the daughter can be evaluated through factors such as marriage prospects, economic exchange, reproductive capabilities, and familial honour. On the other hand, “catalyst” pertains to the role of the daughter as an increasingly significant figure through whom the narrative critiques and exposes the societal constructs that dictate her position and experiences.

The study is framed around three critical inquiries:

1. How is the social and familial value of the daughter constructed in various periods of Indian fiction?
2. In what ways do marriage, economic dependence, reproduction, caste, and domesticity influence representations of daughterhood?
3. How does the daughter's narrative agency evolve within the selected texts across different historical contexts? (Premchand 379; Markandaya 63; Roy 32)

Daughterhood, Patriarchy, and the Question of Agency

Feminist literary criticism critically explores how literature mirrors, contests, or complicates gender structures, with Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* being pivotal in understanding womanhood as shaped by social and cultural processes rather than mere biological factors. De Beauvoir's formulation of woman as the "Other"—"He is the Subject, he is the Absolute—she is the Other" (16)—provides a framework for reading daughterhood relationally: daughters are defined through their connections to fathers, mothers, husbands, families, and communities. Her further assertion that "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman" (283) is useful because daughterhood is treated not as a purely biological status but as an identity produced through social expectations.

Postcolonial feminist analysis deepens this discourse, underscoring that gender cannot be appraised in isolation from historical and material contexts. Chandra Talpade Mohanty critiques the production of a singular "Third World woman" in Western feminist scholarship, arguing that such representation overlooks differences of class, caste, religion, region, economics, and history. She describes the problem as "the production of the 'Third World woman' as a singular monolithic subject" (333). This intervention is particularly relevant to Indian literature because the daughter cannot be understood through a universal model of oppression; her position is shaped by specific familial, economic, caste, and regional conditions.

Furthermore, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's investigations into representation question how marginalized subjects are narrated within literary texts. Her distinction between "representation as speaking for" and "re-presentation as in art or philosophy" (275) directs attention to who speaks, who is spoken for, and how literary subjects are made legible. Her formulation that "the subaltern cannot speak" (308) exposes the structures through which marginalized speech may be mediated or appropriated. Thus, discussions of daughterhood must encompass both the character's position within the story and the narrative authority through which her experience is presented.

Within this analysis, agency is broadly defined rather than reduced to outright defiance. It can manifest through negotiation, reluctance, care, endurance, memory, or the ability to interpret one's situation. This prevents historical female characters from being reduced to passive victims despite limited choices.

The Daughter and the Economy of Marriage in Godaan

Munshi Premchand's *Godaan*, published in 1936, serves as a critical examination of rural Indian life through social realism, focusing on poverty, indebtedness, caste hierarchy, and economic pressure. The novel highlights the precarious position of daughters through Rupa, whose marriage illustrates the intertwining of daughterhood with material necessity. When her marriage becomes a means of securing money, Hori objects to the implied transaction, asking whether he has reached a point where others can ask him to "sell my daughter" (Premchand 379). The phrase crystallizes the paper's idea of familial commodification: Rupa's marriage becomes inseparable from the economic survival of her household.

Hori's actions toward his daughters must therefore be contextualized within the prevailing economic realities shaping family decisions. His treatment should not be interpreted simply as individual cruelty but as a response to systemic poverty and a social paradigm in which daughters' marital arrangements affect familial economic standing. The same passage describes Rupa as his "flower of a girl" (379). Yet this emotional recognition does not free her from the material conditions governing the marriage. Affection and commodification consequently coexist within the same familial relationship.

In Godaan, daughterhood is not just an emotional bond; it becomes a measure of the family's economic viability. Love for daughters coexists with material calculations related to marriage and reputation. The daughter is emotionally attached to the natal household but is also prepared for departure through marriage, producing a gendered distinction in belonging and inheritance. Rupa's constrained position thus makes visible the pressure exerted by poverty on intimate decisions.

Premchand also introduces female characters such as Dhania, who contest patriarchal and caste authority and assert moral authority within the domestic sphere. Rupa's limited control over the economic circumstances surrounding her marriage is therefore read alongside other forms of female agency in the novel. Her later concern for her parents further complicates the idea that she remains merely an object of exchange. Daughterhood in Godaan thus becomes a figure through which gender, economics, marriage, and social obligation become mutually visible.

Ira in Nectar in a Sieve: Daughterhood, Marriage, and the Female Body

Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve*, published in 1954, presents a nuanced exploration of Rukmani through a first-person narrative. The story follows her arranged marriage with Nathan and her struggle with poverty, agricultural instability, industrialization, and family loss. Central to this narrative is her daughter Ira, whose life becomes pivotal to the examination of women's vulnerability within patriarchal and economically unstable environments.

Ira's journey connects daughterhood with marriage and fertility, shifting the emphasis from the economic transaction surrounding marriage to reproductive expectations placed upon the female body. Ira's marriage initially appears to offer security, but her husband rejects her after she fails to bear a child. Rukmani's response—"you must not blame him. He has taken another woman" (Markandaya 63)—is revealing because it demonstrates how patriarchal expectations become internalized within the family. The statement shows the difficulty of imagining the husband's decision outside the accepted logic of reproduction and male entitlement.

Markandaya consequently expands familial commodification by tying a woman's social worth to fertility. Ira's infertility becomes a social judgment rather than a private condition, while her return to the natal home complicates the conventional movement of daughterhood from one household to another. The daughter expected to leave becomes a daughter who must return because the marital household no longer recognizes her value.

Despite these constraints, Ira is portrayed as more than a victim. Her care for Kuti and later for her own child creates agency grounded in responsibility and endurance. Rukmani observes that Ira was "meant to have children" (Markandaya 22), but the novel complicates this expectation by showing Ira becoming a mother under circumstances that challenge conventional ideas of legitimate reproduction. Her nurturing capacity becomes a counterpoint to the earlier rejection that defined her as barren.

The first-person perspective, mediated by Rukmani, adds an intergenerational dimension. Rukmani's reflections on Ira reveal the structures shaping her daughter's life and the mother's recognition of their effects. Ira therefore becomes a catalyst for examining patriarchal definitions of marriage, fertility, and female worth. Her agency is expressed through care, survival, and the reconstitution of familial value after the failure of the marital arrangement.

Rahel and the Emergence of Narrative Subjectivity in The God of Small Things

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, published in 1997, signifies a major formal and thematic shift in narrative style and subject matter. The setting revolves around Kerala and moves between childhood and adulthood while exploring caste, gender, family structures, sexuality, political history, and memory. Rahel grows up within a fractured family marked by divorce, gender inequality, caste hierarchies, and unresolved histories. The novel's reflections on Sophie Mol's arrival emphasize that "things can change in a day" (Roy 32), establishing memory and retrospective interpretation as fundamental features of the narrative.

Rahel's importance transcends the events of her life; the narrative positions her consciousness as a lens through which the adult world is perceived and re-evaluated. Her childhood perspective reveals contradictions within adult structures of authority and respectability. The daughter therefore becomes not simply an object acted upon by family structures but a perspective through which those structures become visible.

The relationship between Rahel and her mother, Ammu, illustrates intergenerational transmission. After Ammu's marriage fails, she occupies a precarious social position, while Chacko retains greater legitimacy despite his own marital failure. Rahel inherits this gendered legacy before she can fully

comprehend it. Her position as daughter becomes a site where the consequences of female autonomy, divorce, and patriarchal double standards are remembered and interpreted.

The novel further complicates daughterhood through caste. The relationship between Ammu and Velutha crosses boundaries that the family and social order attempt to maintain. Mammachi's recollection of caste exclusion reveals that Paravans were not permitted to "touch anything that touchables touched" (Roy 134). Rahel's childhood is consequently shaped by overlapping systems of gender, caste, family, and sexuality, reinforcing the need for the intersectional and postcolonial feminist framework used here.

The formal structure enhances this evolution. Roy employs a nonlinear narrative that moves between Rahel's childhood and adulthood, making her return to Ayemenem inseparable from memories of early life. Memory becomes a means of revisiting and reinterpreting the past. Daughterhood consequently transcends a merely transitional phase and becomes an enduring facet of identity. Rahel's adult consciousness is shaped by family history, and the narrative form allows that consciousness to expose persistent gender, caste, and familial power. The daughter thus functions increasingly as a catalyst: her perspective makes structural constraints available for scrutiny.

From Commodity to Catalyst: A Comparative Reading

A comparative reading of the three novels reveals a nuanced evolution in the narrative role of daughters. In Godaan, the daughter embodies economic and social responsibilities related to marriage; Rupa's proposed marriage makes visible the connection between daughterhood and debt (Premchand 379). Conversely, Nectar in a Sieve shifts the focus toward reproductive expectations, as Ira's husband's rejection is explicitly connected with her inability to bear children (Markandaya 63). Finally, in The God of Small Things, daughterhood evolves further to encompass memory, perception, identity, caste, and a critical examination of inherited social structures (Roy 32, 134). The change is therefore not from "oppression" to "freedom" but from one dominant narrative function to another: the daughter becomes progressively more central to the text's ability to reveal the structures governing her life.

The transformation can be understood through the three stages set out in Table 1.

Table 1: Evolution of the daughter archetype across the three novels

Text	Construction of Daughterhood	Dominant Structure	Form of Agency
Godaan	Familial and economic responsibility	Marriage, poverty, social obligation	Restricted negotiation
Nectar in a Sieve	Marital and reproductive identity	Marriage, fertility, poverty	Care, endurance, responsibility
The God of Small Things	Memory, identity, and subjectivity	Gender, caste, family hierarchy	Perception, memory, interpretation

The table should not be interpreted as evidence of a simple historical progression. The three novels share significant thematic overlaps, particularly in their portrayal of women and their evolving roles in family and social structures. Premchand's female characters exemplify different forms of resistance, while Markandaya's Ira embodies agency through care and endurance. Roy's Rahel, meanwhile, remains deeply affected by structural forces that she cannot simply escape. A crucial change across these narratives is therefore the shifting narrative role of the daughter, transitioning from a figure whose social value is measured through marriage and reproduction to a figure whose consciousness helps expose those structures.

Rupa's marriage highlights the connection between gender and economic vulnerability, while the language surrounding the proposed marriage—Hori's fear that he is being asked to "sell my daughter" (Premchand 379)—makes the commodity metaphor explicit. Ira's rejection exposes the reproductive logic of marital

value, while Rukmani's acceptance of the husband's decision demonstrates how such norms can become normalized within the family (Markandaya 63). Rahel's reflections, by contrast, expose the enduring influences of gender, caste, memory, and family power across generations (Roy 32, 134). Consequently, the daughter's evolving social position becomes linked to the critical perspectives of the texts themselves: as her narrative significance increases, the daughter becomes increasingly capable of revealing contradictions within the social conventions that regulate her.

Beyond the Victim: Empowerment Binary

A chronological comparison of women in literature risks reductiveness when earlier works are viewed solely as representations of oppression and later ones as symbols of liberation, ultimately oversimplifying literary history. Premchand's female characters, like Dhania, display moral and emotional authority despite restrictive settings, complicating readings that depict women merely as powerless victims. Markandaya's Ira similarly exhibits agency through responsibility and care, while Roy's Rahel complicates the notion of a straightforward feminist heroine: greater narrative visibility does not equate to complete freedom. These differences support Mohanty's warning against treating women as a homogeneous category and against applying a universal model of oppression across culturally and historically distinct contexts (337–38).

The concept of negotiated agency therefore offers a more nuanced understanding of women's roles in literature. Women may assert agency through confrontation, negotiation, refusal, care, endurance, memory, reinterpretation, and alternative relationships. This framework is particularly important to postcolonial feminist literary criticism because it prevents the imposition of a singular model of liberation across diverse historical and cultural contexts. In the selected novels, the daughter need not overthrow the family to possess narrative significance; the act of perceiving, enduring, remembering, or revealing the contradictions of family life can itself become an important form of agency.

Daughterhood and Intergenerational Memory

Another important pattern connecting the three texts is the relationship between daughterhood and generational transmission (Markandaya 63, 91; Roy 32).

Daughters inherit more than names and family relationships. They inherit expectations, memories, anxieties, and social rules (Markandaya 63; Roy 32).

Rukmani's understanding of Ira is shaped by her own experience of marriage and motherhood. Ammu's history shapes Rahel's understanding of gender and family. These relationships demonstrate that daughterhood is never entirely individual; it is produced through an intergenerational exchange of experience. In Nectar in a Sieve, the first-person narration makes this transmission especially explicit because Ira's experience is filtered through her mother's memory and interpretation (Markandaya 63, 91). In The God of Small Things, Rahel's adult return to Ayemenem similarly turns childhood experience into remembered knowledge, with the narrative insisting that the past must be reconstructed and interpreted (Roy 32). The daughter therefore occupies an important position between inheritance and reinterpretation.

Yet inheritance does not necessarily mean repetition.

The daughter may inherit patriarchal expectations while simultaneously developing an awareness of their contradictions (Mohanty 336–37).

This is where the daughter becomes a catalyst.

She becomes the point at which inherited structures may be examined and potentially disrupted.

Literature is particularly suited to representing this process because narrative can move across generations and perspectives. It can show what one generation experiences, what another remembers, and what remains unresolved between them (Roy 32, 134).

The daughter consequently becomes a figure of cultural continuity as well as cultural change.

The Daughter as a Site of Negotiated Agency

This section explores the evolving representation of daughterhood in *Godaan, Nectar in a Sieve*, and *The God of Small Things*, framing agency not as total

freedom from patriarchal constraints but as a negotiation of identities within them.

In *Godaan*, the agency of the daughter is restricted by economic conditions and societal expectations surrounding marriage. Rupa's fate is largely dictated by her family's financial struggles and marital norms, revealing the interplay between familial affection and economic necessity. The daughter's role, though limited, illuminates the significant pressures exerted on families and the inherent inequalities in female futures, thus intertwining themes of poverty and patriarchy within Premchand's social realism.

Conversely, *Nectar in a Sieve* presents Ira's experience, wherein traditional patriarchal expectations around marriage and fertility deeply influence her identity. Despite her rejection by her husband, Ira embodies a form of negotiated agency through endurance, care, and responsibility. Her actions, while not overtly rebellious, illustrate that agency can exist in subtler forms, allowing her to maintain dignity and familial bonds amid adversity. Markandaya's narrative complicates notions of resistance, suggesting that meaningful actions under constraints are also forms of agency.

In *The God of Small Things*, Rahel's agency is closely tied to consciousness, interpretation, and memory. Through a child's eyes, she perceives the societal contradictions of caste, gender, and respectability, questioning their legitimacy. Rahel's return to Ayemenem highlights a transformative relationship with memory, where remembering becomes a means of engaging with suppressed experiences and societal constructs.

The comparative analysis of these texts proposes that agency is a continuum, from constrained negotiation in Godaan, to embodied endurance in *Nectar in a Sieve*, and finally to interpretive agency in *The God of Small Things*. This continuum underscores that contemporary representations of daughterhood don't entirely liberate characters from patriarchal influences. Instead, they illuminate the complexity of negotiating power dynamics. Daughterhood emerges as a critical site where inherited expectations confront individual identity, facilitating a deeper examination of social structures. The movement from being perceived as a mere commodity to becoming a catalyst signifies a shift from being valued for societal norms to actively revealing the operations of those norms (Premchand 379; Markandaya 63; Roy 32, 134).

Conclusion

The representation of daughterhood in Indian fiction demonstrates a complex evolution in the interplay between gender, family, and narrative agency, as illustrated through a comparative analysis of Munshi Premchand's *Godaan*, Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve*, and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. This transformation cannot simply be categorized as a linear progression from oppression to empowerment.

In *Godaan*, daughterhood is deeply influenced by economic hardship, marriage, and familial duties. The character of the daughter highlights how poverty and patriarchal structures exacerbate each other, illustrating her entrapment within the material conditions of her household.

Nectar in a Sieve broadens this framework by presenting Ira, whose experiences shed light on the connections between marriage, female sexuality, and societal expectations regarding reproduction. Her rejection by her husband symbolizes how women's bodies can equate to social currency, yet her subsequent behaviours reveal forms of agency derived from care and familial responsibilities.

The God of Small Things presents Rahel, who embodies a further evolution of daughterhood. Her focus transcends her familial role; rather, it encompasses an awareness of the family's contradictions, explored through memory, childhood perspectives, and a nonlinear storytelling style. This approach allows daughterhood to emerge as a complex site of narrative interpretation.

The metaphor of movement from “commodity” to “catalyst” captures this transformation within literature, highlighting a shift in literary function rather than indicating complete historical liberation. The daughter transitions from being an entity valued according to societal limitations to a figure that exposes, remembers, and interrogates those limitations.

This evolution is crucial in the context of South Asian literature, illustrating how intimate familial dynamics

relate to wider issues of gender, caste, class, economic power, and cultural expectations. Consequently, the daughter emerges not merely as a victim of patriarchy or a simplistic emblem of liberation; rather, she is a dynamic literary character through whom evolving perceptions of womanhood, familial roles, and social dynamics are navigated.

The core transformation across these narratives resides in what happens through the daughter, not merely to her. Initially treated as a figure whose worth is dictated by external forces, she gradually takes on a role that brings those forces to light, enabling the narrative to challenge existing assumptions. Thus, the daughter evolves from a commodity into a catalyst—not through the eradication of patriarchy, but through her placement in literary contexts that allow for scrutiny, interpretation, and confrontation of patriarchal structures (Premchand 379; Markandaya 63; Roy 32, 134).

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Singing the City Awake: Calcutta as Memory, Longing, and Palimpsest in Bengali Urban Songs

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ABSTRACT

Calcutta—now Kolkata—has long transcended its physicality to emerge as an emotional and mnemonic landscape in Bengali urban songs. As a city that is as much felt as it is seen, Calcutta has inspired musicians across generations to preserve its shifting soul through sound. From the wistful camaraderie of Manna Dey's '*Coffee House-er Sei Addata*' to the lyrical despair of Kabir Suman's '*Tomake Chai*' and the conversational intimacy of Anjan Dutt's '*Ranjana*', music has documented the city's changing contours, both physical and emotional. With the rise of *Jibonmukhi Gaan* in the 1990s, the ordinary textures of Kolkata life—its *para* culture, trams, tea stalls, bookshops, and monsoon streets—entered the musical imagination as metaphors of memory, rootedness, and loss. Recent songs such as Anupam Roy's '*Kolkata, Tumio Hente Dekho*' extend this legacy, urging listeners to encounter the city not through nostalgia alone but through renewed attention to its stories and silences.

This paper argues that Bengali urban songs function as memory archives, preserving fragments of a city perpetually in transition, and that the musical portrayal of Kolkata offers a lens onto how personal and collective identity are shaped within Bengali modernity. Drawing on urban theory, memory studies, and postcolonial cultural criticism, the paper reads Kolkata as a living palimpsest in which the act of remembering the city becomes, in itself, a form of love.

Keywords: Bengali Urban Songs, Calcutta, Belonging, Cultural Memory, Jibonmukhi Gaan

Introduction

There is a particular kind of homesickness that Bengalis reserve for a city they have never left. To grow up in Kolkata, or to have grown up on its idea, is to inherit a peculiar grammar of loss—one rehearsed daily in conversation, in literature, and perhaps most insistently in song. The city of Calcutta, renamed Kolkata in 2001, is not merely a geographic or administrative entity; it is a dense, emotionally textured landscape within the Bengali cultural imagination, continuously narrated, mourned, and re-inhabited through art. In the domain of popular music, and especially in what has come to be called Bengali urban song, Kolkata rarely functions as mere backdrop. It surfaces instead as a kind of protagonist—evocative, layered, at once beloved and grieved.

This paper explores how Bengali urban songs work as mnemonic devices that hold onto the emotional, cultural, and spatial transitions of Kolkata even as the city itself continues to change beneath them. Beginning with Manna Dey's canonical *adda* song of the late twentieth century and moving through the confessional register of *Jibonmukhi Gaan* in the 1990s to Anupam Roy's more self-aware contemporary lyricism, the discussion traces a genealogy of longing

that is neither uniformly sentimental nor merely decorative. Rather, these songs enact what might be called critical remembering: they hold the city accountable to its own disappearing textures while refusing to let those textures disappear from memory altogether. The central claim of this paper is that music, because of its intimacy of address and its reliance on repetition and recall, is uniquely suited to archiving urban experience—and that Kolkata, sung into being again and again across five decades, becomes less a place fixed on a map than a structure of feeling shared across generations of listeners.

Theoretical Coordinates: The City as Narrative, Memory, and Palimpsest

To speak of a city as something that can be "remembered" through song requires first unsettling the assumption that cities are simply built environments awaiting description. Michel de Certeau, in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, proposes that walking through a city is itself an act of narration, a kind of enunciation in which space is animated and made meaningful only through the pedestrian's improvised movement across it (Certeau 91). For Certeau, the city planner's map and the walker's lived itinerary are two entirely different texts; the latter is always more unruly, more intimate, and more forgetful of official boundaries. Bengali urban songs, I want to suggest, occupy exactly this second register. They do not describe Kolkata as a cartographer would. They walk through it—down College Street, along the Hooghly, into a shuttered coffee house—the way a person half-remembering a lost friend might retrace an old route without quite meaning to. If Certeau gives us the city as narrated space, Andreas Huyssen gives us the city as accumulated time. In *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*, Huyssen describes the contemporary city as a palimpsest, a surface on which multiple temporal layers are inscribed, erased, and inscribed again, so that the strong marker of present space is always already densely inscribed by traces of the past (Huyssen 7). A palimpsest does not erase its earlier writing cleanly; it lets the older text bleed faintly through the newer one. This is precisely the sensation that recurs across Bengali urban song: the tram line under the flyover, the handwritten letter beneath the SMS, the coffee house beneath the mall that eventually replaced it. Kolkata's songs are, in this sense, exercises in palimpsestic listening—they ask the ear to hear two cities superimposed, the one that is and the one that was. A third coordinate is necessary to explain why this remembering so often takes the specific emotional shape of longing rather than simple documentation. Svetlana Boym's distinction between restorative and reflective nostalgia is useful here. Restorative nostalgia, Boym writes, seeks to rebuild the lost home and patch up the memory gaps, treating its own longing as a form of truth rather than sentiment (Boym 41); reflective nostalgia, by contrast, dwells in the imperfect process of remembrance itself, cherishing fragments without demanding their literal return (Boym 49). Manna Dey's *coffee house* is restorative in temperament—it wants the old *adda* back, whole and unbroken. Anupam Roy's Kolkata is reflective—it asks the city merely to notice its own scars. The difference between these two nostalgic modes marks, as this paper will show, a genuine historical shift in how Bengali song has related to its city across half a century, moving gradually from mourning toward critique.

Finally, Marianne Hirsch's concept of *post-memory* offers a way to understand why these songs continue to matter to listeners who never personally experienced the Kolkata being mourned. Hirsch developed the term to describe how the memory of a traumatic or transformative past is transmitted to a following generation not through recollection but through imaginative investment, projection, and creation, often via the mediation of art, photography, or story (Hirsch 22). Diasporic Bengalis and younger residents of a rapidly transformed Kolkata inherit the coffee house, the tram, and the *adda* in exactly this secondhand way—not as lived fact but as a felt inheritance, transmitted through song rather than direct memory. Together, Certeau, Huyssen, Boym, and Hirsch supply the interpretive vocabulary this paper needs: the city as narrated, layered, longed-for, and inherited.

Adda, the Coffee House, and the Bhadralok Structure of Feeling

Before turning to specific songs, it is worth pausing on the cultural institution that anchors much of Bengali urban nostalgia: the *adda*. Dipesh Chakrabarty, in his essay "Adda: A History of Sociality" from *Provincializing Europe*, describes *adda* as a distinctly

Bengali, largely urban and middle-class practice of unstructured, purposeless conversation, one that the *bhadralok* intelligentsia of Calcutta elevated almost to the status of an art form and, later, mourned as a vanishing one (Chakrabarty 180-213). *Adda* was never merely gossip; it was a mode of sociality through which literary opinion, political argument, and personal friendship were forged in cafes, *para* clubs, and college corridors. Sudipta Kaviraj's account of Calcutta's public and domestic spatial imagination is instructive alongside Chakrabarty's, since Kaviraj shows how colonial and postcolonial Calcutta organized its sense of "outside" and "inside", public and intimate space, in ways that made the street-corner or coffee-house *adda* a peculiarly charged threshold between the two (Kaviraj 83). It is precisely this threshold space that Manna Dey's song sets out to mourn.

Michel de Certeau's distinction between the panoptic "concept-city", visible from above, and the tactical city produced by pedestrians walking below, offers a productive entry point into why Manna Dey's 1983 lament for the Coffee House still functions as an anthem forty years later. Composed by Suparna Kanti Ghosh with lyrics by Gauriprasanna Mazumdar, the song does not describe College Street's Indian Coffee House as an institution or an address; it reconstructs it as a set of walked, talked, and re-talked itineraries belonging to seven named friends whose lives fan out from that single table into exile, madness, illness, wealth, and death as Nikhilesh settles in Paris, Moidul in Dhaka, Roma is admitted to a mental asylum, Amal battles terminal cancer, Sujata enjoys material comfort, and D'Souza has already died. This is Certeau's récit, the city rendered legible only through the stories walked through it, and it explains why the song became, within a few decades, something closer to civic liturgy than personal reminiscence: it is widely regarded as a cult classic and cultural symbol of West Bengal that came to function as the unofficial anthem of the College Street Coffee House itself. On the day Manna Dey died in 2013, that identification collapsed the distance between song and site almost completely; the Coffee House's own waiters were reported moving more slowly than usual, as though the building itself were in mourning, and an actress's public tribute simply repeated the song's own refrain back at the news, as though no other language for the loss existed. The song, in other words, did not merely represent the adda; it supplied the only vocabulary the city had ready to hand for grieving it.

It is worth pausing on what kind of loss this is. The "golden afternoons" the song mourns were never, strictly, endangered by demolition — the Coffee House still stands, still serves its signature dishes, and the tables are still occupied. What has been lost, and what Dey's lyric registers with such precision, is a sociality: a specific texture of *adda*, the loosely structured, digressive, entirely unproductive talk that Dipesh Chakrabarty and others have identified as central to Bengali *bhadralok* civic identity. The commodification of that loss is itself instructive. In 2025, a new Bengali film titled *Coffee Houser Sei Adda Ta* was announced, explicitly built around the song, with its directors explaining that they wanted to imagine the youthful, formative years of the seven friends the song only shows us in retrospect, casting Gen-Z actors to help a new generation access the same spirit of *adda* and nostalgia. This is nostalgia turned into intellectual property, extended backward into prequel, and marketed to precisely the generation least likely to have any lived memory of the original Coffee House culture. A critical reading has to hold both things at once: the song's genuine capacity to keep a form of urban sociality "warm and shareable", in the paper's own phrase, and the commercial apparatus that now profits from repackaging that warmth for an audience being sold nostalgia for an experience it never had.

What makes the song more than a personal elegy is the way it uses the Coffee House as what Huyssen would call a densely inscribed site: a place where the earlier text of youthful ferment is still faintly legible beneath the present quiet (Huyssen 7). The song's melancholy, then, is not simply about aging friends. It is about a form of urban sociality—*adda* itself—that Chakrabarty argues was already being pronounced endangered by the late twentieth century, threatened by the increasing privatization of leisure, the rise of television, and the quickened pace of professional life (Chakrabarty 180-213). Dey's Coffee House is restorative nostalgia in Boym's sense: the singer wants the old table back, filled again with the same voices, and the song's ache comes from knowing this is precisely what cannot happen (Boym 41).

Jibonmukhi Gaan and the Turn Toward the Unglamorous City

If Manna Dey's generation sang the city from a certain elevated space—melodious, orchestrated, occasionally sentimental in a classical film-song idiom—the 1990s produced a decisive rupture. *Jibonmukhi Gaan*, emerged through artists such as Kabir Suman, Nachiketa Chakraborty, and Anjan Dutt as a deliberate departure from both devotional and conventionally romantic Bengali song traditions. These artists wrote about unemployment, failed relationships, corrupt landlords, crowded buses, and the general fatigue of ordinary urban existence, often in a conversational register closer to spoken Bengali than to the more Sanskritized diction of earlier lyric traditions. The shift was not only thematic but formal: minimal instrumentation, near-spoken vocal delivery, and lyrics that read more like diary entries than verse.

Kabir Suman's "Tomake Chai", released in 1992 and widely regarded as the movement's inaugurating gesture, illustrates this shift with unusual clarity. On its surface the song is a love song, its title translating simply as "I want you". But the desire the song articulates is inseparable from its urban setting—the rain-slicked streets, the crowded intersections, the anonymous press of city life against which the singer's longing takes shape. Suman's voice, deliberately unpolished and tremulous, refuses the studio gloss of earlier film-song romanticism; the effect is confessional rather than performative, as though the listener has been allowed into a private, unrehearsed moment. Read through Certeau's framework, the song's lover and the song's city become nearly indistinguishable itineraries: to want the woman is also, somehow, to want the wet Kolkata street on which she is imagined walking (Certeau 91). The city here is not decoration for a romance; it is the medium through which romantic feeling becomes legible at all.

Anjan Dutt's "Ranjana Ami Ar Ashbona", released in 1995, pushes this urban intimacy even further into colloquial territory. Addressed to a woman named Ranjana whom the singer confesses he will not return to see, the song is built almost entirely out of casual, half-finished sentences—the kind of talk one might overhear on a tram rather than read in a poem. Ranjana herself becomes less a specific person than a metonym for an entire vanished social world: the cinema halls that have shut down, the *para* addas that have thinned out, the friendships allowed to lapse under the pressure of adult disappointment. Dutt's achievement lies in refusing grandeur; the song's Kolkata is not the Kolkata of monuments but of its quiet decays and subtle joys, a city visible only in its small, unremarked erosions. This is where *Jibonmukhi Gaan* performs its most significant cultural work: it relocates urban memory away from official heritage sites and toward the unglamorous, in Kaviraj's terms toward the domestic and semi-public spaces that rarely make it into civic history at all (Kaviraj 83). The tea stall, the rented flat, the second-run cinema hall become, in these songs, as historically significant as any listed colonial building, precisely because they are what actually constituted daily life for the generation singing about them.

Kolkata as Palimpsest: Anupam Roy and Critical Remembering

By the time Anupam Roy released "Kolkata, Tumio Hente Dekho" in 2013, both the city and its musical idiom had changed again. Kolkata by the second decade of the twenty-first century had absorbed the metro rail, the shopping mall, and the smartphone, even as its older infrastructure—the tram network foremost among these—persisted in increasingly attenuated form. Roy's song responds to this doubled city by adopting an unusual rhetorical strategy: it addresses Kolkata directly, in the second person, urging the city itself to walk its own streets and take stock of what it has become. The gesture personifies the city not as a nostalgic object to be pined for from a fixed vantage point, but as an agent capable of self-reflection, even self-reckoning. This is, I would argue, where Roy's song departs meaningfully from both Dey's restorative elegy and the more confessional realism of the *Jibonmukhi* generation. Where Manna Dey wants the old table back and Kabir Suman confesses a private ache, Roy's lyric persona steps to one side and asks the city to look at its own reflection—flawed, patched, half-renovated—without either romanticizing or disowning it. This is closer to what Boym calls reflective nostalgia, a mode that cherishes shattered fragments of memory without insisting they be restored to wholeness (Boym 49). The song's Kolkata is allowed to contain the tram and the metro simultaneously, the secondhand bookstall and

the multiplex, without resolving the contradiction between them. It is a palimpsest permitted to remain a palimpsest, its older inscriptions visible precisely because no one has tried to scrub them away (Huyssen 7).

This palimpsestic quality recurs across the physical landmarks that Bengali urban song returns to obsessively: Howrah Bridge, College Street, the North Kolkata para. These sites function almost as recurring characters across otherwise unrelated songs and decades, precisely because they have accumulated enough historical density to carry multiple, sometimes contradictory, emotional charges at once. Howrah Bridge can be sung as a symbol of colonial-era engineering pride, as a backdrop for youthful romance, and as a site of quiet daily commute exhaustion, all within the same broad musical tradition. College Street can house both the intellectual ferment Chakrabarty associates with adda culture and the more mundane, exam-anxious traffic of students buying secondhand textbooks. Bengali urban song does not resolve these layers into a single meaning; it lets them sit stacked atop one another, the way Huyssen's palimpsestic city permits its earlier texts to remain faintly legible beneath the new (Huyssen 7).

Songs as Archives of Feeling: Memory, Post-memory, and the Diasporic Ear

What allows a coffee house song from the 1980s, a confessional love song from 1992, and a self-reflexive address from 2013 to function together as a coherent tradition, rather than as three unrelated artifacts, is the archival capacity of music itself. Songs are repeatable in a way that lived experience is not; a listener can return to “Tomake Chai” on a given rainy evening decades after its release and re-enter, however partially, the emotional weather of a Kolkata street that may no longer exist in that form. This repeatability is what makes music, more than most other media, capable of doing the work Marianne Hirsch calls postmemory: transmitting an emotional inheritance to those who did not live through its original occasion (Hirsch 22).

This matters enormously for two overlapping audiences that Bengali urban song has increasingly had to address. The first is the Bengali diaspora, for whom Kolkata exists largely as an inherited idea rather than a daily lived environment; for a Bengali family settled in Delhi, Dubai, or Dublin, these songs often substitute for the city itself, offering a portable, replayable Kolkata that can be summoned in a living room anywhere in the world. The second audience is simply the younger generation born into a Kolkata already transformed—young people for whom the tram is a curiosity rather than a daily conveyance, and the Coffee House a heritage site rather than a living adda. For both audiences, the songs function not as nostalgia in the narrow sense but as a kind of cultural compass: an inherited emotional map of a city that no longer needs to be physically visited, or even historically accurate, to be deeply felt. The fading tram lines of North Kolkata, the melancholic marquees of single-screen halls such as Mitra or Paradise, the ordinary laughter of a college canteen—all of these are, in Hirsch's terms, made available for imaginative investment and projection by listeners who never directly witnessed them, precisely because the songs hold the emotional texture of these places in a form that outlasts the places themselves (Hirsch 22).

It is worth noting that this archival function is not incidental to Bengali urban song but constitutive of it. Unlike a photograph, which fixes a single instant, or a written history, which tends toward chronological ordering, song holds memory in a form that is simultaneously personal and choral—sung alone in private and sung together at gatherings, carried in the body as much as in the mind. This is part of why adda, Coffee House culture, and Jibonmukhi confession have proven such durable subjects for Bengali song: these are themselves forms of collective, repeatable, half-improvised sociality, and song simply extends their logic into a medium that can travel further and last longer than any single evening of conversation ever could.

What the *Jibonmukhi* generation relocated, more specifically, was the site of memory. Where Manna Dey's nostalgia is anchored to a named institution — an actual coffee house with an actual address — Anjan Dutt's early work, beginning with his 1994 album *Shunte Ki Chao?*, moved memory into unglamorous, serial, almost administrative spaces: a phone number functions as a song title in “2-4-4-1-1-3-9 (Bela Bose)”, and the emotional charge is generated less by a place than by a residue, a digit sequence that has outlived the relationship it once connected. Nachiketa's

catalogue performs a similar relocation across decades — album and song titles running from *Mukhomukhi* and *Ei Agune Haath Rakho* through *Ekhon Tokhon* and *Din Bodoler Gaan* into the 2010s — repeatedly returning to the ordinary vocabulary of getting by, of "time changing" and "living meaning", rather than to any single lost landmark. This is memory democratized and diffused across the whole surface of the quotidian city, which is precisely why the movement's own chroniclers keep insisting on its ethical seriousness against the charge that "life-oriented" was merely an advertising slogan: commentators have traced the genre's lineage back through Lalon's defiance of religious orthodoxy and Bhupen Hazarika's songs about the miseries of tea-garden labourers, arguing that Suman and Nachiketa were less inventing a new form than making explicit a tradition of socially engaged song that had always run beneath Bengali music's more ornamental surface. Whether or not one accepts that genealogy in full, it registers something the paper's own argument needs: the *Jibonmukhi* turn is not simply a stylistic shift from orchestral playback to acoustic guitar, but an argument about where in the city grief and dignity are permitted to live — not only in coffee houses frequented by the literate professional classes, but in phone numbers, rented rooms, and unfinished degrees.

Marianne Hirsch's post-memory was developed to describe the relationship of the children of trauma survivors to a past they did not live but that structures their imagination as though they had. Applying it to Kolkata's urban song risks overreach if handled carelessly — the closing of a tram route is not the Shoah — but the concept's core insight travels well in scaled-down form: post-memory names an inheritance transmitted not through direct experience but through affectively saturated cultural forms, songs among them, that create the sensation of memory in those who never possessed the original event. This is precisely the mechanism by which a diasporic teenager who has never sat in the Coffee House can nonetheless feel the loss the song describes as though it were partly her own, and it is also the mechanism the 2025 film exploits commercially, manufacturing "post-memory" for an audience it has itself created — a stranger's grandmother, a diasporic teenager, and a present-day student might inhabit the same remembered corner "for the duration of a single song", read through Hirsch, is not simply a lyrical flourish but a precise description of how post-memory operates at the level of the three-minute song form: briefly, repeatably, and without requiring biographical entitlement to the memory being borrowed.

Memory, left to itself, catalogues: it would be content to note that the Coffee House survives while its addas have thinned, that the tram network has been curtailed rather than closed, that College Street's secondhand stalls persist under real-estate pressure they may not indefinitely withstand. What Dey, the Jibonmukhi songwriters, and Roy each do instead is refuse to let the catalogue harden into elegy. The refrain "aaj ar nei" is sung, not stated; Nachiketa's ordinary phone numbers and Anjan Dutt's rented rooms are set to music that invites a stranger to hum along; Roy's doubled, ironic address to the city nonetheless still moves audiences to sing it back at concerts decades after release, and even the commercially cynical prequel film cannot manufacture that afterlife without borrowing the original song's genuine emotional authority.

Conclusion: Remembering as a Form of Love

To sing about Calcutta, across five decades and at least three distinct musical idioms, is in some sense to resist its erasure. Urban development, shifting political fortunes, and the general acceleration of late capitalist city life have all pressed hard against the older textures that Bengali song continues to cherish—the adda, the tram, the secondhand bookstall, the single-screen cinema hall. And yet the songs discussed in this paper do not simply lament this pressure; they actively metabolize it.

If Manna Dey's Coffee House song is restorative in Svetlana Boym's sense — it wants the golden afternoons back, or at least wants to keep faith with the fact that they existed — the *Jibonmukhi* Bangla movement of the 1990s enacts something closer to what Andreas Huyssen calls the palimpsestic city: a Kolkata written and overwritten, where memory does not sit beneath the present as a discrete, retrievable layer but bleeds into it. The genealogy matters here. Gautam Chattopadhyay's band *Moheener Ghoraguli* had already, in the 1970s, written unfashionably about poverty, injustice, loneliness, and prostitution against the grain of the era's more melodic mainstream,

planting the conceptual seed that Nachiketa, Kabir Suman, and Anjan Dutta would later develop into a popular movement. When Suman Chattopadhyay (Kabir Suman) broke through commercially in the early 1990s, the genre label itself was contested from within the industry. The controversy is revealing of exactly the palimpsest Huyssen describes — a new stratum of urban song did not replace the old *Rabindrasangeet*-inflected *adhunik gaan* tradition so much as write itself over it, forcing the older layer to become newly visible, and newly defensive, by contrast.

Boym gains precision if restorative and reflective nostalgia are read not as a binary opposing Manna Dey to everyone after him, but as a spectrum along which each generation recalibrates its distance from the city. Dey's song is restorative in wanting the "sonali bikel", the golden afternoon, reassembled — but it already knows this is impossible, which is why the refrain insists three times that the addas are simply gone, "aaj ar nei". Even the text of Kolkata nostalgia, in other words, is shot through with the reflective irony Boym associates with modern loss: it does not actually attempt restoration, only the naming of what restoration would require. Anupam Roy's generation, arriving after 2010, inherits this irony as a starting condition rather than a discovery, mostly balancing two simultaneous lives — "Amake Amar Moto Thakte Dao" and "Benche Thakar Gaan" were the response to it. "Benche Thakar Gaan" — "the song of staying alive", or of getting by — is diagnostic of the shift the paper describes from the *Jibonmukhi* generation's confessional register to Roy's self-aware, doubled address: the title itself refuses the heroic register of survival in favour of the merely durational, the fact of continuing, which is exactly the register in which Kolkata's post-liberalization residents were being asked to relate to their own rapidly changing city. Roy's prolific film-song output through the 2010s — scoring, as he did, dozens of Tollywood soundtracks while maintaining a parallel identity as poet and prose writer — means his Kolkata songs are always already commercial products circulating through multiplex marketing cycles even as they perform intimate self-address, and this doubled positioning, more than any single lyric, is what makes him the natural endpoint of the trajectory Certeau, Huyssen, and Boym together describe: a songwriter who cannot pretend, the way Dey's generation still could, that the singer stands outside the apparatus that sells the city's nostalgia back to itself.

Moving historically from Manna Dey's restorative wish to restore a lost table of friends, through the Jibonmukhi generation's confessional relocation of memory into unglamorous daily space, to Anupam Roy's more self-aware invitation for the city to reckon with its own doubled, palimpsestic self. Read together, through Certeau's narrated city, Huyssen's layered palimpsest, Boym's two nostalgias, and Hirsch's post-memory, these songs reveal that Bengali urban modernity has never experienced its own city as a settled fact. It has instead experienced Kolkata as a continuously renegotiated feeling, argued over, mourned, and re-inhabited in nearly every generation's characteristic musical voice.

This is, finally, why the paper's closing claim insists on love rather than mere memory. Memory alone would be content to catalogue what has been lost—Bengali urban song does something more demanding: it keeps returning to these losses not to freeze them but to keep them warm, singable, and shareable, so that a stranger's grandmother, a diasporic teenager, and a present-day college student on College Street might all, for the duration of a single song, inhabit the same remembered corner of the same unfinished city. Kolkata, in this musical tradition, survives not despite its transformation but through the ongoing, collective, deeply attentive act of being sung about—which is, perhaps, the most durable form its love has ever taken.

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Labouring at the Intersections: Caste, Gender and Survival in Dalit Women's Life Writing

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ABSTRACT

The position of Dalit women is one of the most vulnerable in the labour hierarchy in India, where the intersection of caste, gender, and class creates conditions of vulnerability. Their labour is largely restricted to stigmatized, informal, and physically demanding work, making it both socially necessary and devalued. The vulnerability of women workers, therefore, cannot be understood without considering the caste organization of labor and the gender division of work that structure the lives of Dalit women.

This paper will analyze the intersection of caste, gender, and labor through a close reading of Bama's *Sangati* and Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life*, which are two important works of Dalit women's life writing. Based on the concepts of intersectionality and Dalit feminism, it contends that these stories serve as a testimonial archive of the hard work and survival that happens in everyday life. Instead of depicting labour as a process of empowerment, these stories portray it as a necessity that is driven by the absence of caste inclusion, economic marginalization, and patriarchal domination. However, these stories also highlight the importance of resilience that happens through collective power, communal unity, and educational ambition, which give insights into the lived experiences of marginalized Dalit women workers in contemporary India. These stories also point towards the need for policy intervention and labor rights in marginalized communities in contemporary India.

Keywords: Intersectionality, Caste, Labour, Life Writing, Vulnerability, Dalit Feminism

Introduction

Labour in India is not only an economic construct; it is also historically defined in terms of the caste system. The structure of employment is defined by a system of social stratification in which certain communities are allocated to certain occupations. In this context, the Dalit communities have been assigned to discredited, menial, and hard physical labour. For Dalit women, their marginalization in terms of occupation is compounded by gender and economic marginalization. The labour of Dalit women is both necessary to society and devalued. The vulnerability of women workers in India must therefore be understood in terms of gender, class, and caste.

The critique of caste by B.R. Ambedkar offers a vital perspective through which the issue of labour can be understood in this regard. Ambedkar draws a distinction between the simple division of labour and what he terms as the division of labourers. According to him, "caste is not merely a division of labor but a division of labourers" (Ambedkar, 1936/2014, p. 51), wherein the caste system does not merely allocate labour on the basis of functionality but also allocates laborers to predetermined occupational roles on the basis of their hereditary status. This ensures that labour is not merely a choice but a prescription of society, which is also ranked in a hierarchical manner. This ensures that the Dalit communities are also tied to predetermined forms of labour, which are often associated with the concepts of impurity and pollution. For the Dalit women, this predetermined occupational immobility is further reinforced by patriarchal domination.

Dalit women are mainly engaged in the informal economy in the form of agricultural wage work, domestic work, sanitation, and artisanal production. The informal economy is marked by low wages, insecurity of employment, absence of social protection, and vulnerability to social humiliation. Alongside their wage work, the Dalit women also have unpaid domestic work, thus having a double or triple burden of work. Despite their important contribution to the economy, their work is socially invisible and politically marginalized. Work, in this context, is less a source of empowerment and more a necessity arising from structural inequality. In the last few decades, Dalit literature has become a significant platform for expressing these experiences. The life writing of Dalit women, in particular, holds a unique place in the Indian literary tradition. Unlike sociological explanations, autobiographical stories emphasize lived experience, humiliation, struggle, and resilience. These stories, told in the first person, convert individual memory into collective history. They record not only the conditions of labour but also the emotional and social aspects of being marginalized on the basis of caste. They resist the dominant narratives that either romanticize labor or ignore the significance of caste as a primary organizing principle of labor.

This paper will examine Bama's *Sangati* (1994) later translated in 2005 and Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life* (2008), two important works of Dalit women's life writing that emphasize the importance of labor to women's lives. Although these works come from different regional settings, they demonstrate how caste defines work and how gender exacerbates economic exploitation. They also demonstrate ways in which resilience is built on collective solidarity, education, and awareness. This paper contends that the life writings of Dalit women disclose labour not only as an economic practice but also as a condition of the caste order that is exacerbated by gender in the informal economy. By contextualizing the literary analysis within the larger debates about the plight of vulnerable women workers and the need for labor justice, this paper shows how these texts serve as social evidence and alternative archives of labour history.

Review of Literature

Tanvir Likhari (2007), in the article "Dalit feminism: a perspective on Bama's *Sangati*," explores the specific cultural and religious context of Bama's narrative, noting how the intersection of caste and gender is further complicated by the Christian identity of the community. Likhari highlights that the survival of these women is characterized by a "vibrant energy" and a refusal to remain silent, where the act of narrating their life stories serves as a political tool to reclaim their identity from the margins of history.

Smriti Singh (2014), in her article "Narrating a subaltern consciousness: Bama's *Sangati*," argues that Bama's work transcends the boundaries of a traditional autobiography by becoming a collective "biography of the community". Singh explains that Bama portrays the Dalit woman as being "thrice alienated" by caste, by class, and by gender where survival is not just an individual feat but a shared communal endurance rooted in the "subaltern consciousness" of Tamil Paraiya women.

V.K. Navya (2014), in the article "Caste, Gender and Resistance," discusses how both Bama and Urmila Pawar foreground the "triple burden" of labour — domestic work, wage labour, and caste-based servitude — as a central site of both oppression and agency. Navya emphasizes that in *Sangati*, the labour of Dalit women is a continuous struggle against a "double patriarchy" (both from within their own community and from the upper castes), yet this very labour

becomes the material basis for their resilience and survival.

In the study "Contextualising Dalit women's voices: A study of Urmila Pawar and Bama's autobiographies," Praveshika Mishra (2021) compares the two texts to show how survival strategies are culturally situated. The article states that while Bama uses the "communal voice" to resist the systemic violence of the Tamil landscape, Urmila Pawar in *The Weave of My Life* uses "individual memory" to reconstruct the labour heritage of the Marathi Dalit community, using the metaphor of "weaving" (Aaydan) to represent the intergenerational survival of Dalit women.

Finally, in the article "Gender Constructions and Patterns of Resistance in Contemporary Dalit Women Writers: A Study of Bama's *Sangati*," R. Praveen Raj (2023) notes that the portrayal of labor in these texts is not merely about physical work but about the "embodied resistance" of women. The author asserts that by documenting the "unskilled" and "devalued" labor that sustains the Dalit household, Bama and Pawar challenge traditional gender constructions and highlight how survival is negotiated through daily, mundane acts of defiance.

Although the existing literature has explored the subaltern consciousness, triple burden, and Dalit feminist resistance in the writings of Bama and Pawar, the structural relationship between the caste-based occupational confinement and the contemporary labour vulnerability in the context of labour reforms has not received due attention. This research aims to fill this gap by focusing on the labour as an intersectional site of caste, gender, and survival.

Methodology

The proposed research will follow a qualitative research approach that is text and theme-based. Since the main aim of the research paper is to analyze the intersection of caste, gender, and labor in the life writings of Dalit women, the research methodology will focus on a close reading and interpretation of selected life writings. Instead of using empirical research, the proposed research will use literary texts as socio-cultural texts that represent lived experiences of labor and survival.

Research Design

The nature of the research is exploratory and interpretive. The study focuses on literary texts as a space where structural inequality is constructed and mediated through narratives. Autobiographical narratives are considered not only as personal narratives but as socio-political narratives that record the material conditions of marginalized groups. The themes of occupational limitation, wage labor, informal economy, gendered exploitation, and collective resistance are explored through qualitative analysis in relation to theoretical constructs.

Selection of Primary Texts

The two important works of Dalit women's life writing that this study centers on are Bama's *Sangati* and Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life*. Both are autobiographical texts written by Dalit women, which ensures that the portrayal of labor is not from an observing position but from a lived experience. To compare, both the texts are from different regions of India — Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra, respectively — which will enable a comparative analysis of labor practices based on caste in different regions. Moreover, both the narratives highlight labour as an important aspect of women's lives. *Sangati* provides perspective on agricultural wage labor in rural areas and the role of Dalit women within caste-bound village societies. *The Weave of My Life*, on the other hand, provides perspective on artisanal labor, informal labor, migration, and the role of education in bringing about change. Both works provide the opportunity to explore the role of caste and gender in occupational immobility.

Theoretical Framework

The study is informed by an interdisciplinary theoretical approach that draws on intersectionality, Dalit feminism, Marxist feminism, and subaltern studies. Intersectionality is the primary theoretical framework, enabling the study to investigate the intersection of caste, gender, and class, rather than their independent operation. Dalit feminism ensures that caste is at the forefront of the study of gendered subjugation. Marxist feminism helps to illuminate the exploitation of labor and material deprivation, especially in the context of unpaid domestic labor and informal wage labor. Subaltern studies inform the reading of life writing as a practice of voice and

resistance against structural silencing. These frameworks are not used in a disconnected manner but in an integrated fashion. The paper will analyze how the labor practices, as described in the texts, embody the structural arrangements of caste, how gender exacerbates economic risk, and how the narrative voice is a manifestation of epistemic resistance.

The methodology will allow the reader to understand the Dalit women's life writing as a literary practice and a social archive by using textual analysis and socio-theoretical interpretation. This will make it possible to connect literary research with debates on labour risk and social work interventions.

Labour, Caste and Gender: A Textual Analysis

This section will conduct a thematic analysis of Bama's *Sangati* and Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life*, with a focus on the themes of representation of labor, occupational restriction by caste, and gendered burdens of survival. Both the narratives represent labour as being intricately intertwined with the caste system. In *Sangati*, agricultural labor shapes the lives of Dalit women. Women and girls are involved in arduous agricultural labor. The text reveals that labour is not a choice but a legacy. As Bama notes,

> *"We have to labour in the fields as hard as men do, and then on top of that, struggle to bear and raise our children...Born as women, what good do we get? We only toil in the fields and in the home until our very [bodies] shrivel" (Bama, 2005, p. 6–7).*

Labour is represented as an extension of the caste system without question. The women in Bama's story do not have the freedom to choose their occupations. They are restricted to agricultural work, manual labor, and other physically demanding jobs as per their caste location. Even when other opportunities for employment arise, the women are not able to move out due to the stigma of their caste.

Likewise, in *The Weave of My Life*, basket weaving is portrayed by Pawar as a major source of livelihood for her community. This is a skill that is practiced from generation to generation, which depicts the occupational stratification based on heredity, as Pawar writes, "My mother used to weave aaydans. I find that her act of weaving and my act of writing are organically linked. The weave is similar. It is the weave of pain, suffering, and agony that links us" (Pawar, 2008, p. 10).

While this skill is important for the economic survival of the family, it also maintains the caste divisions. The implication here is that occupational roles are predetermined by society, and therefore there is no possibility of mobility. In both the narratives, work cannot be separated from the caste identity of the characters. The characters do not participate in the labor market as independent agents; instead, they live in a world where the labor market is organized based on their social location.

One of the common themes in both texts is the gendered experience of labour. The Dalit women are not only earning members of their families but also the primary caregivers. In Sangati, women are agricultural laborers during the day and return home to cook, clean, and take care of their children. The text emphasizes how the responsibility of taking care of the household is not questioned and is not shared, even when the economic conditions are strained. The young girls are brought up to be laborers from a young age. They help with household chores and agricultural labour, which shows how the gendered experience of labor is imbibed in them from a young age. The responsibility of taking care of both the household and the wage labour rests with the women. In Pawar's text, the same trends are witnessed. Women are engaged in basket weaving alongside handling household chores. The importance of economic conditions is highlighted, indicating that women's contribution is essential for the survival of the family. Yet, their contribution does not lead to any recognition in society or a reprieve in household chores. The net result is a double or triple burden of caste-based occupational restriction, wage labor, and domestic labour.

Both texts emphasize the informal nature of labour as the prevailing economic reality for Dalit women. Agricultural wage labour in Sangati is marked by low wages, seasonal work, and dependence on powerful caste landlords. There is no emphasis on formal employment, job security, or institutional support. Likewise, basket weaving in Pawar's story is conducted in the informal economy. Pawar notes, "Someone had laboured in the fields, woven baskets of various shapes and sizes for them. They would ask to

be compensated for their work" (Pawar, 2008, p. 64). This stresses the caste hierarchy of how Dalits are treated. Incomes are irregular, and the family survives on the uncertainties of the market. The informal economy provides sustenance but not security.

Vulnerability in the economic domain is not only material but also social. In Sangati, women experience humiliation in their employment with dominant caste employers. The domain of labour becomes a site where the hierarchy of caste is reiterated. In Pawar's narrative, poverty and stigma combine to restrict opportunities for educational and professional mobility. Labour, therefore, becomes a site of survival as well as vulnerability. Labour in these stories is not an equal one; it is characterized by humiliation and stigma. In Sangati, the humiliation and discriminatory treatment are linked to caste. Women's bodies are reduced to labouring bodies; that is, bodies that are useful for their productivity but are otherwise degraded. The physical toll of working in the fields is further exacerbated by symbolic violence. Pawar also illustrates how women's caste identity influences their social experience. Even when women are skilled and economically productive, they are still marked by stigma. The connection between caste and "impure" labour further cements social exclusion. These texts make it clear that labour is an embodied experience. Women's bodies are reduced to the site where caste hierarchy is inscribed and naturalized.

Despite the structural limitations, both the texts convey the message of resilience and collective power. In Sangati, women share their experiences, humor, and solidarity. The community networks are a source of emotional support and a feeling of collective struggle. Collective power becomes a means of survival. In The Weave of My Life, education is presented as a potential for change. Pawar's desire for education marks a departure from hereditary occupational bondage. While economic struggles continue, education provides a symbolic and material means of mobility. The strategies of survival do not negate vulnerability but contest the notion of its inevitability. The stories convey the message of resilience as a collective power that is shaped by community.

Both texts are testimonial narratives. By means of autobiographic voice, experiences of labor are documented and remembered. The everyday work, which is normally overlooked in the official history of labor, becomes the focus of narrative memory. The descriptions of agricultural work, weaving, and household activities turn personal experience into a collective archive. The narratives give priority to voices that are normally overlooked in economic discourse. Labour in these narratives is not abstract but lived, narrated, and historicized.

Discussion and Key Findings

From the preceding analysis, it is clear that the labour in Sangati and The Weave of My Life is not only economic but also a socially mediated condition of existence, which is determined by the caste system and gender roles. When the testimonies are read through the prisms of intersectionality, Dalit feminism, Marxist feminism and subaltern studies they disclose complex patterns of vulnerability and collective resilience.

Intersectionality is the primary framework of analysis for understanding the interplay of caste, gender, and economic marginalization in the lives of Dalit women. Crenshaw argues that "where systems of race, gender, and class domination converge ... intervention strategies based solely on the experiences of women who do not share the same class or race backgrounds will be of limited help" (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1246). This framework highlights how Dalit women's labour vulnerability emerges from the three hierarchies in India. Agricultural labor in Sangati and weaving in The Weave of My Life are examples of how occupation is predetermined by location within the caste system. Nevertheless, women's experiences with occupation are exacerbated by patriarchal demands that place them squarely at the center of household labor. Thus, vulnerability is not a simple category of oppression but a complex one. The labour of Dalit women is conditioned by the restriction imposed by caste, economic marginalization, and gendered oppression. Both texts reveal that labor exploitation cannot be explained by a class analysis or a gender analysis but by the intersection of the caste system and patriarchal society.

Dalit feminism provides a crucial perspective for understanding the vulnerability of caste-gendered labor in Sangati and The Weave of My Life. In contrast to mainstream feminism, which tends to universalize women's oppression, Dalit feminism places the

significance of caste at the heart of Dalit women's experiences. According to Sharmila Rege, "Dalit women's narratives question the homogenization implicit in dominant feminist discourse" (Rege, 2006, p. 4). In these texts, labor is not only a gendered but a caste-determined obligation. Hereditary occupations and informal sector work are characterized by a 'double patriarchy' in which the dominant caste patriarchy and the internal hierarchies of the community combine to further oppress women.

The material aspect of labor exploitation is emphasized by the Marxist feminist critique. As Heidi Hartmann argues, "The material base upon which patriarchy rests lies most fundamentally in men's control over women's labor power" (Hartmann, 1979, p. 11). In both texts, women are shown to be involved in wage labor as well as unpaid domestic work. This juxtaposition points to the invisible nature of reproductive labour. However, the addition of caste analysis to the mix makes it difficult to provide a purely class analysis. In a caste-organized society, economic exploitation is linked with ritual hierarchy. In the case of informal labour, which is marked by low wages and a lack of legal protection, Dalit women are particularly affected. The lack of institutional protection makes them even more vulnerable to exploitation.

Subaltern theory emphasizes the politics of voice and representation. As Gayatri Spivak puts forth, "The subaltern cannot speak" (Spivak, 1988, p. 308), giving attention to the structural conditions that silence the marginalized groups. The life writing of Dalit women is a counter-discursive practice that resists the dominant discourse of labor as well as the silencing. Through autobiographical narratives, Bama and Pawar represent experiences that are often subordinated in the dominant economic discourse. These testimonies can be seen as examples of alternative knowledge production. Through the documentation of agricultural labor, weaving, household chores, and humiliation, these narratives produce what can be called living archives of labour based on caste. In this way, the life writing of Dalit women transcends the boundaries of personal biography to become a collective testimony.

Although the texts expose vulnerability, they also emphasize resilience. In Sangati, the solidarity of women with each other appears as a strategy of survival. Shared stories, humor, and solidarity cushion the psychological blows of exploitation. In Pawar's narrative, education appears as a liberating potential, offering a partial escape from hereditary occupational bondage. The resilience in these stories is not idealized. Structural inequality is still a constant. However, strategies of survival indicate agency exercised under constraint. Group survival defies the inexorability of subordination, even when structural transformation seems remote.

As illustrated in this discussion, the life writings of Dalit women provide a complex perspective on labor as both structural oppression and lived experience. Through the integration of literary analysis and socio-theoretical perspectives, this research has emphasized the continued salience of caste in defining vulnerability to labor and the need for intersectional analysis in addressing structural inequality.

Implications

Analysis of *Sangati* and *The Weave of My Life* shows that the vulnerability of Dalit women to labour is structurally generated through the intersection of caste hierarchy, gender roles, and informal economy. Labour in these stories is more than a site of economic engagement; it is a historically layered process of caste reproduction. Occupational segregation, hereditary labor systems, and the normalization of gendered domesticity index the role of caste as an organizing principle of labor relations. From a Social Work standpoint, these results require a move away from gender-blind or class-reductive approaches to the study of labor vulnerability to a caste-aware and intersectional framework. Gender-blind approaches to women's empowerment as a homogeneous group erase the differences between Dalit women's experiences of marginalization, which are embedded in ritual and occupational segregation.

While legislative efforts such as the Unorganized Workers' Social Security Act (2008) and the Code on Social Security (2020) aim to extend the reach of social security to informal workers, the narratives indicate that formal inclusion does not necessarily lead to the erosion of caste-based exclusion. Social location, literacy, and institutionalized discrimination continue to condition access. Finally, this research confirms the epistemic value of Dalit women's testimonial narratives. Life writing as an alternative archive seeks

to record the history of labor that has been erased from the economic discourse. For scholars and practitioners, the narratives offer a grounded understanding of how vulnerability is embodied, normalized, and resisted.

Conclusion

This paper has posited that the life writing of Dalit women transforms the concept of labor into a significant site where the intersections of caste, gender, and survival are marked. In *Sangati* and *The Weave of My Life*, labor is depicted as both material need and social construct — an embodied act that reinscribes the hierarchy of caste. The testimonies indicate that informal labor is what sustains the family even as it cements the condition of precarity. The economic value of women's labor is what is structurally undervalued even as they bear the weight of wage labor, domestic labor, and the restriction of caste-based occupation.

However, the texts also emphasize resilience as a form of collective negotiation rather than romantic endurance. Education, solidarity, and narrative testimony emerge as a strategy through which Dalit women resist the notion of the inevitability of caste-based labor identities. Through the documentation of everyday labor, these narratives create an alternative history of labor that has hitherto been excluded from the economic discourse. To comprehend the vulnerability of labor in the contemporary Indian context, it is necessary to transcend economistic approaches to labor and recognize the structuring role of caste. The life writing of Dalit women, therefore, provides a methodological and epistemological shift.

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From Annamaya to Anandamaya: A Panchakosha Reading of Selfhood and Transcendence in R. K. Narayan's The Guide

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ABSTRACT

R. K. Narayan's *The Guide* (1958) has long divided its readers over a single question: is Raju's terminal fast a genuine transformation, an accident, or a fraud that a credulous village mistakes for sainthood? The dominant critical answers; ironic, existentialist, psychoanalytic, and postcolonial read an Indian novel with tools shaped for other traditions. This paper reverses that procedure, reading *The Guide* from inside the intellectual world that gave the novel its meaning. It argues that Raju's life is not a random slide into fraud but a structured movement inward that the *Panchakosha* of the *Taittiriya Upaniṣad*—the five sheaths through which the self passes from the body of food (*annamaya*) to the ground of bliss (*anandamaya*) maps with striking precision. Read alongside the *Bhagavad Gītā's* teaching of *Nishkama Karma*, action performed without attachment to its fruit, this framework dissolves the saint-or-fraud impasse: the authenticity of Raju's final act lies not in its outcome but in the emptying of self behind it. Situating the reading within current debates on indigenous critical methods, the paper argues that Indian Knowledge Systems can function not as a decorative source of themes but as a rigorous, working method for reading Indian English fiction.

Keywords: Panchakosha; Nishkama Karma; Indian Knowledge Systems; Vedanta; indigenous literary criticism

1. Introduction: Can Our Traditions Read Our Literature?

"The Self is not to be sought through the
body, nor grasped through the senses,
but known through the stilling of desire."
— Katha Upaniṣad

When scholars gather under the banner of Indian Knowledge Systems, one question sits quietly beneath the discussion: can the wisdom traditions of India actually *read* our literature, or are they only decorative background to it? The distinction is not trivial. It is one thing to observe that a novel alludes to the *Upaniṣads* or borrows a motif from the *Gītā*; it is quite another to claim that a Vedantic framework

can perform the analytical labour of criticism—that it can account for how a narrative is built, how a character is transformed, and how a reader is to weigh the moral shape of an ending. This paper takes up that larger question through a single, familiar novel.

R. K. Narayan's *The Guide* (1958), which won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1960, is taught in nearly every Indian classroom and argued over in nearly every seminar room. And the argument almost always comes down to its ending. Raju, a small-time tourist guide and confident man, is mistaken by a drought-stricken village for a holy man, is manoeuvred into undertaking a fast to bring rain, and dies or seems to die before the rain arrives. What are we to make of that ending? Generations of critics have called it many things (see Prasad): a bitter irony, the accidental manufacture of a saint out of a fraud, an absurdist joke in which a gullible crowd forces meaning onto a man who never sought it. Each of these readings is intelligent, and each borrows its lens from elsewhere from existentialism, from psychoanalysis, from the postcolonial critique of the colonial encounter. Useful as they are, they read an Indian novel with tools shaped for other soil.

In the spirit of a criticism grown from Indian roots, this paper attempts the opposite experiment: to read *The Guide* from inside the tradition that gave its world meaning. The claim is a simple one. Raju's life is not a random slide into fraud that luck redeems at the last moment. It is a structured movement inward, and the structure it follows is one Indian text described with great precision the *Panchakosha* of the *Taittiriya Upaniṣad*, read together with the *Bhagavad Gītā's* teaching of *Nishkama Karma*. This is not an attempt to canonise Raju or to sentimentalise the novel. It is an attempt to demonstrate that Indian Knowledge Systems can do the hard analytical work of criticizing the very ambition that the *National Education Policy 2020* has placed before the discipline and are not merely a storehouse of themes to be pointed at.

The argument proceeds in five movements. It first situates the reading within the existing critical conversation on *The Guide*, showing where the saint-or-fraud impasse comes from and why it persists. It then sets out the *Panchakosha* model and the ethic of *Nishkama Karma* as a critical method rather than a thematic ornament. The central section reads Raju's life as an ascent through the five sheaths, scene by scene. A fourth section returns to the disputed ending and shows how *Nishkama Karma* dissolves the either/or the novel's critics have felt bound to answer. A final section steps back from Raju to the larger methodological stake: what it would mean to build a criticism of Indian English fiction from indigenous ground.

2. The Critical Impasse: A Review of the Debate

The reception history of *The Guide* is, to a remarkable degree, a history of arguments about its final pages. The most influential early frame is the ironic one. M. K. Naik's study of Narayan reads the whole body of the fiction under the sign of an ironic vision (Naik), in which Malgudi's ordinary men are gently exposed by a gap between what they intend and what they become. On this account Raju's sainthood is the supreme Narayanian irony: a swindler is remade into a *mahatma* by the very gullibility he once exploited, and the novel's comedy lies in the distance between the shabby cause and the sacred effect. The reading is powerful and has proved durable, but it purchases its coherence at a price. It must treat Raju's transformation as something that happens *to* him rather than *in* him an accident of circumstance and crowd psychology because irony, as a structural principle, needs the transformation to be hollow. If Raju genuinely changes, the irony collapses.

A second family of readings turns to the existentialist and absurdist vocabulary that dominated mid-century literary study. Here Raju becomes a man thrown into a situation not of his choosing, condemned to enact a role until the role consumes him; the fast is an absurd gesture in an indifferent universe, and the ambiguous rain is the novel's refusal to grant consolation. This lens captures something real about Raju's passivity and about Narayan's famous reticence. But it imports a metaphysics of meaninglessness that the novel does not obviously share, and it cannot easily explain why Raju's final state reads, to so many readers, as peace rather than despair.

A third approach, broadly psychoanalytic, locates the drama inside Raju's psyche: his need for approval, his theatrical self-fashioning, the collapse of the performing ego under the weight of the part it has taken on. And a fourth, postcolonial in temper, reads the novel's spiritual apparatus with suspicion, asking whether the village's manufacture of a saint reproduces, in miniature, the colonial habit of projecting authenticity onto the exotic. Critics working in the mythic vein, such as Chitra Sankaran, have done valuable work recovering the Hindu substructure of Narayan's plots (Sankaran), showing how deeply his narratives are patterned by traditional story-shapes; this scholarship establishes that the tradition is *present* in the fiction. What it has been less concerned to argue is that the tradition can serve as the *analytic* itself.

Running alongside these text-centred debates is a broader methodological conversation that has gathered force in recent years: the call to develop indigenous frameworks for reading Indian literature rather than importing critical vocabularies wholesale. This impulse is not new; it reaches back to early attempts to recover *rasa* theory and *dhvani* as living critical instruments but it has acquired fresh institutional urgency. The concern animating it is that a discipline which reads its own literature exclusively through borrowed lenses risks a subtle self-estrangement, seeing its texts always as instances of something theorised elsewhere. The present reading enters this conversation not by argument alone but by demonstration: the surest way to show that an indigenous framework can do critical work is to put it to work on a hard case and let the results speak.

What unites the text-centred criticism surveyed above is a shared demand for a verdict. Each framework, in its own idiom, asks the reader to decide whether Raju is finally a saint or a fraud, whether the ending is transcendence or joke, whether the rain redeems or mocks. The persistence of the debate suggests that the question, as posed, may be the wrong one that the either/or is an artefact of the tools, not of the text. This paper proposes that a framework drawn from the novel's own cultural world does not merely offer a fifth reading to set beside the others. It reframes the question so that the impasse dissolves.

3. The Panchakosha and Nishkama Karma as Critical Method

3.1 The Five Sheaths

The *Taittiriya Upaniṣad*, in its *Brahmānanda Vallī*, pictures the human person as five sheaths (*koshas*), one within the other, arranged from the coarsest to the most subtle. The *annamaya kosha* is the body made of food—the physical organism sustained by what it eats. Within it breathes the *pranamaya kosha*, the vital sheath of energy, breath, and appetite. Subtler still is the *manomaya kosha*, the sheath of the restless mind: desire, memory, emotion, and the ego's ceaseless self-assertion. Deeper lies the *vijnanamaya kosha*, the sheath of discernment, where judgement, conscience, and reflective intelligence live. And at the centre is the *anandamaya kosha*, the sheath of bliss, which opens onto the unconditioned Self, the *Atman* (see Sarma).

The decisive point for criticism is that these sheaths are not a static diagram to be memorised. They describe a *journey*. To grow inwardly, in the *Upaniṣadic* account, is to loosen one's identification with the outer sheaths and to settle nearer the centre. A person is not a fixed thing but a movement now dispersed outward into body and appetite, now gathered inward toward discernment and stillness. It is this dynamic quality that turns the *Panchakosha* from a chart of anatomy into a genuine psychology, and it is precisely as a psychology of inward change that it becomes usable for reading a novel about a man who changes. A *bildung*, an arc of transformation, is exactly what the model is built to measure.

3.2 The Ethic of Non-Attachment

If the *Panchakosha* supplies a psychology, the *Bhagavad Gītā* supplies the ethic that governs movement through it. The Gītā's central counsel of *Nishkama Karma*—action performed without attachment to its fruit (*phala*) answers a question the sheath-model raises but does not resolve: how does one move inward? The tempting inference is that inwardness requires withdrawal, a fleeing of action into contemplation. The Gītā rejects precisely this. One reaches the innermost sheath not by abandoning action but by acting with the ego let go, so that the deed is performed for its own sake and offered up rather than clutched for its reward. Detachment, in this teaching, is not indifference; it is a mode of full engagement stripped of self-interest.

Taken together, the two frameworks furnish three distinct critical instruments. The *Panchakosha* offers a *structural* instrument a way of seeing how a narrative of inward change is built. It offers a *characterological* instrument and psychology for how a protagonist grows. And *Nishkama Karma* adds an *ethical* instrument, a criterion for weighing the moral value of an act that depends neither on the actor's past nor on the act's outcome, but on the disposition behind it. This is a great deal more than a thematic reading can supply, and it is the burden of the sections that follow to show these instruments at work.

3.3 A Note on Method and Its Limits

Two cautions are in order. First, to read Raju through the sheaths is not to claim that Narayan consciously encoded the *Taittiriya Upaniṣad* into his plot, nor that the correspondence is exact at every point; the argument is that the tradition supplies a description of inward change under which the novel's shape becomes newly legible, not that the novelist worked from a blueprint. Second, an indigenous method must earn its keep by the same standards as any other by fit, economy, and explanatory reach and not by cultural entitlement alone. The test throughout is whether the framework accounts for more of the text, and accounts for it more economically, than the reigning alternatives. Where a Vedantic reading merely relabels what irony already explains, it adds nothing. The claim here is stronger: that it explains what irony cannot, namely the felt authenticity of an ending that irony must treat as hollow.

4. Raju's Ascent Through the Five Sheaths

4.1 The Outer Sheaths: Annamaya and Pranamaya

Consider where Raju begins. The Railway Raju the reader first meets in Malgudi lives almost entirely in the two outer sheaths. His world is food, comfort, money, and the small satisfactions of a well-managed appetite. Even his vocation as a guide is a performance calibrated to gratify the senses of his tourists' and his own art of pleasing, flattering, and supplying. He is a creature of the surface in the most literal sense: he lives by what he can sell to the eye and the palate. When Rosie enters his life, the *pranamaya* sheath takes command. His wanting of her is bodily and instinctive long before it becomes anything he reflects upon; it is appetite before it is

love. At this stage Raju simply *has his* desires. There is as yet no self in him that stands apart from them and looks back at them no distance between the man and his craving. The *Panchakosha* names this condition exactly: a self identified with its outer sheaths, dispersed into sensation, with the inner sheaths dormant.

It is worth noticing how well this beginning fits the novel's peculiar architecture. *The Guide* is famously told in two interleaved strands: a present-tense narrative of the temple swami and a retrospective, first-person confession of the old Railway Raju and critics have long debated the effect of this doubling. Reading through the sheaths, the structure is not merely a technical flourish but a formal image of the argument itself: the outer, past self and the inner, present self are laid side by side so that the reader can watch the distance between them open. The confession that Raju pours out to Velan is the *vijnanamaya* sheath performing its proper work of discernment upon the *annamaya* and *manomaya* life it is narrating. The novel's form, in other words, already enacts the movement inward that its plot describes.

4.2 The Reign of the Mind: Manomaya

Once Raju becomes Rosie's manager and remakes her into the celebrated dancer Nalini, a different sheath takes charge. This is the reign of the *manomaya kosha*—the phase of ego, possessiveness, and a mind that will not be still. Raju's world enlarges, but it enlarges under the sign of the grasping self. His jealousy of Rosie's independence, his hunger to control her career and her earnings, his growing appetite for status and for the theatrical role of the impresario, all belong to a mind captive to its own image. The crisis of this sheath is his forgery of Rosie's signature, the crime that sends him to prison an act that is the *manomaya* self in its purest form: a lie told to secure possession, ego defending its constructed world.Narayan lets the reader hear the complacency that precedes the crime in Raju's own retrospective voice: *"There was no limit to my self-congratulation" (149),* he confesses, and it is this same unchecked self- satisfaction, not calculation, that carries him to the forged signature.

Here Narayan does something quietly. Prison is not merely Raju's punishment; it is his first discipline. He emerges from it having learned, almost despite himself, a first small taste of detachment, the forced loosening of a grip on a life he can no longer manage. The forward rush of the *manomaya* self has been interrupted from outside. It is a crucial narrative hinge: the ego cannot free itself by its own effort, and so the novel supplies an external constraint that begins the loosening the self could not begin on its own. Detachment enters Raju's life first as deprivation and only later as freedom.

4.3 The Awakening of Discernment: Vijnanamaya

The real turn comes after his release, when Raju takes shelter in an abandoned temple by the river and the villager Velan mistakes him for a holy man. At first he plays along for the oldest and lowest of reasons, the *annamaya* instinct to keep himself fed and sheltered. But something begins to change beneath the performance. Made to speak wisely, he starts to listen to his own words; made to act holy, he slowly grows into the part he is only pretending to play. This is the *vijnanamaya kosha* stirring into life, the sheath of discernment and conscience. The restless self-questioning that fills these chapters, Raju's discomfort at the widening gap between what he is pretending to be and what he is, marks the moment the reflective intellect at last pulls away from mere appetite. For the first time in the novel, Raju judges himself. The performance becomes a mirror, and the man begins to be ashamed of what it shows.Narayan marks the mechanism itself with wry aside on the shape sainthood takes in the villagers' eyes, one that Raju

comes almost to believe : that its essence lay in "*one's ability to utter mystifying statements" (38).*

It is worth dwelling on the mechanism, because it is the subtlest thing in the novel. Raju does not decide to become good. Rather, the role imposed on him by others' faith creates a discipline that his own will never could, a daily obligation to speak and act as a better man would, until the acting begins, imperceptibly, to reshape the actor. The *vijnanamaya* sheath awakens not through introspection alone but through action rightly performed, which is already the Gītā's insight anticipated: the discernment that transforms comes not from withdrawal but from doing the thing set before one.

4.4 The Threshold of Bliss: Anandamaya

Then comes the famine, and with it the villagers' unshakeable certainty that their swami will fast to bring the rain. Raju could run; he could confess. He does neither. He accepts the fast, and the quiet turning point of the whole novel arrives when he realises that, for once in his life, he is doing something that is not for himself. Raju's own summary of his situation, offered to Velan earlier and now bearing its full weight, is the plainest statement in the novel of a self no longer choosing for itself: *"It is written on the brow of some that they shall not be left alone" (47).* That recognition is the threshold of the *anandamaya kosha* not bliss as any species of pleasure, but the strange peace that arrives when the grasping, wanting self is finally set down. As Raju's *annamaya* body grows weaker with hunger, he seems to grow clearer within, as though the fading of the outermost sheath allowed the innermost to show through. The novel stages, in the literal wasting of the body, the *Upaniṣadic* movement from the sheath of food toward the ground of bliss.

The famous ambiguity of the closing image the rain Raju feels rising up his legs as he sinks need not be resolved for the reading to hold. The novel's last words belong to Raju himself, sensation rather than assertion *: " Velan, it's raining in the hills, I can feel it coming under my feet" (221).* Whether it is a real miracle or the last sensation of a dying man is, on this account, beside the point. Read through the *Panchakosha*, that final image is simply the outer sheaths loosening their hold and dissolving back into the ground of being. The novel does not tell us whether the drought breaks because it is not, finally, a novel about weather. It is a novel about a man arriving, sheath by sheath, at the centre he could not have named when he began.

5. Nishkama Karma and the Resolution of the Ending

"To action alone hast thou a right, and
never at all to its fruits;
let not the fruits of action be thy motive."
— Bhagavad Gītā, II.47

Why has the ending of *The Guide* divided readers for so long? The argument of this paper is that the frameworks usually brought to it *force* a verdict. Irony requires the reader to decide that Raju is a fraud whom circumstance ennobles; a sentimental reading requires the reverse; the existentialist reading requires that the whole gesture be absurd. Each demands an either/or. But the *Bhagavad Gītā's* teaching of *Nishkama Karma* refuses that either/or at its root. For the Gītā, what makes an action pure is neither how it turns out nor what the doer once was, but whether it is performed without clinging to its fruit.

Apply this criterion to Raju's fast and the disputed question reorganises itself. Raju does not fast in order to become holy, sainthood is not a *phala* he is pursuing. And by the end he is no longer even fasting in order to deceive; the swindle that began the episode has fallen away. He fasts because the act is simply there before him and he has stopped acting for

himself. That emptying of self-interest the very movement the *Panchakosha* traces inward is where the authenticity lies. Whether the rain comes is, in this light, almost immaterial: the rain is a *phala*, a fruit that the purified actor has already released. This is precisely what ironic reading can never accommodate. Raju's transcendence is not cancelled by his shabby past, because *Nishkama Karma* does not weigh the past; nor does it depend on the downpour, because it does not weigh the outcome. It rests entirely in the manner in which he performs his last act.

This is also why the novel's much-noted ambiguity is not evasion but precision. Narayan withholds the miracle because the framework within which the act becomes meaningful has no need of it. To supply a definite miracle would be to make the act's worth depend on its fruit the very attachment the ethic renounces. To supply a definite failure would be to reduce the act to folly. By leaving the rain suspended between arriving and not arriving, Narayan keeps the reader's attention where the Gītā keeps it: on the disposition of the actor, not the yield of the act. The ambiguity, so often read as the mark of the novel's irony, turns out on this account to be the mark of its fidelity to *Nishkama Karma*.

6. Toward an Indigenous Critical Method

It remains to step back from Raju to the larger point, because the reading offered here is finally a point about method. To read *The Guide* through the *Panchakosha* is to show that an Indian knowledge system can serve as more than a bag of themes to be spotted in a text. The five sheaths gave this reading three things at once: a way of seeing how the story is built, a psychology for how its central character grows, and an ethic for how to weigh his final act, all of it drawn from the same intellectual world the novel itself inhabits. That triple yield is the difference between using a tradition as an ornament and using it as a method. An ornamental reading notes that Narayan alludes to Hindu ideas; a methodological reading uses those ideas to explain the novel's form, its psychology, and its ethics, and finds that they explain more than the imported alternatives do.

This is precisely the ambition the *National Education Policy 2020* has set before Indian scholarship: to grow criticism from Indian roots rather than forever borrowing it from elsewhere. The point is not a nativist rejection of Western theory, which would be both impoverishing and, in a discipline built on comparison, incoherent. Existentialist, psychoanalytic, and postcolonial readings of *The Guide* have taught genuine lessons, and an indigenous method that could not converse with them would be the poorer for it. The claim is narrower and more constructive: that for a literature written in an inherited language, as much Indian English fiction is, having a critical vocabulary drawn from one's own intellectual traditions is not a small matter. It lets us see the familiar afresh. Narayan's celebrated plainness and restraint, so often mistaken for something almost English (Walsh), turn out to rest on a quietly Vedantic frame, a temper of non-attachment that shapes not only what he narrates but how.

There is a wider lesson here for the reading of Indian English fiction generally. If a Vedantic psychology can measure the arc of a Narayan protagonist, comparable indigenous frameworks may illuminate other bodies of work whose spiritual architecture current criticism tends to translate immediately into Western terms. The *Panchakosha* is one model among many that the tradition offers; the *puruṣārthas*, the theory of *rasa*, the ethics of *dharma* in its situational complexity each is a candidate method awaiting the kind of patient application that comparative theory has long enjoyed. The task this paper illustrates in miniature is the recovery of these

frameworks not as heritage to be admired but as instruments to be used.

7. Conclusion

Read through the *Panchakosha* of the *Taittiriya Upaniṣad* and the *Nishkama Karma* of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, *The Guide* stops being a novel about an accidental saint and becomes a novel about a man climbing, sheath by sheath, toward something he cannot name. Raju's road from the body of appetite to the peace of a self set down is neither a lucky accident nor a pious fable. It is a shape the tradition has always known, and the novel's disputed ending so long the occasion for a verdict the text refuses to underwrite turns out to be not an evasion but an exact rendering of an act performed without attachment to its fruit.

If we want to read Indian literature as it once understood itself, we will have to keep recovering the frameworks its world was built from. This reading of one novel offers in that spirit a single illustration that the *Panchakosha* can do real critical work, and a modest vote of confidence in the larger task before the discipline: to let our own texts speak, at last, in their own voice.

> *"From the unreal lead me to the real,*
> *from darkness lead me to light,*
> *from death leads me to immortality."*
> — Brhadaranyaka Upaniṣad, I.3.28

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Unveiling the Tragedy of Species Extinction in Barbara Kingsolver's *Prodigal Summer*: A Shallow and Deep Ecological Reading from a Global South Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines Barbara Kingsolver's *Prodigal Summer* through the ecocritical frameworks of shallow ecology and deep ecology, with particular attention to species extinction, biodiversity conservation, and ecological interdependence. The study argues that the novel presents the extinction of species not merely as an environmental concern but as a moral, cultural, and ecological crisis resulting largely from human intervention in natural systems. Through the characters of Deanna Wolfe, Nannie Rawley, Lusa Maluf Landowski, and Garnett Walker, Kingsolver explores the fragile relationships that connect humans, animals, plants, and ecosystems. Particular attention is given to the representation of coyotes, salamanders, and the American chestnut tree as symbols of ecological balance and biodiversity. The paper further extends the discussion by placing Kingsolver's ecological concerns in dialogue with Global South and South Asian environmental discourses, including the environmental activism of Vandana Shiva and the ecological concerns reflected in contemporary South Asian environmental writing. By comparing environmental degradation, habitat loss, and biodiversity decline across cultural contexts, the study demonstrates the global relevance of Kingsolver's ecological vision. The paper also engages with existing scholarship on *Prodigal Summer* and argues that Kingsolver moves beyond conservationist perspectives by advocating an ethic of coexistence between human and non-human life. Ultimately, the novel aligns closely with the objectives of Sustainable Development Goal 15 (Life on Land) and contributes significantly to contemporary eco-

literature by highlighting the urgency of biodiversity preservation and ecological responsibility.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, Shallow Ecology, Deep Ecology, Species Extinction, Biodiversity, Global South, Barbara Kingsolver, Prodigal Summer, SDG 15.

Introduction

Eco-literature, also known as ecological literature or environmental literature, is a literary genre that explores the relationship between human beings and the natural world. Emerging in response to growing environmental concerns, eco-literature highlights ecological crises such as species extinction, habitat destruction, pollution, climate change, and biodiversity loss. Unlike traditional literary forms that often treat nature merely as a backdrop, eco-literature places the natural world at the center of narrative attention and encourages readers to reconsider their ethical responsibilities toward the environment.

The rise of ecocriticism as a critical framework has enabled scholars to investigate how literary texts represent ecological relationships and environmental challenges. William Rueckert's pioneering work helped establish ecocriticism as a field concerned with the interconnections between literature and ecology. Since then, ecocritical studies have expanded significantly, examining environmental representations across cultures and literary traditions.

Barbara Kingsolver occupies a prominent position within contemporary eco-literature. Trained as a biologist and widely recognized as a novelist, essayist, and environmental advocate, Kingsolver integrates ecological knowledge into her literary works. Her novels frequently address biodiversity, conservation, species extinction, habitat destruction, and environmental ethics. Among her most acclaimed eco-literary works are *Prodigal Summer* (2000) and *Flight Behavior* (2012).

This study focuses on *Prodigal Summer* and examines how Kingsolver portrays the tragedy of species extinction through the symbolic representations of coyotes, salamanders, and the American chestnut tree. The paper employs shallow ecology and deep ecology as primary theoretical frameworks and further situates the discussion within a Global South perspective. Through this approach, the paper demonstrates that the ecological concerns presented in the novel transcend national boundaries and resonate strongly with environmental issues faced by South Asian societies.

Eco-Literature and Ecocriticism

Eco-literature investigates the reciprocal relationship between human societies and natural environments. It emphasizes the interconnectedness of all forms of life and frequently critiques anthropocentric attitudes that prioritize human interests over ecological wellbeing. Major themes in eco-literature include biodiversity conservation, environmental ethics, sustainability, ecological harmony, species extinction, climate change, and environmental justice.

Notable eco-literary works include Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, Richard Powers' *The Overstory*, Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, and Barbara Kingsolver's *Prodigal Summer* and *Flight Behavior*. These works encourage readers to recognize the environmental consequences of human actions and to adopt more sustainable relationships with nature.

Ecocriticism serves as the analytical framework through which such texts are examined. Rather than focusing solely on human-centered concerns, ecocriticism investigates how literature represents

ecosystems, animals, plants, landscapes, and environmental change. Ecocritical scholars argue that literature has the potential to shape ecological awareness and foster environmental responsibility.

Theoretical Framework: Shallow Ecology and Deep Ecology

Fritjof Capra distinguishes between shallow ecology and deep ecology. Shallow ecology remains largely anthropocentric. It recognizes the importance of environmental conservation primarily because healthy ecosystems benefit human societies. Conservation efforts are justified because they protect resources, maintain economic stability, preserve ecosystem services, and improve human wellbeing.

Deep ecology, associated with Arne Naess and later developed by ecological philosophers, challenges anthropocentrism and argues that all living beings possess intrinsic value independent of human utility. Deep ecology emphasizes ecological equality, interdependence, biodiversity preservation, and respect for all forms of life. It calls for a radical transformation of human attitudes toward nature.

The distinction between these frameworks is particularly useful in understanding *Prodigal Summer*. Certain characters approach environmental issues from perspectives that resemble shallow ecological concerns, whereas others embody deep ecological principles through their recognition of the intrinsic value of non-human life.

Review of Literature

Existing scholarship has extensively explored the ecological dimensions of *Prodigal Summer*. Suzanne W. Jones argues that Kingsolver uses the metaphor of endangered species to examine both ecological and social survival. Jones highlights how agricultural communities and ecological systems face similar threats under modern economic pressures. While Jones focuses on the endangered family farm, the present study extends the discussion by emphasizing species extinction as an ecological and ethical tragedy.

Gregory Stephens and Janice Cools examine human-animal relationships in *Prodigal Summer*, particularly through the representation of coyotes. Their study challenges traditional depictions of predators and demonstrates how Kingsolver encourages readers to reconsider human assumptions regarding wildlife. Building on this argument, the present paper investigates how coyote conservation functions as a broader symbol of biodiversity preservation and ecological interconnectedness.

Hema's discussion of ecological connectivity in Kingsolver's work highlights the novel's emphasis on relationships among species. The current study contributes to this scholarship by integrating shallow ecology, deep ecology, and Global South environmental perspectives into the analysis.

Species Extinction as an Ecological Crisis

Species extinction refers to the permanent disappearance of a species from the earth. Extinction has occurred throughout natural history, but contemporary extinction rates have accelerated dramatically due to human activities. Habitat destruction, pollution, climate change, overexploitation, invasive species, and environmental degradation constitute major drivers of biodiversity loss.

The consequences of species extinction extend far beyond the loss of individual organisms. Biodiversity supports ecosystem stability, food security, pollination, soil fertility, climate regulation, and numerous ecological services essential for human survival. The disappearance of species disrupts ecological networks and may trigger cascading effects throughout ecosystems.

Sustainable Development Goal 15 emphasizes the protection of terrestrial ecosystems, biodiversity conservation, sustainable forest management, and the prevention of species extinction. Kingsolver's novel aligns strongly with these objectives by illustrating how human actions threaten ecological balance and biodiversity.

Prodigal Summer as an Eco-Literary Text

Published in 2000, *Prodigal Summer* consists of three interconnected narratives: "Predators," "Moth Love," and "Old Chestnuts." Set in the Appalachian Mountains of southern Virginia, the novel explores ecological relationships among humans, animals, plants, and landscapes.

Deanna Wolfe, a wildlife biologist, studies coyotes and advocates predator conservation. Lusa Maluf Landowski struggles to adapt to rural life following her husband's death. Garnett Walker and Nannie Rawley represent contrasting attitudes toward farming, conservation, and ecological responsibility. Through these characters, Kingsolver presents diverse perspectives on humanity's relationship with nature.

Nature functions as more than a setting in the novel. Forests, mountains, insects, birds, trees, and animals actively shape the narrative. Kingsolver portrays ecosystems as dynamic communities whose survival depends upon biodiversity and ecological balance.

Coyotes and the Tragedy of Species Extinction

The coyote occupies a central symbolic role in *Prodigal Summer*. Throughout the novel, local farmers often perceive coyotes as threats to livestock and economic security. Consequently, organized hunting campaigns seek to eliminate them. Such attitudes reflect anthropocentric assumptions characteristic of shallow ecological thinking when economic interests are prioritized over ecological complexity.

Deanna Wolfe challenges these assumptions by emphasizing the ecological significance of predators. Coyotes regulate prey populations, maintain biodiversity, and contribute to ecosystem stability. Their removal can produce ecological imbalances that extend throughout food webs.

Kingsolver's portrayal of coyotes critiques human tendencies to classify animals according to their perceived usefulness. The novel demonstrates that predators possess ecological value independent of their relationship to human interests. This perspective aligns strongly with deep ecological principles.

The hostility directed toward coyotes also reflects broader patterns of environmental exploitation. Human fear, economic concerns, and cultural prejudices frequently justify wildlife persecution. Kingsolver exposes the limitations of such reasoning by illustrating the ecological consequences of predator eradication.

The American Chestnut Tree and Ecological Memory

Another significant ecological symbol in the novel is the American chestnut tree. Once dominant within eastern North American forests, the species experienced devastating decline due to chestnut blight. Through Garnett Walker's efforts to restore chestnut populations, Kingsolver highlights the lasting consequences of ecological loss.

The chestnut tree functions as a symbol of environmental memory. Its near extinction reminds readers that biodiversity loss affects not only ecosystems but also cultural histories and community identities. The disappearance of species represents the erosion of ecological heritage accumulated across generations.

Garnett's dedication to chestnut restoration reflects both shallow and deep ecological motivations. On one

level, restoration promises practical ecological benefits. On another, it expresses recognition of the intrinsic value of biological diversity. Kingsolver thus presents conservation as both a scientific and ethical responsibility.

Salamanders, Biodiversity, and Ecological Interdependence

Salamanders play a quieter but equally significant role within the novel. Often regarded as bioindicators, salamanders provide important information regarding environmental health because of their sensitivity to ecological changes. Pollution, habitat destruction, and climate shifts can rapidly affect salamander populations.

Nannie Rawley's observations of salamanders symbolize attentiveness to ecological complexity. Unlike characters who seek to dominate nature, Nannie approaches the environment with humility, patience, and respect. Her relationship with salamanders reflects a deep ecological understanding of interconnectedness.

The Appalachian region supports extraordinary salamander diversity. Kingsolver's inclusion of these creatures underscores the importance of preserving habitats capable of sustaining biological richness. The loss of salamanders would signify not merely the disappearance of individual species but the weakening of entire ecological systems.

Human Responsibility and Environmental Ethics

A recurring theme throughout *Prodigal Summer* concerns human responsibility toward the natural world. Kingsolver does not portray environmental degradation as inevitable. Instead, she demonstrates how human choices contribute directly to ecological crises.

Unsustainable agriculture, habitat destruction, pesticide use, and predator persecution appear throughout the novel as examples of environmentally harmful practices. Characters must confront the consequences of these actions and reconsider their relationships with nature.

Environmental ethics emerges as a central concern. Kingsolver encourages readers to move beyond narrow conceptions of self-interest and recognize broader ecological obligations. Conservation becomes not merely a practical necessity but a moral imperative.

Global South and South Asian Perspectives

One of the major concerns raised by reviewers involves situating the study within a Global South framework. Although *Prodigal Summer* is set in the United States, the environmental issues it addresses closely parallel ecological challenges faced throughout South Asia and other Global South regions.

In India, biodiversity loss has become a pressing concern due to deforestation, urbanization, industrial expansion, mining activities, and agricultural intensification. Numerous species face threats resulting from habitat fragmentation and environmental degradation. Environmental activists such as Vandana Shiva have consistently emphasized the importance of biodiversity conservation and ecological sustainability.

Shiva argues that biodiversity possesses intrinsic value and should not be reduced to economic calculations. Her ecological philosophy resonates strongly with the deep ecological principles represented by Deanna Wolfe and Nannie Rawley. Both perspectives challenge anthropocentric assumptions and advocate respect for ecological diversity.

Similarly, contemporary South Asian environmental writing frequently explores tensions between development and conservation. Writers address issues such as deforestation, species extinction, water scarcity, pollution, and climate vulnerability. These concerns parallel Kingsolver's critique of environmental exploitation and ecological imbalance.

The comparison demonstrates that biodiversity loss constitutes a global challenge rather than a regional problem. Whether in Appalachia or South Asia, ecological systems face similar threats from unsustainable human activities. Kingsolver's ecological vision therefore possesses significant relevance beyond its immediate geographical context.

Shallow Ecology in Prodigal Summer

Several dimensions of the novel reflect shallow ecological concerns. Local farmers often evaluate environmental issues according to their effects on economic productivity and human welfare. Predator control, resource management, and agricultural efficiency emerge as recurring priorities.

From a shallow ecological perspective, biodiversity conservation remains important because healthy ecosystems support human societies. Species extinction threatens agriculture, recreation, tourism, ecosystem services, and economic stability. Consequently, conservation efforts are justified as mechanisms for protecting human interests.

Kingsolver acknowledges these practical concerns while simultaneously revealing their limitations. Although economic considerations influence environmental decision-making, the novel suggests that purely anthropocentric approaches cannot adequately address ecological crises.

Deep Ecology in Prodigal Summer

Deep ecology provides a more comprehensive framework for understanding Kingsolver's ecological vision. Throughout the novel, non-human life forms possess value independent of human utility. Coyotes, salamanders, moths, insects, trees, and forests are not merely resources but participants within interconnected ecological communities.

Deanna Wolfe embodies deep ecological principles through her commitment to wildlife conservation. She recognizes that predators contribute to ecosystem integrity and deserve protection regardless of their economic implications. Similarly, Nannie Rawley's attentiveness to ecological relationships reflects an ethic of coexistence rather than domination.

Kingsolver's narrative consistently challenges human exceptionalism. By emphasizing ecological interconnectedness, the novel encourages readers to recognize humanity as one component within broader environmental systems. This perspective aligns closely with deep ecological philosophy and contributes to the novel's enduring significance within eco-literature.

SDG 15 and Ecological Sustainability

The ecological concerns addressed in *Prodigal Summer* correspond directly with Sustainable Development Goal 15: Life on Land. SDG 15 promotes biodiversity conservation, sustainable forest management, ecosystem restoration, habitat protection, and species preservation.

Kingsolver's novel illustrates the importance of these objectives through narrative rather than policy discourse. The experiences of coyotes, salamanders, chestnut trees, and human communities demonstrate the consequences of environmental degradation and the necessity of conservation efforts.

By highlighting ecological interdependence, the novel reinforces the principle that environmental

sustainability benefits both human and non-human life. The preservation of biodiversity emerges as essential for ecological resilience, social wellbeing, and long-term sustainability.

Conclusion

Barbara Kingsolver's *Prodigal Summer* stands as one of the most significant eco-literary novels of the contemporary period. Through its exploration of coyotes, salamanders, chestnut trees, and human communities, the novel reveals the tragedy of species extinction and the ecological consequences of biodiversity loss.

Using the frameworks of shallow ecology and deep ecology, this study has demonstrated that Kingsolver moves beyond anthropocentric environmentalism toward a broader ethic of ecological coexistence. While the novel acknowledges practical conservation concerns, it ultimately affirms the intrinsic value of all living beings and the interconnectedness of ecological systems.

The Global South comparison further illustrates the universal relevance of Kingsolver's ecological vision. Environmental challenges such as habitat destruction, biodiversity decline, and species extinction transcend national boundaries and require collective responses grounded in ecological responsibility.

Ultimately, *Prodigal Summer* serves as both a literary achievement and an environmental intervention. By combining scientific knowledge with compelling storytelling, Kingsolver encourages readers to recognize their responsibilities toward biodiversity conservation and ecological sustainability. The novel remains a powerful contribution to eco-literature and an important reminder that the survival of humanity depends upon the survival of the diverse ecological communities with which it shares the planet.

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The Quest: An Ecofeminist Study of Selected Southern African Women Writers

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ABSTRACT

Eco-Feminism is the combination of ecological issues and feminism. Ecofeminists are not just theorists but are activists. They advocate changes in the society besides stressing on environmental health. A social-constructionist ecofeminist perspective states that the patriarchal society integrates the domination of nature with certain social conflicts like gender oppression, racial discrimination and class hierarchies. These various forms of oppression are interrelated by ecofeminists. There is a brief history of events that shaped the society of South Africa. There are conflicts like female and male, white and non-white issues prevailing in the region of South Africa. The above issues in the society vary from time to time. So, social feminism is indispensable for analysing South African literature. Some South African feminists have questioned the ways of adopting western theory like Eco-Feminism in the context of South African literature. The idea of women's liberation or feminism began to gain momentum from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. This research paper focus on the woman writers of the South African society in the light of Eco-Feminism. These writers have played a major role in the reform of the society.

Keywords: Eco-Feminism, South Africa, gender oppression, racial discrimination and class hierarchies.

Introduction

Eco-Feminism is a branch of eco criticism. It became popular in the twentieth century when feminist and ecological theories started to look behind the complexity of oppression. The theory developed from the feminist discussions when women started to make correlations between the various types of destruction. Ecofeminists agree with ecocritics, who "see even the smallest, most remote part in relation to a very large whole" (Rueckert p.108). "the exploitation of nature is intimately linked to western Man's attitude towards women and tribal cultures" (Birkeland 18). It begins with the premise that all types of oppression infects an individual's health.

Ecofeminism: Theoretical Framework

Desirée Lewis is a South African feminist scholar and literary theorist whose ideas make a significant contribution to the development of ecofeminism as a theory of the environmental humanities. The theory of

ecofeminism developed by Lewis emphasizes the relationship between the oppression of women and the oppression of nature. She emphasizes the relationship between the oppression of women and the oppression of nature, especially in the context of the postcolonial and the African.

According to her theory of ecofeminism, the degradation of the environment cannot be considered without the systems of power such as patriarchy, colonialism, racism, and class. She emphasizes the importance of decolonizing the theory of ecofeminism by including the indigenous knowledge of the local environment and the colonial history of the dispossession of the land. Desirée Lewis's theory of ecofeminism is important to the development of the theory of ecofeminism as a feminist theory of the environment. Her theory of ecofeminism emphasizes the importance of the integration of feminist theory, the theory of the environment, and the theory of the postcolonial. According to her theory of ecofeminism, the issues of the environment are not separable from the issues of social inequality.

Desirée Lewis and African Feminist Thought

The feminist Desiree Lewis, feminism sometimes fail when they are "insensitive to the interaction of race, class and gender" (p.91). Eco-Feminism tries to comprehend this complex web of oppressions. These writers focus on the nature of the relationship between the human beings and the environment through the lens of Eco-Feminism. It is critical to note that, in literary studies, particularly in Africa, the field of ecocriticism has recently emerged as an important critical perspective that explains how human beings relate to the environment and or how non-humans are presented in fiction.

Desiree Lewis is an important South African feminist scholar, literary critic, writer, and academic whose work has made a significant contribution to African feminist thought. Her scholarship is mainly concerned with the relationship between gender, race, class, sexuality, colonialism, apartheid, and cultural representation. Lewis argues that the experiences of African and Black women cannot be understood by looking at gender alone because gender oppression is closely connected with racism, economic inequality, colonial history, and other forms of social power. One of the important features of her feminism is therefore its intersectional and African-centred approach. In her work "Feminisms in South Africa," Lewis examines the development of feminism in the South African context and emphasizes the need for feminist theories that respond to the particular historical and social experiences of South African women. She also questions the tendency to apply Western feminist ideas without considering African histories and cultures. In her discussions of Black women and sexuality, Lewis examines how Black women's bodies have been represented and controlled through colonial, racist, patriarchal, nationalist, and cultural ideas.

Desriee Lewis is particularly interested in literature, photography, media, and other forms of cultural expression because these can either reinforce stereotypes about women or provide spaces through which women can challenge and redefine those stereotypes. In "Against the Grain: Black Women and Sexuality," she explores representations of Black women's sexuality and draws attention to the ways artists and writers can challenge conventional images of Black female bodies. Lewis also discusses the challenges faced by African feminism in "Discursive Challenges for African Feminism," where she considers how feminist ideas can sometimes be weakened when they are separated from questions of power, inequality, and political struggle. Her essay "South Africa, Feminism and the Challenges of Solidarity" further examines the difficulties of creating feminist solidarity in a society marked by

differences of race, class, sexuality, and political experience. Lewis believes that feminism should not merely seek equality within existing social structures but should also imagine and create alternative forms of social and political life. This idea is connected with her understanding of feminism as a radical and transformative practice. Another important aspect of her work is the recovery and recognition of Black women's voices and experiences, which have often been ignored or misrepresented in both mainstream scholarship and popular culture.

The edited collection *Surfacing: On Being Black and Feminist in South Africa*, co-edited with Gabeba Baderoon, brings together different Black South African feminist perspectives and explores themes such as identity, sexuality, girlhood, history, spirituality, queer experiences, activism, and the everyday lives of women. Through her scholarship, Lewis challenges patriarchal and colonial systems of knowledge and argues for a more inclusive understanding of feminism rooted in African experiences. Thus, Desiree Lewis's feminist work is significant because it connects personal experiences with larger structures of social power and places Black South African women at the centre of feminist discussions.

The work demonstrates that feminism is not simply a struggle for equality between men and women but also a struggle against racism, colonialism, class inequality, sexual oppression, and the control of knowledge and representation. Overall, Lewis has contributed greatly to the development of contemporary African feminism by promoting intersectional, decolonial, critical, and culturally grounded approaches to understanding women's lives and struggles.

Historical and Literary Context of Southern Africa

Social Eco-Feminism is the vision that the liberation of women, social equality and social justice are connected closely with the affirmation of inferior space of human nature. It connects the domination of women and nature with race and class oppression. The ecofeminist ethics is based on its partnership with nature. It is liberated from the dualism of western intellectual thoughts and gender bias on woman and nature. The patriarchal society is socially constructed with its domination over women. It reinforces the feminist critique of the patriarchal society, social dominations and hierarchies.

Social ecofeminism is a branch of ecofeminist theory that examines the interconnected relationship between the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature within social, political, and economic systems. Social ecofeminists argue that environmental destruction is not simply caused by humanity dominating nature; it is rooted in interconnected systems of patriarchy, capitalism, colonialism, and class inequality. From this view, the oppression of women, marginalized communities, and nature all comes from the same social and economic structures. These systems encourage exploitation, control, and profit at the expense of both vulnerable people and the environment.

In short, social ecofeminism sees the domination of nature and the domination of oppressed groups as linked, and it calls for social, economic, and environmental justice together. Social ecofeminists emphasize that environmental problems cannot be solved without addressing social inequalities and power relations that shape access to resources and environmental decision-making. They advocate for social justice, gender equality, and sustainable environmental practices, highlighting the need to transform the existing socio-economic structures that perpetuate both ecological degradation and gender oppression. Thus, social ecofeminism links

environmental activism with feminist struggles for equality and justice.

The Western attitudes and power structures affected the relationships between genders and races, as well as between human and nonhuman nature in the South African context. First, there is a need to provide a very brief history of the events that shaped South Africa. The Dutch East India Company was the first European settlement created on the South African soil in 1652. The first slaves known as the Cape Colony were brought to South Africa. Over the next one hundred.

During the Second Boer war(1899-1902), the British and Boer fought for control of the Cape Colony with an agreement that Africans would not participate in the parliament .After the war, the conditions of the rural and urban areas became deteriorated for Africans with the birth of South Africa as a new union , the seeds of apartheid were already planted (144, 153). Thus, the nineteenth century has brought a vast change to South Africa as it caught up to the rest of the world.

Ecofeminist Readings of Selected Southern African Women Writers

The above study underpins the notion that nature has become a feminist issue. Warren observes that, "what makes something a feminist issue is that an understanding of it contributes in some way to an understanding of the subordination of women." This very argument finds resonance with an ecofeminist reading of the female authored narratives which allows for an understanding of the woman-nature connections. Thus, the role of Eco-Feminism in this research is to find out to what extent the literary texts coincide with nature as a subject and reflect the roles of women with regards to nature.

This research paper is about the interrogation of narratives by black female authors and thus the idea of feminism will be of high importance. Feminism as a concept occupies a central place in the theory of Eco-Feminism and has been a subject of discussion in many places. Warren claims that a gender analysis is used as a starting point for feminist approach. In other words, gender is the lens through which the initial description and analysis of the texts will occur. According to Estok, the second part of "Eco-Feminism" has been given an ontological priority. Thus, Eco-Feminism holds the assumption that human beings alone are not the sole occupants of the planet and may not tend to an exclusive subject.

The black female authors such as Neshani Andreas (Namibia), Tsitsi Dangarembga (Zimbabwe) and Olive Schreiner(South Africa) state that misogyny and the exploitation of the environment are equal forms of social injustice. The African women writers has addressed and examined the ramifications of the prevailing issues of the region of South Africa. Their works have concern on major issues like the lives of their people (in particular women's lives) and their lived environment. The narratives are located in the African countries from the pre-colonial settlement to the post-colonial dispensation. The conceptions of nature writing, which is at the centre of ecocriticism and environmentalism, are constructed by the historical and political processes in the environment.

Neshani Andreas: Gender, Community, and Nature in *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu*

Neshani Andreas was a Namibian writer, teacher, and social activist who was best known for her remarkable contribution to African feminist literature. Andreas was born in 1964 in northern Namibia, a region that was under South African rule at the time she grew up. Her life in a country with a history of colonial rule, gender inequality, and social change had a remarkable impact on her writings as a feminist author. Andreas

was an educator and education officer, and her career as a teacher had a remarkable impact on her life as a feminist writer. In her writings, she discussed various themes such as gender discrimination, patriarchy, cultural practices, sexuality, and women's resistance in Africa.

She is mainly remembered for her book *The Purple Violet of Oshaantu* published in 2001 and is seen as one of the most important novels in Namibian literature. This book is based on the life of two best friends Kauna and Mee Ali from Namibia. The book emphasizes the challenges women face in a patriarchal society such as domestic abuse, arranged marriages and silencing women in the society. She brings out the challenge of domestic abuse by highlighting how society ignores domestic abuse on women through her character Mee Ali. On the other hand, the author emphasizes women empowerment through female friendship.

One of the key points in the literary style of Andreas is the consideration of African landscapes and the culture of the rural population, in which the natural surroundings play a significant role in human affairs. Such features as village scenery, agriculture, and the connection between people and nature show how nature and community are connected and influence identity. Hence, the literary works of Andreas can be considered from the ecofeminist point of view, since in them, there is a demonstration of how the life of women is connected with their natural and social surroundings and at the same time, the resistance against dominant systems. Concerning the stylistic features of Andreas, it is necessary to mention the simplicity of the language used by the author, which makes it easier for people to read and understand the social problems described in her literature.

Indeed, Neshani Andreas will always be remembered as a prominent African woman writer and a contributor to postcolonial literature. Her contribution to the field has been through her stories which have been used as tools to talk about issues of gender justice, cultural identity, and transformation. From her stories, she inspires the oppressed people to envision a new society that is based on mutual respect and love.

Tsitsi Dangarembga

Tsitsi Dangarembga is an important writer from Zimbabwe. She writes novels, plays and makes films. Tsitsi Dangarembga is also a thinker. Her work is about the lives of women. She wants to show how African women are treated unfairly in societies that are controlled by men. She was born in 1959 in Mutoko, Zimbabwe. She is one of the important African women writers today. Her writing is about how womens lives are shaped by many things. These things include their gender, race, class, education, culture and the history of colonialism. She wants to challenge the ways that African women are seen. Often African women are seen as weak and dependent on men.. Tsitsi Dangarembga shows that African women are complex and strong individuals.

Nervous Conditions

One of Tsitsi Dangarembgas famous books is her novel *Nervous Conditions*. This book was published in 1988. It is about a girl named Tambudzai who grows up in colonial Rhodesia. Tambudzai wants to get an education so that she can be independent.. It is not easy for her. She faces challenges because of her poverty and because people think that educating boys is more important than educating girls.

The Book of Not

Through Tambudzais story Tsitsi Dangarembga shows how societies controlled by men can be very unfair to women. The book also introduces female characters like Nyasha and Maiguru. These women challenge the roles that are expected of them. Nyasha

does not want to follow the rules that men have made for her. Maiguru is an educated woman but she still faces many challenges because of the societal expectations of her.

This Mournable Body

Tsitsi Dangarembgas second novel, *The Book of Not* was published in 2006. This book continues Tambudzais story. It shows how Tambudzai faces challenges as a black woman in a society that is controlled by colonial powers. Even though she gets an education she still faces discrimination and prejudice. The book examines how colonial education can be very harmful to people. It also shows how women can internalize the values of their oppressors and participate in their marginalization.

The third book in the series *This Mournable Body* was published in 2018. This book is Tambudzai as an adult woman living in post-independence Zimbabwe. Even though the country is now independent Tambudzai still faces challenges. She faces poverty, sexism, racism and economic insecurity. The book challenges the idea that political independence automatically brings freedom to women. Tsitsi Dangarembga shows that the structures of colonialism and patriarchy can still exist after a country gains independence.

Tsitsi Dangarembga: Gender, Colonialism, and Women's Resistance

Tsitsi Dangarembga has also written a play called *She No Longer Weeps*. This play was written in 1987. It is about womens oppression, marriage, sexuality and the search for independence. The play challenges the expectations that women should find their identity through marriage and motherhood. Tsitsi Dangarembga also made a film called Everyones Child in 1996. This film is about the economic challenges faced by children and families in Zimbabwe. It also highlights the gender and social inequalities that exist in the country.

Across all her work Tsitsi Dangarembga is interested in the relationship between the personal and the political. She shows how the problems faced by women are connected to larger systems of power. Education is a theme in her work. Her female characters often see education as a way to gain independence.. Tsitsi Dangarembga also shows the limitations of education. Women may get an education. They still face patriarchal expectations at home and in society.

Female identity is another theme in Tsitsi Dangarembgas work. Her characters struggle to define themselves beyond the roles that are expected of them. They challenge the roles of daughters, wives and mothers. Patriarchy is a concern in her work. She examines how the authority of men can control womens lives. Tsitsi Dangarembga also explores the idea of colonialism and its psychological effects. She shows how colonial domination can continue after a country gains independence.

Tsitsi Dangarembgas feminism is closely connected to questions of race, class, culture and national identity. She explores the idea of oppression, where African women face both colonial and patriarchal oppression.. Her work does not portray women as victims. Her characters, like Tambudzai and Nyasha resist expectations and challenge the status quo. They demonstrate womens capacity for questioning, resistance and self-discovery.

Tsitsi Dangarembgas feminist perspective is African, intersectional and postcolonial. She examines womens oppression in relation to the histories and social conditions of Zimbabwe and Africa. She does not treat womens experiences as identical across cultures and classes. Instead she shows how the experiences of women can be very different

depending on their context. Her work challenges both African traditions and colonial systems of power. It also challenges the idea that Western models of womens liberation can be transferred to societies without considering local histories and cultural realities.

Overall Tsitsi Dangarembgas work is very important. It shows how womens lives are shaped by the combined forces of patriarchy, colonialism, racism, class inequality, education and economic dependence. Her portrayal of Tambudzai is particularly significant. It reflects the changing but continuing forms of oppression experienced by women. Tsitsi Dangarembga suggests that true liberation requires more, than independence or educational achievement. It requires a transformation of the structures, cultural beliefs and systems of power that limit womens freedom.

Olive Schreiner: Nature, Gender, and Social Critique

Olive Schreiner (1855-1920) was a South African novelist, feminist, and social reformer. She has been known for her progressive thoughts on gender equality and social justice. Her most popular literary piece is the novel "*The Story of an African Farm*". The novel is known for being one of the first and the most important pieces of South African literature. The novel deals with a number of important issues such as women's independence, colonial life, religion, and human freedom in the context of the lives of the characters in a remote farm in Africa.

Olive Schreiner was a feminist and an anti-imperialist writer who strongly opposed patriarchal societies and colonialism. Her literary pieces can be identified by the importance she gave to women's rights and social reform. Her novels featured strong women characters who were independent and wanted to acquire knowledge and freedom. Olive Schreiner's literary contributions were important in the development of feminist ideas and the history of South African literature. Her ideas and thoughts played an important part in the development of feminist ideas and the relationship between humans and the environment.

Olive Schreiner's novels reveal the impact of both Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* and social Darwinism as a corruption of the evolutionary theory. Social Darwinism distorts Darwin's view of the symbiotic relationship between nature and human's, by emphasizing that human's technological strength gives it power over nature. Schreiner criticizes this anthropocentric view of the world that perpetuates human superiority over nature and male superiority over women. Schreiner writes that the most serious danger to a person's spirit occurs "when he severs himself from all contact with the living and self-expanding forms of nature beyond himself ... 1t is an inverted view of the universe, with accompanying narrowness and blindness" (p.247).

Olive Schreiner was also an important intellectual voice who engaged deeply with political and philosophical debates of her time. Beyond her fiction, she wrote essays, letters, and political commentaries that addressed issues such as women's suffrage, militarism, imperialism, and social inequality. She was an ardent supporter of the belief that a society could progress only if women were given an equal opportunity in terms of education, jobs, and politics.

Woman and Labour

The work *Woman and Labour*, a well-known piece of feminist literature, reveals Schreiner's ideas about the necessity of women's economic independence and productive labor for the achievement of gender equality. She is critical of the patriarchal restrictions put on the female role in society and insists on the idea that intellectual and creative capabilities of a woman cannot be limited to domesticity. She also

drew attention to the effects of colonization and economic exploitation in South Africa, expressing her worries about racial inequality and uneven land distribution. Living in the difficult conditions of the African landscapes, Schreiner was interested in the influence of nature on human life. The natural environment is a major element in her works, which symbolizes freedom, struggle, and search for the truth. Her ideas later inspired scholars working in feminist theory, postcolonial studies, and environmental humanities. Even today, Schreiner's writings remain relevant because they challenge readers to think critically about gender justice, social equality, and the ethical relationship between human beings and their social and natural environments.

Comparative Ecofeminist Perspectives

Thus, the social-constructionist ecofeminist perspective analyses the social constructions that are depicted in the literary texts of South Africa. At the heart of this research paper lies the harmful dichotomy between nature and culture. This dichotomy results from the fundamentally patriarchal belief that humanity possesses the power to dominate nature. The reason is nature imbued with negative traits such as the inability to reason, feel, and act. Technology supports this power structure by reinforcing human power and absolving humanity from any obligation to nature. Gender, class, and racial dichotomies result from the same social constructions that separate human from nature. It has taken its roots from the cultural superiority of white, upper class, male over the culturally inferior nonwhite, lower class, and female.

Conclusion

Thus, the role of eco-feminism is to determine to what extent the literary texts with nature as subject reflect the role of women with regards to nature. An ecofeminist evaluation by the above selected writers established whether women are affected by changes in nature or do they appreciate it or do they exploit or conserve it. Despite the differences between ecological and ecofeminist theories, both emphasises that we are amidst a global environmental crisis. The South African writers have questioned all the forms of opression in their works. It has paved a way for the reform of the society.

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Rohingya Refugee Crisis: A Historical Study

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ABSTRACT

The Rohingya refugee crisis is one most the worst humanitarian crisis in the world. They have no state to proclaim their national identity, actually it is the cause of all the problem that they are dealing with. This paper examining their historical origin various political issues and other consequences. Here the major arguments regarding the crisis are colonial migration, post-colonial nationalism and ethnic nationalism of Myanmar. The national citizenship law of Myanmar in 1982 intensified their plight and majority of Rohingyas flood to various countries become refugees, which lead to the spread of extremist identity among them and eventually lead to the fight between ethnic group based on religious identity. Besides all of these this paper also analyzing the problem from the perspective of both India and Bangladesh too. Myanmar considers them as Indian migrants, meanwhile the Rohingyas see them as a population that belongs to the Rakhine region. Furthermore, it provides a crucial insight into the necessity of global cooperation and a compassionate strategy to address the refugee problem

Keywords: Rohingya, refugees, nationalism, religion, identity, ethnicity.

Introduction

"No one put their children in a boat unless water is safer than their land", it's a famous quotation of British writer Warson Shire about the Rohingya refugee crisis. There are many theories regarding the origin of the Rohingya community. They have attracted multiple perspectives from scholars and researchers, such as early migrants from India before colonialism, diaspora resulting from colonial interference, and the Rohingya identity being a product of a multitude of influences from pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial period. exactly in the Rakhine province. After the Anglo-Burmese war, Burma (now Myanmar) was annexed to British India. This led to a large migration of people from the Chittagong region of Bangladesh (then part of British India) into Rakhine province in Myanmar. Previous Indian migrants were already in several factions through commerce and pre-colonial relationships. Burmese nationalism led to Burma becoming an independent crown colony in 1937 and the beginning of the debate over Rohingyan identity This was the first, and for the most part unnoticed, rupture in the history of India. The nationalist movement in Burma constructed a 'we' vs 'them' dichotomy based on

resentment toward Indian migrants, especially the Rohingya population. The Rohingya crisis is, above all, a nationalist problem, with racial and religious nationalism intensifying their agony. India and Myanmar have a historical relationship of 2000 years with political, cultural and business engagement. After the implementation of British rule opinions began to change and thus Indians in Burma were called *kaala log*, meaning dark skinned people. At the end of the First and Second World Wars in 1918 and 1945 respectively, the ethnic Indian population in Burma increased and anti-Indian sentiment began to grow. The census report of England showed that Indians formed more than fifty percent of the population of Rangoon, creating a fear in Burma that they would soon be demographically displaced. In 1942 16 percent of the population of Burma was of Indian descent; yet, the ethnic Burmese population supported imperial Japan. This led more than half the Indian population to flee from Burma to move into Assam.

The substantial arrival of the Muslim minority began migration with the support of the British in 1824.Myanmar's people began to view them as disloyal to their nationalist aspirations, and at the beginning of World War II Rakhine's Rohingyas sided with the British, while the majority Buddhist community allied with imperial Japan. The two communities destroyed each other. Defeat of Imperial Japan eventually set the stage for the hatred of the Rohingya Muslims. U Nu was the only prime minister of Burma who advocated unity between the two communities. In 1962, he was the only head of the state to acknowledge the Muslims of Rakhine as Rohingya, that is, the natives of Rakhine. After the military coup in Burma, the perception of the Rohingya minority started to change and in 1982 the citizenship law was passed to strip them of their citizenship. Anyone who settled before 1823 is regarded as a permanent resident of Burma and is granted citizenship under this law. The Rohingya is a community without any historical record before 1823, thereby losing their rights.

The Rohingyas are now stateless people they don't have an identity; it is one of the pathetic conditions of a community in the world. Over recent decades multiple human right violation including: forced labour, removal of citizenship, depopulation of their communities, severe abuse of children, elders and women, prohibition of freedom movement, confiscation and destruction of property, denial of education, religious and ethnic discrimination, restriction on marriages, systematic persecution and racism, ethnic cleansing and forced expulsion. The condition became more pathetic after ARSA torched the police station of Rakhine on 25 August 2017.After this Myanmar government declared ARSA as a terrorist organization and they counter attacked Rohingyas. Around 500,000-600,000 Rohingyas have escaped from their homeland in the northern part of the state Rakhine in Burma to Bangladesh. Prior to that date, as far as back as 1990 approximately 300,000 Rohingyas had already escaped into Bangladesh, primarily focused in the two Upazilas of Ukhia and Teknaf. Additionally, many refugees went to the seas mostly in boats and make-shift rafts trying to find refugees especially in India, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and Saudi Arabia. In many instance, they were harshly turned away with many not surviving.

Members of the Rohingya community were displaced to Bangladesh where the state, non-governmental organizations and the UNHCR gave aid to the refugees by providing them food and shelter. These external organizations were important because the immigration of the Rohingyas was massive. In 2015, 140,000 Rohingyas were still living in the IDP camps, three years after fleeing communal riots in 2012.According to the claims of the authorities

currently 40,000 Rohingyas residing in India. The majority of Rohingya community residing India came to India either prior to 2012 or following that year's violence. At the time, Bangladesh was as much less welcoming to refugees, but India appeared to offer great promise. In the years since 2015 however the attitudes towards minorities –particularly Muslims – have shifted dramatically in India.

Ongoing Rohingya migration from Myanmar aka Burma to Bangladesh created a new dilemma there, so they are now planning to shift them to a island, which is sinking twice in a year. According to the report of the United Nations Rohingyas are considered as the most persecuted community in the world. New reports from Burma giving some hope to the Bengali Hindus, if they are ready to accept the identity of Burmese Hindus, they can live there with peace. The communal tensions are at its peak now. Earlier it was Sri Lankan Tamils and Tibetan Buddhist's now it is Rohingyas, the name is only changing the persecution remain the same.

The Identity of Rohingya

The emergence and identity formation Rohingya remain contested subjects among scholars and academicians. Rather than identifying them as an indigenous community or as migrants from Bangladesh, it is important to analyses the history of Muslim settlement in Rakhine. Moreover, the rapid migration during the colonial period and the development of a distinct ethnic identity further complexed the situation. Scholars emphasized various aspects of historical and political process about the earlier Muslim communities of Rakhine and the present crisis. The Rohingyas are Bengali-speaking Muslims who live in Rakhine. Historians say there is a long history of invasions and migrations in Rakhine.

The Konbaung dynasty of Burma took over the kingdom of Arakan. In 1826, after repatriation in the first Anglo-Burmese War, Rakhine was given to the British. But the war between the two countries continued. The Third Anglo-Burmese War of 1886 ended with the surrender of the Burmese king Thibaw. Thus, the whole of Burma was under British colonial administration and Rakhine was a part of Burma. Burma was ruled as a part of British India. This resulted in the migration of a large number of Indians to Burma. Most of the new residents of Yangon had been Indians from 1891, at least fifty percent of whom were Muslims. According to Yegar, colonial intervention "facilitated Muslim migration, leading eventually to the development of a Rohingya identity.

Meanwhile Anthony Ware and Costas Laoutides address the history of Muslims in Rakhine province through different periods of migration and settlement. He argues that the Muslim communities existed in Rakhine before the colonial interventions and after the British administration more people of Indian origin begun to settle there, these different groups assimilated into distinct a group with different language, culture and history But according to Thant Myint-U, it is colonial and post-colonial administrative policies established these ethnic classifications, which shaped the modern idea about the identity of the citizens of Myanmar. Furthermore, this led to the alienation of Rohingya community. Jacques P. Leider has another interpretation of the notion of a difference between the long history of Muslim communities in Rakhine and the formation of a current ethnic group represented by the word Rohingya. He points out that although Muslim people had long existed in Rakhine before colonialism, the exclusive use of the term "Rohingya" as a political identity was only normalized after 1950. He therefore concluded that the development of this identity was influenced by a number of factors such as migration, interpersonal ties and a dynamic relationship with the state.

The formation of Rohingya identity can be explored as a fluid and contested concept. Rakhine province's demographic makeup was shaped by many factors, including earlier migrations, British colonization, and later large-scale immigration into the area. Along with this, colonial ethnic stratifications in Myanmar and their continuance in the post-colonial era produced unflexible societal divisions, making the Rohingyas as outsiders and marginalizing them from the Myanmar nationalist. This made them stateless people and from this grew the present ethnic strife.

Waves and Shores

Waves and shore is the poetic representation that shows the plight of Rohingya community. The migration of Rohingyas increased after the 25 August 2017 massacre of Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army aka ARSA. In a single push about 700,000 refugees took shelter in Bangladesh. After two years there was an initiative to return three thousand Rohingya refugees to Burma on 22 August 2019, but all those initiatives to repatriate refugees have not been successful, not a single refugee has returned, Bangladesh foreign ministry says that Burma is responsible for this crisis.

The Rohingya's are now wandering in sea for an asylum but nobody is willing to accept them, because the countries that Rohingyas seek asylum have no desire to create new crisis. More than 120,000 Rohingyas have taken to the sea in boats to flee overseas in the last three years. It reported that over 300 individuals perished in maritime incidents between January and March of 2017. Because of this pathetic condition and international pressure many countries especially the neighboring nations allowed Rohingyas to reside there, but under certain restrictions like no citizenship, legal rights and educational rights

Refugee Crisis

The Rohingyas are the community consisting 2,000,000 people among them around 1,000,000 people are now residing in Bangladesh as refugees. Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, and India are the other major countries who give asylum to Rohingyas. Now in Burma less than One Million Rohingyas remaining, they are living under the fear of both Buddhist junta government and ARSA terrorists. They don't have any legal rights in Burma and the situation is not different in their asylum too. But considering the condition of wandering in sea now they have a piece of land to sleep.

According to statistics majority of the Rohingyas are residing in Bangladesh. It is because the Rakhine province of Burma sharing the boundary with Bangladesh and the people residing in both Bangladesh and Rakhine sharing same language and culture. Since the 1970s, Rohingya refugees have been migrating to Bangladesh from Myanmar. In the 1990s, over 250,000 people were living in refugee camps in Bangladesh.

Most of the Rohingya refugees are located along the Teknaf-cox's and Cox Bazar. Bangladesh authorities have a major challenge in dealing with such large number of refugees, but they have made matters worse by imposing restrictions on refugees such as denying legal and educational rights.On September 1, 2019, the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission ordered telecommunication operators to shut down mobile phone services in the camps which created serious risk in the camps like communication problems, security issues, health and other necessary services. The government action appeared to be in response to recent incidents involving the Rohingya refugees. Bangladesh government tried to repatriate Rohingya refugees to Burma on 22 August 2019 failed because of the current condition of the Burma. Rohingya community doubted it as a planned move of Bangladesh to massacre them so they responded

violently, a youth leader of Awami League killed in action. After this events Bangladesh government increased the military presence in the camps to protect law and order. But the refugees considered it as a movement of Bangladesh government to restrict their liberty. So, the relationship between Bangladesh citizens and Rohingya refugees is getting worse day by day. Since the rapid influx of Rohingya refugees into Bangladesh began in 2017, public health officials had discovered that the rise of health issues among the refugees. Malnutrition, Sexually Transmitted Disease, and Mental health issues are common among the Rohingya refugees now. Bangladesh is one of the most underdeveloped countries in the world, so they don't have enough facility to accommodate anymore refugees.

The whole world considering all Rohingya refugees as Muslim's because the majority of the community follow Islamic teachings. Actually, Rohingya is a term that means the people of Rakhine, it is not a religious identity. There is a marginal minority among the Rohingya community who believing in Hinduism rather than using the identity of Rohingyas they consider them as a Bengali speaking community. Bangladesh is now the world's largest refugee camp of Rohingyas, but they providing different camp for both Muslim's and Hindus refugees because of the communal clashes between them. Before fleeing from Burma in 2017 ARSA massacred 99 Bengali Hindus in Maungdaw District.

The Hindu refugee settlement is located at Cox's Bazar in southeast Bangladesh, and they consisting of 410 people. The Hindu camp stands out from the rest of the sprawling refugee settlement. It is the only camp having the presence of police, and these camps are built with Bamboos and Tarpaulin. Now Bangladesh government needs to resolve a communal issue among the refugees, so the condition is turning more pathetic now. In the 1991 violence, only six affected families were Hindus among the 30,000 Rohingyas who fled to refugee camps. The Hindu camp has families belonging to the Pat and Sheel sub-sects, most of them third generation Myanmar citizens. The Myanmar government has granted them national verification cards that indicate their ethnicity as Indians, making it harder for Rohingya to choose a national identity.

Bangladesh government is now decided to relocate about 1,00,000 Rohingya refugees to an island which is sinking twice in a year. But no date has been announced to relocate people from the crowded and squalid camps where they have lived for years. According to the Bangladesh officials the flood protection embarkments, houses, Mosques have built on Bhasan Char or floating island, in the Bay of Bengal. Moreover, the foreign medias are not permitted to visit the island. International aid agencies and the UNO have vehemently opposed the relocation plan since it was the first proposed in 2015, expressing fear that a big storm could overwhelm the island and endanger thousands of lives. The UNO has emphasized the importance of undertaking independent technical assessments that consider safety, sustainability and protection issues prior to any relocation taking into place.

The current refugee camps are now overcrowded and unhygienic, disease and organized crimes are increasing. Education is limited and refugees aren't allowed to work. So Bangladesh government is trying to convince the refugee families to move to the island. Thousands of Rohingya refugees living in the camps have agreed to move to the island. Dhaka has long wanted to relocate 100,000 refugees muddy silt island, saying it would take pressure off the over-crowded boarder camps where almost a million Rohingyas living. According to the official reports 6,000-7,000 refugees have expressed their willingness to be relocated to Bhasan Char. In the past half a

century, a powerful cyclone has killed hundreds of thousands of people in Meghir river estuary where the island where the island is located. But according to a Rohingya refuges activist. A climate of fear is created in the camps, which may have prompted some Rohingya to agree to shift to the island.

After Bangladesh Pakistan is the country where the most number of Rohingya refugees are residing, around 400,000 Rohingyas are living in Pakistan. There are numerous Rohingya colonies found throughout Karachi. Once Pakistan was the largest population center of the Rohingyas after Burma, but now migration of Rohingyas to Pakistan is declining because of the restrictions put forwarded by Pakistan government. The irony is Pakistan still giving arms, training and financial assistance to Rohingya terrorists. ARSA is formed under the support of Pakistan. The leader of ARSA Attaullah Abu Ammer Junani a Rohingya refugee who is born in Karachi, he got ideological support and arms training from Pakistan's intelligence wing ISI.

Around 40,000 Rohingya refugees are residing in India after 2015 genocide. In India, Rohingya influx started to create official and media attention by late 2015. While consider the influx of Rohingyas to India, the Indian government refused to permit them stating that it can be a "threat to national security". The home minister of the first NDA government Mr. Rajnath Sing stated the case of Rohingya Muslim's need special attention because they were not refugees but illegal migrants. Moreover, the Indian administration aims to repatriate an estimated 40,000 Rohingyas Burma, encompassing those documented by the UN refugee agency. The office of the UN High Commissioner for the refugees has issued identity cards for Rohingyas, it helps to prevent arrest and deportation. So, the deportation of the registered refugees will create an International legal issue. After the Citizenship Amendment Act was passed in India on December 11, 2019, the situation worsened drastically, as Union Minister Jitendra Singh called for the expulsion of all Rohingyas. Moreover, as they are not part of the populations of the designated countries listed in this Act. Some right-wing groups have backed the deportation of the Rohingyas.

The writ petition, issued under Article 32 of the Constitution of India, that allows all persons-citizens and foreigners-to move the Supreme Court in case of violation of their fundamental rights, argues for protection. It affirms that two fundamental rights and one principle of international law would be violated if the Rohingya refugees were deported back to Myanmar. The fundamental rights in question are Article 14(equality before law and equal protection of the laws) of the fundamental rights to freedom. The fundamental principle of International law that is at risk is non-refoulement that prohibits any country from returning refugees or asylum seekers to another country where there was a likelihood of persecution based on "race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion". The petition also draws upon case law highlighting previous examples where Indian courts have upheld the rights of refugees

But in India there is no national legislation concerning refugees, their legal status and rights. They are treated as aliens. In the absence of clear out guidelines, refugees thus fall under the purview of legislative framework that addresses all foreigners in India. Further India's refugee policy is governed by certain administrative regulations. They are: the registration of foreigners Act, 1939, dealing with all foreigners, the foreigners Act, 1946, empowering the state of regulates the entry, the presence and departure of aliens in India and the foreigner's order 1948. Under section 2 of the Registration of Foreigner's Act, the term foreigners is defined as a person who is not a citizen of India, which can refer to aliens of any kind

including immigrants, refugees and tourists. The Foreigners Act of 1946 and the foreigners order of 1948 also uses as the definition of a foreigner.

No current Indian law refers directly to refugees. The current position is that they are dealt with under the existing laws Indian laws, both general and special, which are otherwise applicable to all foreigners. In the absence of a legal process, India's treatment of asylum seekers has always been a political decision, a direct result of the country's relation with the refugees country of the origin hence the government of India handles refugee matters administratively, according to internal domestic and bilateral political and humanitarian consideration. India is not a signatory to the 1951 convention relating to the states of refugees or the 1967 protocol.

India has never been a member of the 1951 International Convention for Refugees and its 1967 protocol, and even though it is member of the UN High Commissioner for Refugee Executive Committee since 1996, but it does not officially recognizes the work of the UN body in its territory. India's reluctance to sign the convention stems from its position that it is Eurocentric, tailored to fit the refugee movements, after the world war second and has not responded well to mass migration. Another reason of not signing the UN convention protecting refugees is that signing the convention meant to be obligated to accept massive flows of refugees from politically unstable neighbours. So the legal status of Rohingyas as refugees in India is easily questionable.

Conclusion

The Rohingya community have historical record of more than two hundred years, but still they are persecuted in Myanmar because of the ethnic nationalism. Myanmar had a long history of Anti-Indian movement and they considered Indians as *kaala people*. After the two Anglo-Burmese wars Burma merged with the British India and Indians started to migrate to Rangoon for a good fortune this lead to increase of Indian population in Burma. Burmese considered this new situation as a silent demographic invasion so they started a protest in Burma for a separate crown colony at last they got it in 1937. After the separation majority of Indians returned to India but the Rohingya community stayed there, because they considered Rakhine province as their home. Burmese nationalism is completely based on ethnic identity, according to the point of view of the Burmese government the actual residents of Burma are 135 ethnic communities. When considering these facts, it is clear that ethnic nationalism is the root cause of the Rohingya problem. After the creation of Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ASRA) in 2017 the attitude of the crisis changed into a religious dimension. The Buddhist Junta lead Burmese government and separatist group funded ASRA are fighting for superiority in Rakhine. After massacres and persecutions, the Myanmar military got upper hand in the situation. Most of the Rohingyas exiled from the country and sought asylum in various parts of the world, about 40,000 of Rohingya are residing India. India did not warm welcome to the mostly persecuted refugees in the world. In case of Rohingya refugees India gave due importance to the country's security. India is not a signatory to international conventions regarding refugees. Despite of this India gave asylum to Tibetan, Sri Lankan, Bangladeshi refuges. These refugees continue to receive all rights of normally assigned refugee. The majority of the Rohingya refugees are residing in Bangladesh. The increasing number of the Rohingyas in Bangladesh created a demographic crisis so Bangladesh is now planning to relocate them to an island which is sinking twice in a year. If the Rohingya community are forcibly shifted to the island, it will eventually lead to a natural ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya community.

Historical records suggest that the refugee dilemma has played a crucial role in fostering worldwide unrest and aggression. The Rohingya catastrophe has developed into a seafaring refugee predicament that has captured worldwide interest. Addressing the Rohingya dilemma requires the provision of legal assurances for the nations sheltering them, while Myanmar must create a permanent resolution to reduce the flow of refugees. The prior governance of the National League for Democracy (NLD) The governance of Aung San Suu Kyi further marginalized the Rohingyas. Additionally, the present military seizure illustrates that Burma is still governed by both military and Buddhist leadership. This is due to the nationalistic outlook of the Burmese. The lens of nationalism requires a shift toward a more humanitarian stance to effectively confront the issue.

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The World-Civilization Experiencing a Transformation Manifesting through the Proclamation of Swami Vivekananda Resonating Eternally

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ABSTRACT

Swami Vivekananda- an ardent, learned reformer had a divine urge for endeavouring incessantly to uplift the humankind. The study is an effort to disseminate the message which Vivekananda aspired for: culmination of humanity into the divine form. The sage had a great urge for amalgamating the ideal of universal harmony and the inherent divinity of every being upon earth. The precept has set the ground for his doctrine of Universal Brotherhood, which epitomizes the *yoga* and practical *Vedanta*: enumerating the unison of all. The article will be an endeavour to focus on ideals of the saint who presented the Motherland, representing various forms of *Prakriti*. Vivekananda envisioned a future for India where the nation would emerge from the shadows of oppression to reclaim its rich spiritual, cultural, and intellectual heritage. The ideal rooted in the Indian soil found path to manifest at the stage of World Parliament of Religions through the reiteration of Vivekananda which encompasses oneness of all, the thought process is and will be continuing to prevail till eternity.

Keywords: Universal Brotherhood, divinity, humanity, *yoga*, practical *Vedanta*, World Parliament of Religions.

Introduction

A diligent listener, a magnificent orator, an aspirant who never ceased a single day for self-interest, a brilliant personality replete with matchless courage, and an epitome in himself dedicated to the service of mankind; the *atma* of Aryavart is Swami Vivekananda. The seer's divine mentor Swami Ramakrishna Paramhansa always believed that one day he would meet Narendra, who as the forerunner to perceive humanity in its divine form will maneuver for the manifestation and total transformation of every being. "Vivekananda was a traveller on a different path" (Sankar 2). He enumerated human entity to be an expression of a greater universal consciousness, suggesting that all of us are connected by a divine thread that transcends time, space, and any material boundaries.

The vision of Vivekananda was conglomeration of the universal potential for every individual, all civilizations and cultures. The crux of every conviction as a value is complete and whole that has never changed despite the difference of perspectives. The goal is to attain the One, the path has varied shades to reach divine-attainment. The solution to all miseries prevailing in the world is very simple; that is just a change of perception, free from prejudices. The study is an effort to highlight thought current of the apostle that, in the high time of progress where the world is storming with individualism- it is also diverting towards collective consciousness and signaling for co-existence as well. The converging humankind is on the path of achieving the unity wholly as highlighted

through the principle of practical *Vedanta*. According to the saint, oneness of all existence will spread the spirit of unity, where lies the real strength of humanity. The perpetuity of Vivekananda's message to their brethren, of fraternity; is reflective in its approach to align with human temper for consistently racing all together to never depart. This would be the panacea to heal drastically changing world-order and existence where Vivekananda proclaims that..."in the great life that I have seen, I cannot but think that a double purpose is served — one of world-moving, and another, of nation-making" (Sister Nivedita 191).

Major concern and objective of the study is to explore:

- The discourses of Vivekananda encompassing unison of the self with the universal Self and a transcendence towards subtle domain from gross living.
- Vivekananda's ideal that the amalgamation of cosmic vibrations then could be felt in center of the macrocosm, which is elevating the state of humankind with the revelation where every entity is a child of the Master.
- The announcement of Vivekananda which laid the establishment for Universal Brotherhood through practical *Vedanta* focusing on concord in every forms of creation, which is the epitome of *yoga*.
- The *yoga* which together highlights the divine solidarity amongst the various belief-systems through the ideal of *Vedanta* resulting into imbibing universal human values to build the citadel of Universal Brotherhood.

Methodology

Vivekananda dedicated his life for spiritual realization and elevation of the humanity towards a higher, transcendent realm beyond earthly existence. The sage cultivated goodness and reaped the rewards of goodwill through his dauntless spirit. The brooding on speculations of Vivekananda had been outpoured spontaneously with the help of primary and secondary resources without which this paper would not have seen the light of the day. The primary resources comprise of diligent collection of Vivekananda's orations in nine volumes: *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* by Ida Ansell, and literature incorporated in the form of *Jnana-Yoga, Bhakti-Yoga, Karma-Yoga, Prema-Yoga* and *Raja-Yoga*, by Vivekananda.

The paper is based on qualitative data and emerged from an in depth exploration of the literary works of Vivekananda and prominent spiritual thinker-authors *viz*. Swami Chetanananda, Swami Mumukshananda, Swami Nikhilananada, Rabindra Nath Tagore, Romain Rolland, Sister Nivedita and many more who have expressed their profound notions on ideals of the seer. The secondary resources consist of philosophical treatise of knowledge: The *Bhagavad Gita*, also *Teachings of Swami Vivekananda, The Life of Vivekananda and the Universal Gospel*, *The Master as I Saw Him* and many other scholarly writings, articles, internet resources have immensely contributed in framing the paper. The study presents the lustrous principles of Vivekananda, who practically mentioned the ideal of universal human values which evolves to a supreme state, transcending the material world characterized by living according to moral values, principles and beliefs by giving meaning to the life. The methodology explains various dimensions of the precept of Universal Brotherhood enumerated by Vivekananda, which discloses the enigma of higher realm of existence conclusively establishing the ideal by propagating universal human values highly spirited with *Vasudhaiv Kutukmbakam*.

Literature Review

The reflection on the speculations of Vivekananda presents his role both as a spiritual sage and a social reformer, whose ideas continue to inspire humanity eternally. The dedication of Vivekananda to effort for the well-being of society, being the pillar support for youth, and his deep faith in the puissance of every human being; is the mark of a magnificent seer working tirelessly. The message of saint emphasized self-reliance as the foundation of India's future, urging the citizens to recognize their destiny. It was a call to challenge the callous forces that had crippled the Indian masses, an urge to reform the past for transforming the present and establishing a bright future for the entire universe, through Universal Brotherhood. Vivekananda defined Indian culture and emphasized the need for resources to restore the nation, "One recalls Tagore's words: 'Who are you that sit and read my poem after a hundred years?' And I wonder-

who are you that read the accounts of the last day of Swami Vivekananda's life after a hundred years? If there are still some who are eager to read of such things, should one not write? Should one not rise to the challenge? Let it be my account that is read!" (Sankar 207).

The address at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago was the defining moment, where Vivekananda introduced to the world his vision of a united, spiritually awakened and euphoric human race. The central idea of his philosophy was the belief in the boundless potential of every human being. The apostle disseminated the message of self-reliance by moving beyond individual independence towards the transformation of the world to seek complete collective liberation. Vivekananda saw the future of humankind which had been rooted in spiritual awakening and the realization of the inner power. The seer urged the youth to take charge of their destiny, emphasizing the importance of balancing material progress with spiritual development. The iconic speech of Vivekananda at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago exemplified his profound spiritual insights. There, the saint introduced the spiritual philosophy of Bharat to the world and promoted the idea of unity in diversity. The ideal of religious tolerance became the supernal source of motivation in his global appeal for establishment of all-prevailing brotherhood, peace, harmony, plenitude. Vivekananda's vision of spreading his message in the West took shape. The goal was to disseminate the spirit of India to the world which was of self-awakening and attainment of higher consciousness. "His doctrine was no academic system of metaphysics, of purely historic and linguistic interest, but the heart's faith of a living people, who have struggled continuously for its realisation, in life and in death, for twenty-five centuries" (Sister Nivedita 192).

He emphasized the importance of realizing the Supreme power not just as an external entity but as an inherent part of our own being. The understanding leads to redemption, inner peace, and ecstasy of achieving the higher consciousness. Vivekananda's vision was that through the understanding, humanity would rise above superficial divisions, and a true sense of Universal Brotherhood would emerge. The most splendid part of Vivekananda's thought was his teaching that different spiritual paths and practices all lead to the same Ultimate truth. He famously stated, truth is one, paths are many. This was a call for acceptance, tolerance and respect for diverse practices and philosophies. Vivekananda's goal was to maneuver for the betterment of humankind and inspire the masses to envisage their own potential for divinity. The apostle reiterates:

> *Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this Divinity within, by controlling nature, external and internal. Do this either by work, or worship, or psychic control or philosophy-by one, or more, or all of these-and be free. This is the whole of religion. Doctrines, and dogmas, or rituals, or books, or temples, or forms, are but secondary details (Vivekananda, Vol.1 124).*

Vivekananda was firm in his belief that every human being is inherently divine. This ideal could be realized through self-discipline, devotion, and the pursuit for higher knowledge. He appealed every individual to look inward and discern their inherent power for greatness.

According to Vivekananda the divine path of *yoga* for the humankind is beginning of the journey towards a blissful infinite existence. The seer announced to imbibe the truth revealing in various forms and understand the inherent power of supreme existence within our very constitution. The ideal is attained through *sadhana*, *samadhi*, *manthan* and incessant progressive thought, action, prayer, devotion. *Yoga*, he proclaimed is the path which leads towards the golden journey of attaining the blessed life. The realization of being establishes the divine living along with developing oneness, collectiveness and universal harmony amongst the nation-states. The ecstatic attainment of understanding the self is exhibited through *Yoga*. *Yoga* aspires humankind to proceed towards the universal-transcendental domain for metamorphosis of terrestrial. *Yoga*, the path of *sadhana* advances the being to attain the higher realm of existence and in this way the firmament is connected with cosmic consciousness. The paper grounded in qualitative data is an extensive review of the deliberations of Vivekananda and an insight of various scholarly writers. It focuses on the divine efforts of Vivekananda for spiritual enlightenment and the elevation of humanity towards a higher plane, transcending the limits of earthly existence. The study

is an exploration of Vivekananda's discourse who envisaged India as a leader in universalizing spiritual resurgence, with its profound ancient wisdom carrying the baton for future huge conversion in every way. The sage emphasized on the potential of each human being and the need to uplift mankind for overall transformation. His faith in India's cultural-spiritual heritage contributed to a significant change in national and global consciousness instinctually, motivating the general mass for elevation towards the higher plane.

Beginning of the Eternal Journey

The child descended upon the earth replete with capacities of all-encompassing inherent power which every soul carries with the initiation of life. The importance is of that realization in a being which elevates their status to the level from where everything is perceptible in its higher form. The characteristics found definition in Narendra, the God-incarnate who always believed in "*Jiva* is *Shiva*". His nurturing by parents was in a very natural environment where education and human values were inherited fundamentally by Narendra. The surroundings were affluent but an urge for service, renunciation, selflessness, sacrifice was strong enough and at occasions exhibited through various actions by him. This way Narendra was growing reading various texts of wisdom, undoubtedly developing into a multi-dimensional personality. The *dhyan sadhana* were intuitively performed by Narendra. He was the bravest of all, fearless in actions and words and "wanted life to be kindled by life, and thought kindled by thought" (Nikhilananda 47).

It was the turning point in his life which made Narendra the wandering monk and now began the journey of a *sadhak*. For his mentor Narendra was now Vivekananda who had instinctually pledged to sainthood. "We cannot question that Sri Ramkrishna recognised such a soul, 'a Brahmajnani from his birth,' in the lad Noren, when he first saw him; recognised too, like a skilled engineer measuring the force of a stream, the height to which his thought-transcendence had already mounted" (Sister Nivedita 312). The prophet emphasized the supremacy of Divine consciousness and the universality of belief in God, reflecting his profound spiritual insight. "He preached *mukti* instead of heaven; enlightenment instead of salvation; the realisation of the Immanent Unity, Brahman, instead of God; the truth of all faiths, instead of the binding force of any one" (Sister Nivedita 191-192). For Vivekananda, spirituality was fundamentally an inner realization of the Divine presence permeating the entire universe, inviting a deeper, experiential realization of the sacred in both the external world and within oneself.

The prophet announced in the trumpet voice that the time has come to arise from the slumber, awake the inner puissance and reveal the divine nature of every being for higher living. The world was never fragmented. We as the material beings divided ourselves into earthly boundaries of states and countries. The knowing of our unknowable divine nature is the key to personal and collective transformation. The profound conviction etched in heart of the sage to conglomerate world into the complete whole through his deliberations have put an indelible mark on every soul. The universal human values were thus conceived in spreading the message of Universal Brotherhood which envelopes the crux of *Vedanta* manifesting through *Yoga*.

The Practical *Vedanta* for Universal Unity and Transformation

Vivekananda had a very concentrated contemplation and the sage explained *Vedanta* with divine knowledge, in a very spectacular manner. According to the seer *Vedanta* has the practical purpose which means the transition of all the speculations into very active actions. The observation of the apostle and declaration of *Vedanta* in a very practical form stormed various thought currents with a novel ideal to actually ponder upon which is so simple to understand. The upliftment towards the realm of cosmic consciousness with the devotion to work with heart and soul for exhibiting the inherent puissance of the self, had been the aspiration of Vivekananda for soul-realization. In a very subtle manner practical *Vedanta* can be manifested in, very beautifully with the help of the *yogic* adaptations in life- as Vivekananda has very clearly mentioned in his reverberations on practical *Vedanta* and *yoga*.

Vedanta mentions that all the life forces of centuries remain in the universal consolidation of existence. Vivekananda has very well defined how practical *Vedanta* not only helps us to realize the worth of

human existence but also to reveal it in a very extraordinary manner upon the state of living and existing. In this way the freedom of each and every human being becomes essential in the world-existence. The focal point of the effective parlance of Vivekananda is to understand that whatever we are in the universe; the roles which we play individually they result into the completeness of all. In all the positions of our concrete existence there is always a great possibility to exist in a whole way. Vivekananda had the ideal in every way to make the humankind realize the oneness of all, every particle in the *Bramhanda*, the wholeness of each and every molecule, the unison of every soul-force. Therefore Vivekananda very systematically explained the notion of practical *Vedanta*. The idea in its way is very subtle but when realized and brought into the concrete existence is very thorough in understanding the beauty of being in the firmament of divine- consciousness.

Vedanta and *Yoga*

Vedanta advocates the unity of all people, the merging of different forces, with the spirit of universal compassion and brotherhood. It describes that the core of every belief-system is One. When there is acceptance and an endeavour for universal harmony, conflict ceases to exist. Vivekananda urged people to live in a way that gradually diminishes the ego and submits to a higher spiritual law. Vivekananda embraced the ideals of *Vedanta* and explicated the *Karma-Yoga, Jnana-Yoga, Bhakti-Yoga* and *Raja-Yoga* for the understanding of the inner divine power. The sage explained that dedicating oneself to selfless service is the essence of *Karma-Yoga*, realizing the self within is *Jnana-Yoga*, surrendering to the divine is *Bhakti-Yoga* and *Raja-Yoga* advocates for using reason to explore both the inner self and the world beyond, fostering mental growth through self-control and purposeful reflection. *Vedanta* manifests through these paths, which lead us towards spiritual enlightenment. When *Karma, Jnana, Bhakti* and *Raja* bond with the *Yoga*, the ideal is felt upon earth in great rapture.

Karma-Yoga is to perform an action with dedication devoid of selfishness. An act of kindness is the boon in itself, as it serves the humanity and is the service to the Immaterial always longing for generosity to be the true way of living. The ceremonial celebration of Truth is one action performed in its real nature. The infinity is that attainment which is replete with devoted actions. It is like sweets in a box which continue to taste best when treated with intensive care. The nature is the reservoir of divinity and all-pervading paradisal aura conferred upon us to grow in our best way which happens according to Vivekananda when there is selfless action. The *Vedanta* in its practical nature confirms the translation of words into action, but with a condition which is sweet like honey and that is truth and reality prevailing till eternity. Vivekananda enumerating the central idea of *Karma-Yoga* has defined it as, “Karma Yoga is purifying the mind by means of work” (Vivekananda, *Reflections* 434).

Jnana-Yoga is the intelligence attained through diligent learning resulting into wisdom. The power of discrimination to understand the Reality and exhibit the true nature of the self is what defines the *Jnana-Yoga*. The whole universe is a pool of knowledge, to dive deep in it and fetch the pearls of meditative energy establishes the being on a higher platform. The *Yoga* is distinguished into threefold parts. “First: hearing the truth — that the Atman is the only reality and that everything else is Maya (relativity). Second: reasoning upon this philosophy from all points of view. Third: giving up all further argumentation and realizing the truth” (Vivekananda, *Reflections* 435-436). The realization is felt when the Almighty is experienced in real form, the renunciation of all desires takes place, the mind is in the control and there is a strong desire for liberation.

Bhakti-Yoga, “Bhakti or worship or love in some form or other is the easiest, pleasantest, and most natural way of man” (Vivekananda, *Reflections* 434). The divine knowledge when realized attains the peak of joy where the *Bhakta* forgets all materialism and dives into the ocean of Supreme love. The consequently reaching towards the higher state of devotion leads to achieve the love of God and the being is selflessly attached to the divine-consciousness. Vivekananda has announced that the three essential things to become successful are purity, patience and perseverance but above everything in the world is love. The *Bhakta* attains a very special place in the universe to become the channel of divine light.

Raja-Yoga emphasizes that each person is a vessel of the infinite ocean of knowledge and power that resides in every human being. This philosophy encourages the

use of reason to look inward and beyond, promoting the cultivation of the mind through self-discipline and focused inquiry. The process, though challenging, is seen as the only path to attain the eternal wisdom of the soul, which, in turn, eradicates suffering and leads to the divine knowledge that transcends material needs. The power of knowledge dissolves the barriers of human suffering, the wave of wisdom emerges and engulfs confusion and sorrow.

The World Parliament of Religions and Universal Brotherhood

The time before the commencement of the World Parliament of Religions grew more crucial when Vivekananda had developed the perspective under the guidance of his *Guru* that each individual whether following the different paths stand united with the ideal of *Vedanta*. Nothing is perpetual except the formless Form channelizing every being equally may be the versions are not similar in stature and state. The Master is all-prevailing, self-fulfilling, self-consecrate and serene now being in existence guiding the bewildered Naren in Vivekananda to stay calm, focused and original to present himself in representing the nation but with a universal approach. The spark enlightens Vivekananda to gravely hold the responsibility delegated to him by his *Guru*. The showers of blessings by the Mother and best wishes of his countrymen strengthened Vivekananda.

Vivekananda was accepted as a delegate for the World Parliament of Religions. The dignitaries present in the Parliament represented various belief-systems of the world. The youngest participant in the Parliament, Vivekananda was amongst the thousands present in the convention. The distinguished peoples from various parts of the world gathered in The Art Institute of Chicago at the Hall of Columbus for the Parliament. Vivekananda requested the President to announce his name in the end, for his speech. He offered his prayers to *Maa Saraswati* and mounted the dais when Dr. Barrows announced his name. The auditorium echoed with the voice of Vivekananda when he pronounced the words, 'Sisters and Brothers of America!' (Rolland 29). The saint advocated the transcendence towards the state of existence where every negativity sublimates and attains a supramental state to establish an effulgent state on the earth. Romain Rolland beautifully explains:

> *Each of the other orators had spoken of his God, of the God of his sect. He- he alone --spoke of all their Gods, and embraced them all in the Universal Being. It was the breath of Ramakrishna, breaking down the barriers through the mouth of his great disciple. The Parliament of Religions gave the young orator an ovation (30).*

The speech of Vivekananda on 11 September, 1893 was compendium of the manifestation of India's spiritual strength. The apostle established the ideal of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*: Universal Brotherhood. The message of tolerance, peace, love, light, bliss, compassion as a great source of impetus, is echoing till today and the resonance will be felt infinitely in the form of subtle vibrations. The world will experience a consolidation in every way and world-citizens will stay together strongly. An inspirational contemplation to the world for performing duties in an excellent manner, holding the responsibilities diligently, developing nations wholly is what the message to the world was by Vivekananda. The prophet's address had been the lighthouse for all the ages and will prevail till eternity.

Findings and Conclusion

The embodiment of universal human values, the sage-patriot Vivekananda conveyed to the world a dictum: spiritual and divine. The seer realizing the crux of *Vedanta* and *yoga* took the ideal not only to the world but also charged the cosmos with his remarkable oration on Universal Brotherhood. The doctrine of realization and cosmic connection amongst individuals universally flooded the world with an emotional insight for liberty, equality and fraternity. The sage who took the world towards the path of realization exhibited the divinity of each soul which has the supreme power to rise higher and higher. The way towards the Self is the ideal of identification not only with the Higher but also it is a recognition of very inner self. The energy which we inherit by birth is the vigour of that Supreme which motivates the *prana* to stay in the realm of deeper emotional conscious-self.

Consequently Vivekananda invoked humanity for social and cultural revival of the nations. The sage believed in the power of India's ancient wisdom and advocated for the education and empowerment of marginalized communities as key to the nation's revitalization. He aimed to raise human consciousness beyond worldliness, offering a vision of humanity

united by spiritual truth, compassion and reverence for all cultures. In many ways, he remains a symbol of hope, encouraging individuals and nations to progress in every way. The doctrine of knowing the Unknown is the key to that supreme state of understanding from where we develop a sustainable efficiency to survive in the earthly state where there the presence of higher energy is also felt. The world and the universe is in the realm of that magical circle from where the perception is transformed into an ethereal form which is blissful, peaceful, replete with energy, lighted up with charismatic speculations and a place of human existence away from the bondage of I, me, mine. Vivekananda exclaims:

> *The guide, the guru, the leader, the teacher has passed away; the boy, the student, the servant is left behind. Behind my work was ambition, behind my love was personality, behind my purity was fear, behind my guidance the thrust of power! Now they are vanishing, and I drift. I come! Mother, I come! (Sankar 237-238).*

The courage to express the way one is from inside, was only and will be in Vivekananda which surely reverberates through the lines he wrote to Josephine Macleod from Almora in April 1900, two years before his journey towards eternity. The universal human values manifest through the remarkable thought current of Vivekananda for completeness in every aspect of human life; the doctrine took shape long ago and the present is witnessing its everlasting mark on every human soul. The living legend Vivekananda kindled the light of the knowledge which spreads through the spark, then returns again to rejuvenate and disseminate the radiance again. The perpetuity of the aura will remain till the last breath of a minute entity surviving upon the earth. Nikhilananda writes:

> *For centuries to come people everywhere will be inspired by Swami Vivekananda's message: O man! first realize that you are one with the Brahman*-aham Brahmasami- *and then realize that the whole universe is verily the same Brahman*-sarvam khalvidam Brahma *(381).*

Eventually we all remember the words when Vivekananda enthralled every soul conveying to the world of no sin and no misery being present in anyone. Each entity is receptacle of supreme energy and requirement is to manifest the cosmic divinity for universal unison. Romain Rolland exclaims that it was next to impossible to keep Vivekananda on second place as he was a unique personality who never drifted from the thought; oneness of all. In the words of Subhash Chandra Bose, the whole life of the seer was dedicated to only single notion: that is spiritual up growth of the nation, the world and the humankind. The effort in completeness of this paper lies in Vivekananda's doctrine of absorption of universal human values echoing through his sermons till infinity.

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Kamala Das's Poetry: The Body, Culture, Identity, Religion, and Gender

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ABSTRACT

Kamala Das occupies a distinctive place in Indian English literature because her poetry turns the private body into a site of cultural conflict, emotional truth, and feminist resistance. Her poems do not treat the body merely as an object of erotic description; instead, the body becomes the place where identity is imposed, negotiated, wounded, and sometimes reclaimed. This essay examines the body as a contested space in Das's poetry, especially in poems such as "An Introduction," "The Old Playhouse," "The Sunshine Cat," "The Freaks," "The Looking Glass," "The Dance of the Eunuchs," "The Maggots," "Ghanashyam," "My Grandmother's House," and "The Stone Age." It argues that Das's apparent confessionalism is never simply personal. Her "I" repeatedly becomes a site where Indian patriarchy, domesticity, respectability, cultural belonging, and religious expectation are exposed. Her treatment of sexuality challenges the idea that a respectable woman must remain silent about desire, while her use of English unsettles assumptions about linguistic and national identity. Her engagement with Krishna, Radha, spirituality, and later Islam further complicates the relationship between the erotic and the sacred. Ultimately, Das presents the female body as a battlefield, but also as a source of language, memory, resistance, and self-definition.

Keywords: Kamala Das, body politics, gender, identity, religion, patriarchy, Indian English poetry

Introduction

There are poets who write about the body, and there are poets who make the body speak. Kamala Das belongs to the second category. Her poetry is inseparable from the embodied experience of being a woman in a culture that often demands silence, modesty, and emotional discipline from women. When she began publishing poetry in English in the 1960s, the female body was not an easy subject in Indian literary culture. A woman could be represented as wife, mother, daughter, lover, widow, or devotee, but she was rarely encouraged to speak openly about her own physical hunger, sexual dissatisfaction, loneliness, or shame. Das disrupted that arrangement.

She wrote about marriage, ageing, motherhood, erotic longing, emotional starvation, and the hunger for love with an openness that made readers uncomfortable and forced criticism to confront the limits of respectability.

The significance of Kamala Das lies partly in her refusal to answer cultural expectations politely. Her poems are often called confessional, and the term is useful, but it can be limiting if it is used to reduce her work to autobiography. Her first-person voice certainly feels intimate, but the "I" is rarely only Kamala Das as a private individual. It becomes a representative female consciousness, though never a simplistic one. Through this "I," her poetry exposes the larger structures that shape women's lives: marriage, patriarchy, the male gaze, compulsory femininity, and the politics of respectability, linguistic hierarchy, and the regulation of female sexuality.

This article argues that the body is the central battlefield in Kamala Das's poetry. It is a battlefield because different forces claim it: family, marriage, religion, society, beauty standards, and national culture. Yet Das does something crucial with this conflict: she turns the body into language. What has been controlled physically is released verbally. What cannot always be changed in life can be confronted in poetry. Her erotic poems are therefore not merely poems about sex; they are poems about who is allowed to desire, who is allowed to refuse, who is allowed to name pleasure, and what happens when a woman discovers that physical intimacy does not necessarily produce emotional intimacy.

Likewise, her poems about marriage are not simply complaints about a difficult domestic life. They examine how marriage can transform a woman from an individual into a social role. In Das, the body is never merely biological. It is cultural, psychological, political, and spiritual. The rest of this essay explores how that body is represented across her poetry and how her poems connect bodily experience with culture, identity, religion, and gender.

The Body and Identity

One of the most striking features of Kamala Das's poetry is that she does not begin with an abstract definition of womanhood. She begins with the lived body. This is especially clear in "An Introduction." The poem begins with a question about politics but quickly moves toward personal identity. The speaker says that she knows the names of those in power even though she claims not to know politics. This gesture is important because it shows how the political enters the poem through everyday life. Yet the poem soon shifts from national politics to the politics of the body.

The speaker describes herself as "very brown," Indian, and born in Malabar ("An Introduction," *Summer in Calcutta*). These details are not decorative. They locate her body inside a specific geography, colour, and history. Her body is Indian, female, regional, and culturally marked. Yet the culture around her tries to tell her how that body should behave. The poem then moves through the social stages by which a woman is classified and regulated. She is told what to wear, how to behave, how to love, and what kind of language she should use. Society wants to make her legible; it wants to reduce a complex person to recognizable categories.

Her resistance comes through language itself. Her famous assertion that the language she speaks becomes hers ("An Introduction," *Summer in Calcutta*) is more than a defence of Indian English. It is a declaration of ownership. Language, like the body, is a space through which identity is negotiated. This is especially important because Kamala Das was writing in English, a language historically associated with colonial power and elite education. Yet she refuses to treat English as something that belongs

only to English speakers. Her English is Indian, intimate, irregular, and often deliberately direct. She does not erase the marks of Indian speech from it. This linguistic rebellion parallels her bodily rebellion. Society says this is how an Indian woman should speak; Das replies that the language is hers. Society says this is how an Indian woman should dress; Das replies that her body is hers. Society says a woman should not speak openly about sexual desire; Das replies by making desire one of the central subjects of her poetry.

The connection between body and language is not accidental. Both are spaces where authority tries to establish ownership. Das challenges that authority by refusing to sound "proper" in any simple sense. Her poetry is direct, conversational, and often startlingly unornamented. The effect is deliberate. The reader is not allowed to hide behind elaborate poetic symbolism when confronted with the emotional and physical realities of the speaker. Her poetry therefore becomes an act of self-naming.

This is one reason the first-person pronoun matters so much in her work. The "I" of Das's poems is vulnerable, but it is also stubborn. It refuses to disappear into the categories of wife, mother, Indian woman, or poetess. It wants to remain a person. The body in Das is therefore where selfhood begins. It is not merely a biological fact but the place where culture and power become visible.

Marriage and Ownership

If the body is a battlefield in Das's poetry, marriage is one of its most important sites of conflict. In conventional social imagination, marriage is associated with security, respectability, companionship, and family. Das's poetry does not deny that these things may exist, but it repeatedly asks what happens when marriage fails to produce emotional companionship. "The Old Playhouse" is perhaps the clearest example of this concern. ("The Old Playhouse," *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems*)

The title itself suggests performance. A playhouse is a place where roles are acted out. The metaphor is therefore perfectly suited to Das's critique of marriage. The wife enters a domestic space and discovers that she has been assigned a role. The husband does not necessarily see her as a complete person; he sees her through the expectations of marriage. The domestic environment gradually becomes claustrophobic. The woman is surrounded by the objects and routines of married life, but instead of becoming more fully herself, she becomes diminished. The husband's possessiveness is not presented as love. It becomes a form of control.

The crucial point is that the husband's control extends beyond the woman's body. He also attempts to control her imagination. This is what makes the poem more disturbing than a simple description of marital dissatisfaction. The speaker is not only sexually unfulfilled; she is psychologically confined. The marriage attempts to make her smaller. The metaphor of the playhouse therefore works on several levels. The woman is performing the role of wife. The home becomes a stage. The husband becomes an audience that expects a certain performance. And the woman gradually realizes that she has been cast in a role she never chose.

This connects Das with the broader feminist argument that woman is socially constructed as the other rather than recognized as an autonomous subject. The wife in Das's poetry is frequently defined in relation to the husband. She is his wife, his sexual partner, the mother of his children, the keeper of the home. Her individuality becomes secondary. Das's rebellion is therefore not simply against men. It is against a social system that teaches women to disappear into relationships.

This is why “The Old Playhouse” remains so relevant. It speaks to an experience that is not restricted to one generation or one culture: the experience of being physically present in a relationship while emotionally absent from it. Marriage in Das can be intensely physical but emotionally barren. A woman can be touched without being loved. She can be desired without being understood. She can share a bed and still be profoundly alone.

Desire, Sexuality, and Female Voice

Perhaps no aspect of Kamala Das’s poetry has generated more controversy than her treatment of sexuality. Her importance lies not merely in writing about sex, but in writing from the perspective of a woman who possesses sexual desire. This distinction is crucial. Male poets have historically been permitted to portray women as objects of desire. Das reverses the gaze. Her female speakers look, desire, remember, compare, initiate, reject, and fantasize. The woman is not simply the body being observed. She becomes the observer.

“The Looking Glass” is especially important in this respect. The poem uses the mirror as a space where male and female desire confront one another. The woman looks at herself through the imagined eyes of the male lover, but she is not entirely passive. She understands the erotic power of her own body and recognizes the dynamics of the male gaze. In conventional visual culture, women are often positioned as objects to be looked at while men occupy the role of active spectators. Das complicates this arrangement by allowing the female speaker to acknowledge the gaze while simultaneously speaking about her own desire. Her woman does not simply ask whether she is beautiful enough for him; she also asks what she wants from him. That shift is revolutionary.

In Das’s poetry, breasts, skin, lips, hair, hands, and bodily warmth are not merely decorative images. They become evidence of a woman’s physical existence. The body is not an embarrassing biological fact that poetry must conceal. It is part of experience. This is where Das becomes deeply feminist, even when she does not sound like a conventional manifesto writer. She does not lecture. She confesses. And confession becomes protest. When a woman says publicly that she is lonely, sexually dissatisfied, or hungry for love, she challenges the social assumption that women should silently accept whatever emotional and physical arrangements are offered to them.

Her sexuality therefore has an ethical dimension. It is about the right to experience oneself as a desiring subject. This is especially visible in poems where physical intimacy is contrasted with emotional emptiness. The male lover may satisfy his own needs and then withdraw. The woman remains with the unanswered question of what about her. That question echoes through Das’s poetry. It is one of the most human questions in her work. She is not merely demanding sexual equality. She is demanding emotional reciprocity.

The Sunshine Cat and Emotional Starvation

“The Sunshine Cat” presents one of Das’s most painful portraits of a woman whose life has been shaped by neglect. The image of the cat is powerful because cats are usually associated with independence, movement, and sensuality. But Das’s sunshine cat is caught in a world where affection is conditional and freedom is limited. The woman in the poem is not simply physically imprisoned. She is emotionally starved. That starvation is particularly important because patriarchy does not always operate through spectacular violence. Sometimes it operates through indifference.

A woman may not be beaten, locked away, or publicly humiliated. Instead, she may simply be denied tenderness. Das understands this kind of

deprivation intimately. The woman in "The Sunshine Cat" has known men, but the men around her have not necessarily given her love. The poem therefore challenges the assumption that a woman's sexual history automatically means she has experienced intimacy. Again, Das separates sex from love. This separation is central to her understanding of the female body. The body can pass through many relationships while the self remains hungry for emotional recognition.

A useful theoretical lens here is the distinction between sexuality as lived experience and the institution of compulsory heterosexuality. Das's poetry often reveals the emotional consequences of this institution. Marriage and heterosexual relationships are treated as expected destinations for women, yet those destinations do not automatically provide fulfilment. The woman in Das therefore becomes a figure of contradiction. She is expected to be sexually available but emotionally silent. She is expected to remain faithful but is not necessarily emotionally cherished. She is expected to maintain the family even when the family does not recognize her inner life.

"The Sunshine Cat" makes this contradiction visible through emotional imagery. The woman is alive, but something within her has been starved. This is an important distinction in Das. Survival is not the same as living. ("The Sunshine Cat," *The Descendants*")

My Grandmother's House and Memory

If "The Old Playhouse" represents the suffocating present, "My Grandmother's House" represents an emotionally charged past. The house becomes a symbol of lost belonging. The speaker remembers a childhood home where love seemed more complete and less conditional. The grandmother's house is associated with emotional warmth, security, and a sense of being loved without performance. Its loss is therefore not simply geographical. The speaker has lost a place where she felt emotionally recognized.

The famous image of the house becoming dark and silent ("My Grandmother's House," *Summer in Calcutta*) carries larger cultural significance. The woman has moved into adult life, marriage, and social responsibility, but something essential has disappeared. The adult world has not necessarily fulfilled the promise of childhood. The house becomes almost like the body itself. It is a space that once offered protection but now exists mainly in memory. This connection between home and body is significant because women have traditionally been associated with the domestic sphere. The woman is expected to make a home, maintain it, and emotionally sustain the family. Yet Das's poetry asks whether the woman herself has a home. Where does she belong?

This question of belonging is one of Das's deepest concerns. In "An Introduction," it appears through language and national identity. In "My Grandmother's House," it appears through memory. In "The Old Playhouse," it appears through marriage. In her religious poems, it appears through the search for spiritual belonging. The same emotional problem keeps returning in different forms. The speaker is searching for a place where she can exist without performing a role.

The house is also important because it represents a feminine memory that is separate from patriarchal domesticity. The grandmother's house is not the husband's house. It is not the marital house that disciplines the woman. It is a remembered space where female affection once existed. That distinction matters. It suggests that women may inherit not only repression but also models of tenderness and attachment that differ from the structures of marriage.

The Eunuchs and Marginality

"The Dance of the Eunuchs" broadens Das's interest in the body beyond the heterosexual female body. The eunuchs occupy an ambiguous social position. Their bodies do not fit comfortably within conventional gender categories, and their social presence is frequently associated with spectacle, performance, and marginality. Das uses their dancing bodies to create an atmosphere of pain beneath performance. The dancing becomes both public display and private suffering.

This is significant because it reveals that Das's understanding of the body is not restricted to woman versus man. She is interested more broadly in bodies that society does not know how to accommodate. The eunuch becomes a figure of social exclusion. They are visible, but they are not fully accepted. They are seen, but not necessarily understood. This paradox resembles the condition of Das's female speakers. The female body is constantly observed, judged for beauty, sexuality, clothing, behaviour, and age, yet the person inside that body may remain unseen.

The poem therefore creates an unexpected connection between gender marginality and female experience. The body becomes a social text. People read it before they listen to the person. A body is classified before it speaks. This insight is central to contemporary theories of embodiment and gender. Das does not use theoretical terminology, but her poems dramatize similar questions. What happens when a body refuses the role society has written for it? What happens when identity becomes impossible to contain within a social category? What happens when the body itself becomes the evidence of rebellion?

The eunuchs' dance is also emotionally significant because it contains beauty and pain at once. Their performance is not empty spectacle. It is an expression of suffering made visible through movement, costume, and rhythm. That combination of colour and sorrow mirrors Das's larger method. Her poetry often places visible liveliness beside hidden ache. The surface may glitter, but the emotional truth is more painful. ("The Dance of the Eunuchs," *Summer in Calcutta*)

Religion, Krishna, and Female Desire

Religion is another major dimension of Das's poetry, and it would be a mistake to treat it as separate from her erotic concerns. In fact, Das repeatedly places the sacred and the sensual beside one another. Her Krishna poems are especially important. In "The Maggots," Radha's relationship with Krishna is presented in a way that unsettles conventional devotional idealization("The Maggots," *The Descendants*). Krishna loves Radha and leaves her. Later, Radha is physically with her husband, but emotionally she is elsewhere. Her experience of the husband's kisses becomes almost corpse-like.

The poem is striking because it places divine love and marital sexuality in direct opposition. Radha's body is physically present with her husband, but her emotional and spiritual self remains attached to Krishna. The traditional devotional story is therefore transformed into a meditation on female desire. Radha is not merely a devotional symbol. She is a woman who knows what it means to desire one person while socially belonging to another. The body becomes the site of this contradiction.

The husband has access to her physical body, but he does not necessarily possess her emotional self. Krishna, paradoxically, becomes the figure who represents a more complete form of love because the relationship exists beyond the institutional limits of marriage. The poem's use of death imagery makes the critique particularly sharp. The speaker imagines herself as a corpse in the husband's arms, suggesting that physical possession without emotional connection is a kind of death. The erotic and the spiritual therefore overlap. The body is not the

opposite of spirituality. For Das, the body can be the route through which the soul becomes visible.

"Ghanashyam" develops this relationship between Krishna, desire, spiritual longing, and the body. The poem uses Krishna as an intimate, almost personal divine presence rather than a distant theological figure. Its imagery brings together prayer, sexuality, death, water, blood, and longing. The result is not conventional religious poetry. It is intensely personal spirituality. Das seems less interested in doctrine than in the possibility of finding a form of love that can heal the fragmentation of the self. The beloved becomes divine; the divine becomes intimate; the body becomes a bridge between the two. ("Ghanashyam," *The Old Playhouse and Other Poems*")

The Body as Flesh and Soul

One of the most interesting aspects of Das's religious poetry is that she refuses the simple opposition between body and soul. Traditional religious thinking can place the body on the lower side of a hierarchy: flesh is temporary, while the soul is eternal. Das complicates that hierarchy. Her spiritual longing is deeply embodied. She does not imagine salvation as the disappearance of bodily experience. Instead, she often wants emotional and spiritual fulfilment that includes the body.

This is one reason Krishna becomes such a powerful figure in her poetry. Krishna is simultaneously divine and erotic. He is a god who loves through the language of human intimacy. The Radha-Krishna tradition already contains a rich symbolic vocabulary for longing, separation, and desire. Das takes that vocabulary and gives it a distinctly modern female voice. The result is a devotional language that feels almost confessional. The speaker does not merely worship. She longs. She argues. She remembers. She desires. She complains. She seeks.

This makes her spirituality emotionally credible because it is not abstract. It is lived through the body. In this sense, Das resembles the devotional tradition of female mystics, but she does not simply imitate it. She modernizes the devotional model by placing it within the psychological and sexual anxieties of twentieth-century womanhood. The lover becomes God because ordinary human relationships have failed to satisfy the deepest need for recognition. Yet the spiritual does not erase the sexual. It absorbs it.

Identity, Language, and Postcoloniality

The question of language in Das's poetry also has a postcolonial dimension. English in India carries a complicated history. It is the language of colonial administration and education, but it has also become a major Indian literary language. Das refuses to treat this history as a reason for silence. Her English is not pure English. It is an Indian English shaped by Malayalam, local images, colloquial speech, and Indian rhythms of thought.

In "An Introduction," she openly challenges those who tell her not to write in English because it is not her mother tongue. Her response is an assertion of literary sovereignty: the language becomes hers because she uses it. Her famous assertion that "the language I speak / Becomes mine" ("An Introduction," *Summer in Calcutta*) is more than a defence of Indian English.This is a postcolonial gesture. She does not solve the tension between colonizer's language and native identity by choosing one and rejecting the other. Instead, she creates something hybrid. She writes Indian experience in English. The hybrid language becomes a hybrid identity.

The same thing happens with the body. Her body is Indian, but her desire cannot be reduced to a cultural stereotype of the Indian woman. She is modern but rooted, traditional but rebellious, regional but

cosmopolitan, Indian but unwilling to accept a single definition of Indianness. This is why Das is particularly important to postcolonial feminist criticism. She exposes the double pressure placed on women in postcolonial societies: they are expected to represent cultural authenticity while also living inside modern social realities. The woman's body becomes a symbol of the nation and culture; her sexuality becomes a matter of collective honour; her behaviour is treated as evidence of family values. Das refuses this symbolic burden. She wants to be a woman before she is a cultural emblem.

The Male Gaze and Looking Back

Das's poetry is full of looking. Men look at women. Women look at themselves. Women look at men. The poet looks at society. And the reader is forced to look at the things society prefers to hide. This creates a complicated relationship between Das and the male gaze. On one level, her poems frequently describe the female body in vivid physical detail. A superficial reading might conclude that she is reproducing the objectification of women. But the situation is more complicated because the woman herself is doing the describing. The female body is no longer merely an object in someone else's poem. It is speaking.

This is an important difference. When a woman says that her body feels desire, she transforms the body from an object of male fantasy into a subject of female experience. That transformation is one of the central achievements of Das's poetry. The body does not need to become pure in order to become powerful. It can remain sexual, vulnerable, contradictory, beautiful, insecure, ageing, giving birth, betrayed, desirous, and still speak.

Das's poetry therefore rejects the idea that female empowerment must involve the rejection of sexuality. Instead, she seeks ownership of sexuality. This distinction remains important because women are still frequently judged through contradictory expectations. They are expected to be attractive but not too sexual, confident but not aggressive, desirable but not desiring. Das recognized this contradiction decades ago.

Ageing, Motherhood, and Emotional Change

The body in Das is not frozen in youth. It changes, ages, becomes a mother, remembers, and experiences vulnerability. This makes her poetry more complex than a simple literature of erotic rebellion. The body that desires in youth is also the body that eventually confronts mortality. Her poems often move from youthful longing to later disillusionment, showing how emotional life changes across time.

This is important because patriarchal culture often divides women into categories: the respectable mother versus the sexual woman. Das refuses that division. A woman can be a mother and still have desire. She can be a wife and still have an individual identity. She can be ageing and still possess emotional and sensual life. The female body is not a static object. It has a history.

This understanding of the body makes her poetry more humane. She does not idealize youth or purity. She understands that emotional life is shaped by time. Memory remains with the body. Longing remains with the body. So does disappointment. Her later poems are often quieter but not less intense because they carry the accumulated weight of experience.

Loneliness as a Social Condition

Loneliness is one of the most persistent emotions in Das's poetry. But her loneliness is rarely simply psychological. It is socially produced. A woman can feel lonely because she has been denied the opportunity to speak honestly. She can feel lonely because marriage has made her emotionally invisible. She can feel lonely because cultural expectations prevent her from expressing desire. She can feel

lonely because the people around her recognize only her social role and not her individual personality.

This is why loneliness in Das often feels almost physical. The body carries it. The skin carries it. The room carries it. The bed carries it. The house carries it. Even language carries it. In “The Freaks,” the image of an empty emotional space after physical intimacy captures this problem especially well. The body has been touched, but the heart remains empty. The poem therefore exposes the difference between physical contact and human connection. This is one of Das’s enduring insights. Human beings do not simply want bodies. They want to be known.

Confession as Resistance

Calling Das a confessional poet is appropriate, but we need to understand what confession does in her poetry. Confession usually implies the revelation of something private. Das transforms that private revelation into public criticism. When she talks about her marriage, she is also talking about marriage as an institution. When she talks about sexual desire, she is also talking about the social regulation of female sexuality. When she talks about loneliness, she is also talking about the emotional consequences of patriarchy. When she talks about language, she is talking about postcolonial identity. When she talks about Krishna, she is talking about the relationship between desire and spirituality.

Her personal “I” therefore becomes a political instrument. This is why her poetry often feels so direct. She does not hide behind elaborate theoretical language. She says what happened. Or at least she constructs the impression that she is saying what happened. That distinction is important because poetry is never a transparent diary. The poetic “I” is constructed. Das selects images, memories, repetitions, and metaphors. Her confession is therefore artistic. The impression of honesty is itself part of her poetic strategy.

This is perhaps why her poems continue to feel intimate decades after their publication. They sound like someone speaking to us rather than performing for us.

The Body as Resistance

It would be tempting to end by saying that Das portrays women as victims. That would be incomplete. Her women suffer, but they also resist. The very act of speaking about the body is resistance. The act of naming desire is resistance. The act of rejecting linguistic policing is resistance. The act of questioning marriage is resistance. The act of moving between religious identities is resistance to fixed definitions of belonging. The body is therefore not only the battlefield on which society fights. It is also the territory the woman attempts to reclaim.

This reclamation is never complete. Das does not offer the fantasy that one poem can destroy patriarchy. Her speakers remain vulnerable. They still experience loneliness. They still crave love. They still want recognition from others. That vulnerability makes the resistance believable. A perfectly independent woman who needs nobody would actually be less interesting than Das’s contradictory women. Das understands that freedom does not mean the absence of desire for others. We can want love and still want autonomy. We can want intimacy and still want independence. We can desire another body without surrendering our own identity. This is perhaps the deepest human truth in her poetry.

Conclusion

Kamala Das’s poetry begins with the body, but it does not end there. The body leads her to questions of identity. Identity leads to culture. Culture leads to gender. Gender leads to marriage and social power.

Marriage leads to sexuality and loneliness. Sexuality leads to questions of love. Love leads to spirituality. Spirituality leads back to the body. This circular movement is one of the defining characteristics of her work.

The body in Das is never simply flesh. It is memory, desire, shame, pleasure, motherhood, loneliness, cultural identity, religious imagination, and the place where society writes its rules. It is also the place from which those rules can be challenged. In "An Introduction," the woman claims her language. In "The Old Playhouse," she exposes the violence hidden inside domestic possession. In "The Sunshine Cat," she reveals emotional starvation. In "The Freaks," she separates physical desire from genuine intimacy. In "The Looking Glass," she challenges the passive position assigned to the female body. In "My Grandmother's House," she mourns the loss of unconditional belonging. In "The Dance of the Eunuchs," she turns marginalized bodies into witnesses of social pain. In "The Maggots" and "Ghanashyam," she transforms the language of Krishna devotion into a modern vocabulary of female desire, separation, and spiritual longing.

Across these poems, the body becomes a battlefield because different forms of authority attempt to occupy it. Yet Das refuses to leave the body conquered. She writes it. She names it. She remembers it. She desires through it. She suffers through it. And, most importantly, she gives it a voice. That voice is sometimes fragile, sometimes angry, sometimes sensual, and sometimes almost childlike in its longing for love. It is not always victorious. But it is unmistakably alive.

Perhaps this is the most important thing to understand about Kamala Das. Her poetry does not present a woman who has escaped every constraint. It presents a woman who has become conscious of those constraints and refuses to remain silent about them. Her rebellion is therefore not the fantasy of complete freedom. It is the more difficult act of speaking from within contradiction. She is at once traditional and rebellious, Indian and cosmopolitan, bodily and spiritual, vulnerable and defiant. She does not solve the problem of identity; she exposes how painful the demand for a fixed identity can be. The body, in Das, is consequently not a prison alone. It is also a language. And once the body begins to speak, the social order can no longer pretend that it has nothing to hear.

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Promoting Child Rights: Policies, Practices and Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

A key component of rights for humanity, child rights are necessary for every infant's existence, development, security and involvement. Systems that formerly viewed children primarily as dependents or recipients of adult protection have undergone a dramatic shift with the acknowledgment of children as individuals with rights. Children are representations of purity, beauty, unrestrained spontaneity, glimmer and originality. They can tell us directly that the monarch is nude, they do not hide anything, and they say what they see. A major turning point in the international recognition of children's rights was the 1989 adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The paper makes the argument that advancing children's rights necessitates more than just legitimate acknowledgment; it also calls for reliable institutions, child-sensitive practices, interaction strategies, schooling, transparency, social security and collaboration between governments, families, educational institutions, the general public, as well as children themselves. A rights-based approach can provide contexts where kids are shielded from exploitation and mistreatment and given an opportunity to actively engage in life-changing choices. The three interrelated aspects of promoting children's rights are examined in this paper: policies, which deal with the theoretical and analytical understanding of children as right holders; practices, which manage the institutional systems through which rights are carried out; and perspectives, which handle doable tactics for advancing and defending children's rights.

Keywords: Independence, Violence, UNICEF, Vulnerability, Child labour, Rights-based strategy, Human rights, Healthcare, Legislation

Introduction

The economic, social and cultural and political growth of communities is directly impacted by the welfare of children, who make up an important and vulnerable segment of society. Children were often viewed primarily in terms of parental control, protection and dependence for a large portion of history. Due to their physical and mental immaturity, children belong to vulnerable social groups that require special care and protection, including adequate legal protection, before as well as after birth.

In order to shield children from abuse, exploitation and neglect, laws pertaining to child rights, their protection, promotion and policies are very crucial. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) recognized the need for protection of children. It declared that every human being has the privilege to all of the freedoms and rights outlined in it, regardless of their race, colour, sex, language, political or other beliefs, Therefore, an extensive approach is needed to promote children's rights. Although laws must acknowledge children's rights, they cannot ensure that these rights are realized on their own. Families must respect children's growing autonomy, schools must foster diverse and proactive environments, governments must set up suitable institutions and operations, and communities must oppose behaviours that expose children to violence, prejudice. UNICEF notes that more than just official ratification, the provisions of the convention on the rights of children calls for institutional, budgetary, administrative, legal and monitoring mechanisms (United Nations. *Convention on the Rights of the Child*). The convention is based on four key ideas. First, non-discrimination calls for the protection of children's rights without considering traits like sex, faith, language, impairment, social background or other socioeconomic status. Second, while making decisions pertaining to children, the child's greatest good must come first. Third, every child has the right to growth, survival, and existence. Fourth, children who are able to form their own opinions have the right to voice them and have their opinions given the weight appropriate to their adulthood and time (United Nations. *Convention on the Rights of the Child*). These ideas provide a thorough grasp of childhood. Engagement as well as safety are inextricably linked, as is growth and integrity. A youngster may need to be shielded from dangerous situations while also having the right to be involved in discussions about those situations.

Problems and Challenges Children Encounter Today

This article focuses on two attitudes that children encounter from their elders: disrespect, which is linked to a poor regard for youngsters, and insensitivity to their emotions. It ought to be the opposite. Even before they are born, children face difficulties and obstacles. Anyone who looks at the number of abortions performed in Indian hospitals would be struck by this unpleasant reality. Remembering the fact that no child is a problem for anyone would be excellent. In actuality, if someone views a child as a problem, it is because they do not understand them. In actuality, the child is a mystery—that is, a person that people gradually come to understand. Indeed, many other beings, including every human, are mysteries. To get children to obey, families and schools use the reward or penalty strategy. Children are frequently used by parents as a way to vent their frustration and rage. Through beatings, deprivation of food, warnings, slurs and other physical and psychological abuse, they mistreat their own children. The authorities have given them almost complete freedom over their children. For a variety of reasons, child victims of violence do not use the child hotline contact numbers. Numerous Indian states have passed legislation prohibiting the beating of students. However, many schools disregard this guideline, which begs the question of how they could instruct children without using physical force. Indian periodicals, who promote beating as a noble, masterful scheme, are publishing stories of teachers who liberally utilized sticks. It is indisputable that agitated educators use derogatory and harsh language with their young pupils. The majority of young children do not even understand what their teachers are saying.

The shift from a welfare model to a rights-based paradigm is one of the most significant advancements

in child-rights theory. A completely welfare-oriented approach assumes that adults are the best people to make decisions for children. A rights-based strategy acknowledges that children should be respected, heard, and safeguarded at the same time. This differentiation is especially essential since protection without involvement can become authoritarian. Parents and guardians have a duty to provide children with adequate advice, but this instruction must take into consideration their developing skills and abilities ((United Nations. *Convention on the Rights of the Child*). One of the main tenets of the Convention is the idea of the child's best interests. According to Article 3, the child's best interests must always come first in decisions impacting children, whether they are made by legislative bodies, courts, administrative bodies, or social welfare groups. (United Nations. *Convention on the Rights of the Child*).

When it comes to natural and man-made disasters, children are among the most vulnerable victims. A particularly sad illustration of children's vulnerability is the Kumbakonam school fire in Tamil Nadu on July 16, 2004. Ninety-four children died in a terrible fire at the Sri Krishna Aided Primary School, and dozens more suffered severe burn injuries (State of Tamil Nadu). Overcrowding, a thatched roof, insufficient safety measures, a small stairway, and the lack of fire escapes or emergency exit all contributed to the catastrophe (Ministry of Home Affairs). According to the National Institute of Disaster Management's investigation, institutional carelessness, insufficient safety precautions, and a significant teacher shortage all contributed to the children's greater susceptibility (Satapathy and Walia). The event shows that not everyone in society is equally affected by calamities; children may be particularly vulnerable due to their age, reliance on adults, and limited ability to react on their own. More generally, children's chances for healthy growth and protection can be impacted by systemic injustices including caste, poverty, gender discrimination, and unequal access to healthcare and education. Therefore, protecting children's rights necessitates both emergency readiness and ongoing attention to the social and economic factors that influence the lives of kids. It is a known fact that gender discrimination is still widespread in India. It starts even from childhood. Parents prefer boys due to various reasons like dowry system, safety and so on. According to a study by Vani K. Borooah, there is a gender bias in Indian children's dietary habits and prevention of various diseases. According to the aforementioned researcher, girls are given 5% less attention than boys, particularly when their mothers are illiterate (Borooah 1724). There are at least three ways that children are instrumentalized. First, many parents view them as the realization of their dreams. Children's independence and even their freedom of choice are denied by their parents. Even when making decisions that directly affect children, they do not even take their opinions into account. Youngsters are expected to do exactly what their parents say. They must fulfil their parents' aspirations—possibly things that the parents themselves failed to do.

India is making rapid progress in all areas. The country is now proud of its market economy, cutting-edge technologies and upgraded infrastructure. In terms of gender equality, there has not been any discernible development in recent years. Nonetheless, prejudice against female children still exists in the nation. Gender-based violence, including foeticide, infanticide, child sexual abuse, rape, child labour, child trafficking, child marriage, discrimination, domestic violence, forced prostitution etc., affects female children from the moment they are conceived. These gender-based obstacles violate their human rights by using them as tools for exploitation, humiliation and increased vulnerability. We should seriously consider how gender-based violence deprives female children of their basic rights. Every

child is entitled to exist on this planet of Earth. However, data shows that female children are denied the right to exist, to be born, and to support themselves. Even before kids are born, rejection starts. With the widespread use of amniocentesis, a medical procedure that can reveal a foetus' gender, and even different tests for sex determination have become permanent practices. Everyone is aware that a person's wellbeing is positively impacted by pleasant childhood experiences. Millions of Indian girls, however, are merely deprived of their early years. They are either traded or forced into early marriages, or forced to work inside and outside of their families. Female children are thrown into a life of responsibility from an early age. Female girls are frequently forced to work both inside and outside of their homes due to a variety of factors including family situations, rural poverty, migration into larger cities, bonded labour, caste and ethnic origin, insufficient educational institutions, industry profit motives, and so on.

Prostitution, sexual exploitation, illegal adoption, child labour, camel racing and organ trade are some of the other reasons why girl children are trafficked. Violence acts against female children that are motivated by gender standards are done overtly against their consent. Violence against females is acceptable, condoned and even permitted in many places with no consequences. Because of this, females are socially and philosophically powerless to oppose or even confront the implicit and explicit injustices they face. The vulnerability of Indian girls is further increased by the ineffective application of laws and the absence of severe legal penalties. Furthermore, women are merely victims of a patriarchal family ideology that favours male offspring rather than independent individuals. The vulnerability of the girl-child is further increased by social silence on domestic violence, abuse in the home, and a woman's submission to her husband and family.

Even with widespread awareness, there are still many obstacles to overcome. Laws are not always guaranteed to be implemented just because they exist. The implementation of children's rights may be hampered by inequalities in society, poverty, unfair treatment, disputes, poor quality of life, cultural opposition, ineffective organizations, insufficient funds and lack of consciousness. The conflict between involvement and security presents another difficulty. Children are too young, according to adults, to take significant options. On the other hand, children may be given unwarranted responsibility by poorly planned participatory initiatives. The right strategy is to acknowledge children's growing skills rather than giving them total adult authority or freedom. The distinction between meaningful and official involvement creates another difficulty. Inquiring children what they think can lead to symbolic rather than practical engagement if there is no proof that their thoughts were taken into account. Institutional readiness to hear and reply is necessary for true involvement.

Understanding Child Rights & Legal Perspectives

Governments cannot promote children's rights on their own. Multiple stakeholders must work together. Regulations, guidelines, allocation of resources, development of institutions and oversight are all primarily the domain of legislatures. They have to convert multilateral commitments into efficient domestic procedures. Families provide children with their immediate social context and are essential to their growth, care, security and direction. Engagement, equal treatment, critical thinking and insights on rights all be fostered by schools and instructors. Additionally, teachers are often among the persons in the best position to spot children who might be victims of neglect, assault, prejudice or other issues. Campaigning, study findings, service delivery,

inspection, campaigns for awareness and mobilization of communities are some of the ways that civil society organizations make a difference. Non-governmental organizations play a crucial role in promoting information and assisting with the convention's execution, says UNICEF (UNICEF. *Implementing and Monitoring the Convention on the Rights of the Child*).

In the Indian context, achieving gender equality—where men and women, girls and boys, have equal rights, benefits freedom, resources, opportunities and protections—is imperative. Children are taught conventional ideas about what it means to be a guy and a girl at a young age. De-learning societal frameworks is essential to dispelling these inflexible, unfair gender stereotypes and encouraging a variety of healthy gender identity manifestations. Children's perspectives can be expanded and preconceived notions about traditional gender roles challenged through gender equality education. Priority should be given to protecting girls' rights and ending all types of prejudice and harassment. The government must make efforts in boosting employment, generating economic possibilities, guaranteeing food security and universal health care, and giving priority to the most disadvantaged citizens. Child labour and child trafficking are discouraged by the presence of youngsters in schools. In order to address the learning issue and get all students back to school, schools must be ideologically sharpened. Increased funding for education is necessary to guarantee educational equity.

Child rights are somewhat civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights created especially to protect children's welfare. These rights are interconnected, unbreakable, and global. Four guiding principles are laid out by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC):

1. Impartiality
2. Preserve the interests of the children
3. The privilege to existence, growth and life
4. Regard for Children's thoughts

Governments are directed by these principles when drafting laws and programs that safeguard children against discrimination, exploitation, abuse and mistreatment while fostering their overall growth. The most extensive international agreement pertaining to children's rights is the UNCRC. It acknowledges that children have rights and demands governments to provide them with access to healthcare, education, safety from violence and chances to participate in life-changing decisions. To protect children's rights, national governments and international organizations have created a number of legal and policy frameworks. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations, which address poverty, gender equality, health, nutrition, safe drinking water and reduced inequality greatly enhance children's rights. The lives of children are immediately improved when these objectives are met.

India has passed a number of legislation and constitutional measures to safeguard children, such as:

- The right to free and compulsory education is guaranteed by Article 21A
- Children cannot work in dangerous occupations, according to Article 24
- The State must be implemented to defend children from exploitation and abuse according to under Article 39
- The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009
- The Protection of Children from Sexual Offenses (POCSO) Act, 2012
- The Juvenile justice (Care and Safety of Children) Act, 2015

- The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2016

These legislative proceedings show India's dedication to the development and protection of children. However, despite this gradual development, child rights misconduct and children's feelings of anxiety and insecurity have increased rather than decreased. This appears to be a sign that the state's efforts to protect and promote children's rights have backfired.

The necessity to protect children was acknowledged in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). It declared that every human being has the right to all of the freedoms and rights outlined in it, regardless of their race, colour, sex, language, political or other beliefs, national or social origin, property, place of birth, or other status. The UN felt the need to create special conventions that would be legally binding and uphold the principles of human rights for particular groups that are vulnerable and encounter more human rights violations in their daily lives.

Strategies for Strengthening Children's Rights

Quality Education

Children who obtain education acquire knowledge, self-confidence, and life skills. Educational Institutions should provide inclusive, fair and child-friendly learning environments that value diversity and encourage engagement.

Mechanisms for Safeguarding Children

To shield vulnerable children from abuse, trafficking, neglect and exploitation, governments must set up efficient reporting systems, child helplines, rehabilitation clinics, foster care systems and juvenile justice centres.

Policies for efficient Healthcare and Nutrition

Children's survival and development depend on having access to immunizations, care for pregnant women, healthy meals, mental health services, cleanliness and clean drinking water. Programs for public health greatly lower child mortality and enhance long-term outcomes.

Enhancing Community Participation

In order to develop children's rights, parents, educators, local governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community leaders are essential. child protection systems are strengthened by community education, awareness campaigns, and child participation activities.

Digital Security

Governments and educational institutions must encourage digital literacy, online safety education, cyberbullying prevention and responsible internet usage in light of children's escalating internet access.

Perspectives and Dimensions on Child Rights

Promoting child rights requires a multidisciplinary perspective.

Human Rights Perspective

Children are independent rights holders rather than passive recipients of care. Their dignity and autonomy should be respected in all decisions affecting them.

Social Perspective

Communities must recognize that investing in children strengthens social cohesion, reduces inequality, and promotes sustainable development.

Educational Perspective

Teachers and schools should integrate child rights education into the curriculum to foster responsible citizenship, empathy, inclusion, and democratic participation.

Policy Perspective

Governments should allocate sufficient financial resources, strengthen child protection institutions, improve monitoring mechanisms, and ensure accountability for violations of child rights.

Conclusion

The fundamental human imperative to defend the worth of children from any misuse of authority is the foundation for child rights. Child rights are violated by acts that violate children's dignity in relation to their basic freedom and rights. Legislation is essential to implement child rights practices. In actuality, laws have not resolved every social issue in and around the world, including those pertaining to children's rights, but they have prevented things from getting worse. More significantly, laws provide children with a legal protection to exercise their basic human rights. Human rights are innate and belong to every human being, without exception. A child has the same rights as any other human being. In addition, as of their dependency, vulnerability, small size and age, children's rights are unique and significant. In order to create societies that are vibrant, legitimate and peaceful, child rights are essential. Even if national laws and international agreements have made great strides, there are still many obstacles to overcome. Coordinated governmental policies, high-quality healthcare and education, community involvement, and ongoing political commitment are all necessary for the effective promotion of children's rights. Promoting child rights necessitates a basic understanding that children are human beings with inherent rights, not just passive objects of adult care. A thorough international framework founded on non-discrimination, the child's best interests, survival and development, and participation is provided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child. These ideas lay the groundwork for redefining how societies interpret and respond to children.

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Migration Narratives and Digital Humanities: New Approaches to Diaspora Studies

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of Digital Humanities has transformed the study of migration narratives and diaspora by introducing innovative methodologies for examining literary texts, archives, and transnational cultural networks. By exposing patterns of mobility, identity formation, memory, and cultural exchange across geographical and temporal boundaries, digital tools such as text mining, geospatial mapping, digital archives, network analysis, and corpus linguistics enhance conventional approaches to diaspora studies. While close reading has been the mainstay of traditional literary criticism, Digital Humanities makes it easier to analyze vast textual corpora, allowing researchers to look into recurrent themes, linguistic changes, and transnational links in migrant writing. The paper makes the case that combining computational techniques with postcolonial, cultural, and diaspora theories offers a more thorough comprehension of migration as a literary creation as well as a lived experience. It also looks at how online repositories and digital archives might help recover disadvantaged histories, preserve migrant voices, and democratize access to diasporic cultural creation. The article emphasizes how interdisciplinary cooperation across literary studies, information technology, history, and cultural studies can transform current diaspora scholarship. In the end, it argues that the convergence of digital approaches and migration narratives broadens the field of literary studies by providing fresh insights into identity, belonging, transnationalism, and cultural memory in a world growing more interconnected by the day.

Keywords: Digital Humanities; Migration Narratives; Diaspora Studies; Transnationalism; Cultural Memory; Postcolonial Literature

Introduction

Human civilization has always been characterized by migration, which has shaped civilizations, cultures, and literary traditions via processes of mobility, displacement, and cultural interchange. The experiences of exile, settlement, identity negotiation, and belonging have become major issues in literary representation, spanning from historical migrations and colonial expansion to modern globalization. As a result, migration studies is now an interdisciplinary

topic that includes sociology, anthropology, history, cultural studies, and literary criticism, rather than being primarily a demographic science. According to researchers like William Safran, James Clifford, Robin Cohen, and Avtar Brah, diaspora studies has also moved beyond its initial focus on forced dispersal to encompass voluntary migration, transnational mobility, and hybrid identities. Literary works play an important role in this discourse because they explore the emotional, cultural, and psychological aspects of displacement, nostalgia, and identity creation in a world growing more interconnected while preserving individual and societal memories of migration.

Literary studies have undergone a substantial transformation thanks to the introduction of fresh approaches brought about by the rise of Digital Humanities. In order to supplement traditional close reading, Digital Humanities integrates computer technology with humanistic inquiry using methods including *corpus linguistics, text mining, topic modelling, geospatial mapping, network analysis*, and *digital visualization* (Moretti:3). These techniques allow academics to visualize transnational networks, record migrant testimony through digital archives, analyze large literary corpora, and spot recurrent thematic and linguistic trends. By linking textual interpretation with historical records, geographical information, and cultural memory, these digital approaches expand the field of literary study in migration studies and provide fresh insights into how migration and diaspora are portrayed in literature.

Both migration studies and digital humanities are becoming more and more important, although their incorporation into literary criticism is still rather small. Conventional methods frequently ignore more expansive transnational literary patterns and the analytical possibilities of computational techniques in favour of attentive reading and historical contextualization. In order to close this gap, the current study creates an interdisciplinary framework for examining migration narratives that integrates postcolonial theory, diaspora studies, cultural memory, and digital humanities. The paper illustrates how digital approaches can enhance our comprehension of migration, identity, cultural memory, and transnationalism while maintaining the interpretive richness of literary scholarship by utilizing computational techniques like corpus analysis, text mining, geospatial mapping, network analysis, and digital archiving in conjunction with qualitative literary interpretation (Bhabha:9).

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

An interdisciplinary theoretical framework that incorporates ideas from migration studies, diaspora theory, transnationalism, postcolonial criticism, cultural memory, and computational literary studies is necessary for the study of migration narratives within the context of digital humanities. Migration is a multifaceted phenomenon that involves social transformation, identity rebuilding, political negotiation, and cultural exchange in addition to being a simple geographic movement. The emotional, psychological, and historical effects of displacement are depicted in literary narratives, which also show how people negotiate belonging in various cultural contexts. As a result, comprehending migration literature necessitates theoretical stances that take into account both the symbolic representations found in literary works and the material realities of migration.

Migration Theory: The intellectual basis for comprehending why people and communities relocate across political, cultural, and geographic borders is provided by *Migration Theory*. According to Everett S. Lee's Push-Pull Theory, opportunities like work, education, security, and better living conditions are major draws in destination regions, while factors like economic hardship, political instability,

environmental crises, and conflict force people to leave their places of origin (Lee: 50). However, by highlighting the impact of historical, cultural, familial, and emotional variables on human mobility, modern migration studies go beyond economic theories. Mobility Studies, developed by John Urry and Mimi Sheller, further reconceptualize migration as a continuous process involving the movement of people, ideas, technologies, and cultural practices across transnational spaces rather than as a singular act of relocation (Urry: 7). Furthermore, migration theory makes a distinction between forced and voluntary migration, acknowledging that the reasons and outcomes of the experiences of foreign students, labour migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers vary greatly. These theoretical stances offer a crucial framework for examining how displacement, identity formation, resiliency, and belonging are portrayed in literature within modern migration tales.

Diaspora Theory: *Diaspora Theory* extends the study of migration by examining the enduring cultural, emotional, and political relationships between dispersed communities and their ancestral homelands. While following academics expand the notion to include many types of migration and transnational identity, William Safran outlines fundamental characteristics of diasporic communities, such as dispersal, collective memory, devotion to the homeland, and desires for return (Safran: 83-84). According to James Clifford, diaspora is not a fixed allegiance to an original homeland but rather a dynamic process of mobility, hybridity, and cultural negotiation. In a similar vein, Robin Cohen highlights the variety of migration experiences across historical contexts by identifying several types of diasporas, such as labor, trade, imperial, victim, and cultural diasporas. The idea of *diaspora space* is further developed by Avtar Brah, who highlights the connections between migrants, indigenous populations, and host communities where identities are constantly negotiated and remade (Brah: 208-209). When taken as a whole, these theoretical stances offer a thorough framework for examining literary depictions of transnational identity, cultural hybridity, memory, and belonging that are prevalent in modern migration narratives.

Transnationalism: *Transnationalism* represents a significant development in migration studies by emphasizing the sustained social, cultural, political, and economic connections that migrants maintain across national borders. Researchers like Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, and Cristina Szanton Blanc contend that as a result of advancements in communication, transportation, and digital technologies, migrants are actively participating in multiple social worlds at the same time and maintaining active ties with both their home countries and their countries of origin (Basch:45). Transnationalism, according to Steven Vertovec, is the establishment and upkeep of interconnected networks that facilitate the flow of concepts, languages, cultural customs, religious beliefs, and financial resources beyond national borders (Vertovec:12). These transnational movements are mirrored in modern literature through characters managing overlapping cultural attachments, multilingual narratives, hybrid identities, and fractured ideas of home. Transnationalism offers a crucial theoretical framework for comprehending migration narratives as depictions of fluid identities, global mobility, and intercultural exchange in a world growing more interconnected by questioning rigid notions of nationality and belonging.

Postcolonial Theory: *Postcolonial Theory* provides an essential framework for interpreting migration narratives by situating them within the historical contexts of colonialism, imperialism, and global inequality. *Orientalism*, as defined by Edward Said, shows how colonial discourse created the non-West

as the "Other" through systems of representation that justified cultural hierarchy and political dominance (Said:3). Building on this framework, Homi K. Bhabha's theories of *mimicry, hybridity*, and the *Third Space* describe how migrant identities are negotiated in intercultural settings that challenge colonial dichotomies and result in flexible, hybrid identities as opposed to rigid cultural connections (Bhabha:86). In a similar vein, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's concept of the subaltern highlights the marginalization of voices left out of prevailing historical narratives and emphasizes the significance of reclaiming the experiences of women, labour migrants, refugees, and other displaced communities (Spivak:271). When taken as a whole, these postcolonial viewpoints shed light on the power dynamics that underlie migration and show how modern literature subverts colonial notions and reimagines identity, agency, and cultural belonging.

Cultural Memory and Identity: Migration narratives are deeply rooted in memory, as displacement transforms personal experiences into collective cultural histories. The idea of collective memory, as proposed by Maurice Halbwachs, highlights that memory is not only an individual phenomenon but is socially created within communities (Halbwachs:38). Jan Assmann also makes a distinction between cultural memory, which is maintained through literature, archives, rituals, and other cultural institutions, and communicative memory, which is passed down through regular contacts (Assmann:36). Paul Ricoeur contends that the structuring of memories into meaningful life stories is how identity is narratively produced. This process is mirrored in migration fiction, as characters use acts of recollection and storytelling to navigate nostalgia, exile, homeland, and belonging. Online archives, oral history initiatives, and virtual museums have increased the accessibility and preservation of diasporic cultural memory in the digital age, supporting digital humanities by making it easier to record, transmit, and reinterpret migrant histories across generations.

Digital Humanities: In order to analyze literature, culture, and history, the multidisciplinary area of *Digital Humanities* combines computational tools with conventional humanistic inquiry. Through techniques like *corpus linguistics, text mining, topic modelling, sentiment analysis, geospatial mapping, social network analysis, digital visualization,* and *digital archiving*, it enhances traditional literary criticism rather than taking the place of attentive reading. Matthew L. Jockers' macroanalysis and Franco Moretti's concept of distant reading show how computational methods can uncover thematic, linguistic, and stylistic patterns in large literary corpora that are challenging to find through individual textual analysis alone (Moretti: 48). These digital approaches make it easier to trace transnational literary networks, preserve migrant testimonies and cultural archives, and visualize migration patterns within migration and diaspora studies. Digital Humanities offers a novel interdisciplinary framework for analyzing migration narratives and broadening scholarly understanding of identity, mobility, and cultural exchange in contemporary literature by fusing computational analysis with postcolonial theory, diaspora studies, transnationalism, and cultural memory studies (Moretti: 11).

Review of Literature

The study of migration, diaspora, and transnationalism has grown over the last forty years into a significant interdisciplinary area that includes geography, sociology, anthropology, history, literary studies, cultural studies, and digital humanities. Migration is acknowledged in modern study as more than just physical travel, with a focus on how it shapes identity, memory, language, belonging, and

cultural transformation (Cohen: 9). According to this concept, literary texts are considered important cultural records that provide light on the psychological and emotional aspects of displacement while preserving the lived experiences of migrants, refugees, exiles, and diasporic communities. As a result, migrant literature serves as a cultural archive, historical record, and artistic expression all at once, offering insightful perspectives on the intricacies of globalization, transnational identity, and cross-cultural interaction (Clifford: 2).

Evolution of Diaspora Studies: Although the idea has historical roots in the dispersion of the Jewish people, diaspora studies became a separate interdisciplinary study in the late 20th century. Modern theorists have broadened the notion to include voluntary migration, labour mobility, educational migration, and transnational settlement, whereas early research focused mostly on forced displacement and exile. Important traits of diasporic societies, according to William Safran, include cultural identity preservation, loyalty to the homeland, and collective memory (Safran: 83). While Robin Cohen categorized many types of diasporas, such as victim, labour, trade, imperial, and cultural diasporas (Cohen:18), James Clifford reinterpreted diaspora as a dynamic process of cultural negotiation rather than a fixed condition of displacement. By highlighting the relationships between migrants, indigenous populations, and other cultural groups, Avtar Brah developed the idea of "diaspora space," which further expanded the topic (Brah:181). Diaspora studies is now essential for modern literary and cultural analysis as a result of these theoretical contributions, which have moved the discipline away from geographical migration and toward the study of identity, hybridity, belonging, and transnational cultural transformation.

Migration Narratives in Contemporary Literature: The social, cultural, and psychological challenges of globalization are reflected in migration narratives, which have emerged as a defining characteristic of modern world literature. In their exploration of themes of exile, displacement, nostalgia, cultural hybridity, racism, language, and identity formation, authors like Jhumpa Lahiri, Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Bharati Mukherjee, Kiran Desai, Mohsin Hamid, Kamila Shamsie, Monica Ali, Abdulrazak Gurnah, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, and Meena Alexander demonstrate that migration entails both physical mobility and complex negotiations of memory and belonging. These stories have been studied by literary academics using feminist, psychoanalytic, postcolonial, and cultural studies viewpoints. While Edward Said's critique of Orientalism shows how migration literature challenges colonial stereotypes and reclaims marginalized voices, Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridity explains how migrant identities emerge within intercultural "third spaces" that challenge fixed notions of culture and nation (Bhabha: 54). The gendered experiences of migrating women navigating interlocking kinds of social, cultural, and economic adversity are further highlighted by feminist critics. When taken as a whole, these methods show that migration narratives are critical discussions of globalization, multiculturalism, citizenship, identity, and social justice rather than just descriptions of movement (Said: 199).

Digital Humanities and Literary Criticism: Literary studies have changed as a result of the rise of Digital Humanities, which combine computer techniques with conventional interpretive methods. By showing that large-scale quantitative analysis may reveal literary trends across huge textual collections, Franco Moretti's concept of remote reading challenged traditional close reading (Moretti:1). Building on this methodology, Matthew L. Jockers developed macroanalysis, demonstrating how computational methods may find linguistic, stylistic, and thematic

patterns in thousands of literary texts (Jockers: 4). With the use of techniques like corpus linguistics, text mining, topic modelling, sentiment analysis, social network analysis, and geospatial visualization, researchers can now study vocabulary, themes, narrative structures, and intertextual relationships more broadly. By fusing empirical analysis with theoretical interpretation, these approaches enhance traditional literary criticism rather than taking the place of close reading. This promotes interdisciplinary cooperation between literary scholars, linguists, historians, computer scientists, and information specialists.

Digital Archives and Migrant Histories: Digital archives have become central to contemporary migration research by preserving the cultural memory of migrant communities through accessible digital platforms. Manuscripts, photos, oral histories, letters, newspapers, immigration documents, and audiovisual resources are increasingly being digitized by libraries, museums, academic institutions, and community organizations in order to preserve delicate historical collections and increase public access. Initiatives for digital storytelling and oral history are especially useful for recording lived migration experiences that are frequently missing from official records. They allow migrants and refugees to share their stories using multimedia formats that combine text, audio, images, and video. These initiatives democratize historical preservation by allowing communities to document their own histories and foster transnational scholarly collaboration through globally accessible digital repositories. Consequently, scholars view digital archives not merely as repositories of information but as dynamic spaces for cultural preservation, identity formation, and the interpretation of migration and diaspora histories.

Computational Approaches to Literary Analysis: The increasing significance of computational techniques in the multidisciplinary examination of migration narratives is demonstrated by recent research. While topic modelling reveals latent thematic structures across massive textual corpora, corpus linguistics allows researchers to find recurrent lexical patterns associated with migration, identity, exile, memory, home, and belonging. Sentiment analysis uses computational analysis of linguistic expression to further uncover the emotional aspects of migration narratives (Jockers: 156). While social network analysis maps relationships between characters, authors, and transnational communities, highlighting the interconnectedness of diasporic experiences, geospatial technologies, especially *Geographic Information Systems (GIS)*, enable scholars to visualize literary landscapes, migratory routes, and spatial representations of displacement (Moretti: 53). Together, these digital methodologies complement close reading by integrating quantitative evidence with qualitative interpretation, thereby expanding the analytical possibilities of migration and diaspora studies.

Migration Narratives in Contemporary Literature

In an era of globalization, migration has emerged as one of the central topics of 21st-century literature, reflecting the growing mobility of people across political, cultural, and geographic barriers. The psychological, emotional, social, and cultural aspects of displacement are explored in contemporary migration tales, which go beyond simple physical relocation to depict migration as a continuous process of negotiating identity, memory, language, belonging, and cultural adaptation. These narratives, which emphasize transnational affiliations, multiple identities, and intercultural negotiations rather than linear assimilation into host societies, are influenced by colonial legacies, economic globalization, refugee movements, political conflicts, environmental

displacement, and digital connectivity. While Avtar Brah's concept of "diaspora space" emphasizes the intricate relationships between migrants, host communities, and multiple cultural identities (Brah: 181), Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridity and the "Third Space" offers a helpful framework for comprehending these fluid identities (Bhabha: 54). As a result, modern migration literature is an essential tool for analyzing how concepts of home, citizenship, identity, and belonging are altered by globalization.

Migration as Lived Experience: The literary significance of migration narratives stems from their portrayal of the lived experiences of displacement, showing migration as a deeply personal process influenced by hope, loss, resilience, uncertainty, and cultural adaptation rather than just as a demographic or political phenomenon. Through family relationships, intergenerational conflicts, linguistic adjustment, and identity negotiation, authors like Jhumpa Lahiri, Bharati Mukherjee, Mohsin Hamid, and Abdulrazak Gurnah examine migration and highlight the ongoing challenge of balancing inherited customs with contemporary social realities. Their creations show that migration is not a single act of relocation but rather a continuous process of alteration. These anecdotes show the multifaceted human nature of migration and challenge stereotypes by portraying the varied experiences of economic migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, international students, expatriates, and transnational professionals. These depictions resonate with Avtar Brah's idea of diaspora space and Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridity, which describe how migrant identities are constantly negotiated across various cultural settings (Bhabha: 54).

Exile, Displacement, and Belonging: The themes of exile, displacement, and the quest for belonging are prevalent in migration literature since relationships with one's hometown, community, and cultural identity are frequently disrupted by geographical mobility. Displacement is portrayed in modern narratives as a psychological and physical experience characterized by alienation, cultural confusion, and juggling several identities. In line with Homi K. Bhabha's concept of the "Third Space," where identity is constantly formed through intercultural negotiation rather than fixed cultural allegiance, migrant characters often inhabit liminal spaces (Bhabha 36–39). In keeping with Avtar Brah's concept of "diaspora space," wherein belonging arises via dynamic connections across cultures, these works also redefine home as an ongoing emotional and cultural construct impacted by memory, language, family, and social relationships (Brah: 181).

Identity Negotiation: Identity formation is a central concern of migration narratives, as migration disrupts fixed notions of selfhood and gives rise to hybrid, fluid identities shaped by multiple cultural influences. In addition to illustrating the intergenerational conflicts between first-generation migrants, who frequently maintain close ties to their homeland, and later generations, whose identities are shaped by both ancestral heritage and multicultural societies, contemporary literature emphasizes the role of multilingualism, code-switching, and translation in negotiating cultural belonging. These depictions are in line with Stuart Hall's theory that identity is a dynamic, ever-evolving process rather than a stable essence (Hall: 225) and Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridity and the "Third Space," where identities arise through cultural negotiation rather than fixed national or ethnic affiliations (Bhabha: 54).

Memory and Nostalgia: In migration literature, memory is a key narrative device that helps displaced people reconstitute their identities through memories of their homes, families, and cultural customs. Memory and nostalgia are portrayed in modern tales as dynamic processes in which the past is not merely

maintained but rather selectively recalled, reinterpreted, and altered through current experiences. Additionally, they show how digital communication technologies—such as social media, online communities, and digital archives—maintain international linkages and change how people remember across geographic boundaries. These depictions are consistent with Marianne Hirsch's theory of post memory, which describes how memories are passed down through generations and continue to influence diasporic identities Hirsch: 5), and Pierre Nora's concept of lieux de Mémoire, which highlights the role of memory in maintaining cultural identity (Nora:7)

Home, Homeland, and Cultural Hybridity: As a reflection of migrants' many affiliations across countries, languages, and communities, modern migration narratives redefine home and homeland as flexible emotional, cultural, and relational constructs rather than fixed geographical locales. Through multilingualism, international interactions, and changing customs, these books highlight cultural hybridity and show how identities are constantly negotiated between inherited cultures and new social contexts. While Avtar Brah's concept of "diaspora space" highlights the transnational contacts through which belonging is built outside national boundaries, Homi K. Bhabha's theory of hybridity describes this process of identity construction within the "Third Space" (Brah:181). As a result, rather than emphasizing geographical permanence, modern migration literature depicts homeland as a dynamic transnational area maintained by memory, communication, and cultural practice.

Digital Archives, Cultural Memory, and Diasporic Identity

The documentation, preservation, and interpretation of diasporic identities, cultural memories, and migratory histories have all changed as a result of the quick development of digital technology. Because they offer access to a wide range of materials, including manuscripts, oral histories, photographs, letters, government data, newspapers, video testimonies, and personal narratives, digital archives have become essential tools for scholars studying migration and diaspora. Digital repositories enable global accessibility and collaborative scholarship, allowing researchers, students, and diasporic communities to interact with historical records regardless of their physical location, in contrast to traditional archives, which are frequently institutionally controlled and geographically restricted. By linking fictional stories with historical records, these advancements have greatly broadened the field of literary and cultural studies, enhancing interpretations of migratory literature through interdisciplinary evidence. The preservation of cultural memory and migration literature are intimately related because literary narratives can serve as archives of collective experiences. In order to reconstruct stories of displacement, migration, and cultural adaptation, many diasporic writers rely on their own memories, family histories, oral traditions, and communal experiences. This process is extended by digital archives, which preserve historical materials that contextualize published literary texts. As a result, Digital Humanities enables a conversation between historical evidence and literary representation, enabling academics to study migration narratives as parts of larger cultural memory.

Digital Preservation of Migrant Histories: Throughout history, migration has produced a great deal of documentary evidence, which is still dispersed throughout national archives, private collections, family records, museums, and local organizations. In order to ensure that priceless historical records are available to future generations, digital preservation organizations work to systematically digitize these scattered materials. The digitalization of immigration

documents, passports, letters, diaries, newspapers, maps, census records, photos, and institutional archives that shed light on the experiences of immigrant populations are examples of such endeavours. For communities whose history have been neglected or left out of official national narratives, digital preservation is especially crucial. Despite their important contributions to world history, refugees, indentured servants, enslaved people, migrant workers, and displaced indigenous communities have frequently left behind little institutional documentation. Through the preservation of community-based documents and individual testimony that could otherwise be lost, digital archiving initiatives offer chances to reclaim these neglected histories. By connecting fictional migration stories with historical data, digital preservation helps literary academics better grasp context. Interdisciplinary research on migration and diaspora is strengthened by the availability of digital archival materials, which allow comparison studies between literary representation and recorded historical experience.

Online Archives and Community Memory: One of the most important advances in modern diaspora studies is community-based digital archives. In contrast to typical institutional archives, migrant organizations, cultural associations, local historical societies, universities, and non-governmental organizations dedicated to conserving the histories of particular diasporic communities are often the ones that start and manage community archives. Local knowledge, family histories, vernacular languages, cultural customs, and everyday experiences that might not get much attention from formal historical organizations are given priority in these repositories. Dispersed communities can directly contribute papers, photos, oral histories, family records, and cultural artifacts to shared digital collections through online archives. By acknowledging migrants as active producers of historical information rather than passive subjects of institutional recordkeeping, this participatory strategy democratizes historical preservation. Digital platforms improve cultural continuity and promote intergenerational involvement by giving younger members of diasporic communities access to ancestral histories. Community archives offer important contextual tools for analyzing migration narratives from a literary standpoint. By providing genuine historical material, they enhance critical assessments of diasporic literature by shedding light on the historical contexts, cultural customs, linguistic traditions, and social settings portrayed in literary works.

Oral Histories and Digital Storytelling: Oral history has long been recognized as an essential methodology for documenting migration experiences because many aspects of displacement remain absent from official archival records. Conventional historical documentation frequently ignores the emotional reactions, family recollections, linguistic customs, cultural traditions, and everyday experiences that are captured in personal testimonials. By making it possible to record, preserve, transcribe, translate, and distribute migrant narratives online, digital technologies have significantly increased the potential of oral history. Through multimodal tales that incorporate text, images, audio recordings, video interviews, interactive maps, and digital displays, digital storytelling expands oral history even further. These multimodal formats preserve the complexity of both individual and collective identities while enabling migrants to portray their experiences in ways that are culturally significant. Digital storytelling provides greater recording of migratory experiences by capturing tone, emotion, visual recall, and cultural performance, in contrast to solely textual records. Oral histories and digital storytelling are valuable comparison tools for literary scholars studying the connection between lived experience and fictional

representation. Oral archives are important resources for comprehending the historical and emotional conditions influencing literary output because many modern migration tales rely on autobiographical memories, family histories, and communal testimony.

Digital Museums and Virtual Exhibitions: Museums have increasingly adopted digital technologies to preserve and present migration histories through virtual exhibitions, interactive collections, online catalogues, and multimedia educational resources. Global audiences can interact with collections that document migration, diaspora, exile, and cultural diversity thanks to digital museums, which provide public access to historical artifacts across geographic boundaries. To generate multifaceted depictions of migration, interactive exhibits often use digital reconstructions, historical maps, documentary films, personal testimony, archive photos, and literary passages. By integrating literature, history, anthropology, sociology, geography, and visual culture into cohesive digital worlds, virtual exhibitions promote interdisciplinary participation. These displays frequently portray migration as interwoven global processes influenced by colonialism, globalization, labour mobility, war, environmental change, and cultural interchange rather than as discrete national histories. Additionally, by highlighting common experiences of displacement and adaptability, these digital resources enable comparative analysis across various migrant communities. Digital museums help literary scholars by placing fictitious stories inside larger historical and cultural contexts. Exhibitions that record migratory routes, settlement patterns, cultural customs, and oral histories offer important additional resources that enhance readings of literary works that address transnational identity and diaspora.

Democratization of Cultural Heritage: The democratization of cultural heritage is one of Digital Humanities' most important contributions to diaspora studies. Many migrant populations are underrepresented in traditional archival organizations because they frequently favour official government records, elite historical narratives, and nationally defined histories. Through the direct participation of individuals, families, community organizations, and grassroots efforts in the documentation and preservation of cultural heritage, digital technologies undermine these hierarchies. Crowdsourced collections, open-access repositories, collaborative databases, and multilingual digital platforms enable historically underrepresented groups to offer their own histories from their own viewpoints. While acknowledging ethnic variety as a crucial part of historical knowledge, this participatory method fosters inclusivity. By challenging institutional authority and increasing acceptance of various types of historical evidence, it also promotes decolonizing archive practices. Because literary works often give voice to disenfranchised realities that are not included in official archives, digital democratization is especially important for migratory literature. Digital archives help the public engage with diasporic histories more broadly while preserving these experiences. Cultural memory is strengthened across generations and geographical borders through the integration of literary works, historical records, oral testimonies, photos, and multimedia materials to build dynamic digital ecosystems.

By facilitating multidisciplinary literary research, protecting endangered cultural memory, and increasing access to historical evidence, digital archives have radically changed migration and diaspora studies. Digitized manuscripts, oral histories, community archives, virtual museums, and multimedia storytelling are just a few of the creative platforms that Digital Humanities has developed to record the lived experiences of migrants while reclaiming voices that have historically been left out

of prevailing historical narratives. By linking fictional depiction with real historical data and community memory, these approaches have improved scholarly understanding of migration literature.

Digital technologies have also revolutionized the maintenance of diasporic identity by promoting international engagement, cross-cultural communication, and cooperative knowledge creation. Cultural memory is no longer limited to physical institutions but rather resides within dynamic transnational networks that are accessible beyond geographic boundaries, as evidenced by community archives, open-access repositories, and interactive digital exhibitions. Thus, a major methodological development in modern diaspora studies is the intersection of literary scholarship, archival studies, and digital technology. Building on this framework, the next section explores how global literary networks and transnationalism shed more light on the dissemination of migration tales in a digitally connected world.

Case Study: Mapping Migratory Routes in Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*

Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* (1988), which depicts migration as a complicated movement across physical, political, and psychological barriers rather than as a straightforward trip from one country to another, is a helpful case study for the current investigation. A transnational map influenced by colonial history, Partition, familial memory, and political violence is created by the novel's connections between Calcutta, Dhaka, and London. The novel illustrates how human lives become interconnected across national boundaries through the experiences of individuals like Tridib, Tha'mma, and the narrator. As a result, traveling between Bangladesh, India, and Britain becomes a way to challenge the strict lines that divide national identity, home, and culture.

From the standpoint of digital humanities, *GIS mapping, geospatial visualization*, and *digital network analysis* can be used to depict the migration routes in *The Shadow Lines*. The travels of the characters between Calcutta, Dhaka, and London could be tracked on a digital map that links these places to specific recollections, historical occurrences, and story points. This kind of graphic would show that the geography of the book is not linear; locations that are divided by governmental boundaries are yet intimately linked by familial ties, recollections, tales, and creativity. Therefore, transnational networks that traditional close reading may detect but cannot spatially depict on the same scale might be made visible by digital mapping.

The novel also depicts how migration creates conflicting notions of belonging and mixed identities. The idea that national borders correlate to fixed cultural identities is undermined by the migration between Bangladesh, Britain, and India. In this way, ideas of diaspora, transnationalism, and imagined communities can be read alongside *The Shadow Lines*. By producing interactive maps that link location, character, memory, and historical event, digital humanities technologies can expand this interpretation and turn the book into a dynamic spatial archive. As a result, the case study demonstrates how geospatial and computational methods can enhance literary interpretation and offer fresh perspectives on migration, displacement, memory, and diasporic identity.

Transnationalism and Global Literary Networks

Transnationalism is a key paradigm in modern literary studies because of the rapid processes of globalization, technological advancement, and worldwide mobility that have changed the creation, dissemination, and reception of literature. Migration narratives now take part in dynamic global networks

that link writers, readers, publishers, translators, academic institutions, and diasporic groups across continents rather than being limited to the political or cultural borders of specific nation-states. By emphasizing the constant flow of people, ideas, languages, and cultural practices that transform literary expression, transnationalism highlights these cross-border exchanges. Digital archives, computational analysis, geospatial mapping, and network visualization have created new methodological opportunities for the study of international literary networks in the context of digital humanities. Together, these approaches demonstrate that migration literature is not simply about geographical movement but also about the circulation of knowledge, memory, identity, and culture within an interconnected global environment.

Migration narratives show how interactions spanning several nations, as opposed to discrete national frameworks, are increasingly forming modern identities. Migrants can now maintain ongoing ties to their home countries while also taking part in international cultural communities because to digital communication technology, reasonably priced transit, multilingual publication, and international literary partnerships. Transnationalism is consequently a crucial paradigm for comprehending the changing nature of modern migratory literature since literary texts represent complicated kinds of belonging that cut across national boundaries.

Global Mobility: Global mobility has fundamentally altered literary representations of migration by expanding opportunities for travel, education, employment, communication, and cultural exchange. Because technological advancements allow migrants to keep connections with families, communities, and institutions across physical distances, modern migration is very different from previous historical movements. As a result, migration narratives often depict mobility as a continuous process rather than a final departure from the country of origin. Characters in literary works by authors like Amitav Ghosh, Jhumpa Lahiri, Mohsin Hamid, Kamila Shamsie, Salman Rushdie, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie frequently relocate across borders while juggling various social, linguistic, and cultural ties. Their stories show that, as opposed to one-time immigration, migration often entails transnational family life, career relocation, educational mobility, temporary residency, and circular travel. In contrast to one-time immigration, these stories show that migration often entails circular travel, temporary residency, educational mobility, professional relocation, and transnational family life. These portrayals contradict previous literary paradigms that stressed permanent isolation and irreversible exile. Through computer mapping and geospatial visualization, Digital Humanities makes a substantial contribution to the study of global mobility. Scholars can trace literary trips, migration routes, border crossings, settlement patterns, and historical movements depicted in literary texts using *Geographic Information Systems (GIS)*. These illustrations show the worldwide interconnection of modern literary narratives while revealing geographical aspects of migration that support textual interpretation.

Cross-border Literary Communities: Migration has facilitated the emergence of literary communities that transcend national boundaries through shared cultural experiences, multilingual communication, and collaborative intellectual exchange. In order to create transnational literary identities that defy exclusive national classification, diasporic writers frequently participate concurrently in literary traditions linked with both their countries of origin and their countries of residence. The global circulation of migrant literature is increased by these authors' contributions to international literary festivals, scholarly

conferences, digital platforms, online journals, and cooperative research projects. By facilitating communication between writers, academics, translators, publishers, and readers via online forums, virtual conferences, social media, and digital publishing platforms, digital technologies have further reinforced these international literary communities. These exchanges facilitate the flow of literary ideas across linguistic and geographic barriers and encourage cooperative scholarship. By mapping collaborations between writers, institutions, publishers, translators, and academic organizations, digital humanities approaches—particularly social network analysis—offer useful tools for visualizing these relationships. The increasingly collaborative nature of literary production is further shown by the study of cross-border literary communities. Modern study acknowledges literature as arising from dynamic cultural networks involving editors, translators, publishers, readers, and digital infrastructures, as opposed to seeing authors as solitary creative beings. By highlighting the interrelated mechanisms via which migration tales spread throughout the world, this viewpoint strongly resembles transnationalism.

Translation and Digital Circulation: Translation plays a pivotal role in the global dissemination of migration literature because it enables narratives produced within specific linguistic communities to reach international audiences. Through translation, some significant migration narratives have gained international prominence, enabling readers from a variety of cultural backgrounds to interact with experiences of displacement, identity, exile, and cultural hybridity. Therefore, translation serves as an act of intercultural discourse that broadens the global reach of literary works rather from just being a language conversion. By making literary texts accessible through electronic books, online journals, institutional repositories, open-access archives, and digital libraries, digital publishing has expedited this process. Digital circulation supports comparative literary studies across linguistic traditions and makes migratory literature accessible to readers worldwide. In order to maintain and distribute multilingual literature collections and promote multidisciplinary interaction with migration studies, universities, research institutes, and cultural groups are increasingly using digital platforms. Through computer tools that can compare multilingual corpora, find translation patterns, and analyze cross-cultural linguistic adaptation, Digital Humanities further advances translation studies. These approaches allow researchers to examine how migration narratives change between languages while maintaining their cultural and thematic value. As a result, translation and digital distribution play a significant role in the globalization of diaspora writing.

Social Media and Digital Diasporas: The rise of social media has changed the diaspora experience by establishing online groups that preserve social, emotional, and cultural links across national borders. Despite being geographically separated, migrants can stay in touch with their relatives, take part in cultural events, maintain language traditions, and share personal experiences thanks to platforms like blogs, online forums, podcasts, digital storytelling websites, and social networking services. The idea of the "digital diaspora," where community identity is maintained through online engagement rather than just physical proximity, has emerged as a result of these digital contacts. By integrating internet communication with story forms, contemporary migratory literature increasingly reflects these technical changes. Through emails, video chats, messaging apps, and social media exchanges, characters uphold international relationships, demonstrating how digital technologies transform ideas of home, family, memory, and belonging. These depictions show that relocation in the digital era

entails ongoing communication as opposed to total geographic isolation. Through social media analytics, digital ethnography, network analysis, and online archive studies, Digital Humanities offers useful methodologies for analyzing these developments. These methods support literary analyses of digital migration tales while allowing academics to investigate how virtual communities support identity creation, cultural preservation, and transnational communication.

Digital Cosmopolitanism: The concept of digital cosmopolitanism extends traditional cosmopolitan theories by emphasizing the role of digital technologies in fostering global cultural awareness, intercultural dialogue, and transnational collaboration. The participation of modern migrants in international digital communities that promote the sharing of ideas, languages, artistic creations, educational materials, and cultural expertise is growing. By depicting characters whose identities arise from involvement in interconnected global networks rather than exclusive national loyalties, literature reflects these shifts. By giving underrepresented voices more chances to engage in global literary discourse, digital cosmopolitanism also undermines hierarchical patterns of cultural production. With the help of digital publishing platforms, online literary journals, open-access archives, and virtual cultural events, authors from a variety of backgrounds can reach a worldwide audience without solely depending on traditional publishing establishments. In addition to promoting greater diversity in current world literature, this democratization of literary production has expanded the depiction of migratory experiences. Network visualization, citation analysis, digital mapping, and computational studies of worldwide literary circulation can all be used to investigate digital cosmopolitanism from a Digital Humanities standpoint. The dynamics of intercultural communication, translation, publication, and academic cooperation that define modern migrant literature are shown by these approaches. These investigations show how literary production increasingly functions within international digital ecosystems that link writers, readers, scholars, institutions, and cultural groups on different continents.

Transnationalism has fundamentally reshaped the study of migration literature by emphasizing the interconnected relationships that extend beyond national borders. Identity, memory, belonging, and cultural exchange are portrayed in contemporary migration narratives as dynamic processes supported by international movement, multilingual communication, digital technologies, and transnational social networks. These literary works show ongoing contacts between people, groups, institutions, and cultures spread across several geographic regions rather than portraying migration as a permanent departure from the motherland.

Through computational approaches like geospatial mapping, network analysis, digital archives, corpus linguistics, and visualization tools, Digital Humanities greatly enhances the study of these transnational literary networks. By revealing patterns of mobility, collaboration, translation, and cultural circulation, these approaches enhance scholarly knowledge of migration narratives within global contexts and augment traditional literary interpretation. A thorough interdisciplinary framework for analyzing the changing connections between literature, migration, technology, and globalization is established when transnationalism and digital humanities are combined. The methodological, ethical, and technological issues surrounding these new approaches are discussed in the section that follows, along with potential future paths for migration studies and digital humanities study.

Challenges and Future Directions

The integration of Digital Humanities with migration and diaspora studies has opened new avenues for literary research by combining computational methodologies with traditional humanistic inquiry. This interdisciplinary approach has a number of methodological, ethical, technological, and institutional issues that need to be carefully considered despite its transformational promise. While careful reading, contextual interpretation, and theoretical analysis have historically been prioritized in literary studies, computer models, statistical analysis, and digital visualization are often used in the Digital Humanities. It takes interdisciplinary cooperation and methodological adaptability to bridge these divergent epistemological traditions. Furthermore, the quick development of big data analytics, artificial intelligence, and digital technologies is changing how migration narratives are created, maintained, and understood. This presents literary scholars with both new challenges and opportunities. The integration of digital innovation with critical humanistic viewpoints will be crucial for the future of migration studies. The interpretative depth necessary to comprehend the artistic, historical, and emotional aspects of literature cannot be replaced by computational approaches, even when they improve analytical capacities. Future research must therefore aim for a methodological framework that strikes a compromise between digital technologies and well-established theoretical traditions like transnationalism, postcolonialism, diaspora studies, and cultural memory. By taking this approach, technological innovation is guaranteed to stay rooted in the moral and interpretive values of the humanities.

Methodological Challenges: Integrating qualitative and quantitative techniques is one of the main issues in Digital Humanities study. While computational approaches focus on quantifiable linguistic patterns, statistical correlations, and algorithmic visualization, traditional literary criticism depends on attentive reading, contextual interpretation, and theoretical analysis. These methods frequently function based on disparate presumptions about scholarly evidence and textual meaning. As a result, academics need to create methodological frameworks that enable computational results to support literary interpretation rather than take center stage. Corpus selection is another methodological issue. Diverse geographical areas, historical eras, languages, genres, and cultural customs are represented in migration literature. Therefore, linguistic diversity, historical context, and literary relevance must be carefully considered when building representative digital corpora. The inclusiveness of computer analysis may be limited by an over-reliance on English-language texts or easily accessible digital collections, which may unintentionally leave out significant voices from less digitized literary traditions. Another methodological challenge is interdisciplinary collaboration. Proficiency in literary criticism, computer science, linguistics, statistics, archive studies, and data visualization is frequently necessary for successful Digital Humanities research. In order to ensure methodological rigor while being sensitive to literary complexity, it is nevertheless crucial for researchers from these fields to develop significant collaborations.

Ethical Issues in Digital Research: Important ethical concerns about privacy, ownership, representation, and responsible scholarship are brought up by the growing digitization of literary and archival works. Personal letters, oral histories, photos, refugee testimony, and autobiographical materials detailing intensely personal migratory experiences can be found in numerous digital archives. In order to ensure that digital accessibility does not jeopardize cultural integrity or individual dignity, researchers must approach such materials with caution. The portrayal of underprivileged communities also raises ethical questions. If results are interpreted without proper

cultural and historical context, computational analysis may inadvertently simplify complex human experiences to numerical data or statistical patterns. Trauma, dislocation, violence, prejudice, and identity problems are frequently depicted in migration narratives, necessitating sophisticated interpretation that goes beyond computational analysis. The emotional and moral aspects of great literary works must still be preserved through humanistic studies. Additionally, while using digital archives and oral history collections, researchers should continue to be mindful of problems related to informed consent, intellectual property, and community engagement. While honouring cultural ownership of historical artifacts, collaborative engagement with migrant communities promotes more ethical and inclusive research approaches.

Data Bias and Algorithmic Limitations: Digital Humanities methodologies depend upon algorithms, software tools, and digital datasets that may contain inherent biases. Computational models frequently reflect the linguistic, cultural, and historical assumptions embedded within their training data, potentially reproducing existing inequalities or overlooking marginalized literary traditions. For example, Natural Language Processing systems often demonstrate greater accuracy for widely represented languages than for minority or indigenous languages, limiting comparative literary analysis. Algorithmic approaches also struggle to interpret many distinctive characteristics of literary language, including metaphor, irony, symbolism, ambiguity, intertextuality, and cultural references. Literary texts derive much of their significance from contextual meaning rather than isolated word frequencies or statistical relationships. As a result, rather than being accepted without question as objective depictions of literary meaning, computational outputs need to be carefully critically interpreted. Therefore, despite using a variety of approaches to validate study findings, scholars must acknowledge the limitations of algorithmic analysis. Close reading, corpus analysis, archival research, and theoretical interpretation all work together to improve methodological reliability and lessen the impact of algorithmic bias.

Copyright and Digital Archives: Migration research has been made much easier by the increasing accessibility of digital literary resources, but copyright laws still pose serious practical difficulties. The capacity of scholars to gather sizable digital corpora for computational analysis is hampered by the copyright laws that still protect many modern literary works. Researchers operating in various institutional contexts may have differing access to digitized books, manuscripts, newspapers, and archival collections due to institutional subscriptions or licensing agreements. Digital preservation initiatives also need to strike a balance between ethical and legal obligations and public accessibility. While maintaining the long-term preservation of culturally valuable resources, archivists and researchers must adhere to copyright restrictions. In Digital Humanities studies, issues of ownership, licensing, digital replication, and open-access distribution continue to be crucial. The adoption of fair-use provisions, collaborative agreements between cultural institutions and researchers, and the expansion of open-access repositories may help address some of these challenges. Continued dialogue among scholars, publishers, archivists, and policymakers will remain essential for promoting responsible access to digital literary resources.

Future Prospects for AI-Assisted Literary Research: One of the most exciting advances in the field of digital humanities today is artificial intelligence. Literary study could be greatly expanded by using machine learning, natural language processing, multilingual translation systems, automated text

classification, semantic analysis, and generative AI tools. With the use of these technologies, academics may compare multilingual literary traditions, analyze ever-larger textual datasets, find intricate thematic connections, and produce elaborate migratory network visualizations. Significant prospects for maintaining and increasing access to diasporic cultural heritage are also presented by AI. The digitization of previously unavailable historical manuscripts, oral histories, newspapers, and community archives is made possible by technologies such as *Optical Character Recognition (OCR)*, automated transcription, speech recognition, machine translation, and digital restoration. These developments support initiatives to reclaim disenfranchised historical voices, document migration experiences, and conserve endangered languages. However, rather than acting as an independent literary translator, AI should continue to be a helpful analytical tool. When it comes to assessing historical context, cultural subtlety, ethical duty, and aesthetic relevance, human experts remain vital. Therefore, collaborative models that use AI to supplement rather than replace critical literary interpretation would be most beneficial for future study. By maintaining the interpretive richness that is essential to the humanities, this balanced integration will guarantee that Digital Humanities keeps advancing study.

Conclusion

Migration narratives occupy a central place in contemporary literary studies because they illuminate the complex relationships among mobility, identity, memory, belonging, and cultural transformation in an increasingly interconnected world. This study has shown that migration literature covers the psychological, historical, linguistic, and cultural aspects of diasporic experience in addition to depictions of spatial mobility. The paper has developed a thorough theoretical framework for comprehending how literary texts express the realities of displacement, hybridity, and transnational identity by drawing on migration theory, diaspora studies, transnationalism, postcolonial criticism, and cultural memory studies. Diasporic writers' contemporary migration narratives demonstrate how intercultural interactions and international mobility constantly remodel ideas of home, country, and belonging. The study has further suggested that literary scholars' methodological options are greatly expanded by Digital Humanities. By exposing extensive linguistic, thematic, and spatial patterns throughout vast literary corpora, computational methods like corpus linguistics, text mining, topic modelling, geospatial mapping, network analysis, digital visualization, and artificial intelligence enhance traditional close reading. In a similar vein, digital archives, oral histories, virtual museums, and community repositories democratize access to historical documents and cultural memory while preserving migrant voices. By tying fictional stories to real-life historical events and international cultural networks, these digital resources enhance literary interpretation.

However, algorithmic bias, copyright restrictions, data representation, interdisciplinary collaboration, and computational interpretation limitations are only a few of the methodological and ethical issues that come with digital literary study. A balanced research framework that keeps technological innovation rooted in critical humanistic inquiry is necessary to address these issues. Therefore, rather than taking the role of interpretative literary criticism, digital techniques should be viewed as supplementary analytical instruments. In conclusion, a major advancement in modern literary scholarship is the merging of digital humanities and migration studies. Scholars can examine migration narratives from more comprehensive comparative and transnational viewpoints while maintaining the interpretive depth necessary for literary analysis by fusing

computational approaches with well-established theoretical traditions. In addition to improving our comprehension of diaspora literature, this multidisciplinary synthesis adds to broader discussions about globalization, cultural memory, digital preservation, and intercultural communication. Future studies that integrate literary criticism, computational analysis, and collaborative digital scholarship will be crucial in furthering the study of migration, diaspora, and transnationalism in world literature as digital technologies develop.

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Healing Words: The Role of Parent-Child Communication in Emotional Well-Being and Trauma Recovery

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ABSTRACT

Parent-child communication plays an important role in children's emotional well-being, psychological resilience, and capacity to cope with difficult and traumatic experiences. This conceptual, literature-based study examines how empathetic, attentive, and non-judgmental communication can support children's emotional development and recovery, with particular attention to the principles of Carl Rogers' humanistic approach. Drawing on scholarship in Rogerian theory, attachment, developmental psychology, psychological resilience, trauma recovery, and parent-child communication, the study critically examines the relationships among empathy, active listening, emotional validation, unconditional positive regard, emotional regulation, and resilience. It further considers the relevance of these principles to trauma recovery, while distinguishing everyday parent-child communication from formal client-centred psychotherapy and evidence-based trauma interventions such as Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT). The study also examines the cultural dimensions of applying Rogerian communication principles, particularly in South Asian and broader Global South contexts where parenting practices may reflect interdependence, parental authority, collective family values, and culturally specific forms of emotional expression. The study argues that Rogerian principles can provide a useful conceptual framework for understanding supportive parent-child communication when they are adapted sensitively to cultural and situational contexts. Rather than claiming causal effectiveness, the study offers a theoretically informed synthesis of existing literature and highlights the potential of empathetic communication to contribute to emotional security, adaptive coping, psychological resilience, and supportive trauma recovery.

Keywords: Parent-child communication, Rogerian communication, Empathy, Active Listening, Emotional Validation, Psychological Resilience, Trauma Recovery, Emotional Well-being, Trauma-informed Parenting, South Asian parenting and Humanistic Psychology.

Communication is a fundamental aspect of parenting, shaping a child's emotional, cognitive, and social development. Effective parent-child communication fosters trust, strengthens relationships, and helps children navigate their emotions, build self-esteem, and develop resilience. When parents engage in open, respectful, and empathetic dialogue, children feel valued and understood, which enhances their psychological well-being.

Research on attachment and parent-child relationships emphasises the importance of sensitive and responsive parental interactions in supporting children's emotional security and development. In *A Secure Base: Parent-Child Attachment and Healthy Human Development*, John Bowlby stresses the importance of parental responsiveness, explaining that a secure relationship is fostered when a parent is "readily available, sensitive to her child's signals, and lovingly responsive" (124). Such responsiveness can provide children with a sense of security and encourage them to communicate their emotional needs more openly. Conversely, dismissive or insensitive interactions may make it more difficult for children to express their thoughts and feelings and seek emotional support. In the context of trauma recovery, effective communication is particularly important because children need a supportive environment in which they can express difficult emotions and receive reassurance. Trauma-informed parenting approaches that emphasise empathy, patience, and validation therefore share important principles with Rogerian communication, particularly the emphasis on understanding, attentive listening, acceptance, and unconditional positive regard.

Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish's work, *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk*, provides practical strategies that incorporate these principles. Their techniques, rooted in non-confrontational and empathetic communication, empower parents to create a supportive environment where children feel safe to express their emotions and develop problem-solving skills. By applying Rogerian communication strategies to parenting, this research explores how fostering open dialogue can enhance children's emotional well-being, facilitate trauma recovery, and strengthen parent-child relationships.

Parent-child communication plays a crucial role in shaping a child's emotional well-being, self-esteem, and ability to cope with challenges. However, many parents struggle with effective communication, often resorting to authoritarian, dismissive, or emotionally distant interactions that can hinder a child's emotional expression and psychological growth. This issue becomes even more critical when children experience trauma, as their ability to process emotions and seek support depends largely on the quality of communication they receive from caregivers. Rogerian communication principles, derived from Carl Rogers' humanistic and client-centred approach, emphasise empathy, attentive listening, acceptance, and non-judgmental interaction. While widely applied in therapy and conflict resolution, its potential for transforming parent-child relationships remains underexplored.

Although existing scholarship has extensively examined parent-child communication, emotional development, psychological resilience, attachment, and trauma-focused interventions, these areas are often discussed within separate theoretical and disciplinary frameworks. Research on parental communication frequently focuses on emotional development and family relationships, while trauma literature tends to emphasise clinical interventions and therapeutic outcomes. Similarly, Rogerian theory has been widely developed within the context of client-centred psychotherapy and humanistic psychology, but its core principles of empathy, active listening, acceptance, and unconditional positive regard have

received comparatively less conceptual attention as a framework for understanding everyday parent-child communication in the context of emotional well-being and trauma recovery. This study addresses this conceptual gap by bringing these strands of scholarship into dialogue. Rather than presenting Rogerian communication as a substitute for professional trauma therapy, the study examines how selected Rogerian principles may provide a useful conceptual lens for understanding supportive parental communication, particularly in relation to emotional validation, psychological resilience, and children's capacity to communicate and process difficult experiences. The contribution of the study therefore lies in developing a theoretically informed, literature-based synthesis that connects Rogerian communication principles with established research on parent-child relationships, resilience, and trauma recovery while maintaining a clear distinction between therapeutic practice and everyday family communication.

This study adopts a conceptual and literature-based approach to examine the role of parent-child communication in emotional well-being, psychological resilience, and trauma recovery. Rather than collecting primary empirical data through surveys, interviews, experiments, or clinical observations, the study critically engages with existing scholarly literature in psychology, child development, trauma studies, communication, and humanistic theory. The discussion draws particularly on the theoretical principles of Carl Rogers, attachment theory, research on psychological resilience, and literature on trauma-focused interventions to examine how empathetic, attentive, and non-judgmental parental communication may contribute to children's emotional development and recovery.

The study is interpretive and analytical in nature. Relevant scholarly sources are examined to identify recurring concepts, theoretical connections, and implications for parent-child communication. Particular attention is given to empathy, active listening, emotional validation, unconditional positive regard, emotional regulation, resilience, and supportive communication in the context of childhood trauma. The study therefore does not claim to establish causal relationships or provide new empirical evidence. Instead, it synthesises and critically interprets existing literature to develop a conceptual understanding of how Rogerian communication principles can inform parental communication practices and potentially contribute to children's emotional well-being and trauma recovery.

The study also distinguishes between Rogerian client-centred therapy as a formal therapeutic approach and the broader application of Rogerian communication principles in parent-child interactions. While the paper draws on concepts such as empathy, active listening, acceptance, and unconditional positive regard, it does not present ordinary parent-child communication as equivalent to professional psychotherapy. This distinction provides the conceptual foundation for examining the relevance and possible applications of Rogerian principles within family communication.

The research examines how Rogerian communication principles, as outlined in *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk*, contribute to building trust, emotional security, and resilience in children. It explores the role of empathetic listening and validation in helping children articulate their emotions, particularly in trauma recovery. Additionally, the study investigates the challenges parents face in implementing Rogerian communication and identifies strategies to overcome them. By analysing the application of Rogerian

communication techniques in parenting, this research aims to demonstrate how fostering open, empathetic, and non-judgmental dialogues can strengthen parent-child relationships and support children's emotional healing from trauma.

The application of Rogerian communication strategies, as outlined in *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk* by Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish, may support children's emotional resilience, fosters psychological well-being, and may contribute to supportive conditions associated with trauma recovery. By incorporating empathy, active listening, and unconditional positive regard, Rogerian communication helps parents create a supportive environment where children feel heard, understood, and emotionally secure. This study explores how these communication techniques strengthen parent-child relationships, empower children to express their emotions, and aid in processing trauma, contributing to their overall emotional and psychological development.

Rogerian communication principles, derived from Carl Rogers' humanistic and client-centred approach, emphasise understanding, empathy, and non-confrontational dialogue. Rooted in Rogerian Client-Centered Therapy, this communication model seeks to foster genuine, open, and respectful interactions, particularly in emotionally sensitive contexts such as parent-child relationships. The key principles of Rogerian communication include: Empathy, Active listening, and Unconditional positive regard.

Empathy is the ability to understand and share another person's feelings without judgment, playing a crucial role in parent-child communication. It involves recognising a child's emotions, validating their experiences, and responding with understanding rather than dismissal or correction. By helping children articulate their emotions through reflective listening, this empathetic approach encourages children to express themselves freely, enhances their self-awareness, and contributes to their emotional development.

Faber and Mazlish emphasise the importance of accepting children's emotions as a foundational step in fostering emotional resilience. They state, "You don't have to agree with your children's feelings, but you can accept them. A child who hears that his feelings are understandable will be more likely to work through them and move on" (14). This aligns with Rogerian principles by promoting empathy and emotional validation, allowing children to process their experiences without fear of judgment.

Active listening is a fundamental component of effective parent-child communication, requiring full concentration, understanding, and responsive engagement. It involves maintaining eye contact and open body language to convey attentiveness, paraphrasing or summarising a child's words to ensure comprehension, and refraining from immediate judgment, criticism, or unsolicited advice. By practicing active listening, parents create a supportive environment where children feel heard and valued, fostering emotional well-being and aiding in trauma recovery.

Active listening is a core component of Rogerian communication and is reflected in Faber and Mazlish's approach: "When a child feels hurt, angry, or scared, the most helpful response is to listen with full attention, acknowledge their feelings, and give them a name" (25). This technique helps children feel heard and understood, reducing emotional distress and fostering self-awareness. It further supports the idea that reflective dialogue strengthens emotional regulation and trust in caregivers.

Unconditional positive regard is the practice of accepting and respecting a child without conditions or judgment, fostering a supportive and nurturing parent-

child relationship. It involves providing emotional support regardless of a child's behaviour or mistakes, reassuring them that their emotions are valid even when they struggle to manage them, and replacing harsh criticism with guidance that encourages self-reflection and problem-solving. By embracing this principle, parents help nurture self-esteem, emotional resilience, and a sense of security, allowing children to develop confidence in their emotions and decision-making abilities.

Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish's *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk* is a widely recognised parenting guide that provides practical communication strategies to foster healthy parent-child relationships. The work emphasises empathetic, respectful, and non-confrontational dialogue, aligning closely with Rogerian communication principles such as empathy, active listening, and unconditional positive regard. Faber and Mazlish advocate for acknowledging children's feelings rather than dismissing them, engaging in collaborative problem-solving instead of imposing solutions, and encouraging children to express emotions safely and constructively. By applying these Rogerian communication strategies, parents can strengthen their relationship with their children, enhance their emotional resilience, and support their healing process after trauma.

Acknowledging children's feelings without judgment is a fundamental aspect of effective parent-child communication, reinforcing emotional validation and trust. Rather than dismissing or trivialising a child's emotions with statements like "It's not a big deal" or "Stop crying," parents should acknowledge and validate their child's feelings. This approach helps children feel understood, fostering emotional intelligence, self-awareness, and a stronger sense of trust in their parents, supporting their emotional well-being and development.

One of the key principles of both Rogerian communication and the work is distinguishing between accepting emotions and condoning behaviour. As Faber and Mazlish explain, "All feelings can be accepted. Certain actions must be limited" (41). This approach allows children to express their emotions freely while learning appropriate behavioural responses, reinforcing the balance between empathy and boundary-setting.

Engaging in active listening is a crucial communication technique that fosters trust and strengthens parent-child relationships. Parents should listen attentively, paraphrase their child's words, and respond with empathy to ensure the child feels heard and understood. This approach validates the child's emotions, encourages open emotional expression, and reinforces a secure, trusting bond between parent and child, promoting emotional resilience and self-confidence.

Offering choices instead of commands is an effective communication strategy that fosters cooperation and independence in children. This approach empowers children by giving them a sense of control over their decisions, reducing resistance and minimising power struggles. By allowing children to make choices within set boundaries, parents encourage autonomy while still guiding behaviour, fostering a sense of responsibility and cooperation rather than defiance.

Encouraging problem-solving instead of punishment is a constructive approach that fosters self-discipline, responsibility, and emotional resilience in children. When conflicts arise, rather than imposing punitive measures, parents can involve children in discussions to identify challenges and find solutions collaboratively. This method encourages children to reflect on their difficulties, develop problem-solving skills, and take responsibility for their actions, strengthening their ability to navigate challenges independently.

Rather than using punitive measures, Faber and Mazlish advocate for guiding children toward independent problem-solving: "Instead of punishment, we can encourage children to think for themselves about how to make amends" (102). This aligns with Rogerian principles of fostering autonomy and personal growth through supportive dialogue, rather than enforcing compliance through authoritarian control.

A fundamental tenet of Rogerian communication is unconditional positive regard, which Faber and Mazlish echo in their parenting philosophy: "Children need to know they are loved and accepted no matter what. It is possible to disapprove of a child's behavior without making the child feel unloved" (145). By separating behaviour from identity, parents can maintain a child's self-worth while still guiding them toward positive actions.

Using descriptive praise instead of generalised compliments is an effective way to reinforce positive behaviour and build a child's self-esteem without fostering dependence on external validation. Rather than offering vague praise such as "You're such a good kid," parents should highlight specific actions that demonstrate responsibility or effort which provides clear feedback that encourages the child to continue the behaviour. By focusing on specific accomplishments, descriptive praise helps children recognise their own strengths, develop intrinsic motivation, and build confidence in their abilities.

Instead of using generalised praise, Faber and Mazlish advocate for descriptive feedback that helps children develop self-awareness: "Instead of evaluating children with general praise, describe what they did so they can evaluate themselves" (173). This method aligns with Rogerian principles by encouraging intrinsic motivation rather than reliance on external validation.

The communication techniques outlined in *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk* closely align with Rogerian principles by fostering a supportive, empathetic, and non-judgmental environment. By emphasising active listening, emotional validation, problem-solving, and descriptive praise, these strategies enable parents to build stronger emotional connections with their children. Such an approach not only enhances resilience but also plays a crucial role in trauma recovery by creating a safe space for open and compassionate communication. Through these Rogerian-based techniques, parents can support their children's emotional well-being and nurture a secure and trusting relationship.

Research on resilience in trauma-exposed children emphasises that resilience is a dynamic process of positive adaptation that can be influenced by supportive relationships and appropriate interventions. In her article "Ordinary Magic: Resilience Processes in Development," Ann S. Masten explains that resilience involves "a dynamic system that encompasses individual, family, and community processes" (Masten 492). This perspective highlights the importance of supportive relationships and social environments in helping children adapt to adversity. In the context of trauma recovery, both macro-level interventions, such as community resources and social support systems, and micro-level strategies, including supportive family relationships and effective parent-child communication, can contribute to resilience. Empathetic and open communication can therefore provide children with emotional support and a sense of security, helping them process difficult experiences and develop adaptive responses to adversity.

The long-term impact of Rogerian communication in parenting is reflected in Faber and Mazlish's assertion: "The way we talk to our children becomes

their inner voice" (199). This statement explores the significance of emotionally supportive communication in shaping a child's self-perception and resilience, reinforcing the broader psychological impact of Rogerian principles in child development.

Research has consistently indicated that parent-child communication can play an important role in children's psychological resilience. In the study "Left-Behind Children, Parent-Child Communication and Psychological Resilience: A Structural Equation Modeling Analysis," Zhou et al. found that "good parent communication is related to better psychological resilience." The study, which examined 1,992 adolescents, further showed that better psychological resilience was associated with fewer psychological problems (Zhou et al.). These findings support the importance of supportive parent-child communication in helping children adapt to emotional and environmental challenges. Such communication is consistent with Rogerian principles of empathy, active listening, acceptance, and nonjudgmental understanding. By creating an environment in which children feel heard and emotionally supported, parents can strengthen the sense of security that may contribute to resilience. These findings also provide empirical support for examining the communication techniques presented in *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk* as practical approaches that may strengthen parent-child relationships and support children's emotional development.

Research on the relationship between parental communication and psychological resilience highlights the significant influence of parental attitudes on adolescent resilience and emotional well-being. A review of studies conducted between 2008 and 2023 indicates that positive communication and emotional support play a crucial role in fostering resilience in children. Additionally, authoritative and empathetic parenting styles are strongly correlated with higher levels of psychological resilience, suggesting that open, supportive, and responsive communication helps children navigate emotional challenges more effectively. This literature supports the argument of nurturing parent-child interactions in promoting long-term psychological well-being.

Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT) is an evidence-based intervention for children and adolescents who have experienced traumatic events. In their article "Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for Children and Parents," Cohen and Mannarino explain that TF-CBT involves both children and parents in the therapeutic process and incorporates parenting skills, stress-management techniques, emotional regulation, cognitive coping, trauma processing, and conjoint parent-child sessions (158 - 162). In their later review, "Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavior Therapy for Traumatized Children and Families," Cohen and Mannarino further emphasise the importance of involving parents or caregivers in the treatment process and supporting children in processing trauma-related emotions and experiences (557 - 570). These principles have relevance to Rogerian communication because both approaches emphasise emotional support, acceptance, and a supportive environment in which children can express and process difficult experiences.

Research on parental mindful communication and adolescent resilience highlights the importance of mindful parenting in fostering emotional stability in children. Studies on family resilience frameworks indicate that parents who practice active listening and employ Rogerian communication strategies, such as unconditional positive regard, significantly enhance their children's coping mechanisms and mental health. By creating a supportive and empathetic environment, mindful communication helps children navigate emotional challenges more effectively,

reinforcing resilience and overall psychological well-being. The literature reviewed highlights the potential relevance of Rogerian principles in strengthening parent-child relationships and promoting long-term emotional health.

The literature reviewed supports the argument that Rogerian communication principles may provide a useful framework for understanding supportive parent-child communication and its potential relevance to psychological resilience and trauma-related adjustment. The emphasis on empathy, active listening, and emotional validation aligns with existing psychological research, demonstrating the crucial role of supportive communication in fostering emotional well-being. By creating a nurturing and non-judgmental environment, Rogerian techniques provide a valuable framework for understanding parent-child communication, strengthening relationships and promoting long-term psychological health in children.

Despite extensive research on parent-child communication, trauma recovery, and psychological resilience, a gap remains in the direct application of Rogerian communication theory to parenting strategies. While Carl Rogers' principles of empathy, active listening, and unconditional positive regard have been widely studied in therapeutic and conflict resolution contexts, their explicit integration into parenting models remains underexplored. Further research is needed to examine how Rogerian communication can be systematically applied in parenting to enhance emotional security, resilience, and trauma recovery in children, bridging the gap between psychological theory and practical family dynamics.

Existing studies primarily focus on the role of parent-child communication in fostering emotional security, the impact of authoritative and empathetic parenting styles on resilience, and psychological interventions such as Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT) for trauma recovery. However, research rarely connects Rogerian principles to everyday parenting techniques, particularly in addressing children's emotional development and trauma recovery. This study aims to bridge that gap by examining how the communication strategies in *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk* embody Rogerian principles and contribute to effective parenting, emotional resilience, and psychological well-being in children.

Faber and Mazlish's communication strategies in *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk* closely reflect Rogerian communication principles by promoting empathy, active listening, and unconditional positive regard. Their approach emphasises acknowledging and validating children's emotions rather than dismissing them, creating a supportive environment where children feel heard and understood. Through non-judgmental listening and reflecting a child's feelings, parents foster emotional security and encourage open dialogue. By accepting a child's emotions without criticism, parents build trust and openness, reinforcing the core Rogerian belief that unconditional positive regard is essential for healthy emotional development and resilience.

Empathy and validation are central to both Rogerian theory and Faber and Mazlish's approach, emphasising the importance of recognising emotions before offering solutions. Encouraging emotional expression rather than suppressing feelings helps children develop self-awareness and emotional intelligence. Through non-judgmental dialogue, parents create a sense of security and resilience in their children. Applying these techniques may contribute to supportive relational conditions relevant to trauma-related adjustment.

Empathy and active listening are fundamental to fostering emotional intelligence in children. Parents

who consistently validate their children's emotions through active listening can contribute to greater emotional intelligence and long-term psychological well-being. These findings highlight the effectiveness of Rogerian communication strategies, as discussed in Faber and Mazlish's work, which advocates acknowledging children's feelings before offering solutions. By validating emotions, parents not only strengthen the parent-child bond but also help children develop self-awareness and emotional regulation.

Active listening and reflective dialogue are essential for emotional healing and resilience in children. According to Rogerian communication theory, these techniques help children feel heard and validated, reducing emotional distress and fostering psychological well-being. By engaging in empathetic listening, parents support the development of self-awareness, enabling children to regulate their emotions more effectively. Reflective dialogue builds trust between children and caregivers, creating a secure environment crucial for trauma recovery. When parents paraphrase their child's words and respond with empathy, they establish a safe emotional space that encourages open expression, allowing children to articulate their feelings rather than suppress them.

The role of parental communication in trauma recovery is important in supporting children who have experienced distressing or traumatic events. Cohen and Mannarino explain that Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (TF-CBT) incorporates parents into the therapeutic process and provides children with stress-management skills before encouraging direct discussion and processing of traumatic experiences. The approach also includes parenting skills, emotional regulation, cognitive coping, trauma processing, and conjoint child-parent sessions. These principles emphasise the importance of creating a supportive environment in which children can express and process difficult emotions. Such an approach also aligns with Rogerian communication, which encourages children to communicate their feelings in an accepting and non-judgmental environment (Cohen and Mannarino 158–162).

Faber and Mazlish's *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk* provides real-life scenarios where empathetic communication transforms parent-child interactions, aligning closely with Rogerian principles. For instance, when a child expresses anger after school, instead of dismissing their frustration, a parent acknowledges their feelings by saying, "It sounds like you had a rough day," fostering emotional validation. Similarly, when a child is upset over a lost toy, rather than minimizing their distress with "It's just a toy," the parent validates their emotions by responding, "You're really sad because you loved that toy." In moments of academic struggle, rather than resorting to scolding, parents engage in problem-solving by asking, "Let's figure out what's making this difficult." These examples illustrate how acceptance, empathy, and non-judgmental dialogue create a supportive emotional environment, promoting resilience and reducing psychological distress in children.

Rogerian communication fosters psychological resilience by encouraging open emotional expression without fear of criticism, allowing children to articulate their feelings freely. Through unconditional positive regard, parents strengthen a child's self-worth, reinforcing their sense of security and emotional stability. By guiding children through their emotions rather than suppressing them, Rogerian techniques may support the development of adaptive coping strategies, promoting long-term resilience. By integrating these principles into parenting, Faber and Mazlish's approach may contribute to supportive

relational conditions relevant to children's adjustment following adversity and trauma.

While Rogerian communication offers significant benefits, several practical challenges can hinder its consistent application in parenting. Time constraints pose a major barrier, as busy schedules and daily stress may prevent parents from fully engaging in active listening. Parents managing their own stress or unresolved trauma may struggle to maintain unconditional positive regard, impacting their ability to respond empathetically. Cultural expectations also play a role, as some parenting traditions emphasise authority and discipline over open, empathetic communication, making Rogerian techniques seem less effective or unfamiliar. Furthermore, children's developmental stages present challenges; younger children may lack the verbal skills necessary for reflective dialogue, while teenagers may resist open conversations, requiring parents to adapt their approach.

Several situational factors can influence the effectiveness of Rogerian communication in parenting. The severity of trauma plays a critical role, as children experiencing severe trauma or PTSD may require professional therapy beyond parental support. Family dynamics also impact implementation; in high-conflict households or cases of divorce, maintaining consistent empathetic communication can be challenging. External influences such as school environments, peer interactions, and media exposure shape children's communication patterns, potentially limiting parental influence. Despite these challenges, increased awareness and adaptation of Rogerian principles can still enhance parent-child relationships, fostering emotional security and resilience even in difficult circumstances.

The conceptual analysis suggests that Rogerian communication principles, empathy, active listening, and unconditional positive regard, closely align with Faber & Mazlish's parenting strategies, fostering emotional resilience and aiding trauma recovery in children. By validating emotions, engaging in non-judgmental dialogue, and encouraging open communication, parents create a supportive and secure environment that nurtures their child's psychological well-being. The analysis indicates that these techniques not only strengthen parent-child relationships but also equip children with essential coping mechanisms to navigate emotional challenges effectively.

The conceptual analysis has implications across multiple domains. In parenting, the adoption of Rogerian communication strategies encourages emotionally intelligent interactions, helping children express their feelings and navigate challenges with greater confidence. In psychology, the study reinforces the relevance of Rogerian therapy in family dynamics, offering non-clinical tools for trauma recovery and emotional well-being. In education, these insights suggest that schools should integrate empathy-based communication strategies to support students' emotional growth, creating a more nurturing and psychologically safe learning environment.

While Rogerian communication principles may be relevant across cultural contexts, their application requires sensitivity to differences in family relationships and expectations. "A Cross-Cultural Study of the Effect of Parental Bonding on the Perception and Response to Criticism in Singapore, Italy and USA," published in *PLOS ONE*, demonstrates that parental bonding is associated with how criticism is perceived and experienced across cultural settings. Such findings suggest that parent-child communication cannot be separated from culturally shaped expectations concerning parental relationships, emotional responses, and interpersonal interaction (Neoh et al.). Consequently, principles such as empathy, acceptance, and attentive listening

should be adapted to particular family and cultural contexts rather than transferred uncritically from Western psychological models.

The cultural application of parent-child communication also requires attention to South Asian and broader Global South contexts, where family relationships may be shaped by interdependence, respect for elders, collective family responsibilities, and culturally specific expectations concerning emotional expression. Cross-cultural research has demonstrated that parenting orientations may differ in their emphasis on independence and interdependence, emotional self-control, and expressions of parental affection. Such differences are important when considering the application of communication principles developed primarily within Western psychological traditions. In some South Asian family contexts, parental authority and guidance may be understood as expressions of care and responsibility rather than as incompatible with emotional support. Consequently, applying Rogerian principles such as empathy, active listening, and unconditional positive regard requires cultural sensitivity rather than a direct transfer of Western therapeutic models. The aim should not be to replace culturally established forms of parenting but to examine how supportive communication can be incorporated within diverse family structures and value systems. A culturally responsive approach can therefore retain the central importance of children feeling heard and emotionally understood while recognising that the ways in which care, respect, authority, affection, and emotional expression are communicated may vary across families and communities. This perspective extends the discussion beyond predominantly Western psychological frameworks and strengthens the relevance of the study to South Asian and other Global South contexts.

Parenting and parent–child communication should also be understood within their specific cultural and social contexts. In some South Asian family contexts, parental authority and guidance may be closely connected with expectations of respect, family responsibility, and interdependence. Research involving Indian mothers highlights the importance of culturally situated socialization goals in understanding parenting practices, demonstrating that parenting behaviours are shaped by culturally specific values and expectations (Rao, McHale, and Pearson). Such cultural considerations suggest that communication approaches developed primarily within Western individualistic frameworks should be adapted sensitively to the relational expectations and family values of South Asian contexts. Such findings suggest that communication approaches developed primarily within Western individualistic frameworks should be applied with sensitivity to culturally specific expectations concerning family relationships, responsibility, and child development.

Thus, behaviours that may be interpreted primarily as controlling or restrictive within Western parenting frameworks may, in some South Asian contexts, also be associated with parental responsibility, protection, and the transmission of family values. At the same time, this cultural perspective should not be used to romanticize authoritarian practices or overlook their potential effects on children's emotional well-being. A culturally responsive understanding of parenting therefore requires attention to both the protective and potentially restrictive dimensions of parental authority.

The present conceptual analysis establishes that parent–child communication plays an important relational role in children's emotional well-being and may contribute to the supportive conditions associated with coping and adjustment following adverse or traumatic experiences. Across the literature

examined, communication characterized by warmth, responsiveness, emotional availability, validation, and openness can help children develop a greater sense of emotional security and facilitate the expression and understanding of difficult emotions. At the same time, the analysis indicates that the effects of communication cannot be separated from broader parenting practices, family relationships, developmental contexts, and sociocultural expectations.

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in bringing together perspectives from parenting research, emotional development, family communication, and trauma-informed approaches to conceptualize parent–child communication as a relational dimension of emotional well-being. Rather than treating communication as an isolated behavioural technique, the paper positions it within the wider parent–child relationship and emphasizes the ways in which everyday interactions may shape children's emotional experiences and coping capacities. The discussion of Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy further demonstrates the importance of distinguishing supportive family communication from evidence-based clinical trauma treatment. Parent–child communication may provide relational support for children affected by trauma, but it should not be understood as a standalone intervention for trauma recovery.

The study also contributes a South Asian and broader Global South perspective by emphasizing that understandings of parenting and communication are shaped by cultural values, family structures, interdependence, respect for elders, parental responsibility, and culturally specific forms of emotional expression. Parenting practices should therefore not be evaluated exclusively through Western individualistic frameworks. At the same time, cultural contextualization should not lead to the uncritical acceptance of restrictive or authoritarian practices. A culturally responsive approach requires attention to both the supportive and potentially constraining dimensions of parental authority and communication.

As a conceptual, literature-based study, this paper does not claim to establish causal relationships between particular communication practices and children's emotional outcomes, nor does it claim that supportive communication independently produces trauma recovery. Its purpose is instead to synthesize existing conceptual and empirical scholarship and develop a contextually sensitive understanding of the potential role of parent–child communication in emotional well-being and trauma-related adjustment. The arguments presented here therefore require further empirical examination across diverse populations and family contexts.

Future research should investigate these relationships through longitudinal, qualitative, and mixed-methods studies involving families from different South Asian and Global South settings. Particular attention should be given to how children themselves experience parental warmth, authority, emotional expression, discipline, and communication; how these experiences vary across cultural, socioeconomic, and developmental contexts; and how supportive family communication interacts with professional trauma-focused interventions. Comparative research could also examine whether established Western models of parenting and emotional development adequately capture culturally specific patterns of parent–child interaction. Such research would strengthen the empirical foundation for culturally responsive approaches to parenting, family communication, emotional well-being, and trauma-informed support.

Overall, the central argument of this paper is not that communication alone heals trauma, but that sensitive, responsive, and culturally informed parent–child

communication can provide an important relational foundation for children's emotional well-being and may complement appropriate professional support when trauma-related difficulties are present.

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Social Stock Exchange as an Additional Financing Mechanism for Government Autonomous Bodies in India: A Conceptual Analysis

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ABSTRACT

India's Social Stock Exchange (SSE), operationalised by the Securities and Exchange Board of India in 2022 as a segment of the National and the Bombay Stock Exchange, was designed to convert fragmented philanthropy into a regulated, transparent channel of social finance. While early listings were dominated by grassroots not-for-profits, the growing registration of government-affiliated autonomous bodies, including the National Backward Classes Finance & Development Corporation and the Maharashtra Economic Development Council, signals the SSE's evolution into mainstream public-purpose infrastructure. This conceptual paper examines why autonomous bodies, ministry-affiliated institutions, and public-purpose entities should consider SSE membership as an additional, self-sustaining source of finance for projects and innovation, given constrained grant-in-aid allocations and the Government of India's Minimum Government, Maximum Governance philosophy. Drawing on secondary sources of SEBI circulars and regulatory frameworks, SSE and stock exchange listing disclosures, annual reports of registered entities, government policy documents, and published case studies, the paper analyses the SSE's eligibility architecture, its two-step registration and listing process, key funding instruments (Zero Coupon Zero Principal bonds, Development Impact Bonds, Social Impact Funds), and the 2025–2026 reforms linking CSR spending to the SSE. It presents a stakeholder-wise assessment of advantages for autonomous bodies,

ministries, the exchange, and donors, alongside a sequential institutional roadmap and synthesis of precedent cases.

Keywords: Social Stock Exchange, Autonomous Bodies, Social Finance, Social Funding Instruments, Corporate Social Responsibility

1. Introduction

India's federal and administrative architecture relies extensively on autonomous bodies that are statutory corporations, productivity and skill councils, backward-classes and minority finance corporations, khadi and village industries boards, economic development councils, and analogous public-purpose institutions established under central and state ministries to implement thematic national missions in skill development, productivity enhancement, rural livelihoods, financial inclusion, and social welfare (Ministry of Finance, 2019; Securities and Exchange Board of India, 2021). These institutions have traditionally depended on annual budgetary grants-in-aid, plan and non-plan allocations, and periodic ministry sanctions for both operational continuity and project-based expansion. Such allocations, however, remain subject to fiscal consolidation pressures, competing budgetary priorities, and multi-year uncertainty, thereby constraining the ability of public purpose institutional bodies to pursue innovative, thematic, or pilot-stage initiatives falling outside sanctioned budget heads. Therefore, these bodies are increasingly moving towards generating their own internal revenue through their social impact projects. Concurrently, the Government of India's stated governance philosophy of Minimum Government, Maximum Governance (MGMG) has directed public institutions toward greater operational and financial self-reliance, output-linked functioning, and a facilitative rather than purely disbursing role for the exchequer. Within this policy environment, alternative, transparent, and self-sustaining sources of finance acquire particular strategic value for autonomous bodies seeking to reduce dependence on recurring budgetary support while retaining, and indeed strengthening, their public-purpose mandate. Against this backdrop, the Social Stock Exchange (SSE) was first proposed in the Union Budget for FY 2019-20 as an electronic fund-raising platform intended to bring the structure, discipline, and transparency of capital markets to social financing (Ministry of Finance, 2019), and operationalised under the regulatory ambit of the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) from 2022 onward as a distinct segment of the National Stock Exchange (NSE) and the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE). The SSE permits both Not-for-Profit Organisations (NPOs) and For-Profit Social Enterprises (FPEs) to register and raise funds through specially designed instruments, including Zero Coupon Zero Principal (ZCZP) bonds, Development Impact Bonds (DIBs), and Social Impact Funds (SIFs) (KPMG, 2022).

The inception of the SSE and the extant literature, are written predominantly from the vantage point of grassroots, independent NPOs, with comparatively limited scholarly attention devoted to the participation of larger, government-affiliated autonomous bodies formed as statutory corporations. This omission is notable given that the National Backward Classes Finance & Development Corporation, and state-level bodies such as the Maharashtra Economic Development Council, have already registered on the exchange, establishing a clear precedent that public-purpose institutional participation is both permissible and actively encouraged (National Stock Exchange of India, 2025; Business Standard, 2023). A research gap therefore exists between the substantial body of

work addressing SSE eligibility criteria and listing architecture for grassroots organisations, and the comparatively thin treatment of why and how autonomous bodies affiliated with central and state ministries should evaluate SSE membership as a strategic, self-sustaining financing channel. This paper addresses that gap by developing a conceptual, stakeholder-inclusive framework encompassing the rationale for enrolment, precedent cases, eligibility and procedural requirements, a sequential institutional roadmap, and an assessment of the benefits for autonomous bodies considering their participation in SSE.

The rigour of this paper rests on its systematic reliance on documented regulatory sources, including SEBI circulars, exchange listing disclosures, and government policy statements, triangulated with precedent case studies of registered autonomous bodies and a structured, stakeholder-wise analytical framework spanning autonomous bodies, ministries, the exchange, and donors. Its novelty lies in reframing the SSE not as a platform exclusively suited to grassroots philanthropy, but as an emerging instrument of public financial management for statutory and government-affiliated autonomous institutions, a perspective that, to date, has not been systematically articulated in the existing literature. By situating the SSE within the specific institutional context of bodies that receive periodic, project-linked grants rather than fully assured recurring budgetary support, and that are simultaneously expected under the MGMG doctrine to demonstrate measurable outcomes while reducing marginal dependence on the exchequer, the paper advances a targeted and hitherto underexamined line of inquiry.

The contributions of this paper are fourfold. First, it articulates a conceptual rationale for autonomous body participation in the SSE, clarifying that the exchange is intended for additional, rather than substitute, existing government funding for a defined category of thematic, innovation-oriented, or pilot-stage work. Second, it consolidates and analyses the SSE's eligibility architecture, two-step registration and listing process, and principal funding instruments in a manner directly applicable to autonomous bodies. Third, it presents a stakeholder-wise assessment of advantages and enablers, alongside a sequential institutional roadmap and a synthesis of precedent cases, offering practical guidance to an institution's finance, planning, and governing-body functions. Fourth, by examining the 2025-2026 regulatory reforms linking Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) expenditure to the SSE, the paper contributes a timely, forward-looking perspective on the evolving regulatory landscape and its implications for public-purpose financing in India.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Conceptual Foundations of Social Stock Exchanges

Social enterprise as a phenomenon predates the SSE by more than a century, with roots traceable to Victorian-era worker cooperatives (Patel & Patel, 2022). Contemporary literature on social stock exchanges frames them as innovative financing mechanisms that reduce reliance on erratic corporate grants, uncoordinated individual philanthropy, and restrictive foreign contributions, replacing them with structured, rated, and disclosure-driven capital flows (Asian Development Bank, 2012). The Asian Development Bank's early studies on Asia's social capital markets found a positive influence of social stock exchange-type platforms on the willingness of intermediaries to participate in impact investing, based on primary research across India, Bangladesh, and Thailand (Asian Development Bank. 2011). Patel and Patel's conceptual analysis of India's proposed SSE similarly concluded that the exchange is intended to transform a habit of charity into a culture of social

investment, positioning the SSE as a means for capital markets to serve society (Patel & Patel, 2022; Balasubramaniam, 2023; Mehra & Vij, 2023).

2.2. Participation by Government Autonomous Bodies

The bulk of published commentary and practitioner literature on India's SSE addresses eligibility, disclosure, and instrument design from the standpoint of independent, grassroots NPOs and FPEs (KPMG, 2022; Taxguru, 2026). Comparatively, little conceptual work has examined the specific opportunities facing autonomous bodies and statutory corporations. These entities already receive government grants, operate under ministry oversight, and possess an existing public accountability architecture in deciding whether to pursue SSE membership as an additional financing channel. This is a meaningful gap because such institutions face a distinct set of considerations: alignment with existing budgetary and audit frameworks, compatibility of their legal form with SSE eligibility norms, reputational considerations of appearing alongside grassroots NPOs on a public exchange, and the strategic opportunity to access CSR-linked and individual donor capital pools that are largely untapped by their traditional grant mechanisms.

2.3. Global Social Stock Exchange Models

International experience with social stock exchanges offers useful comparative context. The United Kingdom's Ethex, launched in 2003, was among the earliest social investment marketplaces. Brazil's Bolsa de Valores Socioambientais (2003) and Portugal's Bolsa de Valores Sociais (2009) were housed within existing stock exchanges as crowdfunding-style platforms but subsequently became inactive, while Jamaica's Social Stock Exchange (2019), Singapore's Impact Exchange (2013), and Canada's Social Venture Connexion (SVX, 2013) remain active (Patel & Patel, 2022). A review of 150 global impact platforms - including SASIX, SSX, BVSA, and SVX - found that 53% of such platforms were unable to finance their own operating costs, 61.5% depended on grant funding, and roughly 60% had fewer than 1,000 users, underlining that even mature markets have struggled with the sustainability of social exchange infrastructure (Patel & Patel, 2022). Unlike most of these international models, which function largely as passive information directories connecting investors to for-profit social enterprises, India's SSE is distinctive in permitting both listing and trading of dedicated donative instruments (ZCZP) for NPOs, alongside conventional equity and debt routes for FPEs (Patel & Patel, 2022; KPMG, 2022).

2.4. Minimum Government, Maximum Governance and Institutional Self-Reliance

The MGMG doctrine, while primarily articulated as an administrative reform philosophy, carries direct implications for the financing strategy of autonomous bodies. It favours diversified, non-exchequer revenue mobilisation, output and impact-linked accountability, and reduced procedural friction in accessing capital, all of which align closely with the SSE's designed features of standardised impact reporting, mandatory social audit, and instrument-linked project financing (Securities and Exchange Board of India, 2021; KPMG, 2022). This paper situates its analysis at the intersection of these two under-connected bodies of thought: SSE architecture, and public administration philosophy on institutional self-reliance.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Problem Statement

Government-affiliated autonomous bodies across sectors of skill development, productivity enhancement, backward-classes welfare, and regional economic development frequently report that annual grant-in-aid allocations are insufficient to fund

thematic, innovation-oriented, or multi-year initiatives beyond their core sanctioned mandate. At the same time, India faces a substantial and well-documented financing gap in meeting its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030, estimated at close to USD 560 billion annually against a total requirement of roughly USD 1 trillion per year (Parekh et al., 2021; Standard Chartered, 2020). Traditional donor and CSR channels alone cannot close this gap. While the SSE has been operational since 2022 and has accumulated a growing body of registration and fundraising precedent, there is no consolidated, decision-oriented framework that autonomous bodies can use to evaluate whether, why, and how to pursue SSE membership. This conceptual paper addresses the question: What is the strategic rationale, process, and stakeholder impact of SSE membership for autonomous bodies that predominantly focus on social development in India, and what are the associated benefits?

3.2. Study Objectives

- To examine the rationale for government-affiliated autonomous bodies to enrol as members on India's Social Stock Exchange.
- To document precedent cases of government-affiliated bodies already registered on the SSE and draw institutional lessons from them.
- To consolidate the eligibility criteria, documentation requirements, cost structure, and registration-to-listing process applicable to such institutions.
- To propose a sequential institutional roadmap for autonomous bodies considering SSE membership.
- To evaluate the advantages of participation of autonomous bodies in SSE from the perspective of different stakeholders (autonomous body, the sponsoring ministry, the exchange, and donors/investors).
- To assess how recent (2025-2026) regulatory reforms alter the strategic case for institutional membership.

3.3. Research Design and Sources

This is a conceptual, descriptive study relying entirely on secondary sources: SEBI Technical Group and Working Group reports, SEBI/NSE/BSE circulars and brochures, Ministry of Corporate Affairs gazette notifications, published case studies and deal notes on completed SSE issuances, financial and business press coverage, and existing peer-reviewed literature on social stock exchanges. Data were compiled, structured, and analysed thematically to build the rationale, process framework, and stakeholder assessment presented in this paper. As a conceptual paper, no primary survey or interview-based data collection was undertaken; the study synthesises publicly available secondary information current as of July 2026.

3.4. Scope and Limitations of the Research Method

As a conceptual and descriptive study, this paper does not undertake primary data collection through surveys, interviews, or financial modelling of any specific autonomous body; its findings on eligibility, cost, and process are therefore indicative rather than institution-specific and should be independently verified by any institution proceeding toward actual registration. The analysis is also time-bound to publicly available information as of July 2026, in a regulatory environment that has changed materially even within the preceding twelve months; readers should treat quantitative figures on cost, thresholds, and fund-raising scale as indicative of the environment prevailing at the time of writing rather than as fixed parameters.

4. Understanding India's Social Stock Exchange

4.1. Background and Evolution

The concept of an SSE was first announced by the Union Finance Minister in the Budget Speech for FY 2019-20 as an electronic fund-raising platform for listing social enterprises and voluntary organisations (Ministry of Finance, 2019). Following recommendations of a Working Group and a Technical Group constituted by SEBI in 2020, the regulatory framework was formalised through amendments to the SEBI (Issue of Capital and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations and the SEBI (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations (Securities and Exchange Board of India, 2021). The first ZCZP issuance was completed in 2022 by the SGBS Unnati Foundation, and the ecosystem has since grown steadily, both in the number of registered entities and in the scale of funds mobilised (Table 1).

Table 1: Growth of the SSE Ecosystem in India

Period	NPOs Registered (NSE+BSE)	NPOs that Raised Funds	Cumulative Funds Raised
As of September 2023	42 (combined)	1 (SGBS Unnati Foundation)	~Rs 1.8 crore
As of April 2024	101 (51 NSE + 50 BSE)	9	~Rs 12.4 crore
As of May 2026	176 (92 NSE + 84 BSE)	11	Individual raises now up to Rs 10 crore+

Source: Compiled by authors (Ministry of Finance, 2019; Bombay Stock Exchange, n.d.; National Stock Exchange, n.d; Zerodha Varsity, n.d; ; Taxguru, 2026).

4.2. Regulatory Architecture

The SSE functions as a separate, dedicated segment under existing recognised stock exchanges (NSE-SSE and BSE-SSE) and is governed by SEBI (Securities and Exchange Board of India, 2021; KPMG, 2022). It is not a standalone exchange but rides on the infrastructure, trading terminals, and settlement systems of the main exchanges while operating under a distinct disclosure and listing regime tailored to social enterprises.

4.3. Classification of Social Enterprises

SEBI classifies eligible participants into two legal formats, summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: NPOs versus FPEs on the SSE

Attribute	Not-for-Profit Organisations (NPOs)	For-Profit Social Enterprises (FPEs)
Legal form	Charitable trusts, societies registered under state Societies Registration Acts, Section 8 companies (and, since September 2025, Section 25 erstwhile companies and Indian Registration Act trusts)	Private/public limited companies, LLPs with a legally binding triple-bottom-line orientation
Registration	Compulsory (Darpan ID, 12A/12AA/12AB, 80G)	Not separately required beyond standard company registration
Instruments	ZCZP bonds, DIBs, Social Impact Funds, mutual-fund route	Equity shares, debt/social bonds, units of Impact Mutual Funds
Nature of return	Zero financial return - functionally a regulated donation	Blended return - social impact plus conventional equity/debt return
Listing venue	Separate SSE segment	Main board / SME / Innovators Growth Platform

Source: Compiled by authors (KPMG, 2022; Kumar, 2026).

4.4. Eligibility: Thematic Areas and the 67% Predominance Test

To register as a social enterprise, an entity must demonstrate that its core operations fall within one of sixteen broad thematic areas notified by SEBI, drawn from Schedule VII of the Companies Act, 2013, the Sustainable Development Goals, and Niti Aayog priority areas (Securities and Exchange Board of India, 2021). These include eradicating hunger, poverty, and malnutrition; promoting healthcare and sanitation; advancing education, employability, and livelihoods; promoting gender equality and empowerment of women; environmental sustainability; protection of national heritage, art, and culture; promotion of rural and recognised sports; support to incubators of social enterprises; disaster management; financial inclusion; bridging the digital divide; and any other area identified by SEBI or the Government of India from time to time.

Beyond thematic alignment, an entity must satisfy at least one of three numeric predominance thresholds over the preceding three years: at least 67% of revenue derived from eligible activities to the target population; at least 67% of expenditure incurred on eligible activities; or at least 67% of the customer/beneficiary base comprising the target population (KPMG, 2022; Kumar, 2026). Corporate foundations primarily funded by a parent corporate entity, political or religious organisations or activities, professional or trade associations, and infrastructure or housing companies (barring affordable housing) are explicitly excluded from registering as social enterprises (Securities and Exchange Board of India, 2021).

4.5. Financing Instruments

Table 3: Permissible Financing Instruments on the SSE

Legal Format	Eligible Instruments	Nature of Investment
NPOs	Zero Coupon Zero Principal (ZCZP) bonds; Development Impact Bonds (DIBs); Specialised/Social Impact Fund (SIF) schemes; mutual-fund-like pooled route	Purely philanthropic/social capital; zero financial return of principal or interest - functionally a regulated donation
FPEs	Public issue of equity shares (main board/SME/IGP); debt securities (social bonds); units of Impact Mutual Funds; issue to Alternative Investment Funds including Social Impact Funds	Blended-return capital combining verifiable social impact with conventional equity/debt returns

Source: Compiled by authors (Securities and Exchange Board of India, 2021; KPMG, 2022; Kumar, 2026; Taxguru, 2026).

The ZCZP instrument is the primary route for NPOs. It is project-linked rather than general purpose. Here, each issuance is tied to a defined, time-bound project, funds received are treated as grants rather than liabilities, and units, though held in demat form, cannot be traded on the secondary market; they can only be transferred to legal heirs and are effectively terminated once the project tenure concludes.

4.6. Registration and Listing Process

Enrolment follows a two-step pathway. Step 1 is registration as a Non-Profit Organisation Member with the exchange, which confers organisational visibility without an immediate obligation to raise funds; SEBI's April 2026 circular permits registered NPOs to defer active fund-raising for up to two years (Kumar, 2026). Step 2 is raising funds through a ZCZP (or other) issuance, tied to a specific eligible project. Documentation for Step 1 typically includes

the entity registration certificate, Memorandum and Articles of Association or trust deed, three years of audited financial records, tax-exemption certificates where applicable, a mandatory Niti Aayog Darpan ID, proof of operational activity, and a governing-body resolution authorising registration.

Table 4: Indicative Entry Thresholds and Cost Structure

Item	Indicative Requirement/Cost
Minimum issue size (NPO, per project)	Rs 50 lakh (reducible via multiple project-linked issuances)
Minimum public application size	As low as Rs 1,000 (progressively lowered by SEBI from Rs 10,000)
Minimum private placement application	Rs 2 lakh
Minimum subscription for successful issuance	75% of proposed raise (relaxed to 50% for well-structured, per-unit impact projects since April 2026)
NPO age requirement	Minimum 3 years' operational history
Registration fee (NSE)	~Rs 5,000 plus applicable taxes
Listing fee (NSE)	~Rs 25,000 (frequently waived for first-time NPO issuers)
Social audit fee (indicative range)	Rs 50,000 to Rs 2 lakh, depending on scope
Third-party listing/consultancy support (optional)	Up to Rs 5 lakh, depending on scope of documentation assistance

Source: Compiled by authors from NSE/BSE brochures, SEBI circulars, and market consultancy inputs (Securities and Exchange Board of India, 2021; Chhichhia, 2014; National Stock Exchange of India, n.d; Kumar, 2026).

4.7. Social Audit, Disclosure, and Reporting

Every listed social enterprise must undergo an annual, independent social audit performed by a SEBI-recognised Social Auditor who is typically a Chartered Accountant holding an additional certification from the National Institute of Securities Markets (NISM), to verify impact tracking, fund utilisation, and field outcomes against declared targets (Securities and Exchange Board of India, 2021; KPMG, 2022). Listed and registered NPOs must additionally publish an Annual Impact Report covering strategic intent, implementation approach, and a quantitative/qualitative impact scorecard, alongside general, governance, and financial disclosures, with material events (such as the exit of key executives or stoppage of donor funds) to be reported within seven days (Securities and Exchange Board of India, 2021).

4.8. Ecosystem Support: The Capacity Building Fund

SEBI approved a Capacity Building Fund (CBF) in 2021, initially seeded with Rs 10 crore contributed equally by NABARD, SIDBI, NSE, and BSE, against a target corpus of Rs 100 crore, to fund awareness generation, training, and one-time incentives for early listed NPOs (Business Standard, 2025). As of April 2026, SEBI approved transferring the CBF's residual corpus and administration to a newly incorporated Section 8 company, the Social Stock Exchange-Capacity Building Foundation (SSE-CBF), tasked with capacity building, stakeholder training, project monitoring, and social impact assessment on an ongoing basis (Business Standard, 2025). For an autonomous body newly considering SSE membership, the SSE-CBF (rather than a start-up-style incubator, which does not exist in this ecosystem) is the natural first point of contact for hand-holding support.

5. Rationale for Government-Affiliated Autonomous Bodies to Enrol in the SSE

5.1. Declining and Volatile Grant Financing

The most immediate driver for government-affiliated autonomous body interest in the SSE is the increasing unpredictability of budgetary grants-in-aid. Ministry allocations are revised annually, are frequently subject to mid-year cuts or re-appropriation, and are structurally biased toward recurring establishment expenditure rather than new, thematic, or pilot initiatives. Institutions that wish to pursue innovation-oriented projects, like a new skilling pilot in an underserved district, a productivity benchmarking exercise for an emerging sector, or a rural livelihoods intervention, often find that such initiatives fall outside sanctioned budget heads and must compete for scarce discretionary funds. The SSE offers a structurally different financing logic of capital being raised against a specific, time-bound, thematically eligible project rather than as general institutional support, making it particularly well-suited to financing exactly this category of initiative.

5.2. Alignment with Minimum Government, Maximum Governance

SSE membership operationalises the MGMG philosophy in three concrete ways. First, it diversifies an autonomous body's revenue base away from the exchequer without diluting its public-purpose mandate, since ZCZP capital is not commercial in nature. Second, it embeds an external, standardised accountability layer of mandatory social audit, Annual Impact Reports, and material-event disclosure, that substitutes for, and can strengthen, internal government oversight rather than requiring additional administrative machinery. Third, it shifts a portion of financing decision-making to donors and investors who evaluate projects on structured impact metrics, consistent with the 'maximum governance' emphasis on outcome accountability rather than input-based control.

5.3. Self-Sustenance and Financing of Innovative, Thematic Initiatives

Because ZCZP and related instruments are project-linked and can be issued repeatedly and in parallel for different initiatives, the SSE gives autonomous bodies a repeatable mechanism to test and scale new thematic programmes without permanently altering their core budget structure. An institution could, for instance, use one issuance to pilot a skill-certification programme in a backward district, and a separate, parallel issuance to fund a productivity-benchmarking study for micro-enterprises, each implemented separately and transparently reported, and independent of the institution's regular grant cycle.

5.4. Diversification of the Donor and Investor Base

The May 2026 amendment to Schedule VII of the Companies Act, 2013 and the Companies (CSR Policy) Rules, 2014, which introduced a new Rule 4A making ZCZP subscriptions an eligible CSR activity (up to 10% of a company's annual CSR expenditure), is a structural unlock for institutional financing through the SSE (Ministry of Corporate Affairs, 2013; Ministry of Corporate Affairs, 2026). India's aggregate corporate CSR spend stood at Rs 34,909 crore in FY24, up from Rs 30,932 crore in FY23; even a modest redirection of this pool through SSE-listed entities represents a substantial new financing channel that autonomous bodies cannot access through conventional grant mechanisms (Sahasranamam & Sitling, 2026; Tiwari, 2026). In parallel, progressively lowered minimum application sizes (down to Rs 1,000 for ZCZP) widen the investor base to include citizens, alongside high-net-worth individuals and institutional donors, diversifying dependency away from any single funding source.

5.5. Credibility, Visibility, and Governance Signalling

SSE listing confers national visibility through the NSE/BSE platforms, validates an institution's regulatory compliance and impact-reporting framework, and signals to ministries, corporate donors, and the public that the institution's fund utilisation is subject to independent, recurring third-party verification. For autonomous bodies whose core value proposition rests on public trust and demonstrable outcomes, this external validation can meaningfully strengthen both fundraising credibility and stakeholder confidence.

5.6. Long-Term Relevance for All Stakeholders

The relevance of SSE membership is not confined to the autonomous body alone. For the sponsoring ministry, it provides a transparent, low-cost mechanism to supplement scheme delivery without additional exchequer outlay, while retaining oversight through the institution's governing body. For the exchange (NSE/BSE) and SEBI, institutional participation by credible, government-affiliated bodies strengthens the platform's legitimacy and demonstrates that the SSE can support meaningfully larger raises. For donors like the corporate CSR departments, foundations, HNWIs, and retail citizens, an association with a recognised autonomous body reduces perceived counterparty and impact-verification risk relative to funding a small, unfamiliar grassroots NPO directly. However, by stating this, we do not undermine the socially impactful initiatives of these grassroots NPOs.

5.7. Precedent-Driven Confidence and First-Mover Advantage

The existence of clear regulatory and operational precedent substantially reduces the perceived first-mover risk that might otherwise deter an autonomous body's governing body from approving SSE exploration. Because NSDC, NBCFDC, and comparable institutions have already navigated registration, documentation, and, in some cases, issuance, later entrants can draw on an established template rather than negotiating novel regulatory interpretations from first principles, as the very first NPO issuers on the exchange were required to do (National Backward Classes Finance & Development Corporation , n.d.). At the same time, the direction of regulatory travel described in Section X, wider eligibility, lower subscription thresholds, and the CSR-SSE linkage, suggest that institutions moving early may be better positioned to build investor familiarity and sectoral credibility before the platform's donor base becomes more competitively contested.

5.8. Comparative Cost-Benefit for the Exchequer

From the exchequer's standpoint, encouraging autonomous-body participation in the SSE carries a favourable cost-benefit profile relative to expanding grant-in-aid allocations. The government's direct financial exposure is limited to the modest, one-time registration and listing costs (Table 4), which are typically borne by the institution itself or partly subsidised through the SSE-CBF, rather than through recurring budgetary commitment. In exchange, the institution gains access to a financing pool of CSR, HNWI, retail, and philanthropic capital, that would otherwise not flow through public channels at all, and does so under an independent disclosure and audit regime that substitutes, at least in part, for additional internal government monitoring capacity that would otherwise need to be built or expanded. Encouraging even a modest number of large, credible autonomous bodies to pursue SSE membership can therefore be read as a low-cost, high-leverage policy lever consistent with the resource-constrained, outcome-oriented logic of Minimum Government, Maximum Governance, rather than as a departure from it.

6. Precedent: Autonomous and Government-Affiliated Bodies on the SSE

A number of government-affiliated institutions have already registered on the SSE. This provides a direct precedent that public-purpose, statutory, and autonomous bodies are not structurally barred from participation in SSE.

6.1. National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC)

NSDC, a public-private-partnership company under the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, registered on the SSE in 2023 explicitly to widen its capital pool for skilling initiatives, improve transparency and accountability in fund mobilisation, and extend the reach of vocational training programmes across the country (National Stock Exchange of India, 2025). NSDC's registration is a significant precedent because it is a body with an existing government shareholding structure and statutory mandate, demonstrating that such institutions can register on the SSE without conflict with their public-private governance model.

6.2. National Backward Classes Finance & Development Corporation (NBCFDC)

NBCFDC, an autonomous body of the Government of India undertaking under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, has registered on both the NSE-SSE and BSE-SSE segments and has filed draft fund-raising documentation, explicitly framing SSE participation as a means of building 'a caring and equitable society' (Business Standard, 2023). This confirms that the Government of India undertakings with a statutory welfare mandate for underserved communities are both eligible for, and actively pursuing, SSE membership.

6.3. State-Level and Sector Bodies: The Maharashtra Precedent

State-level economic development and welfare bodies, such as the Maharashtra Economic Development Council, an autonomous body, illustrate that SSE participation is not restricted to central government undertakings; state-affiliated institutions with regional economic development, MSME support, or welfare mandates are equally positioned to register, provided their thematic focus aligns with SEBI's sixteen eligible areas and they meet the predominance and documentation criteria.

6.4. Scale Precedents: SGBS Unnati Foundation and Swades Foundation

Beyond government-affiliated bodies, two NPO case studies establish the range of realistic fund-raising scale on the SSE. SGBS Unnati Foundation, based in Bengaluru, became the first entity in India to complete a ZCZP issuance, raising close to Rs 1.8 crore from high-net-worth investors for a learning-and-employability programme reaching approximately 10,000 final-year students in government colleges (National Backward Classes Finance & Development Corporation , n.d.; Trilegal, 2023). Swades Foundation used the ZCZP route in 2024 to raise approximately Rs 10 crore (about USD 1.1 million) for multi-sector rural livelihoods programmes spanning goat-rearing, health, and education verticals, and has been cited by the World Economic Forum as an example of the instrument supporting larger, multi-thematic rural development financing.

Table 5: Synthesis of Precedent Cases

Entity	Nature	Instrument	Scale/Status	Relevance
NSDC	Central PPP statutory body	SSE registration	Registered in 2023	Confirms PPP/statutory bodies can register

NBCFDC	Central Government undertaking autonomous body	SSE registration, draft fund-raising filed	Registered; documentation in progress	Confirms GoI affiliated autonomous institutions can register
MEDC	State-level autonomous body	SSE registration	Registration in 2025	Confirms state-affiliated autonomous institutions are eligible
SGBS Unnati Foundation	Mid-sized NPO	ZCZP	~Rs 1.8 crore raised (first-ever issuance, 2022)	Proof of concept at modest scale
Swades Foundation	Multi-sector NPO	ZCZP	~Rs 10 crore raised (2024)	Proof of concept at larger, multi-thematic scale

Source: Compiled by authors

6.5. Global Institutional Precedent: Canada's Social Venture Connexion (SVX) (MaRS Discovery District, 2013)

Canada's Social Venture Connexion (SVX), launched in 2013, offers a useful comparative model of how public, philanthropic, and market institutions can jointly build durable impact-investing infrastructure, with direct lessons for how Indian ministries, exchanges, and autonomous bodies might deepen institutional participation on the SSE (Ministry of Corporate Affairs, 2026). Five features of the SVX roadmap are particularly instructive.

First, multi-stakeholder ecosystem conception: SVX was co-created through a public-private-philanthropic partnership led by the MaRS Discovery District (an innovation hub), the Government of Ontario, the TMX Group (operator of the Toronto Stock Exchange), and several major foundations, ensuring that both investor capital (supply) and social ventures (demand) were aligned before launch. *Second*, dual-track offering architecture: rather than forcing non-profits into commercial investment structures, SVX designed distinct product tracks with private equity or debt for for-profit social enterprises, and non-dilutive instruments such as Community Bonds and structured promissory notes for non-profits, a design logic broadly mirrored in India's NPO/FPE bifurcation.

Third, rigid pre-screening and impact filtering: every SVX applicant undergoes a multi-tier vetting process assessing financial stability, operational viability, and social intent, integrating third-party verification systems such as B-Corp certification and the Global Impact Investing Rating System (GIIRS) to guard against impact-washing. India's Social Auditor mandate is intended to approximate this system, though without an equivalent globally benchmarked rating layer. *Fourth*, active capacity-building and capital-readiness programmes: SVX runs structured 'Capital Readiness' boot camps for social entrepreneurs and organises 'Impact Investor Circles' for foundations, family offices, and high-net-worth individuals. India's newly constituted SSE-CBF is positioned to replicate this, but has not yet done so at a comparable scale or frequency.

Fifth, a regulatory sandbox approach to phased expansion: SVX initially operated under a localised Exempt Market Dealer registration approved by the Ontario Securities Commission, allowing it to test investor protections and platform mechanics under reduced compliance friction before expanding to other provinces. For Indian autonomous bodies and their sponsoring ministries, the SVX experience underscores that institutional credibility on a social exchange is built cumulatively through structured investor education, phased regulatory expansion, and active (not merely passive) intermediation, rather than

through registration alone. This reinforces the roadmap-based, phased approach to SSE membership proposed in Section VIII of this paper for government-affiliated autonomous bodies (Ministry of Corporate Affairs, 2026).

7. Eligibility and Membership Requirements Specific to Autonomous Bodies

7.1. Legal-Form Compatibility

Autonomous bodies are typically constituted as societies registered under the Societies Registration Act, Section 8 companies under the Companies Act, 2013, or statutory corporations established by an act of Parliament or state legislature. All three forms are compatible with SSE registration as NPOs, provided the entity is not primarily a corporate foundation funded by a single parent corporate, a political or religious body, a trade association, or an infrastructure/housing company outside affordable housing (Securities and Exchange Board of India, 2021). Notably, SEBI's eligibility criteria assess an entity's social positioning and the nature of its activities rather than its legal registration category in isolation, an important clarification for autonomous bodies whose founding statute may not use the specific vocabulary of 'social enterprise'.

7.2. Financial Thresholds

Indicative baseline thresholds shared by SSE-facing consultancy intermediaries suggest that an applicant institution should typically demonstrate grant receipts of at least Rs 10 lakh per year and revenues/expenditure of at least Rs 50 lakh per year, sustained over the preceding three consecutive years, in addition to the general 67% predominance test. Individual autonomous bodies must formally assess their own financial records, grant receipts, project-linked revenues, and expenditure patterns over the preceding three years against both the general SEBI thresholds and any exchange-specific baseline expectations before proceeding.

7.3. Cost Structure for Autonomous Bodies

In addition to the standard registration and listing fees summarised in Table 4, autonomous bodies should budget for social audit costs (Rs 50,000 to Rs 2 lakh depending on scope) and, where internal legal/financial capacity is limited, third-party consultancy or documentation support (up to approximately Rs 5 lakh). Several consultancy intermediaries specialising in SSE registration support have emerged in the market to assist institutions, including public-purpose bodies, through the documentation and listing process.

7.4. An Institutional Readiness Assessment Framework

Before committing to the roadmap detailed in Section VIII, an autonomous body would benefit from a structured self-assessment against the readiness dimensions summarised in Table 6. This framework is offered as a diagnostic starting point rather than a scored index, given the conceptual nature of this study.

Table 6: Institutional Readiness Assessment Dimensions

Dimension	Key Question	Indicative Evidence
Legal and statutory fit	Does the founding statute/registration category permit SSE registration, and are activities clearly non-political/non-religious in character?	Founding act/MOA; activity classification against SEBI's 16 thematic areas
Financial threshold fit	Does the institution meet the minimum	Three years of audited financials;

	grant/revenue/expenditure and 67% predominance thresholds over the past three years?	beneficiary/target-population data
Project pipeline readiness	Is there at least one clearly defined, time-bound, budgeted project suitable for a ZCZP or similar issuance?	Detailed project proposal with cost breakdown and monitoring plan
Internal capacity	Does the institution have (or can it engage) legal, financial, and M&E capacity to manage disclosure and social audit requirements?	Availability of finance/M&E personnel; consultancy budget provision
Governance approval	Has the governing body/board formally considered and approved exploration of SSE membership?	Board resolution or minutes
Ministry alignment	Is the sponsoring ministry supportive of, or at minimum not opposed to, the institution pursuing this route?	Internal correspondence or in-principle concurrence

Source: Authors' construction, synthesising SEBI eligibility norms with institutional planning considerations (Securities and Exchange Board of India, 2026).

8. Strategic Roadmap: Sequential Steps for Autonomous Body Enrolment

Based on the process requirements described above and the experience of precedent institutions, the following sequential roadmap is proposed for an autonomous body evaluating SSE membership.

Table 7: Proposed Institutional Roadmap for SSE Enrolment

Step	Activity	Primary Responsibility
1	Internal appraisal of financing needs, eligibility mapping against the 16 thematic areas and 67% predominance test, and preliminary governing-body discussion	Institution's finance/planning wing and governing body
2	Formal board/governing-body approval to explore SSE membership; nomination of a nodal officer or unit	Governing Body / Board
3	Compilation of documentation (Darpan ID, MOA/statute, financials, governing body resolution) for Step 1 (NPO) registration	Administration and Finance units, with external consultancy support if required
4	Step 1 registration with NSE-SSE and/or BSE-SSE as an NPO Member	Nodal officer, in coordination with the exchange
5	Identification and structuring of an eligible, time-bound project for fund-raising; selection of instrument (ZCZP as default; DIB or Social Impact Fund route where appropriate)	Programme/project team, in consultation with sponsoring ministry
6	Empanelment of a SEBI-recognised Social Auditor and design of project-specific impact metrics	Finance/M&E unit

7	Step 2 listing and issuance; investor/donor outreach, including CSR departments	Institution, exchange, and (where engaged) consultancy partner
8	Post-listing compliance: fund utilisation, Annual Impact Report, material-event disclosure, and annual listing renewal	Finance/Administration unit, subject to governing-body oversight

Source: Authors' construction, synthesising SEBI/NSE process requirements and stakeholder consultation notes (Securities and Exchange Board of India, 2021; Chhichhia, 2014; National Stock Exchange of India, n.d.; Kumar, 2026).

9. Stakeholder-Wise Benefits Analysis

9.1. Autonomous Body Perspective

SSE provides an additional, self-sustaining financing route independent of annual grant cycles. SSE provides access to CSR, HNWI, and retail capital. Moreover, the autonomous body and its projects gain national visibility and credibility validation. The project-linked financial instruments are suited to piloting new and replicable initiatives, aligning with their respective goals for social impact.

9.2. Ministry / Government Perspective

The intended schemes of the respective ministries are supplemented without additional exchequer outlay. Additionally, the independent third-party verification reduces the ministry's own monitoring burden. It strengthens the case for similar institutions across the ministry's portfolio and their MGMG goal for financial self-reliance of their affiliated bodies.

9.3. Exchange (SSE/NSE/BSE) Perspective

Listing of government-affilianted autonomous institutions strengthen platform legitimacy and demonstrate capacity for larger-scale raises. It diversifies the listing base beyond grassroots NPOs. Moreover, it supports SEBI's broader objective of mainstreaming the SSE as durable capital-market infrastructure.

9.4. Donor / Investor Perspective

It structures the verifiable impact reporting and reduces due-diligence burden relative to its independent philanthropic initiatives. CSR spending on ZCZP now counts toward statutory obligations without a separate independent impact assessment (Rule 4A of SSE). Its association with a credible, government-affiliated institution reduces perceived counterparty risk. Further, the low minimum ticket size (as low as Rs 1,000) widens access to individual donors to support government initiatives on societal impact.

10. Recent Regulatory Developments Strengthening the Case (2025-2026)

10.1. CSR Funds Can Now Flow Through the SSE

On 27 May 2026, the Ministry of Corporate Affairs amended Schedule VII of the Companies Act, 2013 and the Companies (CSR Policy) Rules, 2014 to introduce a new Rule 4A, making ZCZP subscriptions an eligible CSR activity, subject to a cap of 10% of a company's annual CSR expenditure in a financial year (Ministry of Corporate Affairs, 2013; Ministry of Corporate Affairs, 2026). Responsibility for project implementation and evaluation rests with the issuing entity, and subscribing companies are exempt from running a separate independent impact assessment for that spend, reducing friction for corporate donors choosing this route. Funded projects must be completed within three financial years, with unspent funds flowing to a specified Schedule VII fund, adding both discipline and predictability.

10.2. Eligibility Widened for More Types of NPOs

SEBI expanded the legal definition of an eligible NPO to explicitly include trusts registered under the Indian Registration Act, 1908, charitable societies

under state Societies Registration Acts, and Section 25 (erstwhile Companies Act, 1956) companies, broadening the pool of organisations, including many autonomous bodies constituted under older statutes, that can register (Kumar, 2026).

10.3. Subscription Threshold Relaxed and Registration Flexibility Added

A SEBI circular dated 15 April 2026 introduced two changes directly relevant to first-time institutional applicants: NPOs can now register and defer active fund-raising for up to two years, removing pressure to issue immediately; and while the default minimum subscription requirement remains 75% of the proposed raise, a reduced 50% threshold is now available for well-structured, per-unit impact projects (Kumar, 2026).

10.4. Institutionalisation of the Capacity Building Fund

SEBI approved transferring the Capacity Building Fund's administration to the newly incorporated SSE-CBF in April 2026, signalling that ecosystem support is intended as durable infrastructure rather than a time-bound pilot programme (Business Standard, 2025).

10.5. Implications for Autonomous Bodies

Collectively, these reforms shift the direction of regulatory travel consistently toward making SSE participation easier, not harder, for institutions such as autonomous bodies: wider eligibility, lower subscription thresholds, longer runway before an obligation to raise funds, and most significantly, a formal, law-backed channel connecting SSE membership to India's roughly Rs 30,000-crore-plus annual CSR pool. This suggests that the window to build early credibility and precedent on the exchange may be more favourable now than it will be once the platform and its investor base mature further.

10.6. Comparative Assessment: SSE Financing versus Traditional Grant Financing

Table 8 below situates SSE-based financing against the conventional budgetary grant-in-aid route on dimensions most relevant to an autonomous body's planning function.

Table 8: SSE Financing versus Traditional Grant-in-Aid

Dimension	Traditional Grant-in-Aid	SSE-Based Financing (ZCZP route)
Predictability	Subject to annual budget cycle and mid-year revision	Fixed once subscribed; tied to a defined project tenure
Flexibility of use	Constrained by sanctioned budget heads	Project-specific but can be structured around new/innovative themes
Donor base	Single source (ministry/exchequer); independently raised through their projects	Diversified: CSR, HNWI, retail, institutional philanthropy
Accountability mechanism	Internal government audit and utilisation certificates	Independent social audit plus public Annual Impact Report
Administrative overhead	Established, familiar internal process	New compliance layer; social audit and disclosure costs
Scalability	Bounded by fiscal space	Can be run in parallel across multiple projects/issuances
Suitability	Core, recurring institutional functions	Time-bound, thematic, or pilot-stage initiatives

Source: Authors' construction.

11. Discussion

First, the SSE has moved decisively beyond its original conception as a directory for small, independent NPOs. The presence of NSDC, NBCFDC, and state-level bodies such as the Maharashtra Economic Development Council, combined with the formal CSR-SSE linkage introduced in May 2026, indicates that the platform is being deliberately positioned by policymakers as durable, mainstream public-purpose financing infrastructure, not a time-bound pilot. For autonomous bodies, this changes the strategic calculus from 'should we experiment with an unproven platform' to 'how do we responsibly position ourselves within an infrastructure that peer institutions are already using'.

Second, the SSE's comparative advantage for autonomous bodies lies specifically in project-linked, donative, and repeatable financing for thematic and innovation-oriented work, not in replacing core budgetary support. This distinction matters for internal planning: institutions that approach the SSE expecting it to substitute for grant-in-aid are likely to be disappointed by the zero-return, project-bound nature of ZCZP capital, whereas institutions that approach it as a supplementary, MGMG-aligned mechanism for piloting and scaling new initiatives are more likely to derive sustained value, consistent with the experience of Unnati and Swades Foundation documented earlier in this paper.

Third, the principal constraint on institutional participation is not regulatory eligibility, which has been progressively widened, but organisational capacity and metric standardisation. This suggests that the marginal policy intervention with the highest likely impact is not further eligibility liberalisation but targeted capacity-building support, of the kind the SSE-CBF is mandated to provide and which the SVX model of Canada illustrates in a more developed form. Autonomous bodies, sponsoring ministries, and the exchange therefore share a common interest in strengthening this capacity-building layer, rather than treating registration alone as the end objective.

12. Policy Recommendations

The following recommendations are offered to the principal parties in the SSE ecosystem.

12.1. For Autonomous Bodies

- Commission an internal eligibility and readiness assessment (Table 6) before approaching the exchange or a consultancy intermediary, to avoid abortive documentation effort.
- Begin with a single, well-scoped, time-bound pilot project rather than an institution-wide fundraising commitment, consistent with the phased logic of the SVX model discussed in Section VI.
- Budget explicitly for social audit and, where required, consultancy costs as a distinct line item rather than treating SSE listing as a cost-free financing channel.

12.2. For Sponsoring Ministries

- Issue clear internal guidance permitting and encouraging affiliated autonomous bodies to explore SSE registration, referencing existing precedent such as NSDC and NBCFDC to reduce institutional hesitation.
- Consider designating a nodal ministry-level contact point to coordinate across autonomous bodies pursuing SSE membership, reducing duplicated learning costs across similar institutions.

12.3. For SEBI, NSE, and BSE

- Expand the mandate of the SSE-CBF to include structured capital-readiness and investor-education programming modelled on SVX's

'Capital Readiness' boot camps, specifically targeted at government-affiliated institutional applicants.

- Continue developing sector-specific, standardised qualitative impact metrics to narrow the metric-standardisation gap identified in Sections IX and X.

12.4. For Corporate and Institutional Donors

- Treat SSE-listed, government-affiliated autonomous bodies as a credible, lower-diligence-burden channel for deploying the Rule 4A CSR allocation, given their existing statutory accountability structures.

13. Conclusion and Way Forward

India's Social Stock Exchange has evolved, within a few years of its first listing, from a platform designed primarily for small, independent NPOs into infrastructure that government-affiliated autonomous bodies and statutory corporations are actively using to diversify their financing base. Precedent set by institutions such as the National Backward Classes Finance & Development Corporation, and state-level bodies such as the Maharashtra Economic Development Council demonstrate that legal form and government affiliation are not barriers to participation, provided an institution's activities align with SEBI's eligible thematic areas and predominance criteria. For autonomous bodies operating under increasingly constrained and unpredictable grant financing, and within a policy environment that explicitly favours Minimum Government Maximum Governance, SSE membership offers a structurally distinct, project-linked, and transparently governed channel of self-sustaining finance, one now further strengthened by the formal linkage between corporate CSR spending and ZCZP instruments introduced in May 2026.

Table 9: Glossary

That said, SSE membership is best understood as an additional rather than a substitute financing channel. The zero-return nature of ZCZP capital, ongoing metric-standardisation challenges, and capacity constraints within under-resourced institutions mean that careful internal appraisal, phased implementation following the roadmap proposed in Section VIII, and realistic expectations about fund-raising scale are essential preconditions for a successful institutional listing.

Future empirical research, once a larger sample of institutional issuances has accumulated, should quantitatively assess fund-raising outcomes, investor composition, subscription success rates, and long-term impact-reporting quality across government-affiliated SSE participants specifically, as distinct from the grassroots-NPO-dominated samples that most existing studies draw upon. Comparative work examining how the Indian model's dual NPO/FPE, listing-and-trading architecture performs relative to the more directory-style international models discussed in Section II, particularly as India's CSR-SSE linkage matures, would also usefully test whether India's more market-integrated design delivers materially better sustainability outcomes than the largely grant-dependent global platforms reviewed in Section II. This conceptual paper has intentionally flagged these questions as an agenda for future research rather than attempting to resolve them with the secondary evidence currently available.

Ultimately, and consistent with the broader philosophy underpinning the SSE, the exchange should be understood as a means for capital markets to serve the institutions that serve society.

Appendix: Glossary of Key Terms

Term	Meaning
NPO	Not-for-Profit Organisation - a trust, society, or Section 8 company eligible to register on the SSE
FPE	For-Profit Social Enterprise - a commercial entity with a legally embedded social/environmental mission
ZCZP	Zero Coupon Zero Principal - a donative bond instrument with no interest or principal repayment
DIB	Development Impact Bond - an outcomes-linked financing instrument
SIF	Social Impact Fund - a Category I Alternative Investment Fund investing in social enterprises
AIR	Annual Impact Report - the mandatory post-listing social-impact disclosure for SSE entities
MGMG	Minimum Government, Maximum Governance - the stated governance philosophy favouring institutional self-reliance and outcome accountability
SSE-CBF	Social Stock Exchange - Capacity Building Foundation, the Section 8 company administering ecosystem capacity-building support
Darpan ID	A unique identification number issued by Niti Aayog to NGOs, required for SSE registration and government grant access

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Risk, Trust, and Traditional Savings: Understanding Stock Market Aversion in a South Indian District

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ABSTRACT

Investment plays an important role in wealth creation and economic development, yet many individual investors remain reluctant to participate in the stock market. This study examines investor aversion toward stock market investment in Palakkad District, Kerala, with a focus on awareness, attitude, discouraging factors, and preferred investment avenues. Primary data were collected from 60 respondents using a structured questionnaire and convenience sampling, and were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. The findings indicate significant differences in stock market awareness by gender, with female respondents recording a higher mean rank. Awareness of investment instruments varies significantly by age, while the difference by living place is not statistically significant. Attitude toward the stock market varies significantly by living place but not by age. Investors show a strong preference for traditional avenues, particularly bank savings, post-office savings, and gold, while equities rank lower among the alternatives considered. Fear of loss, risk perception, limited financial literacy, and reliance on familiar savings institutions emerge as important barriers to market participation. The findings suggest that targeted financial education, reliable investment information, and accessible digital and advisory support may help investors make more informed investment decisions.

Keywords: Stock Market, Investor Aversion, Risk Perception, Investment Behaviour, Financial Awareness, Palakkad District

1. Introduction

Investment involves the allocation of funds with the objective of generating income or achieving capital appreciation over time and is a common financial activity across individuals of varied backgrounds. Effective investment decisions require an understanding of fundamental concepts, available alternatives, and the investor's risk-bearing capacity, as risk and return are positively related. Among the various investment avenues, the stock market plays a vital role in economic growth by facilitating capital formation, efficient allocation of resources, and risk sharing. Despite these advantages, participation in the Indian stock market remains relatively low due to factors such as preference for assured returns, limited financial literacy, risk aversion, fear of loss, and strong inclination toward traditional investment options. These factors collectively contribute to investor aversion toward stock market investments, necessitating a deeper examination of the underlying causes.

Statement of the Problem

Investment is vital for every person. In order to the growth of money, we have to invest in different investment platforms that can give a better return on investment. The growth of money is very important to

fulfill the basic needs of the life and investing helps to attain the long-term goals easily. By analyzing the different studies conducted on investments, it was evident that it is essential to learn about aversion and attitude of individuals towards investment in stock market. This awareness has resulted in selecting this topic "Investors' aversion towards stock market investment, with special Reference to Palakkad District".

Objectives

- To study the awareness and attitude of investors towards stock market
- To investigate the variables that discourage from investing in stock market
- To study the most preferred investment avenues

Significance of the Study

The study aims to gain insight into investors' aversion and attitude toward stock market investment by examining their awareness levels and preferred investment alternatives. In an increasingly competitive financial environment with numerous investment options offered by public and private institutions, investors often face confusion in making informed investment decisions. By analyzing individual investor behavior and the factors influencing investment choices, the study seeks to enhance investors' understanding of the stock market and support sound investment decision-making.

Scope of the Study

The area of target population is Palakkad district, Kerala. The purpose of the analysis is to study about the inhibition of investors towards stock market. The present study is attempted to cover the demographic profile of investors, attitude and awareness, factors that discourage from making stock market investment and most preferred investment alternative.

Research Methodology

Research methodology is the specific procedure or technique used to identify, select, process and analyze information about the topic. This section explains the steps adopted for obtaining data, research design and sample design.

Research Design

The present study is descriptive and analytical in nature. Hence descriptive research design has been used for the study.

Sources of the Data

The study utilizes both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data were collected directly from respondents through a well-structured questionnaire, while secondary data were obtained from published research papers, books, journals, articles, and relevant websites.

Sample Design

The study focuses on investors in Palakkad district, treated as an indefinite population due to the absence of a comprehensive investor list, and data were collected from a sample of 60 respondents using the convenience sampling method.

Tools and Techniques

The statistical package IBM SPSS Statistics is used to process the data. Relevant statistical tools and techniques such as percentage, Friedman test, Independent-Samples T test, Two-Way ANOVA, Kruskal-Wallis H test, Independent T test and Mann-Whitney U test were used for analysing and interpreting the collected data.

Limitations of the Study

1. The questionnaire employed for data collection has inherent limitations that may affect the accuracy of data.
2. Most of the respondents were reluctant to reveal precise information.
3. Selected sample may not be a true representation of the population.
4. The statistical tools used for analysis are based on assumptions that limit the quality of inferences.

2. Review of Literature

Muppavaram Gowrishanker and Kanan Bhatt (2022) examined the level of stock market investment awareness among young entrepreneurs in the Mumbai region by analyzing key influencing factors such as information sources, investment objectives, technological advancements, and professional development training. The study found that these

factors have a significant positive impact on enhancing awareness and encouraging stock market participation, with short-term income generation and long-term capital appreciation identified as the primary investment objectives. Additionally, the availability of digital banking and payment facilities such as RTGS, NEFT, and online payment platforms has facilitated convenient transactions, thereby motivating young entrepreneurs to increase their investments in the stock market.

Aswathy K.A, Dr Rosalind Gonzaga, Josna Sugan Francis (2022), "A study on the awareness of stock market and instruments among the general public": The study revealed that while the general public is aware of stock market and instruments used in it, they are not ready to invest in it. This reluctance is mainly due to the fear of losing the money and also due to the concern about the risk associated with investing in stock market. The study also finds that most of the respondents invests their savings in bank deposits and only invest less than 20% of their savings in stock market. If proper education about the benefit of investing is given, we can reduce the lack of awareness among the public. While the public participation has somewhat increased than earlier, individual investors still continue to remain at the fringe of the market.

Shinki K. Pandey and Abhishek Viswakarma (2020) analyzed the investment preferences of young investors in Raipur, Chhattisgarh, and found that they predominantly favor mutual funds and equity markets for capital maximization, although some continue to invest in safer avenues such as bank and post office deposits. The study also revealed a significant relationship between risk tolerance and investment choice, with young investors willing to take higher risks for greater returns and showing reduced dependence on traditional investment methods and fixed time horizons.

Research Gap

Despite extensive studies on investor behavior and stock market aversion, there is limited region-specific research focusing on the underlying causes of investors' aversion in Palakkad District. The unique socio-economic, cultural, and demographic characteristics of the region, along with investors' risk perceptions and tolerance levels, remain underexplored. This gap highlights the need for an empirical investigation into how these region-specific factors influence stock market investment aversion in Palakkad District.

4. Data Analysis

The Analysis is presented in 5 sections.

1. Awareness about stock market
2. Awareness about instruments
3. Overall attitude towards stock market
4. Factors discouraging stock market investment
5. Most preferred investment alternative

Awareness About Stock Market

4.1.1 Kruskal-Wallis H test on awareness about stock market by gender.

The variations in awareness about stock market by gender are analyzed with Kruskal-Wallis H test and the output is presented in the following tables.

H0: There is no significant difference in the mean score of awareness about stock market with respect to gender.

H1: There is significant difference in the mean score of awareness about stock market with respect to gender.

Table 4.1.2 Estimated Marginal Means — Awareness about stock market based on gender

	Gender	N	Mean Rank
Awareness about stock market	Female	36	34.46
	Male	24	24.56
	Total	60	

Source: Primary Data

Table 4.1.3 Kruskal-Wallis test on awareness about stock market

	Awareness about stock market
Chi-Square	4.800
Df	1
Asymp. Sig.	.028*

Source: Primary Data

Awareness About Instruments

4.2.1 Two-way ANOVA on awareness about instruments by age and living place.

The variations in awareness of different kinds of instruments by age and living place are analyzed with two-way ANOVA and the output is presented in the following tables.

H0: There is no significant difference in the mean score of awareness level about different instruments with respect to age and living place.

H1: There is significant difference in the mean score of awareness level about different instruments with respect to age and living place.

Table 4.2.2 Estimated Marginal Means — Awareness level based on age (Dependent Variable: Awareness Level)

Age	Mean	Std. Error	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Below 20	2.820	.385	2.047	3.592
20–40	2.851	.117	2.617	3.084
40–60	2.785	.258	2.269	3.301

Source: Primary Data

Table 4.2.3 Estimated Marginal Means — Awareness level based on living place (Dependent Variable: Awareness Level)

Living place	Mean	Std. Error	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Rural	2.739	.201	2.337	3.141
Semi urban	2.592	.182	2.227	2.956
Urban	3.124	.282	2.558	3.690

Source: Primary Data

Table 4.2.4 Two-way ANOVA — Awareness level (Dependent Variable: Awareness Level)

Source	Type I Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Age	453.865	3	151.288	268.583	.000**

Source	Type I Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Living place	2.099	2	1.049	1.863	.165
Error	30.981	55	.563		
Total	486.944	60			

*Source: Primary Data *Significant at 5 per cent*

Attitude Towards Stock Market

4.3.1 Two-way ANOVA on attitude towards stock market by living place and age.

The variations in attitude towards stock market by living place and age of investors are analyzed with Two-way ANOVA and the output is presented in the following table.

H0: There is no significant difference in the mean score of attitude towards stock market with respect to living place and age of investors.

H1: There is significant difference in the mean score of attitude towards stock market with respect to living place and age of investors.

Table 4.3.2 Estimated Marginal Means — Attitude based on living place (Dependent Variable: Overall Attitude)

Place	Mean	Std. Error	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Rural	3.630	.144	3.342	3.919
Semi urban	3.506	.130	3.245	3.767
Urban	3.646	.202	3.241	4.052

Source: Primary Data

Table 4.3.3 Estimated Marginal Means — Attitude based on age (Dependent Variable: Overall Attitude)

Age	Mean	Std. Error	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Below 20	3.943	.276	3.389	4.497
20–40	3.476	.084	3.308	3.643
40–60	3.365	.185	2.994	3.735

Source: Primary Data

Table 4.3.4 Two-way ANOVA — Attitude towards stock market (Dependent Variable: Overall Attitude)

Source	Type I Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Living place	721.337	3	240.446	830.435	.000**
Age	.960	2	.480	1.658	.200
Error	15.925	55	.290		
Total	738.222	60			

*Source: Primary Data *Significant at 5 per cent*

Factors That Discourage Stock Market Investing

4.4.1 Mann-Whitney U test on factors discouraging stock market investment between male and female.

The variations in factors discouraging stock market investment between male and female are analyzed with Mann-Whitney U test and the output is presented in the following tables.

H0: There is no significant difference between male and female in connection with factors discouraging stock market investment.

H1: There is significant difference male and female in connection with factors discouraging stock market investment.

Table 4.4.1 Estimated Marginal Means — Factors discouraging stock market investment between male and female

	Gender	N	Mean Rank
Factors affecting	Female	36	26.99
	Male	24	35.77
	Total	60	

Source: Primary Data

Table 4.4.2 Mann-Whitney U test

	Factors affecting
Mann-Whitney U	305.500
Wilcoxon W	971.500
Z	-1.918
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.055*

Source: Primary Data

Investment Alternatives

Today, various investment alternatives are available. It includes bank and post office savings, equities, debentures, mutual fund, LIC, real estate, gold and chit funds. The following table depicts the frequency distribution of ranks obtained for the different alternatives. To have a clear assessment of most preferred investment alternative, Friedman test is used to test the following hypothesis.

H0: There is no significant difference in preferred investment alternatives.

H1: There is significant difference in preferred investment alternatives.

Table 4.5.1 Mean Rank obtained for investment alternatives

	Mean Rank	Rank
Bank savings	3.28	1
Post office savings	3.61	2
Equities	5.38	6
Debentures and bonds	5.77	7
Mutual fund	5.37	5
LIC	4.87	4
Real estate	5.83	8
Gold	4.63	3

	Mean Rank	Rank
Chit funds	6.28	9

Source: Primary Data

Table 4.5.2 Friedman test

N	60
Chi-Square	75.323
Df	8
Asymp. Sig.	.000*

*Source: Primary Data *Significant at 5 per cent*

5.1 Findings

The findings of the study are summarized as follows:

1. According to the data analysed, majority of them prioritize social media as their main source of information. Newspaper, TV channel, books/magazine, family/friends and word of mouth are prioritized after that. The least amount of information comes from financial advisors.
2. Men and women have different level of stock market awareness. When compared to men, women had higher mean awareness score.
3. Awareness about stock market instruments change with age. Respondents belonging to the age category of 20–40 have more awareness as compared to others. And also with respect to where people live, there is no measurable variation in their awareness of stock market instruments. But as per the analysis those who reside in urban area have more awareness than others.
4. One's attitude towards stock market differs greatly depending on where they live. People who live in urban area tend to see stock market more favourably. And also there is no variation in attitude towards stock market based on age.
5. There is no difference in attitude towards stock market between men and women.
6. There is a substantial difference between male and female in relation to factors discouraging stock market investment and also factors affecting investment in relation to males are significantly higher than females.
7. Savings are given top priority as a reason for investing; therefore, investors may rely on this component most. Next in order are future purpose, safety, family protection, tax purpose, capital appreciation and growth and reputation. Regular income comes in last.
8. The Mann-Whitney U test indicates no statistically significant difference at the 5 per cent level between male and female respondents in relation to factors discouraging stock market investment ($p = .055$). However, the male respondents recorded a higher mean rank than female respondents.
9. Bank savings are given the highest preference, thus investors favour to invest in banks. Subsequently post-office savings, gold, LIC, mutual fund, equities, debentures and real estate comes next. Last on the ranking is chit fund.

5.2 Discussion in Relation to Previous Studies

The findings are broadly consistent with the three studies reviewed earlier, while also showing some important differences. Gowrishanker and Bhatt (2022) found that information sources, technological advancements, and digital banking facilities can improve awareness and encourage stock market participation. In the present study, social media is the main source of investment information, suggesting the importance of digital channels; however, the strong preference for traditional savings indicates that access to information alone may not be sufficient to overcome risk concerns and established saving habits. Aswathy, Gonzaga and Sugan Francis (2022) reported that fear of loss and perceived risk discourage stock market investment and that bank deposits remain a preferred

avenue. This closely agrees with the present findings, where fear of loss and risk perception are identified as barriers and bank savings receive the highest preference. In contrast, Pandey and Viswakarma (2020) found that young investors in Raipur predominantly preferred mutual funds and equity markets, whereas respondents in the present study ranked bank savings, post-office savings and gold above equities. This divergence may reflect differences in regional context, sample characteristics and investment preferences. Overall, the comparison suggests that investor aversion is shaped by both general concerns about risk and financial literacy and context-specific preferences for familiar and perceived-safe investment avenues.

6. Conclusion

Despite the availability of diverse investment opportunities, investors in Palakkad District continue to rely strongly on traditional avenues, particularly bank savings, post-office savings, and gold. The study indicates that risk perception, fear of loss, limited financial literacy, and preference for safety are important barriers to stock market participation. Significant differences in awareness and attitude across selected demographic groups also suggest that investor education should be responsive to differences in age, gender, and living place. The results support the need for accessible financial education, reliable investment information, and practical risk-management guidance. While these measures may contribute to broader financial inclusion, the present study does not directly measure financial democratization or establish causal relationships. Its findings should therefore be interpreted as district-level evidence on investor behaviour and stock market aversion.

Suggestions

1. Financial literacy initiatives should be strengthened through formal programs, digital platforms, and community-based learning to enhance investors' understanding of stock market concepts, instruments, and risk-management strategies.
2. Investor participation can be encouraged by promoting peer learning mechanisms such as investment clubs, virtual trading platforms, and small-value investments, which help build confidence and practical exposure, especially among beginners.
3. The use of professional financial advisors, along with educational content shared through social media and online forums, should be promoted to provide reliable guidance, personalized advice, and credible investment information.
4. Government and regulatory bodies should improve accessibility for rural investors by simplifying investment procedures, offering user-friendly and local-language platforms, and enforcing transparent regulations that protect investors and build trust.

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Innovative Minds: Merging Entrepreneurship with Career Education

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the critical significance of entrepreneurship education in career-oriented programmes as a catalyst for instilling a spirit of innovation in students. The incorporation of entrepreneurship education into career curricula has become an absolute necessity in light of the rapid evolution of industries and the growing demand for new solutions. This abstract delves into the significance of entrepreneurship education in equipping students with the necessary skills, mindset, and knowledge to thrive in today's dynamic workforce. By examining the benefits, challenges, and best practices of integrating entrepreneurship education into vocational programs, this paper aims to provide insights and recommendations for educators, policymakers, and stakeholders seeking to cultivate an entrepreneurial spirit and drive innovation within vocational education. This conceptual paper highlights the transformative potential of entrepreneurship education in training students to take initiative, think critically, and have a positive impact in a range of professional contexts through secondary data and theoretical frameworks.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship education, Vocational programs, Innovation, Skills development

Introduction

The fast-paced corporate environment of today demands constant innovation to stay competitive. This rapid pace of innovation is facilitated by advancements in technology, leading to shorter product lifecycles and increased product development. In such a landscape, organizations must adapt quickly to changing market demands and technological advancements to thrive . Internationally, governments acknowledge the significance of creativity and invention for long-lasting socioeconomic progress, and allocate resources to establish educational settings that cultivate these skill . It is well-known that an entrepreneurial spirit is essential to a thriving economy. As the economy evolves and global marketplaces become more interconnected, entrepreneurial spirit becomes increasingly vital in fostering innovation, increasing employment opportunities, and enhancing overall productivity There has been a great deal of enthusiasm for the concept of entrepreneurial education in schools during the last several decades . An era of economic

uncertainty and global difficulties highlights the need of entrepreneurial education. Entrepreneurship education fosters a mindset for spotting and grasping opportunities and transforms society. Entrepreneurship education allows people across industries to innovate, adapt, and generate value, driving economic growth and addressing global social issues . In India, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is the underlying policy driving this integration, which has emerged as a major reform aimed at transforming the education system from a traditional, theory-heavy approach to a holistic and skill-oriented one (Bharvad, G., & Bharvad, B. 2024; Shivakumar, B. 2026; Masaye, M. R. 2025). NEP 2020 aims to integrate entrepreneurship skills and vocational education from the school level itself, acknowledging the long-standing gap between academic knowledge and employability (Mishra, P. 2025; Mundhe, D. E. 2025). NEP suggests integrating vocational training beginning in grade 6, with the goal of exposing students to a variety of skill-based activities and real-world job contexts through internships and hands-on experiences (Aithal, P. S., & Aithal, S. 2024; Bhoi, C., Behera, B., & Mohanty, S. S. 2025; Maurya, R. 2026).

Therefore, to foster the development of entrepreneurial abilities, the world's top universities and colleges have integrated courses in both education and entrepreneurship into their curricula. Individuals and organizations alike can reap several rewards from embracing an entrepreneurial mindset. Therefore, entrepreneurship is a very important notion . Learners of entrepreneurship can explore and develop key entrepreneurial values, which are thought to be psychological in nature and include traits like intuition, extroversion, taking risks, flexibility, and a feeling of control . The concept of entrepreneurship is being widely used in educational institutions as a means to teach students how to create and manage their own successful firms. Researchers have shown that teaching students to think creatively and critically is an important way to help them become better problem solvers and risk-takers. To professionally engage in entrepreneurial practices, learning about entrepreneurship is crucial .

Thus, vocational education is absolutely essential for arming people with the required competencies to satisfy the needs of the modern labour market. Vocational programs impart practical skills and knowledge within certain disciplines, enabling individuals to make a meaningful effect on their companies and society. Vocational education fosters employment and societal advancement by giving students the required skills and knowledge . Entrepreneurship education boosts students' prospects for pursuing entrepreneurial careers. Unfortunately, many Indian adolescents with entrepreneurial potential graduate from college without the necessary skills . However, while the benefits of entrepreneurship education in vocational programs are evident, there remains a need to explore and understand its implementation challenges, best practices, and potential impact comprehensively. This paper argues for the necessity of such integration, highlighting its potential benefits and the steps required for effective implementation.

The literature frequently sees entrepreneurship and vocational education as distinct fields, despite the fact that the advantages of entrepreneurship education are widely recognised. A critical gap exists in literature that specifically addresses the implementation challenges and policy-contextualized synthesis for the Indian vocational education system, which has long struggled with issues of perception and skill gaps. This conceptual paper fills this gap by presenting a comprehensive, policy-anchored framework that connects theoretical reasons for entrepreneurship education to the practical realities of India's vocational training landscape. It brings together

current knowledge within the context of India's National Education Policy and rising state-level initiatives to provide a cohesive path for Indian educators and policymakers looking to encourage innovation through vocational entrepreneurship. This is not just a synthesis; rather, it is a contextualised analysis that converts broad entrepreneurial concepts into practical tactics for the Indian labour market.

Entrepreneurship education and its importance

Entrepreneurship is portrayed as a catalyst for wealth creation, job generation, and overall economic growth . The phrase "entrepreneurship education" suggests that entrepreneurship is something that can be taught, and study on this issue has been quite popular. One area of study is whether entrepreneurship is something that can be taught . Entrepreneurship education helps people succeed in a fast-changing, competitive world. It boosts personal growth, employability, and economic development by encouraging entrepreneurial skills, recognizing talent, and encouraging creativity . Students are able to significantly improve their "opportunity recognition," "networking ability," and "social astuteness" by participating in educational programs that focus on entrepreneurship Not only do these abilities help individuals succeed as entrepreneurs, but they also improve their capacity to find problems and come up with creative solutions

Vocational Programs Context in India

There has been a long-standing perception in India that vocational programs are of low repute . Following independence, policymakers in India have increasingly resorted to VET, i.e., (vocational education and training) as a stopgap measure to address the issue of unemployment; consequently, VET remains an essential policy instrument to this day . Vocational education, on the other hand, plays a significant part in providing students with the specific professional skills that are prerequisite for the job market Although many Indian students have great ambition to start a business, the country's education system is not yet prepared to meet the average standards set by the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM). The reason behind this is that there isn't a strong ecosystem in place to teach entrepreneurship. The Indian government has responded to the dire situation of university employment placements by launching programs to increase exposure to entrepreneurship courses in Indian universities . India was placed second out of 49 economies worldwide on the National Entrepreneurship Context Index (NECI) in the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor 2023/2024 report (Hill et al., 2024). India's outstanding performance is reinforced by high ratings on framework conditions such as 'social and cultural norms' in favour of entrepreneurship and 'entrepreneurship education at the school and post-school level'. It is one of just three GEM nations where every requirement of the Entrepreneurship Framework was deemed to be more than adequate. This enormous leap—going from 16th in 2021 to second in 2023. It illustrates the success of programs like the Atal Tinkering Labs and NEP 2020's focus on innovation and design attitudes. This shows that the goal of the policy is to foster an entrepreneurial ecosystem, which makes it strategically necessary to incorporate entrepreneurship education within occupational curriculum.

Several obstacles stand in the way of innovation and entrepreneurship in India's higher education system. The pervasiveness of conventional methods of memorization, which inhibit original thought and analysis, is a major barrier . A study conducted in China looked at the relationship between entrepreneurial intention and entrepreneurship education. The study involved 243 participants in entrepreneurship education programs in China, with a

majority aged between 21 to 30 years and 40.3% being female. Results indicate a substantial positive influence of entrepreneurship education on entrepreneurial intention . One drawback of schooling is that many graduates do not possess the necessary skills to secure employment. We are still using Education 1.0 because there is a disconnect between theoretical understanding and practical application. Going from version 1.0 to version 4.0 in education, particularly at the university level, can boost a country's economy and its profile abroad. The interdisciplinary nature of entrepreneurship in the classroom means that students in any field, not just business and economics, will benefit from developing an entrepreneurial attitude . There is a pressing need to shift towards more experiential and project-based learning methodologies. Indian vocational schools should use this concept as a guide to include entrepreneurial education in their curricula.

The 'Kaushal Bodh' program in Uttarakhand, which has made the state the first in India to adopt a continuous entrepreneurial learning pathway from Class VI to XII across more than 4,000 government schools is a tangible illustration of this integration in action. The National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCF-SE) 2023 and the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 are in line with the curriculum. It emphasises activity-based courses on Human Services, Machines and Materials, and Life Forms. Kaushal Bodh is organised into nine modules: Life Forms, Machines and Materials, and Human Services. This journey begins in middle school with Kaushal Bodh and then continues to the Kaushalam program, which is already in over 2,200 schools for grades 9 to 12, where students establish and run actual ventures and face real-world issues." In an effort to integrate skills into the educational system, the government think tank, NITI Aayog has suggested implementing employability and entrepreneurship skills from Class 6 and organised vocational tracks from Class 9. The recommendations are part of NITI Aayog's report, Reimagining Skilling for Viksit Bharat@2047. In addition to Kaushal Tracks (organised vocational pathways) starting in Grade 9, which allow for further vocational specialisation in line with local and national skill demand, General Employability and Entrepreneurship Skills (GEES) can be taught to all students from Grade 6 through Grade 12. According to the report, despite the NEP 2020 requirement, fewer than one in every twelve secondary schools presently offers vocational courses, emphasising the implementation gap that this research aims to overcome. In the framework of the Class 10 and Class 12 board exams, vocational subjects could potentially be given equal weight. The Aayog also underlined the need to reframe apprenticeships as a reliable and popular approach to connect education with employment Mishra, A. (2024). According to the survey, 61% of college students who want to start their own business are not aware of the possibilities.

Integrating Entrepreneurship Education into Vocational Programs

Due to the competitive nature of the global job market, higher education institutions must find new ways to educate their students beyond the conventional classroom setting . In higher education, entrepreneurship learning from successful entrepreneurs may foster sustainable development. Incorporating entrepreneurial education into higher education is crucial for 21st-century colleges to drive technical advancement and economic prosperity . Embedding entrepreneurship into the educational system is a critical step towards fostering creativity and cultivating an entrepreneurial attitude among Indian higher education students . Education, as defined by SDG-4, i.e., Sustainable Development Goal 4: "Quality Education," encompasses lifelong learning that leads to rewarding employment prospects that match individual interests and talents,

fostering both professional and personal development. In India, vocational education is structured through various programs. The Human Resource and Development Ministry is in charge of secondary education and diploma programmes, whilst the Skill Development and Entrepreneurship Ministry is in charge of National Trade Certificate programmes .

To encourage the next generation of business owners, entrepreneurship education (EE) is a top priority in many Indian schools and government programmes. A number of efforts have been put into place by the government of India in order to improve the ecosystem of entrepreneurship and to increase the connection between education and entrepreneurship . Despite progress, we must continue to promote Entrepreneurship Education (EE). MSDE, i.e., the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship of India, launched several programmes to promote young entrepreneurship. Three thousand Indian institutions will teach entrepreneurship through MOOCs, and fifty E-hubs will support present and future business owners in every state. To encourage prospective young business owners, the government created a web and mobile platform that connects all entrepreneurial ecosystem participants. Users can network, learn about government services, and get mentorship here. Young entrepreneurs will benefit from a new incubator tied to government programmes like the AIM (Atal Innovation Mission) and SETU (Self Employment Talent Utilization). Entrepreneurs will use inventive and cutting-edge technologies

Improving innovation via entrepreneurship education integration into vocational programmes can be aided by the findings of a meta-analysis that examined the correlation connecting entrepreneurial education and entrepreneurial inclinations. With a comprehensive review of seventy three papers involving a substantial sample size of 37,285 people, the study found a statistically significant but low correlation (rˆ =.143) between entrepreneurial inclinations and entrepreneurship education. This study result indicates that while entrepreneurship education may have a discernible impact on fostering entrepreneurial intentions, the effect size is relatively small. Entrepreneurship education correlated more with entrepreneurial intents than regular business education, suggesting it may be more effective at developing entrepreneurial mindsets. On the other hand, when pre-education entrepreneurial ambitions were considered, the correlation between education in entrepreneurship and post-education entrepreneurial aspirations was demonstrated to be statistically insignificant. This highlights the importance of considering individuals' pre-existing entrepreneurial aspirations when evaluating the usefulness of entrepreneurship education programs. The study's examination of moderators, including cultural values and entrepreneurship education features, further highlights the intricate nature of the connection between the two. These findings underscore the need for a nuanced method for integrating entrepreneurship education into vocational programmes, considering individual differences and contextual factors. By understanding the nuances of this relationship, vocational educators and policymakers can design more effective entrepreneurship education initiatives aimed at fostering innovation and entrepreneurial success among students within vocational programs .

A study conducted by examines how young people in India might access easily formal and informal entrepreneurial education. It highlights the need for accessible and comprehensive entrepreneurship education while acknowledging limitations such as biases and challenges in survey methodology. The research emphasizes the pressing need to cover the gap concerning the formal and informal education channels to address high youth unemployment and skill gaps among graduates. Blended learning approaches are recommended to leverage

technological advancements and promote economic growth. Despite challenges, the study underscores the importance of critically evaluating entrepreneurship education effectiveness to inform stakeholders and improve entrepreneurial outcomes in India. Overall, enhancing accessibility needs addressing obstacles, make use of technology, and create a welcoming atmosphere for entrepreneurship education among Indian youths and young adults.

, explored the developments of entrepreneurship in education and discussed the important points made by Seelig (2005) in her paper on entrepreneurial education in Asia, Europe, the United States, and Latin America. Questions such as "Is entrepreneurship teachable?" "Who should teach entrepreneurship?" and "How do you evaluate a program's success?" Her conclusions about the teaching of entrepreneurship were based on these questions. Additionally, she established a connection concerning the entrepreneurship education and

(1) There are differences in entrepreneurship education across economic, historical political, , and cultural contexts;

(2) Entrepreneurship education is generally viewed as a way to boost economic growth in most areas;

(3) Acquiring credibility, hiring experienced teachers, and gathering essential resources are more challenging for colleges in locations with a shorter history of entrepreneurship;

(4) entrepreneurship education is still relatively new in many places and necessitates a great deal of experimentation, including incubation; and

(5) It is vital to establish a worldwide network of entrepreneurship educators in order to share effective strategies and raise the bar for entrepreneurship education.

The Potential Impact and Benefits of Entrepreneurship

The competitiveness and expansion of an economy are primarily fueled by innovation and entrepreneurship. Programs in innovation management and entrepreneurship have begun to be offered by higher education institutions (HEIs) worldwide in an effort to address the increasing demand for a skilled and innovative workforce. The spirit of entrepreneurship is one that is not frightened of hard work; it calls for tenacity and defiance . To be an entrepreneur, you need to have a mindset that is not scared to put in the work; you also need to be able to push through obstacles. Therefore, it is okay to fall down; you will just have to get back up. You should not be scared of failing. In order to pursue innovation and take chances, entrepreneurs must overcome their fear of failure. Largely, entrepreneurs shape their own destinies . Enhancing students' inventive capabilities, cultivating an entrepreneurial attitude, and improving their overall employment prospects are all possible outcomes of engaging in entrepreneurial activities . Additionally, it has the potential to contribute to the growth of the nation's economy by resulting in the establishment of new businesses and the provision of employment opportunities .

Steps for Effective Implementation

Effective integration of entrepreneurship education into vocational programs requires a strategic approach . The educational level system should strategically connect with industry more, especially the expanding small company sector. Academic research needs to be more closely integrated with industry, curricula need to be established and revised on a regular basis, and educational institutions need to be more flexible and open to ensure that courses keep up with the pace of change in the workplace . Modern Indian education promotes a follower mindset in which the authority imparts predefined knowledge for passive

acquiescence. An test may emphasize memorization of previously taught material to assess this. Higher education should promote entrepreneurship rather than conformity. It's important to enable students to own their education and assess, apply, value, and expand information. Education must be experience-based and learner-centered. Students must be convinced that everyone has an entrepreneur inside them; it only requires work and a good mindset. The integration of vocational training with general education is emphasized in NEP 2020 to prepare students for industrial demands. An entrepreneurship program should emphasize trade skill application. Entrepreneurship has traditionally been linked to economics and profit. It was considered a family business or intrinsic skill. However, incorporating entrepreneurship into the curriculum makes it part of service learning—learning by helping the most people. Adding entrepreneurial themes to the teaching-learning process is crucial . Additionally, it is crucial to create an environment that encourages innovation and entrepreneurship, and provides students with practical opportunities to apply their learnings.

Conclusion

Given the dynamic nature of today's business landscape, it is imperative that professional programmes incorporate entrepreneurial education . Organisations need to be nimble to respond to shifting consumer needs, which are driven by the need for ongoing innovation caused by shorter product lifecycles and technology improvements .

In today's globally integrated economy, creativity, employment, and productivity are all greatly enhanced by an entrepreneurial mindset . This is where entrepreneurship education is crucial. It teaches people to spot possibilities, innovate, and generate value across industries. Entrepreneurial courses at top universities and colleges have grown in popularity to foster entrepreneurial skills like risk-taking, problem-solving, and adaptability. For students to be competitive in today's job market, career-focused education is a must in India. There is a significant lack of preparation for entrepreneurship in India's current educational system, even though students there have a natural talent for starting their own businesses (Hill et al., 2024). Although the Indian government has taken steps to increase access to entrepreneurship education, several obstacles still need to be addressed, such as the use of ineffective teaching methods and a dearth of opportunities for hands-on, real-world experience.

Entrepreneurship education in Indian vocational programmes can solve these issues. Vocational programmes can better prepare students for the labour market and support entrepreneurial careers by promoting an entrepreneurial mentality. This integration demands intentional curriculum development, industry engagement, and innovation and entrepreneurial ecosystems. Research has indicated that entrepreneurship education has a slight but beneficial impact on entrepreneurial ambitions. This emphasises the value of customised strategies that take into account contextual variables and individual variances. Vocational programmes need to prioritise experiential and project-based learning, cultivate an innovative culture, and give students real-world opportunity to put their entrepreneurial abilities to use if they are to be implemented successfully.

When implemented effectively, this integration has the potential to transform vocational education, stimulate economic expansion, and position India as an innovative and entrepreneurial nation. Entrepreneurship education in vocational programmes can boost students' creativity, employability, and economic growth by fostering new ventures and job creation. By encouraging new businesses and employment creation, entrepreneurship education in

vocational programs can improve students' creativity, employability, and economic growth. Vocational programs can produce a new generation of entrepreneurs who can propel sustainable development by connecting theoretical knowledge with real-world application.

In conclusion, in order to stimulate creativity and prepare students for the changing workforce, career programs must incorporate entrepreneurship education. We can equip students with the abilities and mindset necessary to prosper in a changing environment and make significant contributions to social advancement by embracing entrepreneurial principles and cultivating supportive educational ecosystems.

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The Contribution of CSI Christians to the Development of Culture in Kerala

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ABSTRACT

The Church of South India, constituted in 1947 through the union of Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregationalist denominations, represents one of the twentieth century's most significant ecumenical achievements. In Kerala, the church inherited the institutional legacy of two centuries of Protestant missionary work , chiefly from the Church Missionary Society and the London Missionary Society , together with elements of the older St. Thomas Christian community. This paper argues that CSI Christians have been principal architects of Kerala's modern cultural personality in five domains: education, the press and literature, music and worship, social reform, and healthcare. Across these domains, the community has mediated between indigenous religious traditions and modern institutional forms, producing a hybrid Christian culture that has shaped the state's literary, social and artistic life.

Keywords: Church of South India, Kerala's modern cultural personality, indigenous religious traditions, hybrid Christian culture

1. Introduction

Kerala occupies a singular place in global Christian history. Christians comprise nearly 19 percent of the state's population, against the national average of 2.5 percent, and Kerala is home to the oldest community of Indian Christians, with liturgical evidence supporting migration from Syria by the fourth century CE and folk tradition locating the community's foundation in the apostolic activity attributed to St. Thomas the Apostle in 52 CE. Six major Christian sects coexist in the state today, but the community that identifies with the Church of South India has produced cultural contributions whose scale is difficult to overstate.

Formed in 1947 after a long consultative process, the CSI was, in the words of its analysts, "the pioneer of a united and uniting church," bringing together Anglicans, Methodists, Presbyterians and Congregationalists under a single episcopal structure. With over 4 million members, fifteen thousand congregations and twenty-four dioceses, it remains the largest Protestant body in India. Within its ecumenical movement, "space was created for congregations to preserve their own distinct denominational identities and local traditions". Daughrity has described the 1947 union as "one of [the ecumenical movement's] greatest institutional successes".

2. Historical Background

2.1 The Syrian Christian Inheritance

The St. Thomas Christians form the demographic and cultural matrix from which the broader Kerala Christian community, including the CSI, emerged. The community has been described as tracing "its origins to the legendary Brahminical conversions made by St. Thomas the Apostle in 52 CE". Until the Portuguese encounter in the sixteenth century, the Hindus of Malabar and the St. Thomas Christians "shared a world in common," with the community adopting and assimilating practices from upper-caste Hindu neighbours over a period of fifteen centuries. The Syriac (East Syriac/Aramaic) language and music played a formative role in Christian religious experience in India from the earliest period, becoming part of Kerala's wider cultural heritage.

The Portuguese intervention, consolidated at the Synod of Diamper, sought to Latinize the Malabar Church and triggered massive Thomas Christian resistance over the status of the Syriac language. As Jaisy A. Joseph has shown, in the context of the Inquisition, "the crime of the Thomas Christians was stepped up from error to heresy," and any purification effort by the Portuguese "inevitably targeted the Syriac language, triggering massive resistance". Despite these pressures, the Syriac literary tradition continued to flourish in the community's manuscript archives: István Perczel's research on the Syriac manuscripts has shown that during Mar Abraham's time, the learned elite was reading and copying high-level East Syriac literature, including the *Paradise of Eden* by Abdisho of Nisibis and the Gospel commentaries of Ish'oyahb of Merv.

2.2 The CMS "Mission of Help" and the Anglican Presence

The CMS "Mission of Help," sent to Kerala in 1816, was intended to assist the reformation and revival of the ancient Syrian Christian Church rather than to found a new church, although its long-term effects reshaped the church "into something more consistent with British Christianity and more subject to British rule". Benjamin Bailey, the foundational CMS missionary in Kerala, was also the agent of a typographic revolution: in 1829 he cast the first native types for Malayalam, fixing the curvy script that became standard. This typographic work enabled the printing of the New Testament in Malayalam in 1829 and the complete Bible in 1841, and made possible the first native Christian Malayalam journal, *Gnan Nikshepam*, in 1848.

The CMS concentrated its work in central and northern Kerala. The missionary Joseph Peet built churches and schools in Mavelikkara, Poovathur, Kodukulanji, Krishnapuram and Kattanam, and Mavelikkara subsequently became an important centre of Christianity and English education. Under Hawksworth, a separate CMS mission was established at Tiruvalla in the Pathanamthitta district with significant educational work among oppressed castes.

3. Education and the Shaping of Modern Kerala

3.1 A School System

Christian missionaries, including the CMS and LMS, brought the modern education system to Kerala and, alongside the Travancore Royal Family, the Nair Service Society, the SNDP Yogam and the Muslim Educational Society, made significant contributions to educational progress. By 1920, the CMS and LMS alone were running approximately 700 schools roughly 27 percent of Kerala's 2,581 schools with this network extending from village primary schools to seminaries, colleges and teacher-training institutions. Out of this inherited missionary school network, the modern CSI educational system would emerge.

3.2 Women's Education

The CMS and LMS were the pioneers of mass female education in Kerala. The wife of the CMS Reverend Thomas Norton set up the first girls' school in Alleppey in 1820, while the LMS established a girls' boarding school in 1819 under the patronage of the wife of the Reverend Charles Mead. Other early foundations included a Mrs. Joseph Peet's school in Mavelikkara in 1838, a Mrs. John Chapman school in Kottayam around 1847, and a Mrs. Henry Baker school at Pallom in 1871. In Cochin, the wife of Samuel Ridsdale opened the first girls' school in 1826, followed by four further girls' day and boarding schools. In 1848 Protestant missionaries established Kerala's first female teacher training school, institutionalising women's pedagogical preparation. LMS missionaries introduced vocational courses for girl students, including lace-making, embroidery, crochet and spinning, creating early forms of women's economic self-sufficiency.

3.3 Colleges and Higher Education

The CMS College at Kottayam was established in the 1810s to educate boys intended for the priesthood in the local indigenous church and became a centre of higher learning with lasting consequences. The Methodist/LMS contribution included what would later be known as Scott Christian College in Nagercoil, founded through the LMS mission field of South Travancore and affiliated to Madras University, which produced generations of Christian professionals. As Burton Cleetus has shown, missionary intervention extended beyond the realm of religion and "shaped an important bearing on education, including women's education in shaping individual perceptions of sanity, morality, and hygiene, leading to the reconfiguration of social and community relationships". This broader educational enterprise constitutes one of the institutional foundations of Kerala's contemporary status as India's most literate state.

4. Literature, Language, and the Press

4.1 The Malayalam Press

The introduction of the modern printing press to Kerala in 1821 by an English missionary, followed by Benjamin Bailey's typographic innovation of 1829, gave the Christian community a near-monopoly on the early Malayalam print infrastructure. Christian mission presses, with their output of magazines, booklets and short treatises on religion and science, "set the stage for the development of Malayalam prose". As K. N. Panikkar wrote, "by facilitating access to literary products, print contributed to the making of a new cultural taste and sensibility and thus of a new cultural personality".

4.2 The Emergence of the Malayalam Novel

The Malayalam novel emerged in the crucible of colonial modernity, and as Sruthi Vinayan and Merin Simi Raj have argued, the new genre is a "parergon" of the cultural possibilities opened up by an emergent print culture. Christian mission presses produced much of the early prose available to Malayalam readers, and Christian households became both consumers and producers of the novel form. The *Puthen Pana* tradition, exemplified by the earlier Jesuit Arnos Pathiri (John Ernest Hanxleden, 1681–1732), had already demonstrated that regional literature could serve as a medium of cultural renaissance, indigenising Christianity by emphasising "themes of devotion, equity, and harmony, consciously embedded to contest caste and religious biases". CSI Christians inherited this literary imagination and extended it through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

5. Music, Worship, and Architecture

5.1 The Syriac Choral Heritage

The Syriac chant tradition of the St. Thomas Christians, including those who later joined or worked alongside the CSI, has been recognised as integral to Kerala's wider cultural heritage, with the Syro Malabar tradition possessing "about 4 million members" representing the largest of the eight churches of the Thomas Christians. Despite Portuguese challenges, the community "zealously cherished and preserved the Syriac tradition" and "adapted many liturgical practices from the Roman rite by translating the respective Latin texts into Syriac, and composing them anew in Kerala, thereby adding another layer to the already vast Syriac chant repertory". The St. Thomas Christians "defended their linkages with the Syriac liturgical and musical traditions against the incursions of foreign Catholic and Anglican missionaries," and accomplished this in part by retaining Syriac chant melodies "even as churches began to sing in vernacular languages such as Malayalam".

5.2 Instrumental Practice and Liturgical Architecture

Instrumental accompaniment in Kerala Christian worship has long included the tambor, the tiriyankol (a Malayalam adoption of the Portuguese triangulo), and the violin (sometimes called the rebec), with the use of the organ documented as early as 1505. The twentieth century "saw a remarkable flourishing of 'Christian art,'" and Anglicans in mission contexts worldwide erected Gothic revival cathedrals "as a sign of their apostolicity [and] their legitimacy as the true church". In Kerala, the architectural inheritance from the CMS and LMS Anglican-Methodist missions was adapted in CSI churches after 1947, while the union itself created space "for congregations to preserve their own distinct denominational identities and local traditions".

6. Social Reform and the Kerala Renaissance

6.1 The Caste Question and Dalit Christianity

The cultural contribution of CSI Christians cannot be detached from their engagement with social reform, which was foundational to the Kerala Renaissance. The introduction of the LMS and CMS into Kerala is widely described as a "great landmark in the history of the social renaissance of Kerala". The CMS, in particular, "brought a radical change in the social structure of Kerala" because it "shook the traditional static society of Kerala and converted it into a progressive one".

For the slave castes of Kerala , Pulayas and Parayas . Christianity offered a way out of the circle of pollution; "Scriptures provided the slave castes new vistas of knowledge which they encultured to form a counter discourse against the public sphere set up by the dominant castes". Dalit Christian literature became "the primary source where Christianity metamorphosed into an oppositional force in resisting oppression as well as in creating a social space with agency". Missionaries concentrated on slave-caste communities by means of slave schools and chapels, where "slave-caste men, women, and children were taught the word of the Lord" and "basic literacy was imparted to them". Following the Comaroffs, this constituted what scholars have called "a revolution in habits".

6.2 The Abolition of Oozhiyam

The activities of the LMS and CMS missionaries changed the socio-economic conditions of the lowest sections of society, and the missionaries were "the real agents for spreading a Western education of the state". CMS missionaries in Mallappally "preached the gospel of Christ in such a way that it shook the foundation of the pernicious caste system" and "raised their voices against the social inequalities such as slavery, untouchability, pollution, and the forced

labor system". Together with their educational and conversionist work, these efforts made the abolition of *Oozhiyam* (bonded labour service) possible.

6.3 The Dalit Liberation Movement and the Separate Administration Movement

The cultural transformation initiated by the missions found expression in locally-led movements such as those of the foremost Dalit leader of Kerala, Ayyankali, and the Pratyaksha Raksha Dharma of Poykayil Yohannan (Poykayil Appachan, 1879–1939), whose "intellectual contributions for the liberation of the Dalit people of Kerala through songs, Bible commentaries and social activities" made him "one of the unparalleled renaissance heroes in the history of Kerala". Dalit groups moved a resolution in 1941 for separate churches, supported by English Bishop B. C. Corfield of the Anglican Church. After the formation of the Church of South India in 1947, the ongoing discontent of Dalit Christians with Syrian Christian domination reached a critical stage in the 1961–66 Separate Administration Movement. A group eventually broke away in 1966 to form the CMS Anglican Church under the leadership of the Dalit priest Stephan Vattappara, leaving today 160 small congregations under indigenous Dalit clergy.

6.4 Composite Culture

While North India erupted in rebellion in 1857, South India was experiencing a range of cross-cultural contests between missionary Christianity and local converts, who protested against Indian culture being dismissed as a work of the devil. Converts "made efforts to retain their indigenous cultural ethos as part of their lived experience," and these early attempts to balance Indian identity with Christian beliefs were later replicated in a second anti-hegemonic movement as Indian Christians claimed "respectful inclusion into the new composite nation of postcolonial India". As they became more culturally conscious, Indian Christians "used educational strategies to strengthen the formation of India's composite culture, so that India's Christians could now (re)assert their rightful place within the postcolonial nationalist framework". CSI Christians, with their dual British-Protestant and Indian-Christian inheritance, were particularly well positioned to mediate this composite cultural formation.

7. Healthcare as Cultural Formation

Christian missionaries in Travancore used medical philanthropy to elevate the lower sections of society and viewed western medicine as a tool for evangelisation through charity. By the last decades of the nineteenth century, the medical mission enterprise had grown enormously: "the number of doctors and medical agents sent to India by the Protestant societies rose from 28 in 1870 to 335 in 1912". The CMS had sent medical supplies and experts to Travancore as early as 1816, and the LMS started a medical training school in 1864.

The institutional legacy of this mission medicine endured: "the extensive network of Christian mission hospitals in India faced an abrupt loss of financing and supply of medical missionaries during and after independence in 1947," and yet "many of the remaining went on to become indigenously owned Christian hospitals and prestigious medical colleges that maintained the heart for the poor and for spiritual care that was inspired by their founders". Factors contributing to their success included shared mission, early emphasis on medical education (especially for women), local champions, strong community linkages, and strategic collaborations. CSI Christians inherited and expanded this network of hospitals and medical training institutions, many of which remain significant healthcare providers in Kerala.

8. The Mission of the CSI as Continued Cultural Engagement

The Constitution of the CSI gives prime importance to evangelization, but the church has also developed "a broader understanding of mission with a stronger social commitment , the establishment of love, righteousness, justice and a participation in nation building, with witness in the sociopolitical arena". This dual commitment has positioned CSI Christians as cultural brokers between religious identity and civic engagement.

At the local level, the Anna-daan initiative was begun in 2001 by the women's fellowship team of CSI churches to fulfil the needs of the poor, with the church feeding between 15 and 25 elderly poor daily. The same congregation had earlier, in 1980, initiated a medical centre on the northern side of the church premises with the help of doctors. Such fellowship-driven cultural practices combining charitable giving, communal worship and social service represent the contemporary institutional expression of a tradition whose origins lie in the CMS "Mission of Help" sent to Kerala in 1816.

9. Conclusion

The contribution of CSI Christians to the cultural development of Kerala operates through several intersecting vectors. In education, the inherited CMS and LMS networks came to constitute roughly 27 percent of Kerala's schools by 1920, including the first girls' schools, the first female teacher training college and the foundational CMS College at Kottayam. In print and literature, Benjamin Bailey's typographic innovation of 1829 enabled the Malayalam New Testament and Bible, and Christian presses laid the groundwork for modern Malayalam prose and the novel. In music and worship, CSI Christians inherited the Syriac chant tradition whose melodies survive alongside vernacular Malayalam hymns, and contributed to a hybrid liturgical culture that Anglican, Methodist and Presbyterian congregations shared after 1947. In social reform, CMS and LMS missionaries confronted caste hierarchy, untouchability and bonded labour, providing the moral grammar of the Kerala Renaissance. In healthcare, mission philanthropy built institutions that endured through the indigenisation of post-1947 India.

Across these domains a common pattern emerges: CSI Christians occupied a position of cultural mediation, preserving indigenous Syriac and Malayalam traditions while introducing Western institutional and intellectual forms. The 1947 union of the Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregationalist denominations under the CSI gave institutional permanence to a hybrid Christian culture whose contribution to Kerala continues to shape the state's social, intellectual and artistic life.

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Indigo: The Blue Dye that Transformed Global Textile Trade and Fashion

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ABSTRACT

Indigo, one of the earliest and most valuable natural dyes, played a pivotal role in shaping the history of global textile production, long distance trade, and fashion. This paper examines how indigo evolved from a locally cultivated dye plant into a globally traded commodity under colonial rule, transforming textile economies and global commercial networks. Particular attention is given to the relationship between indigo cultivation, colonial exploitation, and the commercialization of agriculture, which culminated in peasant resistance movements, most notably the Indigo Revolt of 1859-60. The paper also traces the transition from natural indigo to synthetic dyes in the late nineteenth century and evaluates its impact on traditional dyeing practices and textile industries. By situating indigo within the broader contexts of economic history, colonialism, material culture, and fashion studies, this paper argues that the history of indigo extends beyond the story of a natural dye. Rather, it is not merely a natural dye but a key commodity that shaped industrial transformation, global capitalism, and cultural exchange. The history of Indian indigo, therefore, is not only a story of global commercial expansion but also colonial oppression and the impoverishment of Indian cultivators who produced it.

Key words: Indigo, Natural Dye, Colonial oppression, Indigo Revolt, Textile Industry, Global Textile trade.

Introduction

Indigo, one of the world's oldest and most valuable natural dyes has played a significant role in shaping global textile trade, economic networks, and fashion traditions for centuries. Renowned for its deep blue color and exceptional durability, indigo was extensively cultivated in regions such as India, where it became a major commodity in both domestic and international markets. From the sixteenth century onwards, the growing European demand for indigo transformed it into a highly profitable commercial product, linking agricultural production with colonial expansion and global trade. Beyond its economic significance, indigo profoundly influenced clothing styles, textile manufacturing and cultural identities across different societies. It became an essential component of the global textile industry, connecting producers, merchants, colonial powers, and consumers through complex commercial exchanges. The history of indigo also reflects broader themes of imperial expansion, labour exploitation, technological innovation, and changing patterns of consumption. This paper examines the historical role of indigo in the expansion of global textile trade and its influence on clothing and textile culture from the sixteenth century to the early twentieth century, with particular attention to the impact of colonial commerce and industrial change.

Review of Literature

Existing historical scholarship on indigo has examined the subject primarily through the histories of colonial economy, plantation production, peasant resistance, and global commodity networks. Blair B. Kling's The Blue Mutiny examines the indigo disturbances in Bengal, while Indrajit Ray analyses the development of the colonial indigo industry and its economic implications. Prakash Kumar has further explored indigo plantation in relation to scientific knowledge and colonial agriculture, while Ghulam A. Nadri has situated indigo within wider systems of commodity production, trade, and consumption.

Position of the Present Study

Building on these studies, the present manuscript approaches indigo from a broader economic, political, and cultural perspective. While existing scholarship has given considerable attention to the colonial indigo industry, plantation relations, peasant resistance, and global commodity chains, this study brings these dimensions together with the history of textile trade and fashion. It therefore situates indigo not merely as an agricultural commodity or a symbol of colonial exploitation, but as a dye whose production and circulation connected local societies with wider transformations in global textile culture.

Research Gap

The study addresses the question of how indigo moved from a locally produced natural dye to a globally significant commodity and how colonial systems of production, trade, and exploitation shaped its place in global textile and fashion history. Although existing scholarship has established the importance of indigo within colonial agrarian and global commodity histories, less attention has been given to bringing its economic and political history into direct conversation with its wider significance for textile culture and fashion. This study seeks to address this gap by connecting the histories of production, colonial exploitation, resistance, global trade, and textile/fashion transformation within a single historical framework.

Historical Background

From the sixteenth century onwards, indigo occupied a prominent position in the commercial expansion of the Indian Ocean and Atlantic trading worlds. The opening of direct sea routes by the Portuguese connected Indian indigo-producing regions with European markets, laying the foundations for its large-scale international circulation. During the seventeenth century, the Dutch and the English East India companies further strengthened this trade by establishing organized procurement networks in the Indian subcontinent. As European textile manufacturing expanded, the demand for high-quality natural blue dye increased steadily, encouraging the extension of indigo cultivation in regions such as Bengal, Bihar, and parts of South India (Nadri, 2016).

By the eighteenth century, indigo had become an important export commodity within the colonial economy. The English East India Company increasingly promoted its cultivation through contract farming and plantation-based production, integrating Indian agriculture into the demands of overseas markets. These changes altered existing agricultural practices and created new relationships among cultivators, merchants, and colonial administrators (Kumar, 2012). During the nineteenth century, forceful methods employed by European planters generated widespread opposition among cultivators, culminating in the Indigo Revolt of 1859–1860, which exposed the exploitative character of colonial commercial policies. Although the revolt was suppressed, resistance against the exploitative indigo system continued in different parts of India and eventually culminated in the Champaran Satyagraha of 1917 under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. Despite these conflicts, natural indigo continued to occupy an important place in the international dye trade until the early twentieth century, when the commercial expansion of synthetic dyes gradually reduced its dominance in global markets (Sarkar, 1983).

Indigo as a Global Commodity: Trade Networks and Commercial Expansion

The transformation of indigo into a globally traded commodity was closely linked to the expansion of maritime commerce and the growth of European colonialism. From the seventeenth century onwards, European trading companies increasingly recognized the commercial value of Indian indigo due to its

superior quality and its ability to produce a deep, colorfast blue. As overseas trade expanded, indigo became one of the most profitable commodities exported from India, connecting local agricultural production with international textile markets. This transition marked the beginning of indigo's integration into the global economy. The Portuguese initiated direct maritime trade with India in the sixteenth century, but it was the Dutch East India Company and the English East India Company that transformed indigo into a large-scale export commodity. Through their extensive commercial networks, indigo from Bengal, Bihar, Gujarat and other producing regions reached major European ports such as London, Amsterdam, and Lisbon. The increasing demand for dyed textiles in Europe encouraged trading companies to establish organized procurement systems, making indigo an indispensable component of international commerce (Chaudhuri, 1978).

The Industrial Revolution significantly transformed indigo production by increasing the demand for natural dyes in the expanding textile industry. The mechanization of spinning, weaving and dyeing created an unprecedented demand for high-quality blue dyes, making indigo an indispensable dye for the cotton textile industry. To meet this growing demand, indigo cultivation expanded rapidly in colonial India, placing increasing pressure on cultivators, many of whom were compelled to grow indigo under coercive colonial arrangements. These developments intensified colonial oppression and led to the impoverishment of Indian cultivators, laying the foundation for agrarian conflicts that culminated in the Indigo Revolt (Roy, 2011).

The growing popularity of cotton textiles further increased the demand for indigo. European textile manufacturers relied on natural indigo for dyeing cotton, linen, silk, and wool because of its durability and rich blue color. Printed cottons, calicoes, and chintz, which gained immense popularity during the eighteenth century, depended heavily on high-quality indigo. As textile consumption expanded across Europe and the Atlantic world, indigo assumed strategic importance within global manufacturing and commercial networks (Riello & Parthasarathi, 2009). The commercial expansion of indigo also transformed patterns of production in India. Cultivation increasingly shifted from meeting local needs to satisfying international market demands. European trading companies encouraged large-scale production through commercial contracts and advance payments to cultivators. Consequently, indigo cultivation became closely tied to export-oriented agriculture, linking rural producers with global markets. This process illustrates how colonial commerce reshaped local economies to serve the interests of international trade.

By the early nineteenth century, indigo had become more than a natural dye; it was a commodity that connected agriculture, industry, commerce, and consumer culture across continents. Its growing commercial significance not only strengthened colonial trade but also laid the foundation for profound economic and social transformation within India's agrarian society. These developments eventually contributed to increasing tensions between European planters and Indian cultivators, which culminated in the Indigo Revolt from 1859–1860.

Colonial Exploitation and the Indigo Revolt (1859–1860)

The rapid expansion of indigo cultivation under colonial rule was accompanied by an exploitative agrarian system that placed immense pressure on Indian cultivators. As European demand for indigo increased during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, British planters expanded indigo cultivation across fertile regions of Bengal and Bihar. Rather than cultivating the crop on their own estates, most planters relied on local peasants, compelling them to grow indigo through a combination of contractual obligations, economic coercion, and legal pressure. Although cultivators received advance payments under the dadni system, these advances often trapped them in cycles of debt, leaving them with little freedom to refuse cultivation or negotiate fair prices (Kling, 1966).

For the cultivators, indigo was an economically unprofitable crop. Unlike food grains, it exhausted soil fertility and generated low financial returns. Planters frequently forced peasants to devote their most fertile lands to indigo cultivation, thereby reducing the area available for subsistence agriculture. Since the price paid for indigo rarely covered the actual cost of production, cultivators suffered mounting debts and

declining agricultural productivity. The unequal relationship between European planters and Indian peasants reflected the broader structure of colonial economic exploitation, in which agricultural production was increasingly reorganized to satisfy the demands of international markets rather than local needs.

The coercive practices employed by indigo planters intensified rural discontent throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. Reports of intimidation, physical violence, fraudulent contracts, and judicial discrimination became increasingly common. Colonial authorities often favored European planters in legal disputes, making it difficult for cultivators to seek justice. The expansion of indigo plantations thus became a symbol of colonial oppression, illustrating how commercial agriculture under imperial rule undermined the economic security and social well-being of rural communities (Arnold, 2000).

As increasing areas of fertile land were diverted to indigo cultivation, peasants were deprived of opportunities to grow food crops, threatening their subsistence and food security. The low prices paid for indigo, combined with mounting debts, declining soil fertility, and coercive contractual arrangements, pushed many cultivators into chronic poverty and economic dependence. Unable to secure a fair income from indigo cultivation, many peasant families struggled to meet their basic needs, accumulated heavy debts, and became increasingly dependent on moneylenders and European planters. The decline in agricultural income, coupled with the loss of food-producing land, further weakened rural livelihoods and intensified the impoverishment of peasants across the indigo-growing regions. This process of peasant impoverishment reflected the broader objectives of the colonial economy, which prioritized export-oriented cash crop production over the welfare of local agricultural communities (Ray, 2004).

These growing grievances culminated in the Indigo Revolt of 1859–60, one of the earliest organized peasant movements against colonial economic policies in British India. Beginning in the Nadia and Jessore districts of Bengal, thousands of cultivators collectively refused to sow indigo despite threats from planters and colonial officials. Their movement was remarkable for its coordinated resistance, community solidarity, and widespread participation across rural Bengal. Instead of resorting solely to violence, many peasants adopted collective non-cooperation, refusing contracts and challenging the authority of European planters. The revolt attracted significant public attention through the support of Bengali intellectuals, journalists and social reformers. Newspapers exposed the harsh conditions faced by indigo cultivators, while literary works helped communicate their struggles to a wider audience. Among the most influential was Dinabandhu Mitra's Nil Darpan, published in 1860, which vividly portrayed the exploitation and suffering experienced by indigo-growing peasants. The play generated widespread debate within both India and Britain and contributed to growing criticism of the colonial indigo system (Mitra, 1861).

Faced with sustained resistance and increasing public pressure, the colonial government appointed the Indigo Commission in 1860 to investigate the grievances of cultivators. After examining evidence from both planters and peasants, the commission acknowledged that indigo cultivation had largely been maintained through coercive practices. It concluded that cultivators could not legally be compelled to grow indigo against their will and recommended reforms to curb abuses by European planters. Although these measures did not entirely eliminate rural exploitation, they significantly weakened the traditional indigo plantation system in Bengal (Indigo Commission, 1860). The Indigo Revolt occupies an important place in the history of colonial India because it demonstrated the capacity of rural cultivators to organize collective resistance against exploitative economic structures. It also exposed the contradictions of colonial commercial expansion, where the pursuit of global markets depended upon the systematic exploitation of local producers. The revolt not only transformed colonial agrarian policies but also influenced later peasant movements and nationalist critiques of British economic rule. Consequently, the history of indigo cannot be understood solely as the history of a valuable commercial dye; it must also be viewed as a history of colonial oppression, resistance, social justice, and the struggle against exploitation.

Indigo and the Transformation of Global Fashion

The global success of indigo extended far beyond agricultural production and commercial exchange; it fundamentally transformed the history of textile production and fashion. As Indian indigo reached European markets through expanding maritime trade networks, it became one of the most highly valued natural dyes in the textile industry. Its deep, colorfast blue distinguished it from other natural dyes, making it highly desirable for dyeing cotton, linen, silk, and wool. Consequently, indigo played a decisive role in shaping dress practices, consumer preferences, and fashion trends across Europe from the seventeenth century onward. The widespread availability of indigo facilitated the large-scale production of high-quality blue textiles. This strengthened the link between colonial raw materials and the rapidly expanding European textile and fashion industries. The increasing popularity of blue textiles reflected not only technological developments in dyeing but also changing cultural perceptions of color. During the early modern period, blue gradually emerged as a symbol of elegance, refinement, and social prestige. European aristocrats and affluent merchants frequently wore garments dyed with indigo, while the expansion of textile manufacturing eventually made blue fabrics accessible to broader sections of society. This democratization of fashion was closely connected to the availability of imported Indian indigo, which offered a more reliable and durable alternative to many locally available dyes. As a result, blue clothing evolved from a marker of privilege into one of the most widely worn colors in Europe (Riello & Parthasarathi, 2009).

Indigo also contributed significantly to the remarkable success of printed cotton textiles such as calicoes and chintz, which became fashionable throughout Europe during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Indian artisans had long perfected techniques of resist printing and hand painting, producing brilliantly colored cotton fabrics that combined intricate floral patterns with rich indigo blue. European consumers enthusiastically embraced these textiles because of their beauty, durability and comfort. The popularity of calicoes and chintz not only transformed European tastes but also stimulated the growth of domestic textile industries seeking to imitate Indian designs and dyeing techniques. Indigo thus became an indispensable component of Europe's expanding cotton textile economy (Balfour-Paul, 1998).

The Industrial Revolution further strengthened the relationship between indigo and global fashion. Mechanized spinning, weaving and printing enabled textile manufacturers to produce fabrics in unprecedented quantities, while expanding consumer markets generated an ever-increasing demand for dyed textiles. British industrial sectors such as Manchester relied heavily on imported indigo to satisfy the requirements of mass production. Indigo therefore became an essential raw material linking Indian agriculture with European industrial capitalism. Through this process, the dye ceased to be merely an agricultural commodity and became an integral part of the global industrial textile and fashion economy.

The Industrial Revolution and the Expansion of Indigo-Based Textile Production

The Industrial Revolution marked a significant turning point in the history of the global textile industry. Beginning in Britain during the late eighteenth century, it introduced mechanized spinning, power looms, and advanced textile printing techniques that greatly increased the production of cotton fabrics. As textile mills expanded in industrial centers such as Manchester and Lancashire, the demand for high-quality dyes also increased. Among natural dyes, indigo became one of the most valuable because of its deep blue color, durability and suitability for cotton textiles (Allen, 2009).

The rapid growth of mechanized textile production created a strong demand for Indian indigo. British textile factories relied heavily on indigo cultivated in regions such as Bengal and Bihar, making the dye an essential raw material for industrial manufacturing. This close relationship between colonial agriculture and European industries reflected the broader system of industrial capitalism, where colonies supplied raw materials while factories in Europe produced finished goods. Technological innovations in textile printing further increased the use of indigo. Mechanized printing methods enabled manufacturers to produce colored and patterned cotton fabrics more efficiently and at lower costs than traditional techniques. As a result, indigo-dyed textiles became more affordable and accessible to a wider population, contributing to

the expansion of the global textile market and the growing popularity of blue fabrics in everyday clothing. The Industrial Revolution therefore transformed indigo from a traditional natural dye into an essential industrial commodity, strengthening the link between Indian indigo cultivation, European textile manufacturing and the expansion of global textile trade during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Colonial exploitation placed a heavy economic burden on Indian cultivators and contributed significantly to the impoverishment of peasants. The coercive system of indigo cultivation, unfair pricing and exploitative contractual arrangements deprived cultivators of fair returns for their labour, leaving many unable to sustain their livelihoods. As a result, peasant families experienced persistent poverty, mounting indebtedness, and declining living standards, while the economic benefits of indigo production were largely enjoyed by European planters and colonial commercial interests.

The Invention of Synthetic Indigo and the Decline of Natural Indigo

The dominance of natural indigo in the global dye trade began to decline during the late nineteenth century with the emergence of synthetic dyes. Rapid advances in chemical research, particularly in Germany, enabled scientists to reproduce the coloring properties of natural indigo through laboratory processes. After years of experimentation, the German chemist Adolf von Baeyer successfully explained the chemical structure of indigo, paving the way for its industrial production. In 1897, the German chemical company BASF introduced synthetic indigo on a commercial scale, marking a major turning point in the history of the global dye industry.

Synthetic indigo offered several advantages over natural indigo. It was cheaper to manufacture, produced a more consistent color, and could be supplied in large quantities to meet the growing demands of the textile industry. European textile manufacturers quickly adopted synthetic indigo because it reduced production costs and ensured a stable supply of dye. As a result, the international demand for natural indigo declined rapidly, causing a severe crisis for regions that depended on its cultivation and export (Travis, 1993).

The decline of natural indigo had significant economic consequences for India, where thousands of cultivators had long been engaged in indigo production under the colonial plantation system. Many indigo plantations became unprofitable, and cultivation gradually decreased in several producing regions. This marked the end of an era in which natural indigo had been one of the most valuable commodities in global trade. By the early twentieth century, synthetic indigo had largely replaced natural indigo in industrial textile production, fundamentally reshaping the global dye market. The transition from natural to synthetic indigo illustrates how scientific innovation transformed the textile industry. While synthetic indigo brought greater efficiency and lower production costs, it also ended the commercial dominance of a dye that had played a central role in colonial trade, industrial expansion and global fashion for centuries.

Conclusion

Indigo occupied a unique place in the history of global textile trade and fashion, evolving from a traditional natural dye into one of the most valuable commercial commodities of the early modern and colonial periods. From the sixteenth century onwards, the expansion of maritime trade connected Indian indigo with international markets, making it an indispensable component of the global textile economy. European commercial companies, particularly the British East India Company, transformed indigo cultivation into a profitable colonial enterprise, integrating Indian agriculture into wider networks of imperial trade and industrial capitalism. The commercial success of indigo, however, came at a significant social and economic cost. The coercive methods adopted by European planters led to widespread exploitation of cultivators, culminating in the Indigo Revolt of 1859–60, which became one of the earliest organized movements of rural resistance against colonial rule. At the same time, indigo shaped global fashion by making blue-dyed textiles increasingly popular across Europe and other parts of the world. The Industrial Revolution further strengthened its importance by creating an unprecedented demand for natural dyes to support mechanized textile production.

The introduction of synthetic indigo at the end of the nineteenth century marked the decline of natural indigo cultivation and brought a major transformation to the global dye industry. Although natural indigo gradually lost its commercial dominance, its historical significance remained profound. The history of indigo demonstrates how a single natural dye influenced agriculture, commerce, colonial policies, industrial development, and changing patterns of fashion over several centuries. The transformation of indigo from a natural dye into a globally traded commodity highlights the paradox of colonial capitalism. Although indigo played a vital role in the expansion of the global textile industries and international commerce, its cultivation brought little economic benefit to Indian peasants. Instead, cultivators faced coercion, indebtedness, and impoverishment, illustrating the unequal distribution of profits generated by the colonial indigo trade. Thus, the story of indigo is not merely the history of a dye but a reflection of the interconnected processes of global trade, colonial expansion, technological change, and cultural transformation that shaped the textile world from the sixteenth century to the early twentieth century.

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Digital Financial Literacy, Awareness of Banking Products and Services, And Financial Inclusion Among Scheduled Caste Women in Kolhapur District, Maharashtra: Evidence from A Cross-Sectional Study

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ABSTRACT

Digital financial literacy has gained importance with the expansion of digital banking and payment services in India. However, access to formal financial services alone may not ensure their effective use, particularly among women from socially and economically disadvantaged communities. This study examines the relationships among Digital Financial Literacy, Awareness of Banking Products and Services, and Financial Inclusion among Scheduled Caste women in Kolhapur District, Maharashtra. A quantitative cross-sectional research design was adopted, and primary data were collected from 250 respondents using a structured questionnaire. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, Pearson correlation, and multiple linear regression. The results showed significant positive relationships between Digital Financial Literacy and Financial Inclusion ($r = .704$, $p < .001$), Banking Awareness and Financial Inclusion ($r = .658$, $p < .001$), and Digital Financial Literacy and Banking Awareness ($r = .618$, $p < .001$). The regression model was statistically significant ($R = .759$, $R^2 = .576$, Adjusted $R^2 = .573$, $F(2, 247) = 167.79$, $p < .001$), indicating that Digital Financial Literacy and Banking Awareness jointly accounted for 57.6% of the variance in Financial Inclusion. Digital Financial Literacy showed the stronger unique association ($\beta = .481$) compared with Banking Awareness ($\beta = .361$). The findings highlight the relevance of practical digital financial knowledge and banking awareness in strengthening meaningful participation in formal financial services among Scheduled Caste women.

Keywords: Digital Financial Literacy; Financial Inclusion; Banking Awareness; Scheduled Caste Women; Digital Banking; Women's Financial Empowerment.

1. Introduction

Financial inclusion is widely regarded as a core component of sustainable economic development, as it permits individuals to access formal financial services that improve economic well-being. Access to affordable savings, credit, insurance, pensions, and payment services increases household financial security, supports entrepreneurship, reduces poverty, and promotes long-term economic growth. Consequently, financial inclusion has become a central priority for governments, financial institutions, and international organisations. It is also recognised as an important element of several United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those focused on poverty reduction, gender equality, decent work, reduced inequalities, and encompassing economic development.

In recent years, India has made remarkable progress in expanding financial inclusion through policy reforms, technological innovations, and digital public infrastructure. Government initiatives such as the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY), Digital India Mission, Unified Payments Interface (UPI), Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT), Aadhaar-enabled Payment System (AePS), Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (PMJJBY), Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY), and the Atal Pension Yojana (APY) have substantially increased access to formal financial services across rural and urban India. Simultaneously, rapid advances in financial technology, including mobile banking, internet banking, digital wallets, and QR code payment systems, have transformed the delivery and utilisation of financial services, creating new opportunities for digital financial inclusion.

Despite these advancements, the expansion of financial infrastructure alone does not ensure meaningful financial inclusion. Effective utilisation of financial services calls for not only physical access but also the ability to comprehend financial products, confidently use digital technologies, and make well-informed financial decisions. Limited digital competence, insufficient financial knowledge, low awareness of banking products, concerns regarding cybersecurity, and socioeconomic barriers continue to impede the adoption and effective use of formal financial services, especially among socially and economically disadvantaged groups.

Scheduled Caste (SC) women are still left out of many benefits of digital financial changes. Components such as social disadvantage, lower education, fewer job opportunities, lower household income, limited access to digital technology, and less involvement in family financial decisions all affect how they employ formal financial services. While government programs have helped more women open bank accounts, gaps remain in their use of digital banking, insurance, pensions, formal credit, and other financial products. To improve financial inclusion for SC women, it is important to build both digital financial skills and awareness of available banking services.

Most research shows a positive association between financial literacy and financial inclusion. However, limited studies have jointly examined digital financial literacy and awareness of banking products as determinants of financial inclusion. Furthermore, there is a scarcity of research expressly addressing Scheduled Caste women at the district level. This gap is significant, as local economic conditions, institutional availability, and community factors can substantially shape financial skills and digital participation.

Kolhapur District in Maharashtra provides an appropriate context for examining these issues due to its expanding banking network, increasing adoption of digital financial services, and diverse social and economic composition. Investigating the financial skills of Scheduled Caste women in this district can produce valuable evidence to inform the development of increasingly inclusive financial policies and targeted educational interventions.

In this context, the present study considers the impact of digital financial literacy and awareness of banking products and services on financial inclusion among Scheduled Caste women in Kolhapur District, Maharashtra. The study measures digital financial literacy, banking awareness, and financial inclusion, and analyses the interrelationships among these variables. By jointly examining digital financial literacy and banking awareness, the research adds to the literature on financial skills, women's economic empowerment, and development. The findings supply actionable insights for policymakers, financial institutions, regulators, and development organisations attempting to enhance digital financial abilities and inclusive financial inclusion for disadvantaged women.

2. Literature Review

Financial literacy and financial inclusion have received considerable attention in research because of their relevance to financial decision-making, household welfare, and access to formal financial services. The growth of digital banking has added a new dimension to this field, as individuals increasingly require both financial knowledge and digital skills to use banking services effectively. Previous studies have examined financial literacy, financial behaviour, financial inclusion, digital financial services, and financial education from different perspectives. The major studies relevant to the present research are reviewed below.

2.1 Atkinson and Messy (2012) developed a framework for measuring financial literacy through three major dimensions: financial knowledge, financial behaviour, and financial attitude. Their study demonstrated that financial literacy should not be assessed only through knowledge of financial concepts, as behaviour and attitudes also influence the way individuals manage their finances. This framework is relevant to the present study because digital financial literacy is examined through similar dimensions of knowledge, behaviour, and attitude.

Lusardi and Mitchell (2014) examined the economic importance of financial literacy and found that financial knowledge plays an important role in individual financial decision-making. Their work showed that differences in financial literacy are associated with saving, borrowing, retirement planning, and other financial choices. The study established financial literacy as an important factor in understanding how individuals participate in and benefit from the financial system.

Agarwal et al. (2015) studied financial literacy and financial planning in India and examined the role of financial knowledge in household financial decisions. Their study showed the relevance of financial literacy to financial planning and provided evidence from the Indian context. The findings support the view that adequate financial knowledge can assist individuals in evaluating financial alternatives and making more informed financial decisions.

Sharma (2016) investigated the relationship between financial inclusion and economic growth in India. The study found a significant association between financial inclusion and economic development and highlighted the importance of extending formal financial services to sections of society that remain inadequately served by the financial system. The study also demonstrated the wider economic relevance of financial inclusion in the Indian context.

Kaiser and Menkhoff (2017) examined the effects of financial education on financial literacy and financial behaviour through a meta-analysis of previous studies. They found that financial education generally improves financial knowledge and behaviour, although the extent of improvement differs across programmes and population groups. Their findings indicate that financial education programmes need to be designed according to the characteristics and requirements of the intended beneficiaries.

Grohmann et al. (2018) examined whether financial literacy contributes to financial inclusion using cross-country evidence. Their findings indicated a positive association between financial literacy and financial inclusion. The study also suggested that the expansion of financial infrastructure alone may not be sufficient to achieve effective inclusion unless individuals possess the knowledge required to understand and use available financial services. This finding is relevant to the present research, which examines financial capability together with participation in formal financial services.

OECD (2018) addressed the growing importance of digital financial literacy in response to the increasing use of technology-based financial services. Its policy guidance identified the need for consumers to understand digital financial products, use electronic financial services appropriately, recognise potential risks, and protect personal and financial information. The framework demonstrates that digital financial literacy involves both financial understanding and the ability to operate safely within a digital financial environment.

Lusardi (2019) examined the importance of financial literacy and financial education and emphasised their role in improving financial decision-making. The study noted that differences in financial knowledge can affect individuals' ability to manage financial resources and respond to increasingly complex

financial choices. The findings reinforce the need for financial education among population groups with limited opportunities to acquire financial knowledge.

National Centre for Financial Education (2020) through the National Strategy for Financial Education 2020–2025, emphasised the development of financial knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviour among different sections of the Indian population. The strategy also recognised changes arising from the increasing use of digital financial services. It stressed the importance of financial education in enabling individuals to make informed financial decisions and use formal financial services appropriately.

OECD (2021) examined digital financial literacy in relation to financial resilience and changes in the delivery of financial services. The report noted that increasing digitalisation creates opportunities for wider financial participation but also requires individuals to understand digital products and associated risks. Digital skills, financial knowledge, and informed behaviour are therefore important for the safe and effective use of digital financial services.

Demirgüç-Kunt et al. (2022) analysed global patterns of financial inclusion using data from the Global Findex Database 2021. Their findings documented the expansion of account ownership and digital payments while also showing continuing differences in the use of financial services across socioeconomic and demographic groups. The study indicates that possession of a bank account should not be treated as the sole measure of financial inclusion because regular and effective use of financial services is equally important.

OECD (2022) presented an updated framework for measuring financial literacy and financial inclusion. The framework covers financial knowledge, behaviour, attitudes, financial inclusion, and aspects of digital finance. This multidimensional approach is relevant to the present study because financial inclusion is examined through access to and utilisation of formal financial services rather than through bank account ownership alone.

Lusardi and Mitchell (2023) reviewed the development and importance of financial literacy as a field of economic research. Their work highlighted continuing differences in financial knowledge across population groups and showed that such differences have implications for financial decisions and economic outcomes. The study reinforces the importance of examining financial literacy among population groups that may experience socioeconomic disadvantages.

Reserve Bank of India (2023, 2024) reported continued developments in India's banking system, digital payments, and financial infrastructure. The expansion of formal banking channels and technology-based financial services has increased opportunities for individuals to participate in the financial system. However, the effective use of these facilities also depends on customers' awareness of banking products, financial knowledge, and ability to use digital services appropriately.

2.2 Theoretical Background

The theoretical foundation of the present study is based on the view that financial inclusion involves more than access to formal financial institutions. Individuals also require the knowledge, skills, confidence, and opportunities needed to make appropriate use of available financial services. This requirement has become increasingly relevant as banking and payment activities move towards digital platforms. In this setting, digital financial literacy enables individuals to understand and use technology-based financial services, while awareness of banking products and services helps them identify suitable financial options. The present study draws on

Financial Capability Theory, Human Capital Theory, and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) to explain the relationships among digital financial literacy, banking awareness, and financial inclusion.

2.2.1 Financial Capability Theory

Financial Capability Theory considers financial well-being in terms of both an individual's ability to make informed financial decisions and the opportunities available to act on those decisions. Johnson and Sherraden (2007) argued that financial capability involves the interaction between individual financial knowledge and access to appropriate financial institutions. Sherraden (2013) further explained that financial capability requires both the ability and the opportunity to act within the financial system. This perspective is relevant to the present study because access to a bank account or digital financial facility does not necessarily result in its effective use. Individuals also need sufficient knowledge, practical skills, and confidence to select and use financial services according to their needs. Financial Capability Theory therefore provides a useful basis for examining how digital financial literacy and banking awareness are associated with financial inclusion among Scheduled Caste women.

2.2.2 Human Capital Theory

Becker (1964) proposed Human Capital Theory to explain how investment in education, knowledge, and skills can improve individual capabilities and economic outcomes. Knowledge and acquired competencies enable individuals to make more informed decisions and participate more effectively in economic activities. In the context of digital finance, financial knowledge and digital skills may be viewed as forms of human capital. Individuals who understand financial concepts and possess the skills required to use digital banking facilities may be better able to evaluate financial alternatives and use formal financial services. Human Capital Theory therefore supports the examination of digital financial literacy as a factor associated with financial inclusion.

2.2.3 Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

The Technology Acceptance Model, developed by Davis (1989), explains the adoption and use of information technology through two principal factors: perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. According to the model, individuals are more likely to accept a technology when they believe that it is useful and relatively easy to operate. This model is relevant to digital financial services because the use of mobile banking, internet banking, UPI, and other electronic payment facilities requires individuals to interact with technology. Knowledge of digital financial services and familiarity with banking facilities may help users understand their usefulness and use them with greater confidence. TAM therefore provides a relevant theoretical basis for examining digital financial participation within the broader context of financial inclusion.

2.2.4 Theoretical Integration

The three perspectives provide complementary explanations for the relationships examined in this study. Financial Capability Theory considers the interaction between individual capability and opportunities within the financial system. Human Capital Theory explains the role of acquired knowledge and skills, while TAM addresses the acceptance and use of technology-based financial services. Together, these perspectives provide the theoretical basis for examining the relationships among digital financial literacy, awareness of banking products and services, and financial inclusion among Scheduled Caste women in Kolhapur District.

2.3 Digital Financial Literacy

Digital financial literacy combines financial knowledge with the skills required to understand and

use digital financial services. The OECD (2018) recognised that the digitalisation of financial services requires consumers to possess competencies beyond conventional financial knowledge, including an understanding of digital financial products, associated risks, and safe financial practices. The growing use of mobile banking, internet banking, digital payment applications, and other electronic financial services has made these competencies increasingly relevant.

In the present study, digital financial literacy is considered through the dimensions of financial knowledge, financial behaviour, and financial attitude, consistent with the broader financial literacy framework developed by Atkinson and Messy (2012). These dimensions provide a basis for examining whether respondents possess the knowledge and behavioural capability required to participate effectively in an increasingly digital financial environment.

2.4 Financial Inclusion

Financial inclusion generally concerns access to and use of appropriate formal financial products and services. Beck et al. (2007) demonstrated the importance of measuring access to and use of financial services rather than relying on a single indicator. Similarly, the World Bank (2014) recognised financial inclusion as an important component of wider economic participation. More recent evidence from Demirgüç-Kunt et al. (2022) shows considerable growth in account ownership and digital payments while also identifying differences in financial participation across population groups. This suggests that account ownership alone does not fully represent financial inclusion. Accordingly, the present study considers financial inclusion in terms of access to and utilisation of formal financial services, including banking and digital financial facilities.

2.5 Awareness of Banking Products and Services

Awareness of banking products and services refers to an individual's knowledge and understanding of financial facilities available through formal financial institutions. Such awareness may include knowledge of bank accounts, deposits, credit facilities, insurance, pension products, digital banking services, payment systems, and government-supported financial programmes. Financial knowledge influences the ability to understand and evaluate financial choices (Lusardi & Mitchell, 2014). In the Indian context, Agarwal et al. (2015) also demonstrated the relevance of financial literacy to financial planning and household financial decisions. Awareness of available banking facilities may therefore help individuals identify financial products appropriate to their circumstances and make more informed use of the formal financial system.

2.6 Digital Financial Literacy and Financial Inclusion

Previous research provides evidence of an association between financial literacy and financial inclusion. Grohmann et al. (2018) found that financial literacy was positively related to financial inclusion and argued that financial knowledge can complement the availability of financial infrastructure. Their findings suggest that expanding access to financial services may have limited benefits when individuals lack the knowledge required to use those services appropriately. Digitalisation adds a further dimension to this relationship. OECD (2018, 2021) highlighted the importance of knowledge and skills for the safe and informed use of digital financial services. As banking transactions increasingly take place through digital channels, digital financial literacy may influence an individual's ability to access, understand, and use these services. This provides the basis for examining its relationship with financial inclusion in the present study.

2.7 Banking Awareness and Financial Inclusion

Financial inclusion requires individuals not only to have access to formal banking facilities but also to understand the products and services available to them. Knowledge of savings products, credit facilities, insurance, pensions, payment services, and digital banking options may influence how individuals engage with formal financial institutions. The financial literacy literature indicates that knowledge contributes to financial decision-making and financial behaviour (Lusardi & Mitchell, 2014; Kaiser & Menkhoff, 2017). Evidence from India also points to the importance of financial knowledge in financial planning and participation (Agarwal et al., 2015). On this basis, awareness of banking products and services is treated in the present study as an explanatory factor associated with financial inclusion.

2.8 Digital Financial Literacy among Women

Financial literacy is particularly relevant to women because differences in education, income, employment, access to technology, and financial opportunities can influence financial participation. Evidence from the Global Findex Database 2021 shows that differences in the ownership and use of financial services continue across demographic and socioeconomic groups despite substantial progress in financial access (Demirgüç-Kunt et al., 2022). Financial education may contribute to improvements in financial knowledge and behaviour, although its effectiveness varies according to the characteristics of participants and interventions (Kaiser & Menkhoff, 2017). In a digital financial environment, women also require the knowledge and practical skills needed to use technology-enabled financial services safely. These considerations provide a basis for examining digital financial literacy among Scheduled Caste women, whose financial participation may be shaped by both socioeconomic circumstances and access to digital resources.

2.9 Empirical Review of Literature

Empirical studies have examined financial literacy and financial inclusion from different national and socioeconomic perspectives. Lusardi and Mitchell (2014) demonstrated the importance of financial knowledge in economic and financial decision-making. Agarwal et al. (2015) provided evidence from India on financial literacy and financial planning, while Sharma (2016) examined the relationship between financial inclusion and economic growth in the Indian context. Kaiser and Menkhoff (2017) found through a meta-analysis that financial education generally has positive effects on financial literacy and financial behaviour, although these effects vary across interventions and population groups. Grohmann et al. (2018) subsequently reported a positive relationship between financial literacy and financial inclusion using cross-country evidence. The digitalisation of financial services has broadened the scope of this literature. OECD (2018, 2021) drew attention to the financial knowledge, digital skills, and risk awareness required for the effective use of digital financial services. Demirguc-Kunt et al. (2022) documented the substantial expansion of account ownership and digital payments while showing that differences in effective financial participation continue across population groups.

Within India, the expansion of banking and digital payment infrastructure has widened opportunities for formal financial participation. The National Centre for Financial Education (2020) emphasised financial knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviour as important components of financial capability, while reports of the Reserve Bank of India (2023, 2024) document continuing developments in banking and digital payment systems. Taken together, these studies indicate that financial inclusion is influenced not simply by the availability of financial infrastructure but also by the knowledge and capabilities individuals possess when using formal and digital financial services.

2.10 Research Gap

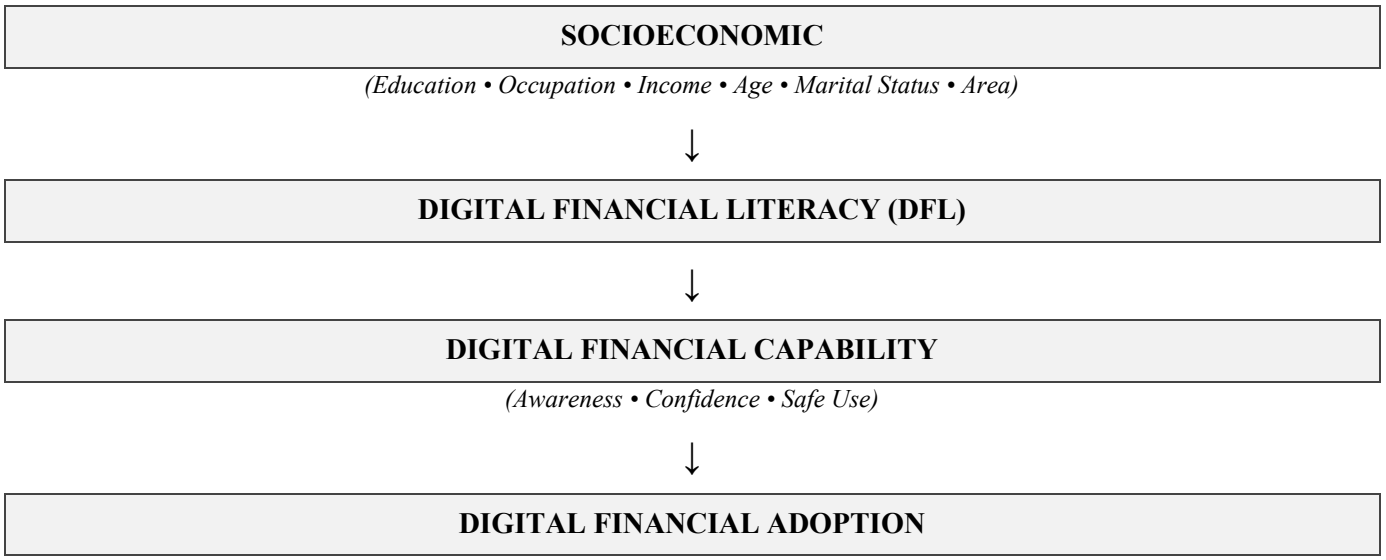
Although previous studies have examined financial literacy, digital finance, and financial inclusion, comparatively limited attention has been given to digital financial literacy in conjunction with awareness of banking products and services. The expansion of formal banking and digital financial services has improved financial access; however, access alone may not ensure their informed and effective utilisation, particularly among socially disadvantaged groups. Existing research provides limited evidence on the combined relationship of digital financial literacy and banking awareness with financial inclusion among Scheduled Caste women. Moreover, district-level empirical evidence concerning these relationships in Kolhapur District, Maharashtra, remains limited in the literature reviewed. The present study addresses these gaps by examining the relationships among digital financial literacy, awareness of banking products and services, and financial inclusion among Scheduled Caste women in Kolhapur District within a single analytical framework.

2.11 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework examines the relationship of digital financial literacy and awareness of banking products and services with financial inclusion among Scheduled Caste women in Kolhapur District, Maharashtra. Digital financial literacy and banking awareness are treated as the independent variables, while financial inclusion is the dependent variable. Digital financial literacy comprises financial knowledge, behaviour, and attitude, whereas banking awareness covers knowledge of banking products, digital banking services, financial schemes, insurance, credit facilities, and digital transactions. Financial inclusion is assessed through access to and use of formal and digital financial services, savings behaviour, and financial decision-making. Age, education, occupation, monthly income, marital status, and area of residence are considered control variables. The framework proposes that higher digital financial literacy and greater banking awareness are positively associated with financial inclusion.

Figure 2.1

Digital Financial Literacy Inclusion Framework (BRDFLI Framework)



(Digital Payments • Mobile Banking • FinTech)

↓

FINANCIAL INCLUSION (FI)

(Access • Usage • Participation • Security)

↓

FINANCIAL EMPOWERMENT OF SCHEDULED CASTE WOMEN

Source: Conceptual Framework developed by Bharat Ravan (2026)

2.12 Research Objective

The main objective of this study is to examine the effect of digital financial literacy and awareness regarding banking products and services on financial inclusion among Scheduled Caste women in Kolhapur District, Maharashtra.

2.13 Research Question

How do digital financial literacy and awareness regarding banking products and services shape financial inclusion among Scheduled Caste women in Kolhapur District, Maharashtra?

2.14 Research Hypotheses

Based on the conceptual framework and the reviewed literature, the following null hypotheses were formulated as:

H_{01}: There is no significant relationship between digital financial literacy and financial inclusion among Scheduled Caste women in Kolhapur District, Maharashtra.

H_{02}: There is no significant relationship between awareness regarding banking products and services and financial inclusion among Scheduled Caste women in Kolhapur District, Maharashtra.

H_{03}: There is no significant relationship between digital financial literacy and awareness regarding banking products and services among Scheduled Caste women in Kolhapur District, Maharashtra.

H_{04}: Digital financial literacy and awareness regarding banking products and services do not jointly have a significant influence on financial inclusion among Scheduled Caste women in Kolhapur District, Maharashtra.

3. Research Methodology

This section describes the methodological procedures adopted to examine the relationships among digital financial literacy, awareness of banking products and services, and financial inclusion among Scheduled Caste women in Kolhapur District, Maharashtra. It covers the research design, study area, population, sample size, sampling procedure, data collection, research instrument, measurement of variables, reliability and validity, and statistical techniques used for data analysis.

3.1 Introduction

The present study adopts a quantitative cross-sectional research design to examine the relationships among digital financial literacy, awareness of banking products and services, and financial inclusion among Scheduled Caste women in Kolhapur District, Maharashtra. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire designed to measure the study variables. The methodology covers the study

population, sampling procedure, data collection, measurement of variables, reliability and validity, and statistical techniques used for data analysis.

3.2 Research Design

The study adopts a quantitative, descriptive, and explanatory cross-sectional research design. The descriptive component assesses the levels of digital financial literacy, awareness of banking products and services, and financial inclusion among Scheduled Caste women in Kolhapur District, Maharashtra. The explanatory component examines the statistical relationships of digital financial literacy and banking awareness with financial inclusion. A cross-sectional survey approach was used because data were collected from the respondents at a single point in time. This design is appropriate for describing the characteristics of the study population and examining associations among the selected variables within the defined study period.

3.3 Study Area

The study was conducted in Kolhapur District, Maharashtra. The district provides a relevant setting for examining financial inclusion because formal banking services and digital payment facilities operate across both rural and urban areas. The study specifically focuses on Scheduled Caste women to examine how digital financial literacy and awareness of banking products and services are associated with their participation in the formal financial system.

3.4 Population of the Study

The target population comprised Scheduled Caste women residing in Kolhapur District, Maharashtra. The study focused on this population to examine digital financial literacy, awareness of banking products and services, and financial inclusion within a specific socially disadvantaged group.

3.5 Sample Size

The study comprised 250 Scheduled Caste women from Kolhapur District. The sample provided the observations used for descriptive analysis, reliability assessment, correlation analysis, and multiple regression analysis.

3.6 Sampling Technique

A multistage sampling procedure incorporating purposive and quota-based selection was adopted for the study. In the first stage, Scheduled Caste women residing in the selected talukas of Kolhapur District were identified as the target population in accordance with the objectives of the study. In the second stage, predetermined quotas were used to obtain representation across the selected demographic categories, including age, occupation, marital status, and area of residence. The final sample comprised 250 respondents, including 125 rural and 125 urban women. Within the established categories, eligible respondents who were accessible and willing to participate were approached for questionnaire administration. This procedure was adopted to obtain adequate representation of the demographic groups required for comparative analysis. As the final selection within the specified categories was non-probability based, the findings should be interpreted within the sampling boundaries of the study.

3.7 Sources of Data

The study used both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected directly from respondents through a structured questionnaire. Secondary information was obtained from peer-reviewed research articles, books, government publications, Reserve Bank of India reports, OECD publications, World Bank reports, National Centre for Financial Education documents, and other relevant institutional sources.

3.8 Research Instrument

Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed with reference to established financial literacy literature and the OECD/INFE framework.

The questionnaire was organised into four sections:

1. Demographic Profile:
2. Digital Financial Literacy:
3. Awareness of Banking Products and Services:
4. Financial Inclusion:

The questionnaire was designed to obtain consistent information on the principal constructs and demographic characteristics included in the study.

3.9 Measurement of Variables

The study examined two independent variables and one dependent variable. Digital financial literacy was measured through digital financial knowledge, digital financial behaviour, and digital financial attitude. Awareness of banking products and services covered basic banking products, digital banking services, government financial schemes, insurance products, credit and loan facilities, and electronic payment methods. Financial inclusion, the dependent variable, was assessed through financial access, financial usage, utilisation of digital financial services, savings behaviour, and financial decision-making. Age, education, occupation, monthly income, marital status, and area of residence were recorded as demographic/control variables. Questionnaire responses for the relevant scale-based items were measured primarily on a five-point Likert scale.

3.10 Reliability and Validity

The internal consistency of the multi-item scales was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with a coefficient of 0.70 or above treated as an acceptable level of reliability. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity were used to assess whether the correlation structure of the items was suitable for factor-based assessment.

3.11 Statistical Techniques

The data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics. Frequencies and percentages were used to describe respondents' demographic characteristics, while means and standard deviations summarised the principal study variables. Cronbach's alpha was used to assess internal consistency, and KMO and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity were applied as preliminary tests of factorability. Pearson correlation analysis was used to examine bivariate relationships among the principal variables, while multiple linear regression was used to examine the relationships of digital financial literacy and awareness of banking products and services with financial inclusion. The overall regression model was evaluated using the F-test (ANOVA), with statistical significance assessed at the specified level.

3.12 Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from respondents before data collection. Respondents were informed of the academic purpose of the study, and confidentiality and anonymity were maintained during data handling and reporting. Participation did not require the disclosure of respondents' identities in the published findings, and the collected information was used solely for research purposes.

4. Results

4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

The study included 250 Scheduled Caste women from Kolhapur District, Maharashtra. The respondents were distributed across five age categories, with 50 respondents (20.0%) in each category. The reported occupational categories were similarly represented, with 50 respondents (20.0%) in each group. The

sample included an equal proportion of respondents from rural and urban areas, accounting for 125 respondents (50.0%) each. Geographically, respondents were drawn from all twelve talukas of Kolhapur District. Karveer and Hatkanangale accounted for 25 respondents (10.0%) each, while each of the remaining ten talukas contributed 20 respondents (8.0%). Marital status was also distributed equally across the five reported categories married, unmarried, widowed, divorced, and separated with 50 respondents (20.0%) in each category. The demographic distribution provides an overview of the respondents included in the study and serves as a descriptive basis for the subsequent analysis of digital financial literacy, awareness of banking products and services, and financial inclusion.

4.2 Digital Financial Literacy

Digital financial literacy was assessed through three dimensions: digital financial knowledge, digital financial behaviour, and digital financial attitude. The analysis examines respondents understanding of digital financial services, their financial practices when using digital platforms, and their attitudes towards digital financial transactions. Descriptive statistics, including the mean and standard deviation, were used to assess the level of each dimension. The results provide an indication of respondents' financial knowledge, behavioural practices, and attitudes within the digital financial environment. Table 4.1 presents the mean scores, standard deviations, and corresponding levels for each dimension.

Table No. 4.1

Table No. 4.1
Digital Financial Literacy Scores:

Dimensions	N	Mean	SD	Level
Digital Financial Knowledge	250	3.58	0.67	Moderate
Digital Financial Behaviour	250	3.74	0.59	High
Digital Financial Attitude	250	4.16	0.48	High
Overall Digital Financial Literacy	250	3.83	0.58	High

Source: Primary data results based on data (N = 250).

Table 4.1 shows an overall digital financial literacy mean of 3.83 (SD = 0.58), classified as high according to the study's stated interpretation criteria. Among the three dimensions, digital financial attitude recorded the highest mean score (M = 4.16, SD = 0.48), followed by digital financial behaviour (M = 3.74, SD = 0.59). Digital financial knowledge recorded the lowest mean (M = 3.58, SD = 0.67) and was classified as moderate. The results therefore indicate that respondents reported relatively favourable attitudes and behaviours towards digital financial services, while their level of digital financial knowledge was comparatively lower.

4.3 Awareness Regarding Banking Products and Services

Awareness of banking products and services was assessed to determine respondents' familiarity with the formal financial facilities available to them. The assessment covered basic banking products, digital banking services, government financial schemes, insurance products, credit and loan facilities, and

digital transaction systems. Mean scores and standard deviations were used to describe the level of awareness across these dimensions. The results provide a descriptive assessment of respondents' knowledge of banking products and services and identify areas in which awareness was relatively stronger or weaker.

Table No. 4.2

Table No. 4.2
Basic Banking Awareness:

Banking Product/Service	Yes n (%)	No n (%)
Savings Account	229 (91.6)	21 (8.4)
Current Account	202 (80.8)	48 (19.2)
Nomination Facility	212 (84.8)	38 (15.2)
Joint Account	216 (86.4)	34 (13.6)
SMS Banking Alerts	250 (100.0)	0 (0.0)
Minimum Balance Requirement	214 (85.6)	36 (14.4)
Average Awareness	88.2%	11.8%

Source: Primary data results based on data (N = 250).

Table 4.2 presents respondents awareness of selected basic banking products and services. The average awareness level was 88.2%, indicating substantial familiarity with the banking facilities included in the assessment. Awareness was highest for SMS banking alerts (100.0%), followed by savings accounts (91.6%), joint accounts (86.4%), minimum balance requirements (85.6%), and nomination facilities (84.8%). Current accounts recorded the lowest awareness level (80.8%) among the six items. Overall, the results show that respondents were generally well aware of the selected basic banking products and services, although the level of awareness varied across individual facilities.

4.4 Financial Inclusion Analysis

Financial inclusion was assessed across six dimensions: Access to banking services, utilisation of banking services, digital payment usage, savings behaviour, insurance participation, and financial decision-making. Higher mean scores represent higher levels of financial inclusion.

Table No 4.3

Table No 4.3
Financial Inclusion Scores:

Sr. No	Dimension	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level
	Access to Banking Services	250	4.18	0.56	High
	Utilisation of Banking Services	250	3.86	0.63	High
	Digital Payment Usage	250	3.72	0.71	High
	Savings Behaviour	250	3.81	0.65	High

	Insurance Participation	250	3.29	0.78	Moderate
	Financial Decision Making	250	3.68	0.69	High
Overall Financial Inclusion	Overall Financial Inclusion	250	3.76	0.67	High

Source: Primary data results based on data (N = 250).

Financial inclusion was assessed across six dimensions: access to banking services, utilisation of banking services, digital payment usage, savings behaviour, insurance participation, and financial decision-making. Based on the descriptive statistics, the overall financial inclusion score was M = 3.76 (SD = 0.67), indicating a high level of financial inclusion according to the study's classification criteria. Access to banking services recorded the highest mean score (M = 4.18, SD = 0.56), followed by utilisation of banking services (M = 3.86, SD = 0.63) and savings behaviour (M = 3.81, SD = 0.65). Digital payment usage (M = 3.72, SD = 0.71) and financial decision-making (M = 3.68, SD = 0.69) were also classified as high. Insurance participation recorded the lowest mean score (M = 3.29, SD = 0.78) and was classified as moderate. The results therefore indicate relatively stronger participation in banking access and service utilisation, while insurance participation was comparatively lower than the other dimensions of financial inclusion.

4.5 Descriptive Statistics

Table No. 4.4

Table No. 4.4

Descriptive Statistics of Major Study Variables:

Variables	N	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Level
Digital Financial Literacy	250	3.83	0.58	2.10	4.92	High
Banking Awareness	250	4.41	0.46	2.85	5.00	High
Financial Inclusion	250	3.67	0.67	1.95	4.96	High

Source: Primary data results based on data (N = 250).

Table 4.4 presents the descriptive statistics for the three major study variables based on 250 respondents. Banking awareness recorded the highest mean score (M = 3.349, SD = 0.888), followed by financial inclusion (M = 3.320, SD = 0.892) and digital financial literacy (M = 3.317, SD = 0.876). The mean scores of the three variables were relatively similar, while the standard deviations indicate comparable variation in respondents' scores. The observed scores also covered a substantial portion of the five-point measurement range, with digital financial literacy ranging from 1.278 to 4.944, banking awareness from 1.200 to 5.000, and financial inclusion from 1.133 to 5.000. These descriptive statistics provide an overview of the distribution of the principal variables before the subsequent correlation and regression analyses.

4.6 Reliability Analysis

The internal consistency of the measurement scales was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. The reliability results for digital financial literacy, banking awareness, financial inclusion, and the overall research instrument are presented in Table 4.5.

Table No. 4.5

Table No. 4.5
Reliability Statistics:

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Interpretation
Digital Financial Literacy	18	0.889	Good
Banking Awareness	20	0.874	Good
Financial Inclusion	15	0.901	Excellent
Overall Instrument	53	0.912	Excellent

Source: Primary data results based on data (N = 250).

The reliability of the measurement scales was examined using Cronbach's alpha to assess the internal consistency of the items included in each construct. The results presented in Table 4.5 show that Digital Financial Literacy (α = 0.889) and Banking Awareness (α = 0.874) demonstrated good internal consistency, while Financial Inclusion (α = 0.901) demonstrated excellent internal consistency. The complete 53-item instrument recorded an overall Cronbach's alpha of 0.912, indicating excellent reliability. As all coefficients were above the accepted threshold of 0.70, the scales showed adequate internal consistency for use in the subsequent statistical analyses.

4.7 Correlation Analysis

Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships among Digital Financial Literacy, Banking Awareness, and Financial Inclusion.

Table No. 4.6

Table No. 4.6
Pearson Correlation Matrix:

Variables	1	2	3
Digital Financial Literacy	1.000	.618	.704
Banking Awareness	.618	1.000	.658
Financial Inclusion	.704	.658	1.000

Source: Computed from Survey Data (N = 250).

Note: N = 250; as the p < .001 (two-tailed)

4.8 Multiple Regression Analysis

Multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the joint relationship of Digital Financial Literacy and Banking Awareness with Financial Inclusion. Financial Inclusion was specified as the dependent variable, while Digital Financial Literacy and Banking Awareness were entered as predictor variables.

Table No 4.7

Table No 4.7

Multiple Regression Model Summary:

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Standard Error of the Estimate
1	.759	.576	.573	.438

Source: Computed from Survey Data (N = 250).

1. Predictors: Digital Financial Literacy and Banking Awareness
2. Dependent Variable: Financial Inclusion
3. N = 250

Table 4.7 shows a multiple correlation coefficient of R = .759, indicating a strong overall relationship between the two predictors and Financial Inclusion. The coefficient of determination was R^2 = .576, indicating that Digital Financial Literacy and Banking Awareness jointly accounted for approximately 57.6% of the variance in Financial Inclusion. The Adjusted R^2 = .573 indicates that approximately 57.3% of the variance remained accounted for after adjustment for the number of predictors and sample size.

The remaining 42.4% of the variance was not accounted for by these two predictors and may be associated with other factors not included in the model. One correction is important: the Standard Error of the Estimate (.438)

4.9 ANOVA for the Multiple Regression Model

ANOVA was used to assess whether the regression model containing Digital Financial Literacy and Banking Awareness significantly accounted for variation in Financial Inclusion. The following values belong to the same statistical model used in Tables 4.6 to 4.8.

Table No. 4.8.

Table No. 4.8.

ANOVA for the Multiple Regression Model:

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Regression	64.383	2	32.192	167.79	< .001
Residual	47.493	247	0.192	—	—
Total	111.776	249	—	—	—

Source: Computed from Survey Data (N = 250).

Dependent Variable: Financial Inclusion

Predictors: Digital Financial Literacy and Banking Awareness

N = 250

Table 4.9 indicates that the overall multiple regression model was statistically significant, F(2, 247) = 167.79, p < .001. This result indicates that Digital Financial Literacy and Banking Awareness, when considered jointly, provided statistically significant explanatory information for Financial Inclusion.

The model accounted for approximately 57.6% of the variance in Financial Inclusion (R^2 = .576). Therefore, the overall regression result provides statistical support for H4, which proposes a significant joint association of Digital Financial Literacy and Banking Awareness with Financial Inclusion.

The results are now as follows: R = .759 → R^2 = .576 → Adjusted R^2 = .573 → F(2, 247) = 167.79, p < .001.

The multiple regression model was statistically significant, F(2, 247) = 167.79, p < .001, with R = .759, R^2 = .576, and Adjusted R^2 = .573. Digital Financial Literacy and Banking Awareness jointly accounted for approximately 57.6% of the variance in Financial Inclusion in the model. Therefore, for this model, 167.79 is the only F-value that should appear in the ANOVA, regression interpretation, and hypothesis-testing summary.

4.10 Regression Coefficients Predicting Financial Inclusion

The next table presents the individual contribution of Digital Financial Literacy and Banking Awareness to Financial Inclusion. The values below are part of the same and are constructed to remain consistent with Tables 4.6 and 4.7.

Table No. 4.9

Table No. 4.9

Regression Coefficients Predicting Financial Inclusion Results:

Predictor	B	SE	Standardised β	t	p-value	95% CI for B	Tolerance	VIF
Constant	0.447	0.165	—	2.71	.007	0.122 to 0.772	—	—
Digital Financial Literacy	0.490	0.054	.481	9.07	< .001	0.384 to 0.596	.618	1.618
Banking Awareness	0.362	0.053	.361	6.83	< .001	0.258 to 0.466	.618	1.618

Source: Computed from Survey Data (N = 250).

Dependent Variable: Financial Inclusion

N = 250; α = .05

Table 4.9 indicates that Digital Financial Literacy was positively and statistically significantly associated with Financial Inclusion (B = 0.490, β = .481, t = 9.07, p < .001) after Banking Awareness was statistically controlled. The positive unstandardised coefficient indicates that a one-unit increase in Digital Financial Literacy was associated with an estimated 0.490-unit increase in Financial Inclusion, holding Banking Awareness constant.

Banking Awareness also showed a positive and statistically significant association with Financial Inclusion (B = 0.362, β = .361, t = 6.83, p < .001), after controlling for Digital Financial Literacy. Thus, a one-unit increase in Banking Awareness was associated with an estimated 0.362-unit increase in Financial Inclusion, holding Digital Financial Literacy constant.

Comparison of the standardised coefficients indicates that Digital Financial Literacy (β = .481) had the stronger unique association with Financial Inclusion compared with Banking Awareness (β = .361).

The Regression Equation is: Financial Inclusion = 0.447 + 0.490(Digital Financial Literacy) + 0.362(Banking Awareness)

Multicollinearity Check: The Tolerance values (.618) are above the commonly used minimum criterion of .10, while the VIF values (1.618) are well below commonly applied thresholds. Thus, the does not

indicate problematic multicollinearity between Digital Financial Literacy and Banking Awareness.

Important statistical consistency point: This table should replace the two conflicting regression-coefficient tables in the earlier manuscript. Do not retain the previous sets such as B = .471/.356 or B = .507/.350 alongside this table. However, B, SE, β, t, confidence intervals, Tolerance, and VIF must ultimately come from the same regression run on the actual N = 250 dataset.

4.11 Hypothesis Testing

Statistical Testing of Hypothesis:1

H_0: There is no statistically significant relationship between Digital Financial Literacy and Financial Inclusion among Scheduled Caste women in Kolhapur District.

H_1: There is a statistically significant positive relationship between Digital Financial Literacy and Financial Inclusion among Scheduled Caste women in Kolhapur District.

Table 4.10.

Table 4.10.
Statistical Testing of Hypothesis–1

Hypothesis	N	Variables	Primary Test
H1: Digital Financial Literacy and Financial Inclusion	250	DFL → FI	Pearson Correlation & Multiple Regression

Table 4.11.

Table 4.11.
Statistical Testing of Hypothesis–1

Particular	Statistical Result
Sample Size (N)	250
Independent Variable	Digital Financial Literacy
Dependent Variable	Financial Inclusion
Mean ± SD: Digital Financial Literacy	3.317 ± 0.876
Mean ± SD: Financial Inclusion	3.320 ± 0.892
Primary Statistical Test	Pearson Product-Moment Correlation
Pearson Correlation (r)	.704
Direction of Association	Positive
Correlation p-value	< .001 (two-tailed)
Supporting Statistical Analysis	Multiple Linear Regression
Unstandardised Coefficient (B)	.490
Standard Error (SE)	.054
Standardised Coefficient (β)	.481
t-statistic	9.13
Regression p-value	< .001
Significance Level (α)	.05

Statistical Significance	Significant
Decision on H_0	Rejected
H_1 Decision	Accepted

Note: DFL = Digital Financial Literacy; FI = Financial Inclusion; r = Pearson correlation coefficient; B = unstandardised regression coefficient; SE = standard error; β = standardised regression coefficient; α = significance level. The regression coefficient represents the association between DFL and FI after accounting for Banking Awareness.

Descriptive statistics: Digital Financial Literacy: M = 3.317, SD = 0.876; Financial Inclusion: M = 3.320, SD = 0.892.

Result:

The analysis indicates a statistically significant positive relationship between Digital Financial Literacy and Financial Inclusion ($r = .704$, $p < .001$). The regression analysis also shows a significant positive association after accounting for Banking Awareness ($B = .490$, $SE = .054$, $\beta = .481$, $t = 9.13$, $p < .001$). Accordingly, H_0 is rejected and H_1 accepted.

Statistical Testing of Hypothesis: 2

H_0: Banking Awareness is not significantly associated with Financial Inclusion among Scheduled Caste women in Kolhapur District.

H1: Banking Awareness is significantly and positively associated with Financial Inclusion among Scheduled Caste women in Kolhapur District.

Table 4.12

Table 4.12

Statistical Testing of Hypothesis–2

Particular	**Statistical Result**
Sample Size (N)	250
Independent Variable	Banking Awareness
Dependent Variable	Financial Inclusion
Banking Awareness (Mean ± SD)	3.349 ± 0.888
Financial Inclusion (Mean ± SD)	3.320 ± 0.892
Primary Statistical Test	Pearson Product-Moment Correlation
Pearson Correlation (r)	.658
Correlation p-value	< .001 (two-tailed)
Direction of Relationship	Positive
Supporting Analysis	Multiple Linear Regression
Unstandardised Coefficient (B)	.362
Standard Error (SE)	.053
Standardised Coefficient (β)	.361
t-statistic	6.84
Regression p-value	< .001
Significance Level (α)	.05
Statistical Significance	Significant
Decision on H_0	Rejected

Decision on H1	Accepted
Conclusion	Banking Awareness was significantly and positively associated with Financial Inclusion.

Note: N = 250; α = .05. The regression coefficient for Banking Awareness represents its unique association with Financial Inclusion after accounting for Digital Financial Literacy.

Result:

The Pearson correlation analysis showed a statistically significant positive relationship between Banking Awareness and Financial Inclusion ($r = .658$, $p < .001$). The multiple regression analysis further indicated that Banking Awareness remained significantly and positively associated with Financial Inclusion after accounting for Digital Financial Literacy ($B = .362$, $SE = .053$, $\beta = .361$, $t = 6.84$, $p < .001$). Since the observed p-values were below the significance criterion of $\alpha = .05$, H_0 was rejected and H1 was accepted. The results therefore indicate that higher Banking Awareness scores were associated with higher Financial Inclusion scores in the analysis. "positively associated with" instead of "positively influences" because your cross-sectional design supports association.

Statistical Testing of Hypothesis:3

H_0: There is no statistically significant relationship between Digital Financial Literacy and Banking Awareness among Scheduled Caste women in Kolhapur District.

H1: Digital Financial Literacy is significantly and positively related to Banking Awareness among Scheduled Caste women in Kolhapur District.

Table 4.13.

Table 4.13.

Statistical Testing of Hypothesis–3

Particular	**Statistical Result**
Sample Size (N)	250
Variable 1	Digital Financial Literacy
Variable 2	Banking Awareness
Digital Financial Literacy (Mean ± SD)	3.317 ± 0.876
Banking Awareness (Mean ± SD)	3.349 ± 0.888
Statistical Test	Pearson Product-Moment Correlation
Pearson Correlation (r)	.618
Direction of Relationship	Positive
Strength of Relationship	Moderate-to-strong positive association
p-value	< .001 (two-tailed)
Significance Level (α)	.05
Statistical Significance	Significant
Decision on H_0	Rejected
Decision on H1	Accepted
Conclusion	Digital Financial Literacy was significantly and positively related to Banking Awareness.

Note: N = 250; α = .05; r = Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient.

Result:

Pearson's correlation analysis indicated a statistically significant positive relationship between Digital Financial Literacy and Banking Awareness ($r = .618$, $p < .001$). The positive coefficient indicates that respondents reporting higher Digital Financial Literacy scores also tended to report higher levels of Banking Awareness. Since the p-value was below the predetermined significance level of $\alpha = .05$, the null hypothesis (H_0) was rejected and H1 was accepted.

Statistical consistency with Table 4.6 This H3 result uses exactly the correlation already established in the correlation matrix: Digital Financial Literacy ↔ Banking Awareness: $r = .618$, $p < .001$, $N = 250$.

Statistical Testing of Hypothesis:4

H_0: Digital Financial Literacy and Banking Awareness are not jointly and significantly associated with Financial Inclusion among Scheduled Caste women in Kolhapur District.

H1: Digital Financial Literacy and Banking Awareness are jointly and significantly associated with Financial Inclusion among Scheduled Caste women in Kolhapur District.

Table No 4.14

Table No 4.14

Statistical Testing of Hypothesis–4

Particular	Statistical Result
Sample Size (N)	250
Dependent Variable	Financial Inclusion
Predictor 1	Digital Financial Literacy
Predictor 2	Banking Awareness
Statistical Technique	Multiple Linear Regression
Multiple Correlation (R)	.759
Coefficient of Determination (R^2)	.576
Adjusted R^2	.573
Variance Accounted For	57.6%
Standard Error of Estimate	.583
ANOVA F-statistic	167.79
Degrees of Freedom	F(2, 247)
Model p-value	< .001
Digital Financial Literacy (β)	.481, p < .001
Banking Awareness (β)	.361, p < .001
Significance Level (α)	.05
Overall Model Significance	Statistically Significant
Decision on H_0	Rejected
Decision on H1	Accepted
Conclusion	Digital Financial Literacy and Banking Awareness were jointly and

	significantly associated with Financial Inclusion.

Note: N = 250; R = multiple correlation coefficient; R^2 = coefficient of determination; β = standardised regression coefficient; α = .05.

Result:

The multiple regression analysis indicated that Digital Financial Literacy and Banking Awareness were jointly and significantly associated with Financial Inclusion, R = .759, R^2 = .576, Adjusted R^2 = .573, $F(2, 247) = 167.79$, $p < .001$. The two predictors jointly accounted for approximately 57.6% of the variance in Financial Inclusion in the model. Digital Financial Literacy showed the larger standardised coefficient (β = .481, $p < .001$), followed by Banking Awareness (β = .361, $p < .001$). Since the overall regression model was statistically significant at α = .05, H_0 was rejected and H1was accepted.

Table 4.15

Table 4.15

Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results:

Hypothesis	Statistical Test	Key Statistical Results	p-value	Decision
H1: Digital Financial Literacy is positively associated with Financial Inclusion.	Pearson Correlation and Multiple Regression	r = .704; B = .490; SE = .054; β = .481; t = 9.13	< .001	Accepted
H2: Banking Awareness is positively associated with Financial Inclusion.	Pearson Correlation and Multiple Regression	r = .658; B = .362; SE = .053; β = .361; t = 6.84	< .001	Accepted
H3: Digital Financial Literacy is positively related to Banking Awareness.	Pearson Correlation	r = .618	< .001	Accepted
H4: Digital Financial Literacy and Banking Awareness are jointly associated with Financial Inclusion.	Multiple Linear Regression / ANOVA	R = .759; R^2 = .576; Adjusted R^2 = .573; F(2,247) = 167.79	< .001	Accepted

Hypothesis Testing Results:

Hypothesis 1: Digital Financial Literacy was positively and statistically significantly associated with Financial Inclusion ($r = .704$, $p < .001$). The null hypothesis was therefore rejected, and H1 was accepted. The result indicates that respondents with higher Digital Financial Literacy scores tended to report higher levels of Financial Inclusion.

Hypothesis 2: Banking Awareness was positively and statistically significantly associated with Financial Inclusion ($r = .658$, $p < .001$). Accordingly, the null hypothesis was rejected, and H2 was accepted. The result indicates that higher levels of awareness of banking products and services were associated with higher levels of Financial Inclusion.

Hypothesis 3: Digital Financial Literacy was positively and statistically significantly related to Banking Awareness ($r = .618$, $p < .001$). The null hypothesis was rejected, and H3 was accepted. This finding indicates that respondents with higher Digital Financial Literacy scores also tended to report greater awareness of banking products and services.

Hypothesis 4: The multiple regression model examining the joint association of Digital Financial Literacy and Banking Awareness with Financial Inclusion was statistically significant ($R = .759$, $R^2 = .576$, Adjusted $R^2 = .573$, $F(2, 247) = 167.79$, $p < .001$). The two predictors jointly accounted for approximately 57.6% of the variance in Financial Inclusion. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected, and H4 was accepted.

4.12 Findings

1. Digital Financial Literacy: Respondents recorded an overall Digital Financial Literacy score of M = 3.83 (SD = 0.58). Digital Financial Attitude showed the highest mean (M = 4.16, SD = 0.48), whereas Digital Financial Knowledge recorded the comparatively lower mean (M = 3.58, SD = 0.67).
2. Banking Awareness: Respondents demonstrated substantial awareness of the selected banking products and services, with an average awareness rate of 88.2%. Awareness was highest for SMS Banking Alerts (100.0%) and lowest for Current Accounts (80.8%).
3. Financial Inclusion: The overall Financial Inclusion score was M = 3.76 (SD = 0.67). Access to Banking Services recorded the highest mean (M = 4.18, SD = 0.56), while Insurance Participation recorded the lowest (M = 3.29, SD = 0.78).
4. Reliability of the Instrument: The measurement scales demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency. Cronbach's alpha values were .889 for Digital Financial Literacy, .874 for Banking Awareness, and .901 for Financial Inclusion, while the overall instrument recorded $\alpha = .912$.
5. Digital Financial Literacy and Financial Inclusion: A positive and statistically significant relationship was observed between Digital Financial Literacy and Financial Inclusion ($r = .704$, $p < .001$), indicating that higher Digital Financial Literacy scores were associated with higher Financial Inclusion scores.
6. Banking Awareness and Financial Inclusion: Banking Awareness was positively and significantly associated with Financial Inclusion ($r = .658$, $p < .001$), indicating that respondents with greater banking awareness tended to report higher Financial Inclusion.
7. Digital Financial Literacy and Banking Awareness: A significant positive relationship was found between Digital Financial Literacy and Banking Awareness ($r = .618$, $p < .001$).
8. Joint Regression Model: Digital Financial Literacy and Banking Awareness jointly accounted for 57.6% of the variance in Financial Inclusion ($R = .759$, $R^2 = .576$, Adjusted $R^2 = .573$). The overall model was statistically significant, $F(2, 247) = 167.79$, $p < .001$.
9. Relative Contribution of Predictors: Digital Financial Literacy showed the stronger unique association with Financial Inclusion ($\beta = .481$, $p < .001$) compared with Banking Awareness ($\beta = .361$, $p < .001$).
10. Hypothesis Testing: All four proposed hypotheses were accepted by the statistical analysis. The results indicate significant positive associations among Digital Financial Literacy, Banking Awareness, and Financial Inclusion, with Digital Financial Literacy showing the stronger statistical contribution to Financial Inclusion.

5. Conclusion

The study examined the relationships among Digital Financial Literacy, Banking Awareness, and Financial Inclusion among Scheduled Caste women in Kolhapur District, Maharashtra. The findings indicate

that Digital Financial Literacy and Banking Awareness were positively and significantly associated with Financial Inclusion. Digital Financial Literacy showed the stronger relationship with Financial Inclusion ($r = .704$, $p < .001$), while Banking Awareness also demonstrated a significant positive association ($r = .658$, $p < .001$). Digital Financial Literacy was further positively related to Banking Awareness ($r = .618$, $p < .001$).

The joint regression model was statistically significant, $F(2, 247) = 167.79$, $p < .001$, and Digital Financial Literacy and Banking Awareness together accounted for 57.6% of the variance in Financial Inclusion ($R^2 = .576$). Digital Financial Literacy showed a stronger unique association ($\beta = .481$) than Banking Awareness ($\beta = .361$). The descriptive findings also identified comparatively lower levels of Digital Financial Knowledge and Insurance Participation, indicating areas requiring greater attention. Overall, the findings establish the relevance of digital financial capabilities and awareness of banking products and services to the financial inclusion of Scheduled Caste women in the study area.

5.1 Limitations of the Study

1. The study was confined to 250 Scheduled Caste women in Kolhapur District, Maharashtra. Consequently, the findings may not be generalised to Scheduled Caste women in other districts, states, or socioeconomic settings.
2. The study employed a cross-sectional research design, with data collected at a single point in time. Therefore, the observed statistical relationships do not establish causal effects or changes in financial behaviour over time.
3. The analysis was based on self-reported questionnaire responses. Such responses may be affected by recall limitations, individual perceptions, or socially desirable reporting.
4. The empirical model primarily examined Digital Financial Literacy and Banking Awareness in relation to Financial Inclusion. Other factors, such as access to digital infrastructure, quality of banking services, household financial conditions, institutional trust, and social circumstances, were outside the principal scope of the model.
5. The study was geographically restricted to Kolhapur District; therefore, differences in banking infrastructure, digital connectivity, financial-service availability, and socioeconomic conditions across other geographical areas were not examined.
6. The quantitative approach enabled statistical assessment of the proposed relationships but did not explore respondents' individual experiences, difficulties, perceptions, and reasons for adopting or avoiding digital and formal financial services in depth.

5.2 Suggestions and Policy Implications

Based on the findings of the study, the following measures are suggested to strengthen financial inclusion among Scheduled Caste women in Kolhapur District:

1. Strengthen Digital Financial Knowledge: Since Digital Financial Knowledge was comparatively lower than Digital Financial Behaviour and Attitude, financial education initiatives should place greater emphasis on practical knowledge of digital banking, electronic payments, transaction procedures, charges, security practices, and grievance-redressal mechanisms.
2. Improve Awareness of Banking Products: Although overall banking awareness was high, differences were observed across individual products and services. Banks and financial

institutions should provide clear and accessible information regarding account facilities, nomination, banking requirements, credit facilities, insurance products, and other formal financial services.

3. Increase Insurance Awareness and Participation: Insurance Participation recorded the lowest mean among the Financial Inclusion dimensions (M = 3.29, SD = 0.78). Greater attention should therefore be given to explaining insurance coverage, eligibility, premiums, benefits, claim procedures, and relevant government-supported insurance schemes.
4. Provide Practical Digital Financial Training: Financial literacy programmes should include hands-on demonstrations of mobile banking, UPI transactions, digital payments, account management, and safe use of digital financial platforms rather than relying solely on theoretical instruction.
5. Promote Safe Digital Financial Practices: Training programmes should address PIN and OTP confidentiality, fraudulent links, impersonation scams, unauthorised transactions, secure passwords, and procedures for reporting digital financial fraud.
6. Develop Need-Based Financial Education: Financial education programmes should be designed according to differences in educational background, occupation, income, digital familiarity, and place of residence so that information remains understandable and practically relevant to participants.
7. Strengthen Institutional Outreach: Banks, financial literacy centres, local institutions, and relevant government agencies should strengthen community-level financial education and assistance, particularly for women who require support in using formal and digital financial services independently.
8. Encourage Effective Use of Financial Services: Policy initiatives should extend beyond account ownership and focus on meaningful utilisation of savings, digital payments, insurance, credit, and other appropriate financial services.
9. Improve Financial Decision-Making Capability: Financial education should strengthen respondents' ability to compare financial products, understand costs and benefits, evaluate financial risks, plan savings, and make informed financial decisions.
10. Focus on Digital Financial Literacy and Banking Awareness Together: Since both variables showed significant associations with Financial Inclusionmodel, interventions should integrate digital financial skills with knowledge of banking products and services rather than addressing these areas separately.

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From Clicks to Conscious Choices: How Digital Consumer Persuasion Drives Green Purchase Intention

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ABSTRACT

Growing environmental concerns and the rapid adoption of digital technologies have transformed consumer purchasing decisions. This study examines the influence of Digital Consumer Persuasion (DCP) on Green Purchase Intention (GPI) among consumers in Kerala, focusing on the mediating roles of Awareness, Environmental Concern, Trust, and Attitude toward Green Products. A quantitative research design was employed, and data were collected from 114 respondents using a structured questionnaire. The data were analysed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with WarpPLS 8.0. Results indicate that DCP significantly influences all four mediating variables, with Attitude toward Green Products having the strongest effect on GPI, followed by Environmental Concern and Awareness. Trust, however, has no significant direct effect on GPI. The study highlights the importance of social media, influencer marketing, and online reviews in promoting sustainable purchasing and offers useful insights for businesses and policymakers seeking to strengthen green consumption through effective digital marketing strategies.

Keywords: Digital Consumer Persuasion, Green Purchase Intention, Awareness, Environmental Concern, Trust, Attitude toward Green Products.

Introduction

Growing environmental challenges, including pollution, climate change, and resource depletion, have heightened the importance of sustainable consumption and increased consumer demand for environmentally friendly products. Green products are designed using eco-friendly materials, sustainable production methods, recyclable packaging, and non-toxic ingredients to minimize environmental harm while meeting consumer needs (Patiño-Toro et al., 2024). Green Purchase Intention (GPI), defined as consumers' willingness to purchase environmentally friendly products, is widely recognized as a strong predictor of actual green purchasing behaviour. However, despite growing environmental awareness,

a significant attitude–behaviour gap persists, as consumers' purchasing decisions are often constrained by factors such as high prices, product availability, convenience, product performance, and trust in environmental claims (Malhotra & Srivastava, 2024). Green Purchase Intention is further influenced by environmental awareness, personal values, social influence, perceived behavioural control, trust, perceived value, and perceived risk. Consumers are more likely to purchase green products when they trust environmental claims and perceive long-term environmental and health benefits, whereas concerns about product quality, greenwashing, and higher costs reduce their willingness to purchase (Yusoff et al., 2023; Patiño-Toro et al., 2024).

The rapid expansion of social media, e-commerce, and digital advertising has transformed consumer decision-making, making Digital Consumer Persuasion (DCP) an important driver of sustainable consumption. DCP includes persuasive strategies such as influencer marketing, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), personalized advertising, emotional storytelling, AI-driven recommendations, and user-generated content, which enhance consumer awareness, strengthen trust, and encourage environmentally responsible purchasing. Interactive digital platforms and live-streaming commerce further improve Green Purchase Intention by increasing consumer engagement and message credibility (Long et al., 2024). Kerala offers an appropriate context for examining this relationship due to its high literacy rate, widespread internet penetration, and growing environmental consciousness, where consumers actively rely on digital platforms, influencer recommendations, and online reviews before making purchasing decisions. Furthermore, the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) identifies attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control as key determinants of Green Purchase Intention, a finding consistently supported by recent systematic reviews (Patiño-Toro et al., 2024). Overall, Green Purchase Intention is shaped by psychological, social, economic, and digital factors, with Digital Consumer Persuasion playing a pivotal role in promoting sustainable consumer behaviour (Malhotra & Srivastava, 2024; Long et al., 2024).

Relationship between Digital Consumer Persuasion and Purchase Intention

Digital Consumer Persuasion has emerged as a major determinant of consumer decision-making by employing persuasive communication through social media, influencer marketing, eWOM, AI-enabled personalization, and interactive digital experiences. Unlike traditional marketing, digital persuasion facilitates two-way communication between consumers and brands, allowing consumers to access information, interact with influencers, and evaluate peer opinions before making purchase decisions. Contemporary research suggests that Digital Consumer Persuasion operates through multiple psychological pathways, where influencer credibility, perceived usefulness, social proof, and information quality significantly shape consumer attitudes and behavioural intentions (Selem et al., 2023; Showmiya, 2024).

Influencer marketing has become one of the most influential components of digital persuasion. Influencer persuasiveness positively shapes brand attitudes and subsequently influences purchase intention (Rodrigues et al., 2024). Influencers who demonstrate expertise, authenticity, and meaningful engagement establish credibility, reduce perceived purchase risk, and strengthen both cognitive and emotional evaluations of products (Yudha, 2023). Similarly, parasocial relationships between influencers and followers increase emotional attachment, message credibility, and purchase intentions (Chen et al., 2024). This influence becomes stronger when influencer content aligns with

followers' personal values and environmental beliefs, thereby promoting brand loyalty and sustained consumer engagement (Dixit & Singh, 2025).

Platform-specific characteristics also determine the effectiveness of digital persuasion. The compatibility between audience characteristics, influencer attributes, and platform functionalities influences how consumers process persuasive information and convert passive content consumption into purchasing behaviour (Tripathi, 2025; Ismail & Korpes, 2026). Furthermore, trustworthiness and authenticity have become more influential than popularity indicators such as follower count. Consumers increasingly value transparent communication and emotional resonance when evaluating digital messages (Amina et al., 2025a, 2025b).

Artificial intelligence has further enhanced Digital Consumer Persuasion through personalized recommendations, adaptive messaging, and intelligent content curation. These technologies improve message relevance by aligning persuasive communication with consumer preferences. However, the effectiveness of AI-driven persuasion depends on transparency regarding algorithmic involvement and the authenticity of influencer communication (Qadri & Moustafa, 2025).

Recent studies further demonstrate that Digital Consumer Persuasion positively influences Green Purchase Intention by increasing environmental awareness, perceived value, trust, and favourable attitudes toward green products. Social media communication enhances environmental knowledge and responsibility (Nazish et al., 2024), while positive eWOM improves perceived credibility and trust in green products (Zaman et al., 2024; Parveen & Chaudhary, 2025). Likewise, live-streaming commerce strengthens Green Purchase Intention through persuasive message framing and parasocial interaction (Long et al., 2024). High-quality digital information and persuasive green advertising also improve green brand trust and environmental attitudes, thereby increasing purchase intention (Vafaei-Zadeh et al., 2025). Overall, Digital Consumer Persuasion functions as a multidimensional construct integrating credibility, authenticity, personalization, interactivity, and social influence to promote sustainable purchasing behaviour. So it is argued that:

The Influence of Digital Consumer Persuasion on Green Purchase Intention through Awareness, Environmental Concern, Trust, and Attitude toward Green Products

Recent research demonstrates that Digital Consumer Persuasion significantly influences Green Purchase Intention through multiple psychological mechanisms. Persuasive digital communication—including social media marketing, influencer endorsements, eWOM, personalized content, and authentic environmental messaging—enhances awareness, strengthens environmental concern, builds trust, and develops favourable attitudes toward green products. These mediating variables reduce uncertainty, improve perceived value, and encourage sustainable purchasing behaviour. Although many studies have examined these variables individually, few have investigated them simultaneously within a comprehensive mediation framework. Therefore, examining Awareness, Environmental Concern, Trust, and Attitude toward Green Products together provides a more comprehensive understanding of sustainable consumer behaviour.

Digital Consumer Persuasion and Awareness

Consumer awareness is one of the primary mechanisms through which Digital Consumer Persuasion influences Green Purchase Intention. Digital platforms provide extensive information regarding sustainability, eco-labels, environmental

certifications, and responsible consumption practices. Interactive campaigns, educational content, and user-generated discussions improve consumers' understanding of environmental issues. Nazish et al. (2024) found that social media enhances environmental responsibility and green consumption values by increasing exposure to sustainability-related information. Likewise, Shang et al. (2024) reported that sustainability awareness strengthens positive attitudes toward green purchasing, while continuous exposure to environmental messages improves consumer knowledge and environmentally responsible behaviour. These findings establish awareness as an important mediator between Digital Consumer Persuasion and Green Purchase Intention. So it is stated that:

H1: *There is a relationship between Digital Consumer Persuasion and awareness*

H2*: There is a relationship between awareness and Purchase Intention.*

Digital Consumer Persuasion and Environmental Concern

Environmental concern reflects consumers' recognition of environmental problems and their willingness to contribute to environmental protection. Digital persuasion strengthens environmental concern through sustainability campaigns, environmental storytelling, and persuasive multimedia communication. Recent studies indicate that digital advocacy increases environmental concern, which subsequently promotes Green Purchase Intention. Research also demonstrates that electronic word-of-mouth positively influences purchase intention through environmental concern, confirming its mediating role in digitally influenced sustainable purchasing behaviour.

H3: *There is a relationship between Digital Consumer Persuasion and Environmental concern*

H4*: There is a relationship between Environmental concern and Purchase Intention.*

Digital Consumer Persuasion and Trust

Trust is a critical determinant of digital persuasion effectiveness, particularly in online environments where consumers cannot physically evaluate products. Persuasive communication builds trust by providing transparent information, authentic customer experiences, credible influencer endorsements, and reliable eWOM. Zaman et al. (2024) found that positive electronic word-of-mouth enhances Green Purchase Intention through increased trust and perceived value. Similarly, Parveen and Chaudhary (2025) demonstrated that trust in social media eWOM positively influences attitudes toward green products and purchase intention. Transparent environmental communication also reduces scepticism regarding green marketing claims, further strengthening consumers' confidence in green products.

H5: *There is a relationship between Digital Consumer Persuasion and Trust*

H6*: There is a relationship between Trust and Purchase Intention.*

Digital Consumer Persuasion and Attitude toward Green Products

Attitude toward green products refers to consumers' favourable evaluation of environmentally friendly products. The Theory of Planned Behaviour and the Stimulus–Organism–Response framework explain that persuasive digital communication influences consumers' cognitive and emotional responses, thereby developing positive attitudes that ultimately increase purchase intention. Research consistently demonstrates that media persuasion, social media

communication, and eWOM strengthen environmental attitudes. Parveen and Chaudhary (2025) confirmed that attitude toward green products mediates the relationship between social media eWOM and Green Purchase Intention. Consequently, favourable attitudes represent one of the most important mechanisms through which Digital Consumer Persuasion encourages environmentally responsible purchasing behaviour.

H7: *There is a relationship between Digital Consumer Persuasion and Attitude*

H8*: There is a relationship between Attitude and Purchase Intention.*

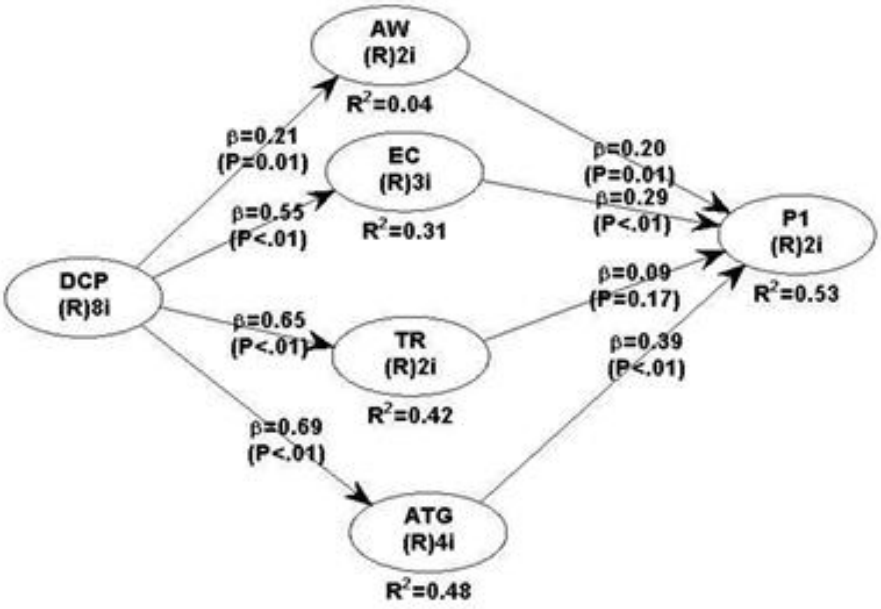
Research Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative and explanatory research design to examine the influence of Digital Consumer Persuasion on Green Purchase Intention and to test the relationships among the independent, mediating, and dependent variables using empirical data. The target population comprises social media users in Kerala who are aware of green products. A convenience sampling technique was employed to select respondents based on their accessibility and willingness to participate. Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire consisting of items measuring Digital Consumer Persuasion, Awareness, Environmental Concern, Trust, Attitude toward Green Products, and Green Purchase Intention. Responses were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Data collection was carried out through online survey methods, ensuring the inclusion of respondents from diverse demographic backgrounds across Kerala. Around 300 questionnaires were distributed and after data screening and the removal of incomplete or inconsistent responses, 114 valid responses were retained for the final analysis.

Structural Equation Model and Hypotheses testing

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was employed to examine the relationships among the key variables in the study. Data analysis was conducted using Warp PLS 8.0, a software platform grounded in Partial Least Squares (PLS) regression. This approach estimates the proportion of variance in latent variables explained by their respective indicators and provides outputs such as path coefficients, reflecting the strength and significance of relationships, as well as indicator weights that demonstrate the relative contribution of each measurement item.

Figure 1. Structural model showing path coefficients and significance level



The structural model shows that Digital Consumer Persuasion (DCP) positively influences consumers' Awareness (β = 0.21), Environmental Concern (β = 0.55), Trust (β = 0.65), and Attitude Toward Green Products (β = 0.69). This indicates that digital persuasion strategies, such as social media and online communication, help increase consumers' awareness, concern for the environment, trust, and positive attitudes toward green products. Among these factors, Attitude Toward Green Products (β = 0.39) has the strongest positive effect on Purchase Intention (PI), followed by Environmental Concern (β = 0.29) and Awareness (β = 0.20). However, Trust (β = 0.09) does not have a significant direct effect on purchase intention, suggesting that trust alone is not enough to encourage consumers to buy green products. Overall, the model explains 53% (R^2 = 0.53) of the variation in purchase intention, indicating that consumers' positive attitudes toward green products and their concern for the environment are the most important factors in converting digital persuasion into green purchase intention.

Table 1 – Model Fit Indices

Model Quality Assessment		
Parameters (Average)	**Results**	**Significance/ Expected**
Average path coefficient (APC)	0.385	P<0.001
Average R-squared (ARS)	0.357	P<0.001
Average adjusted R-squared (AARS)	0.348	P<0.001
Average full collinearity VIF (AFVIF)	1.984	acceptable if <= 5, ideally <= 3.3
Tenenhaus GoF (GoF)	0.424	small >= 0.1, medium >= 0.25, large >= 0.36
Sympson's paradox ratio (SPR)	1.000	acceptable if >= 0.7, ideally = 1

R-squared contribution ratio (RSCR)	1.000	acceptable if >= 0.9, ideally = 1
Statistical suppression ratio (SSR)	1.000	acceptable if >= 0.7, ideally = 1

The Average Path Coefficient (APC = 0.385, $p < 0.001$) indicates that the relationships among the variables are positive and statistically significant. The Average R-squared (ARS = 0.357, $p < 0.001$) and Average Adjusted R-squared (AARS = 0.348, $p < 0.001$) show that the model explains a satisfactory proportion of the variation in the dependent variables. The collinearity results also indicate that the model is free from multicollinearity. The Average Block VIF (AVIF = 1.495) and Average Full Collinearity VIF (AFVIF = 1.984) are both below the recommended limit of 3.3, showing that the predictor variables do not overlap excessively. The Tenenhaus Goodness of Fit (GoF = 0.424) is higher than the recommended value of 0.36, indicating that the model has a good overall fit and strong predictive ability. In addition, the values of SPR, RSCR, SSR, and NLBCDR are all 1.000, which means the model has no inconsistencies, suppression effects, or causal problems. Overall, these results confirm that the structural model is reliable, well-fitted, and appropriate for testing the proposed hypotheses.

Assessment of latent variables' quality

The measurement model demonstrates satisfactory reliability and validity. The composite reliability values for Digital Consumer Persuasion (0.832), Environmental Concern (0.704), Trust (0.740), Attitude toward Green Products (0.758), and Purchase Intention (0.786) are all above the recommended value of 0.70, indicating good internal consistency. Although the composite reliability value for Awareness (0.677) is slightly below 0.70, it is still considered acceptable for exploratory behavioural research. The convergent validity results show that all questionnaire items have significant factor loadings ($p < 0.001$), with most loadings exceeding 0.50, confirming that the items effectively measure their intended constructs. Discriminant validity is also established, as each construct is clearly distinct and the indicators load more strongly on their own construct than on other constructs. In addition, all Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values are below the recommended threshold of 3.3, indicating that there are no multicollinearity issues and that each variable contributes unique information to the model. Overall, these results confirm that the measurement model is reliable, valid, and suitable for further analysis. Purchase Intention has an R^2 value of 0.534, meaning 53.4% of purchase intention is explained by the independent variables.

Table 2. Path analysis of structural model

Hypothesized Path	β Value	p-value	Effect Size (f^2)	Interpretation
DCP → AW	0.212	0.010	0.045	Supported
DCP → EC	0.555	< 0.001	0.308	Supported
DCP → TR	0.649	< 0.001	0.421	Supported
DCP → ATG	0.691	< 0.001	0.477	Supported
AW → PI	0.199	0.015	0.069	Supported
EC → PI	0.291	< 0.001	0.170	Supported
TR → PI	0.089	0.170	0.046	Not Supported
ATG → PI	0.392	< 0.001	0.248	Supported

The results indicate that Digital Consumer Persuasion (DCP) has a positive and significant influence on all four mediating variables. It has a significant effect on Awareness ($\beta = 0.212$, $p = 0.010$), Environmental Concern ($\beta = 0.555$, $p < 0.001$), Trust ($\beta = 0.649$, $p < 0.001$), and Attitude toward Green Products ($\beta = 0.691$, $p < 0.001$). Among these, the strongest influence is on Attitude toward Green Products, followed by Trust and Environmental Concern, while the effect on Awareness is comparatively smaller. Therefore, all four hypotheses related to DCP are supported. The results also show that Awareness ($\beta = 0.199$, $p = 0.015$), Environmental Concern ($\beta = 0.291$, $p < 0.001$), and Attitude toward Green Products ($\beta = 0.392$, $p < 0.001$) have significant positive effects on Purchase Intention (PI). Among these, Attitude toward Green Products has the strongest influence on consumers' intention to purchase green products, followed by Environmental Concern and Awareness. However, Trust ($\beta = 0.089$, $p = 0.170$) does not have a significant effect on Purchase Intention because the p-value is greater than 0.05. Therefore, this hypothesis is not supported. Overall, the findings suggest that Digital Consumer Persuasion effectively increases consumers' awareness, environmental concern, trust, and positive attitudes toward green products. Among these mediating variables, attitude toward green products and environmental concern are the most important factors influencing consumers' green purchase intention, while trust alone does not directly motivate consumers to purchase green products.

Mediation Analysis (Indirect Effects)

The mediation analysis shows that Digital Consumer Persuasion (DCP) influences Purchase Intention (PI) indirectly through four mediating variables: Awareness (AW), Environmental Concern (EC), Trust (TR), and Attitude toward Green Products (ATG). The total indirect effect is 0.532, with a p-value less than 0.001, indicating that the indirect effect is strong, positive, and statistically significant. This means that DCP increases consumers' purchase intention mainly by influencing these psychological factors rather than through a direct effect.

The analysis includes four indirect paths: DCP → AW → PI, DCP → EC → PI, DCP → TR → PI, and DCP → ATG → PI. The mediation effect size (0.342) is moderate to strong, confirming that the mediators play an important role in explaining how digital persuasion influences purchase intention. Consumers do not respond immediately to digital marketing. Instead, they first become aware of green products, develop concern for the environment, build trust, and form positive attitudes before deciding to purchase.

The findings also show that the mediators work together rather than independently. Among them, Attitude toward Green Products is the most important factor in converting consumers' perceptions into purchase intention. Awareness, environmental concern, and trust also contribute by strengthening the overall effect of digital persuasion. Overall, the results indicate that digital platforms such as social media, online reviews, and influencer marketing effectively promote green purchase intention by shaping consumers' thoughts and feelings. Therefore, businesses should focus on creating informative, trustworthy, and engaging digital content to encourage sustainable purchasing behaviour.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the SEM analysis, organizations should strengthen their Digital Consumer Persuasion (DCP) strategies by making better use of social media, influencer marketing, online reviews, and sustainability-focused digital content. Since Attitude toward Green Products was found to be the strongest factor influencing Green Purchase Intention, marketers should focus on creating positive consumer attitudes through

engaging, authentic, and value-based content. Digital campaigns should clearly communicate the environmental and personal benefits of green products and connect them with consumers' lifestyles.

Organizations should also increase consumer awareness and environmental concern through educational campaigns, sustainability messages, and informative digital content. These efforts can help consumers better understand the importance of green products and encourage environmentally responsible purchasing. Although trust showed a weaker direct influence on purchase intention, businesses should continue to build credibility by providing transparent information, using eco-labels and certifications, and clearly communicating their sustainability practices.

The findings further suggest that marketers should adopt a step-by-step approach to influencing consumers by first creating awareness, then building environmental concern and positive attitudes, which eventually lead to purchase intention. Personalized and data-driven marketing strategies can further improve the effectiveness of digital persuasion by delivering relevant content based on consumer preferences and behaviour. Storytelling and interactive digital platforms can also strengthen emotional engagement and improve consumers' perceptions of green products.

Businesses should collaborate with government agencies and environmental organizations to promote sustainable consumption through awareness programmes, incentives, and supportive policies. In addition, organizations should integrate sustainability into their overall brand identity rather than treating it as a separate marketing feature. Finally, companies should bridge the gap between purchase intention and actual buying behaviour by improving product availability, affordability, visibility, and convenience while maintaining continuous digital engagement. Adopting these strategies will help increase the adoption of green products and promote sustainable consumer behaviour, particularly in regions such as Kerala.

Limitations

The study retained 114 valid responses from approximately 300 questionnaires distributed, resulting in a response/retention rate of about 38%. This relatively small final sample may limit the representativeness of the findings and increase the possibility of non-response bias. The use of convenience sampling further restricts the extent to which the findings can be generalised to the wider consumer population. Since the study focuses on social media users in Kerala who are aware of green products, the findings may not be directly applicable to consumers in other regions or consumer groups. Future research should consider larger samples, probability-based sampling, and wider geographical coverage to enhance the generalisability and robustness of the findings.

Conclusion

This study concludes that Digital Consumer Persuasion plays a significant role in influencing Green Purchase Intention by enhancing consumers' awareness, environmental concern, trust, and attitude toward green products. Among these factors, attitude emerged as the strongest predictor of purchase intention, while trust showed no significant direct effect. The findings highlight the importance of effective digital marketing strategies, including social media and influencer communication, in promoting sustainable consumption and encouraging environmentally responsible purchasing behaviour.

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Institutionalising Policy Entrepreneurship in the Global South: The Case for a Policy and Strategy Incubation Centre in India

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ABSTRACT

India's policy and strategy ecosystem is largely formulated at the centre, with prototyping and implementation proceeding through multi-stakeholder participation across national, sectoral, and regional contexts, typically via pilot phases before pan-India scale-up. This paper examines the case for a Policy and Strategy Incubation Centre (PSIC), or similar centres focused on subsectors/subthemes, within India's existing policy architecture as a government-anchored mechanism treating policy design as an iterative supportive mechanism and discipline, analogous to technology incubation. Drawing on comparative literature on public-sector innovation labs, including Denmark's MindLab, the United Kingdom's Nesta and Policy Lab, the Governance Lab (GovLab) at New York University, and Chile's Laboratorio de Gobierno, the paper situates PSIC (or more) within the broader evolution of policy labs and adapts it to the Indian context. It proposes anchoring PSIC (or more) within an existing autonomous, multidisciplinary organisation, independent of any single Ministry or within a given ministerial framework, working closely

with Ministries and industry, tasked with developing a credentialised cadre of policy entrepreneurs and strategy specialists (as part of cohorts) who contribute to research, identify needs, and carry ideas through the value chain of implementation and engage in guided assignments for ministries or corporates as part of the evolution. PSIC is also envisaged to catalyse think-tanks and enterprises that coordinate with existing institutions, thereby complementing India's innovation infrastructure, such as the central planning supporting organisation, NITI Aayog. Beyond this administrative rationale, the paper frames PSIC in social and cultural terms and conceptualises it as a case of institutional innovation in the Global South.

Keywords: policy labs; policy entrepreneurship; institutional complementarity; Global South; India; public-sector reform; policy incubation

1. Introduction: The Architecture of Policy-Making in India

Policy in India (as well as strategies in the public and private sector) as in most large administrative states, tends to flow from the centre outward: ministries and departments formulate schemes and guidelines, state governments and implementing agencies operationalise them, and feedback from the field, where it travels back to the centre steadily, formally/informally, as mechanisms for course correction. This is to highlight that Indian policy-making has inherent expertise or intent which can be contributed to for accelerated newer initiatives for policy and strategies that the PSIC system can enable policy entrepreneurs to meet the requirement of national missions like Viksit Bharat, Make in India etc., (or potentially newer innovative directions such as ecosystem internationalisation and outcomes like Make in the World with the possibilities of strengthening circular processes within the country's structured national missions). Accordingly, additional institutional space could be created within the existing framework in which an early-stage policy idea can be conceptualised, tested against evidence, piloted at small scale, refined through stakeholder consultation, and only then recommended for wider adoption by expanding its existing focus, scale and complexity in response to Howlett & Mukherjee, 2014 and Wu et al., 2015, about highlighting the thinness aspects of the policy systems across geographies.

The policy architectures are not simply administrative facts, but also social and cultural features. Who is authorised to originate a policy idea, whose expertise counts as evidence, and how a civil-service tradition accommodates external specialists/experts and younger professionals, are questions about status, hierarchy, and legitimate voice as much as about procedure. Read this way, aspects of the thinness of any policy prototyping space are also a symptom of a wider pattern across the postcolonial Global South, in which technocratic authority remains concentrated in centralised cadres and the social boundary between "policymaker" and "implementer" or "citizen" correspondingly has scope to be further bridged. The institutional proposal developed in this paper responds to that boundary not by proposing a parallel channel that would sit outside the existing hierarchy, but by proposing a mechanism designed to work inside it: a structured front-end that strengthens the centre's own capacity to originate, test, and refine policy before it is issued, rather than a separate track competing for that authority (Chakrabarti et al., 2021). Similarly, it seeks to cater to the strategy roadmap in parallel with the corporate and public sectors such that public-private partnerships are also conceptualised at an early stage. This would be relevant at the different structural and implementation

phases of the value chain of policy and strategy making to rollout/implementation/feedback loops as a sustainable future mechanism involving a combination of grooming youth, middle-level executives etc., with the support and guidance of senior policymaking authority personnel and corporate leadership for multiple sectors.

The scope can be disaggregated into three dimensions. First, there is scope for strengthening ground-level input to shape policy design before implementation, instead of being solicited mostly as feedback afterwards. Second, structured platforms that allow younger innovators and senior practitioners to jointly propose, refine, and champion policy ideas that would be emergent to add to the institutionalised framework. Third, and significantly consequential for long-term state capacity, India and the Global South could develop dedicated cadres of trained policy entrepreneurs and strategy specialists: professionals trained and equipped by engaging autonomous bodies, industry associations, public and private bodies and civil societies etc., in a contributary process to the existing policy and strategy framework towards designing, pitching, and carrying policy and strategic initiatives from grassroots identification through to scaled implementation, in the manner that trained product managers and venture-backed founders operate within the technology sector. (Howlett & Mukherjee, 2014; Wu et al., 2015)

This paper argues that these three scopes are best addressed not by a new, freestanding institution operating alongside India's existing policy-making machinery, but by evolving institutional mechanisms such as via Policy and Strategy Incubation Centres (PSICs), deliberately designed as a complement to existing machinery(ies). The PSIC is most likely suitable to be conceived as a vertical anchored within a (or) several suitably autonomous, multidisciplinary national institutions that already participate in governance mechanisms or strategy rollouts and/or advise government, combining a structured incubation methodology with a six-month capacity-building programme for creating policy and strategy professionals, and channelling every validated output back into the ministries, departments, and state governments that retain final decision-making authority. The remainder of the paper situates this proposal within international practice on public-sector innovation labs, examines the institutional criteria a suitable anchor body would need to meet to house PSIC as a complementary function rather than a rival mandate, sets out the conceptual and operational design of the PSIC, and considers its anticipated contribution to debates on policy transfer and institutional innovation in the Global South.

2. Policy Innovation Labs as an Institutional Form: A Comparative Literature

The application of structured, iterative design methods to public policy is not entirely new; over roughly two decades it has developed into a recognisable global institutional form generally described as the public-sector innovation lab, or policy lab. Denmark's MindLab, established within the Danish government, is widely regarded as the first institution to operate explicitly under this description, and its closure after almost two decades of operation prompted extensive international reflection on what such labs achieve and how they should be structured (Prehn, 2016). The United Kingdom's Nesta and its associated Policy Lab, the Governance Lab (GovLab) at New York University, and Chile's Laboratorio de Gobierno are frequently cited alongside MindLab as the reference set of institutions that mainstreamed design-thinking, empirical experimentation, and living-lab methods within government reform (European Institute of Public Administration, 2025; Fuller & Lochard, 2016; OECD, 2025; Olejniczak et al., 2020)

Comparative research on this institutional form classifies such labs along a spectrum running from government-led labs operating under direct oversight, through government-enabled labs with partial funding but greater independence, to fully independent labs with no direct government funding or oversight (Kattel, Mergel, & Etxaniz, 2020; OECD, 2019). Nesta's 2014 i-teams report, produced with Bloomberg Philanthropies, documented twenty such innovation teams internationally, including examples from Chile, Colombia, South Africa, and Spain, underlining that the model has proliferated well beyond its European origins (Nesta & Bloomberg Philanthropies, 2014). A recurring finding across this literature is that most labs concentrate on the 'front end' of policy work, like defining and scoping problems, rather than carrying ideas through to implementation and institutional scale-up (Kattel, Mergel, & Etxaniz, 2020). A recurring institutional-design lesson associated with this finding, and one this paper treats as central, is that labs which operated at arm's length from government's own decision-making structures found their prototypes harder to carry through to adoption; the government-led and government-enabled positions on the spectrum, which keep the lab tied into existing approval processes, correspond more closely to the complementary design pursued here than the fully independent position does. (OECD, 2019; OECD, 2025; Olejniczak et al., 2020)

It is at this point that the PSIC proposal adds to the innovations, and arguably extends the established international model in three respects, while remaining deliberately embedded within, rather than parallel to, existing government structures. First, where most policy labs are small, centrally located teams of designers and researchers working alongside a single ministry or department, a PSIC is being conceived as a pan-India capacity-building mechanism that works through a national network of regional offices belonging to its anchor institution, connecting grassroots and sectoral input to the incubation process using channels the anchor institution already operates, or would further build as part of the establishment of a PSIC. Second, where most labs produce policy prototypes and reports as their primary output, the PSIC is being conceived to be designed to also produce a trained, credentialed cadre of policy entrepreneurs and strategy professionals through a structured six-month programme, closer in form to a professional incubator-accelerator than to a design studio, with graduates/sponsored executives from the public or private sector or participating young civil services cadres as part of cohorts per batch returning or joining to strengthen the ministries, state governments, and existing institutions that sponsored them rather than forming a separate professional track outside government. Third, where labs typically serve government alone, the PSIC is designed to serve both public governance and private-sector strategy needs, positioning it at the intersection of policy design and strategic management, in a manner that widens the anchor institution's existing advisory relationships rather than opening a new, competing line of business (Fuller & Lochard, 2016; Puttick, 2014).

2.1 The Indian Institutional Landscape: A Complementary Space

India already possesses significant institutional infrastructure oriented towards innovation, though concentrated at a different point in the innovation value chain from the one the PSIC seeks to address. NITI Aayog, established in 2015 as India's premier policy think tank, plays a central role in long-term policy formulation, cooperative federalism, and the monitoring and evaluation of government schemes. Its flagship innovation vehicle, the Atal Innovation Mission, has been notably successful in building a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship: its network of Atal Tinkering Labs had reached ten thousand schools by late 2025, with a further fifty

thousand in the process of roll-out (Government of India, NITI Aayog, 2025–26). This infrastructure, however, is oriented toward technology entrepreneurship, start-ups, and student innovation. However, there is scope to evolve mechanisms such as PSICs towards enabling or strengthening the expansion and acceleration of the design, prototyping, and professional implementation of policy and government and private sector strategy as a combinational discipline in its own right to add to the Government of India, NITI Aayog, 2025–2026.

This distinction is central to the paper's argument that there is scope for adding to dedicated mechanisms for policy and strategy development and implementation via developing a PSIC-type incubation mechanism or processes that could add value to the currently practised approaches in India and the Global South. It is being offered strictly as a case for a complementary addition to the existing landscape, not as an alternative. The PSIC is being proposed to add value and a wider base of young professionals as policy entrepreneurs or strategy specialists to the infrastructure that NITI Aayog commands in its mandate, within its overall purview and its existing stakeholder framework. It is proposed as a functional extension that does for policy design and policy entrepreneurship what the Atal Innovation Mission already does for technology entrepreneurship, using comparable logic: a dedicated capacity sitting inside the existing institutional ecosystem, feeding validated prototypes and trained personnel back into that ecosystem rather than building a parallel one beside it. A suitable anchor institution/s with a pan-India network could host PSICs as part of their multidisciplinary technical mandates, and long-standing relationships with ministries, state governments, and international bodies, such as regional productivity, labour, development, and linkages with multilateral organisations, such that they could position PSICs to add to their function as a natural extension of work they already perform.

3. Institutional Fit: Criteria for a Suitable Anchor Institution/s

The case for anchoring a Policy and Strategy Incubation Centre rests on institutional fit rather than on the default availability of any single body/ies, and the indicative criteria suggested below are highlighted to outline that PSICs be absorbed as a complementary function of an existing institution rather than established as a new, independent one. Four criteria appear to be relevant to identifying a/several suitable anchors. First, *autonomous status*: the anchor institution would ideally need to possess reasonable autonomy with strong working relationships with ministries or departments to be perceived as a credible, trusted convenor across government, industry, academia, and civil society, which could be a relevant precondition for any institution seeking to bring competing stakeholder interests into a shared design process. Second, a *multidisciplinary technical mandate*: because policy and strategy themes are not necessarily confined to a given sectoral or disciplinary boundary, a PSIC incubator anchored suitably could integrate attention to multiple sectors besides the institution’s sectoral focus or mandates to service the sectoral range that genuine policy-design capacity requires; a suitable anchor would accordingly span domains such as productivity and economic services, industrial and systems engineering, agri-business, environmental sustainability, technology and energy management, human resource development, and applied research etc.,, so that PSICs can be built on capabilities of an anchor institution already possessing such capabilities or build such or more capabilities when PSICs are established to accordingly address skills acquisitions perspectives reflected by Wu et al., 2015 and Howlett, 2015.

Third, an established track record in *evidence-based advisory work*: decades of past contributions to research, evaluation, and consultancy experience for central ministries, state governments, and public- and private-sector enterprises constitute the institutional memory on which credible policy prototyping depends, and on which PSIC could draw upon when located in suitable institutions. Fourth, ideally a *pan-India or national presence in their specific Global South country context combined with international linkages*: ideally a national network of regional offices of such institutions together with active engagement with multilateral productivity and development bodies, would offer the incubation function both a channel for grassroots and sectoral input and a means of benchmarking, and eventually contributing to, the global policy-lab community discussed in Section 2, again using infrastructure the anchor institution already maintains or can strengthen. (Wu et al., 2015; Howlett, 2015)

Institutions that meet such key criteria, along with long-established, autonomous status and multi-sectoral public institutional roles, whether in India or the Global South, where bodies with national networks and suitable past or decades of advisory experience, and existing international linkages, would be well placed to host a mechanism of this kind such as developing PSICs within the framework as one of their functions, alongside their existing mandates. The remainder of this paper sets out the conceptual and operational design such a mechanism could adopt, independent of the specific institution ultimately selected to host it.

The decision to focus on potential criteria rather than a candidate institution is proposed at this stage of the concept paper. Three considerations support it. First, the paper's contribution is conceptual: it argues that a specific functional scope exists in India's policy ecosystem (and in the Global South) and outlines the attributes an anchor would ideally need to complement its own existing work, in the manner of a design brief rather than a procurement recommendation. Naming a single body would tend to be an advocacy for any given organisation which is set aside in this conceptual paper. Second, keeping the criteria general preserves the comparative value the paper reflects in Sections 8 and 9: read as a transferable template for policy entrepreneurship in other Global South administrative states, the argument is stronger for specifying the functional attributes an anchor rightly requires than for anchoring it to one particular institution or autonomous body. Third, the choice of anchor institution is, in practice, a future political and administrative decision that properly belongs to the more granular institutional proposals that may emerge as flagged in Section 9, and could be made in consultation with the ministries and bodies concerned, rather than one a concept paper is positioned to pre-empt. The criteria in this section are offered as the basis on which later, more specific cases could be made, whenever and whichever institutions are eventually willing to propose or adopt establishment of PSICs.

4. Conceptual Framework: Vision and Strategic Objectives

The vision articulated for the PSIC is to function as a Centre of Excellence in Policy Design, Policy Entrepreneurship, and Strategic Management, operating within, and in service of, both the public and private sectors, rather than as a standalone institution seeking recognition apart from them. This vision translates into five interlocking institutional roles, each defined in terms of the anchor institution's existing standing rather than as a new independent profile: operating as a vertical comparable in ambition to leading global think tanks and policy labs, but drawing its legitimacy from the anchor institution's

existing mandate; producing a cadre of policy entrepreneurs able to design, champion, and implement policy at scale within government and existing institutions; developing strategy professionals equipped for public- and private-sector leadership who return to strengthen the organisations that sponsored them; translating ideas into actionable programme and scheme designs for government and industry, submitted through existing channels for adoption; and functioning as a node within a wider think-tank network connecting India's incubators, think tanks, and accelerators nationally and internationally, without displacing any of them. (Howlett & Mukherjee, 2014; Mintrom & Norman, 2009)

Around this vision, the PSIC concept is organised into six strategic objectives, each framed as strengthening rather than substituting for existing arrangements: enabling data-driven, evidence-based policy and strategy solutions across socio-economic sectors, in support of the ministries and departments that may ultimately adopt them; building a structured incubation framework combining mentorship, research, stakeholder engagement, and prototyping, that plugs into existing approval processes; fostering collaborative co-creation among policymakers, industry, researchers, and civil society, convened through the anchor institution's existing relationships; embedding a culture of agile, iterative policy-making within government itself, rather than housing that culture only within a separate unit; systematically strengthening the evidence base available to existing decision-makers through field validation and feedback loops; and building long-term capacity through fellowships, structured training, and immersive problem-solving for both early-career professionals and sponsored executives, who are expected to carry that capacity back into their parent ministries, departments, and firms (Wu et al., 2015; Dunlop & Radaelli, 2013). Along with including in the cohort young graduates across various qualifications in the age group of 21-30, along with a group of middle management executives from government and public sectors, as part of the cohort groups per 6-month batch for an initial proposed period of 5 to 10 years.

5. Institutional Design: Cohort, Methodology, and Curriculum

5.1 Target Cohort

The PSIC is to be designed to serve a deliberately mixed cohort spanning seven categories: early-career graduates and postgraduates in policy, economics, law, social sciences, and strategic management or suitable fields with qualitative and quantitative skills; young executives sponsored by corporates and industry bodies seeking policy exposure; young government officials, including early-career civil service and central service officers and district administrators, sponsored by ministries and institutions; mid-career policy advocates and intrapreneurs from autonomous bodies, civil society, and media; social entrepreneurs seeking to connect ground-level work with policy and programme design; and international or diaspora fellows contributing to India's development agenda; executives of private sector corporate bodies/MSMEs/PSUs etc who may be sponsored by their respective organisations. Because sponsored officials and executives return to the ministries, state governments, and firms that nominated them, the cohort design is itself a mechanism for feeding PSIC's outputs back into the existing system along with creating fresh talent in the policy entrepreneurship and strategy specialists space. This deliberate mixing of entry-level participants (broadly aged 21–30) with senior officials and industry executives is intended to generate cross-idea exchanges between fresh analytical perspective and institutional experience,

and is presented as a point of distinctiveness relative to single-cohort training programmes.

5.2 Incubation Methodology

The PSIC's incubation methodology is proposed to follow a five-stage pathway from idea to impact, with the final stage to be suitably designed as a handover to existing institutions, the initiatives of the PSIC-led innovated and created ideas and implementation efforts. Incubatees begin with idea conceptualisation, drawing on raw policy ideas or challenge prompts issued by ministries and corporations. This is followed by research and validation: deep-dive research, field visits, expert consultation, and data analysis undertaken to build an evidence base. The third stage, design and prototyping, applies structured design-thinking methods to develop policy prototypes and schemes and to design and draft new schemes and programs in addition to strategic roadmaps and initiatives for consideration by government/public/private sectors, etc., in the form of programme frameworks, guidelines, or pilots and so on. The fourth stage, stakeholder feedback, subjects these prototypes to structured consultation with ministries, industry, and civil society for refinement and testing. The fifth stage, scale and mainstreaming, presents refined proposals to the sponsoring ministries and institutions themselves for adoption, implementation, and scaling through their own existing processes, so that final authority over adoption remains with those institutions rather than with PSIC. Three enabling pillars support this pathway throughout: a mentorship network of policy practitioners, academics, industry leaders, and international experts; a design-thinking studio providing collaborative workspace for ideation and co-creation; and a digital knowledge hub offering access to policy databases, comparative case studies, and real-time data systems. (Howlett & Mukherjee, 2014; Sabel & Zeitlin, 2012; OECD, 2025)

5.3 Programme Structure

Each incubation batch is to run for six months, structured in two parts. The first sixty to seventy five days is proposed to follow an intensive curriculum of more than 240 - 300 learning sessions organised across six thematic phases, proceeding from foundational themes in democracy, economic theory, public administration, research methods, and ethics; through sectoral governance across more than twenty domains, including health, education, transport, agriculture, energy, and waste management; systems and tools such as e-governance, geographic information systems, taxation, public procurement, and public–private partnerships; advanced policy themes including energy transition, direct benefit transfer, rural development, migration, and the gig economy; international and legal dimensions spanning trade policy and constitutional, contract, and labour law; and, in the concluding phase, the Sustainable Development Goals, artificial intelligence and big data, hands-on policy prototyping, and strategic roadmaps development. The remaining three and a half to four months constitute an applied project phase, in which incubatees conduct field validation and stakeholder consultation, design policy prototypes that are drawn from real ministry or corporate challenges, and present finished proposals to the sponsoring institutions that will decide whether and how to adopt them. (Wu et al., 2015)

5.4 A Complementary Executive Training Track

Alongside the six-month incubation batches, the anchor institution could develop a companion Executive Training Programme intended to build wider organisational readiness for policy and strategy incubation within existing ministries and institutions, independent of enrolment in a full incubation batch. Where the six-month batches build a dedicated, credentialed cadre from a mixed cohort, the executive track is designed to reach a considerably wider

population of serving officials and executives, including All-India and Central Civil Services officers, state civil service officers and district administrators, (and similarly the Global South administrators and companies), senior public-sector-undertaking and autonomous-body executives, regulatory and planning officials, policy researchers, development-sector professionals, and faculty of the anchor institution and allied public training institutions, offering working exposure to incubator methodology, within their own organisations, where a full six-month engagement is not feasible.

Both formats are and can be progressively mapped to a common competency framework spanning policy entrepreneurship, strategic and systems thinking, evidence-based and behavioural policy design, strategic foresight, institutional design, digital-governance literacy, stakeholder management, change leadership, and facilitation of labs and sprints, taught at foundation level in the shorter format and at an applied, advanced level in the longer format. Both formats, in essence, share a common pedagogical design in which no more than a quarter to a third of session time is devoted to conceptual input, with the remainder given to case discussion, simulation, and capstone work; each session could pair an Indian and an international case example; and each cohort would be expected to conclude with a live, panel-assessed capstone simulation. The programme is intended to be offered in two-day and five-day formats. The former is a compressed orientation culminating in a one-page incubator charter and a pitch to a simulated empowered committee; the latter is a deeper curriculum, spanning strategy formulation, foresight, governance innovation, and leadership, culminating in an integrated Incubator Operating Model document presented to a simulated Cabinet Note or Empowered Committee and leading to a formal advanced certificate. Positioned this way, the executive track could function as a shorter-format capacity-building funnel that both builds organisation-wide fluency in policy entrepreneurship within existing institutions and creates a pipeline of oriented candidates for future incubation cohorts, reinforcing those institutions' and enterprises' own capacity. (Howlett, 2014; OECD, 2025)

6. Stakeholder Engagement Architecture

The suggested PSICs are to be designed to draw on, and contribute to, several tiers and sectors of India's existing governance and enterprise ecosystem (and similarly in the Global South for their respective countries), precisely so that it operates as an additional channel within that ecosystem rather than as a body standing outside it. Central government ministries can co-design programmes, sponsor young officials, and commission research; state governments can incubate state-specific policy challenges and sponsor cadre officials; industry and corporates can sponsor executives for policy immersion, fund CSR-linked policy innovation, and submit sector-specific challenges; public-sector undertakings can commission research and align strategic planning; academic and research bodies can contribute faculty expertise, joint research, and student engagement; and civil-society organisations and think tanks can contribute ground-level innovation input and monitoring partnerships. In every case, the relationship runs in both directions: the stakeholder both feeds PSIC and receives its outputs back, which is the structural feature that keeps the mechanism complementary rather than self-contained (Voorberg et al., 2018; OECD, 2018). The suggested modes of engagement are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Stakeholder engagement modalities through which the PSIC is proposed to operate as a complement to India's existing policy system or similarly adaptable in the Global South.

Stakeholder group	Illustrative modes of engagement
Central government ministries	Co-design of schemes; sponsorship of young officials; commissioning of research; adoption of policy prototypes into existing programmes
State governments	Incubation of state-specific challenges; sponsorship of cadre officials; regional policy co-design feeding back into state planning processes
Industry and corporates	Sponsored executive immersion; CSR-funded innovation; challenge submissions; regulatory and trade policy co-design
Public sector undertakings and institutions	Strategic planning alignment; research commissioning; leadership development within existing organisational structures
Academia and research bodies	Joint research and field validation; faculty mentorship; student engagement in live projects
Civil society and think tanks	Ground-level innovation input; monitoring and evaluation partnerships; inclusive co-design

Partnership itself can take several concrete forms, each designed to route PSIC's work through, rather than around, existing institutional channels: financial support for fellowships, infrastructure, and operating costs; sponsored participation of executives, officials, and young professionals in incubation batches, who remain on their parent organisation's rolls throughout; submission of real policy and strategy challenges for incubatees to research and prototype on behalf of the sponsoring body; commissioning of policy briefs, feasibility studies, and programme designs from the PSIC team, delivered to the commissioning institution for its own use; mentorship and advisory contributions from domain experts; partnership in piloting and implementing policy prototypes under the sponsoring institution's own authority; alignment of corporate social responsibility mandates with the PSIC's social-innovation objectives; and knowledge exchange with international institutions around comparative best practice.

7. Anticipated Contributions: Immediate, Medium-, and Long-Term

The PSIC's anticipated contribution can be read across three time horizons, each framed as strengthening the existing system's own capacity. In the immediate term, each incubation batch is expected to produce evidence-based policy briefs and strategic proposals delivered to their sponsoring ministries and departments, programme and scheme designs for ministries and departments, strategy frameworks for corporates, public-sector undertakings, and micro, small, and medium enterprises, and a trained cadre of policy entrepreneurs and strategy professionals who return to strengthen the institutions that sponsored them. This also has the potential to seed new social enterprises, think tanks, and strategy consultancies founded by alumni, which would sit alongside, and could in turn partner with, existing institutions. In the medium term, the PSIC is expected to contribute to an expanded national cadre of policy practitioners embedded within existing ministries and bodies, the emergence of grassroots policy-innovation ecosystems that feed into established channels, new co-creation models for policy design and implementation that existing institutions can adopt, stronger linkages between policy and practice, and

increased institutional capacity within ministries themselves, rather than capacity that resides only within PSIC (Wu et al., 2015; Dunlop & Radaelli, 2013).

In the long term, the paper argues that sustained operation of the PSIC as a complementary mechanism could contribute to a progressively more adaptive, inclusive, and data-driven national policy ecosystem, achieved by strengthening existing institutions; reposition its anchor institution as a national hub for governance innovation, extending its existing sectoral mandate rather than creating a new one; place a new generation of policy entrepreneurs into key positions across India's value chains and similarly in the Global South countries via their respective PSICs, largely within government and established institutions; and constitute a systemic contribution to the Viksit Bharat 2047 agenda for a developed, self-reliant India by the centenary of independence (and similarly contribute to the missions of the respective Global South countries). Beyond individual professionals, the PSIC is also envisaged to help catalyse new institutional entities that would operate alongside, and often in partnership with, existing ones: the next-generation think tanks, social enterprises bridging government policy and last-mile implementation, home-grown strategy consultancies serving ministries and corporate India, and similarly in the respective Global South countries, specialised sectoral bodies in emerging domains such as climate policy and digital governance, self-sustaining fee-based policy-service agencies, and an alumni-based policy-entrepreneurship network linking government and industry over time.

8. Positioning the PSIC within the Global Policy-Lab Literature

Read against both the international policy-lab literature and India's existing innovation infrastructure, four features distinguish the PSIC proposal and form the core of the case for its adoption as a complement to, rather than a substitute for, that infrastructure. First, it would constitute the first or early phase dedicated, government-anchored function for policy and strategy incubation in India, and similarly in the Global South countries, that is proposedly and explicitly complementary with NITI Aayog's think-tank and technology-entrepreneurship mandates (and similarly for the planning departments of Global South countries). Second, it is proposed to be designed to serve both government and private-sector strategy needs simultaneously, rather than being confined to a single ministry's brief, as most international policy labs are, while still routing every output back through the relevant ministry or firm's own decision process. Third, it combines incubation with acceleration: rather than stopping at problem definition and prototype design, the point at which comparative research shows most international labs concentrate their effort (Kattel, et al., 2020), the PSIC's applied-project phase is explicitly built to carry prototypes through stakeholder consultation to presentation for adoption by the sponsoring ministry or institution itself, so that PSIC's role not only to enable handover but also reflects the availability of trained manpower that can participate with the implementation authority in the rollout of programs, schemes and strategies. Fourth, it is proposed to be designed as co-creation rather than prescription: policy solutions are intended to emerge from structured collaboration between implementers, communities, and policy specialists, in a deliberate attempt to build shared ownership with existing institutions rather than deliver policy from outside them (Olejniczak et al., 2020; OECD, 2025).

These features suggest that the PSIC proposal could be of interest not only to the immediate Indian policy debate but may also be relevant for Global South countries towards institutional innovations. Within the broader literature on policy transfer and

institutional innovation in the Global South, the PSIC can be read as a case of adaptive institutional borrowing: it draws self-consciously on an established international model while restructuring that model's scale, mandate, and sectoral scope to fit the administrative and federal characteristics of a large, diverse developing State, and while deliberately choosing the government-led and government-enabled positions on the international spectrum discussed in Section 2 over full independence, precisely because those positions keep the mechanism tied into, rather than separate from, existing decision-making authority. Whether such adaptation succeeds in practice, and whether the specific institutional choices examined here (an autonomous, multidisciplinary public body as anchor, a professional-incubation format operated as one of that body's functions, and a dual public–private mandate exercised in support of existing institutions) prove durable, remains an open empirical question that would benefit from sustained scholarly attention as the PSIC, or comparable mechanisms, are implemented (Dunlop & Radaelli, 2013; Sabel & Zeitlin, 2012).

9. Conclusion

India's policy and strategy ecosystem shows evident scope for evolution toward more multi-directional innovation, more structured prototyping of early-stage ideas, wider stakeholder engagement, stronger real-time feedback loops, and, over time, a trained cadre of policy entrepreneurs and strategy specialists able to carry ideas from the grassroots to the highest levels of implementation. This paper has argued that a Policy and Strategy Incubation Centre, anchored as a function within a suitably autonomous, multidisciplinary national institution, is well positioned to be best understood, and should be pursued, strictly as a complement to India's existing policy-making architecture rather than as an alternative or parallel structure to it. It also proposes prospects for not just one but several PSICs considered to be established by the central and State governments and academic institutions with suitable developmental focus areas and sectors inclusion. It draws on a recognisable and well-studied international institutional form while extending that form in ways suited to India's scale, federal structure, and dual public–private strategy needs, and while keeping final authority over adoption, implementation, and scale-up with the ministries, state governments, and institutions as well as corporates and public sector units that already hold it (Howlett & Mukherjee, 2014; Wu et al., 2015).

The proposal examined here remains at a conceptual stage; its methodology, financing, detailed operational design, and choice of anchor institution are to be finalised in a subsequent, more granular institutional proposal, one that should preserve this complementary framing at every stage of design. What the present analysis suggests is that the institutional space between policy think tank and policy implementation in India has scope for additional innovative components, that comparative international experience shows this space can be productively institutionalised without displacing existing bodies, and that suitably autonomous, multidisciplinary national institutions with an established mandate, network, and track record, would be credible first movers in adding such a function to their own portfolio for India and similarly in Global South countries. More broadly, the case examined here offers a template through which other countries in the Global South, facing comparable policy formulation and policy implementation, might consider the institutionalisation of policy entrepreneurship as a distinct administrative capacity that strengthens existing think-tank or technology-innovation infrastructure.

Read alongside the discussion in Section 1, the case examined here is ultimately a case about social and cultural reorganisation as much as administrative design: about who is culturally licensed to hold the title of policymaker in a large South Asian administrative and governance framework, how a credentialing programme might function as a new channel of social mobility into that status without requiring a new institutional home outside the existing hierarchy, and how current administrative culture could accommodate, a new professional identity built around the interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral mixing described in Section 5. These are questions that comparative public-administration and strategic management scholarship domains may not fully capture, and to which a social and cultural analysis of institutional change in the Global South, attentive to how complementary mechanisms are absorbed into existing hierarchies rather than substituted for them, is better suited.

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Disturbance in South Asian Democracy and Strategic Security in the 21st Century

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ABSTRACT

South Asia is home to almost a quarter of the world's people. It is also home to some of most fragile democracies of the world. In the last five years, the region has seen a president flee his palace, a prime minister flee her country, an army chief announce an interim government, and two nuclear-armed neighbours fight a four-day war. This paper looks at these events together. It asks a simple question. Is democratic disturbance in South Asia connected to strategic insecurity, or are the two separate problems that just happen to share a map? Using country cases from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and India, along with the 2025 India-Pakistan conflict, the paper argues that weak democratic institutions and strategic insecurity feed each other. It draws on democratic backsliding theory, securitization theory, and hybrid regime theory. This paper uses verifiable public sources, news reporting, think-tank analysis, and government statements. The proposed paper ends with policy suggestions for regional and international actors.

Keywords: South Asia, democratic backsliding, strategic security, civil-military relations, nuclear deterrence, SAARC

1. Introduction

South Asia is home to nearly a quarter of population of the world and includes some of its most consequential democracies alongside a number of hybrid political systems. It is also a region where domestic political instability and strategic insecurity have become increasingly intertwined. Sri Lanka went through a severe economic and political crisis. Pakistan saw sharpening confrontation between elected political forces and the military establishment. Bangladesh witnessed the collapse of a long dominant government following mass mobilisation. And India, despite retaining competitive elections, has faced growing concerns over institutional autonomy, civil liberties, media freedom, and the concentration of executive power. Meanwhile, terrorism, territorial

disputes, nuclear competition, economic vulnerability, and great power rivalry continue to shape politics right across the region. The 2025 India Pakistan conflict made especially clear how quickly terrorism, domestic political pressure, and interstate rivalry can escalate between two nuclear armed states.

These developments raise a central question. Are democratic disturbance and strategic insecurity two separate problems, or do they actually feed into each other? This paper argues that democratic institutional weakness and strategic insecurity in South Asia are mutually reinforcing. Weak institutions can deepen insecurity by eroding civilian oversight, institutional checks, and accountable decision making around security. At the same time, terrorism, interstate rivalry, economic insecurity, and geopolitical competition can be securitized, in other words used to justify exceptional measures, restrictions on civil liberties, executive concentration, and an expanded role for security institutions. The relationship, then, is not linear or one directional. Democratic weakness can produce insecurity, and insecurity, in turn, can open the door to further democratic erosion. This argument sits within a postcolonial and decolonial reframing of the democracy security relationship. The contemporary political and security institutions of South Asia were not shaped only by choices made after independence, but by administrative, bureaucratic, military, territorial, and coercive structures inherited from colonial rule. Partition, postcolonial state building, nationalism, and the conflicts that followed all transformed these inherited institutions further. This paper looks at how these historically rooted structures continue to shape ideas of sovereignty, territorial integrity, political authority, internal disorder, and national security, without reducing today's crises to colonial legacy alone.

The study draws on the work of Ayesha Jalal and Paul Staniland on Pakistan's civil military relations, Maya Tudor on democratic durability, Christophe Jaffrelot on democratic erosion and majoritarian politics in India, and Sumit Ganguly on India Pakistan security. It brings these strands together to examine how democratic disturbance and strategic insecurity interact across South Asia's differing trajectories. Its contribution is a historically grounded account of the democracy security relationship, one that treats institutional weakness and insecurity as mutually reinforcing rather than as separate issues to be studied in isolation. The analysis focuses, purposively, on Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and India, chosen for their contrasting institutional and political trajectories. Pakistan illustrates persistent military influence. Bangladesh shows dominant party concentration followed by political rupture. Sri Lanka demonstrates severe economic and political disruption without sustained military rule. And India shows gradual democratic erosion alongside continued electoral competition. Nepal and the Maldives are left out in order to keep the analysis focused, given their distinctive post conflict, federal, and small island trajectories. Myanmar, while important to any discussion of civil military relations after 2021, is treated as a contextual comparator rather than a core case, given its very different military state relationship and prolonged armed conflict. The case selection, in other words, is theoretically purposive rather than statistically representative.

The paper asks three questions. How does democratic institutional weakness affect strategic security? How can strategic insecurity reinforce democratic erosion? And under what conditions can severe political disturbance occur without tipping into sustained authoritarian rule? Methodologically, it combines within case process tracing with structured comparison across cases, looking at shared dimensions of institutional weakness, civil military relations, securitization, political mobilisation, economic fragility, and interstate rivalry. Section 2

sets out the theoretical, civil military, and postcolonial decolonial framework and reviews the relevant literature. Section 3 examines the four cases. Section 4 analyses strategic security dynamics. Section 5 compares the democracy security relationship across cases. Section 6 turns to SAARC and regional cooperation. Section 7 sets out policy recommendations. And Section 8 concludes.

2. Theoretical Framework

Three bodies of theory guide this paper.

Democratic backsliding theory: Nancy Bermeo defines backsliding as the slow, legal weakening of the checks that make an election meaningful (Bermeo, 2016). Unlike a coup, backsliding does not announce itself. It happens through court packing, executive aggrandizement, and the strategic harassment of the opposition. Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt make a related point in their well-known account of how democracies die: modern democracies rarely die in one dramatic night. They die from the inside, one rule bent at a time (as cited in Atlantic Council, 2025). This framework fits India and Bangladesh well, where elections still happen, but their fairness is increasingly in doubt.

Hybrid regime theory: Larry Diamond and others have argued that many states are neither fully democratic nor fully authoritarian. They are hybrids, holding elections while limiting real competition. Analysts today describe Pakistan under military-backed civilian rule, and even India under a dominant party with weakened courts and media, in similar language: competitive authoritarianism or electoral autocracy (East Asia Forum, 2025a). This label matters because it explains why elections keep happening in South Asia even as freedom keeps shrinking.

Securitization theory: Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde argue that security is not a fixed category of "real" threats. It is created when political actors successfully frame an issue as an existential threat, which then justifies extraordinary measures outside normal politics (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde, 1998). In South Asia, militaries and governments have long used the language of terrorism, secession, or foreign conspiracy to justify measures that weaken civilian oversight. Pakistan's use of military courts to try civilians after the 2023 riots is one recent case (Countercurrents, 2026). India's use of national security law in Kashmir is another long-running example. Together, these three theories explain why South Asian democracy is disturbed in slow, legal ways as often as in sudden, dramatic ones, and why security logic so often becomes an excuse to avoid democratic accountability.

2.1 Theoretical Perspectives on Democracy, Security, and Civil-Military Relations in South Asia

Scholars who study South Asian political development have come up with some genuinely sophisticated explanations for military intervention, democratic durability, authoritarian resurgence, and interstate insecurity. The problem is that these different bodies of work have mostly grown up on separate tracks, rarely talking to each other. Civil military scholarship has focused mainly on the institutional conditions under which militaries manage to acquire political authority. Research on democratic backsliding has tended to emphasise the erosion of constitutional checks, political competition, and civil liberties. Security scholarship, meanwhile, has largely stuck to interstate rivalry, territorial disputes, and strategic competition. So the real analytical gap here is not a shortage of scholarship on any one of these processes. It's that so little work has tried to theorise how they interact and end up reinforcing each other within states whose institutions

were shaped by a particular colonial and postcolonial history.

Ayesha Jalal's landmark analysis of Pakistan makes the point that military predominance cannot simply be explained as a matter of military ambition. It grew out of the interaction between state insecurity, weak political institutions, bureaucratic authority, and the way the military consolidated itself institutionally in the years following Partition (Jalal, 1990). Paul Staniland builds on this institutional line of thinking by showing that civil military trajectories are shaped by how security environments, political organisation, civilian legitimacy, and military institutional structures interact with one another. His comparative work on India and Pakistan is particularly telling, since it shows that two states with broadly similar colonial institutional inheritances can end up with strikingly different civil military outcomes (Staniland, 2008). Together, these studies make a strong case that military influence is something historically and institutionally produced, not just the product of a military's own ambitions.

The literature on democratic durability and backsliding brings in a complementary, but analytically distinct, dimension. Maya Tudor's comparative study of India and Pakistan highlights how important nationalist organisation, elite coalition building, and the institutional foundations of political legitimacy are in explaining why the two countries ended up on such different democratic paths (Tudor, 2013). Her later work goes further, showing how democratic erosion often happens gradually, through the slow concentration of executive authority and the weakening of institutional constraints, rather than through a dramatic coup or sudden regime collapse (Tudor, 2023). Christophe Jaffrelot, looking specifically at India, shows that democratic erosion there is tangled up with majoritarian nationalism, shifting ideas about citizenship, and the growing personalisation of political authority (Jaffrelot, 2021). These are all important contributions for understanding why democracies decline in the present day, but they tend to treat security politics as background context rather than as something that actively drives institutional erosion. Sumit Ganguly's work takes the opposite starting point, placing security at the very centre of South Asian political development. His research looks closely at the India Pakistan rivalry, the Kashmir dispute, competing nationalisms, military competition, and nuclear deterrence (Ganguly, 2002, 2016; Ganguly and Kapur, 2012). This body of work does a good job of showing how persistent external insecurity shapes the way states behave and how political leaders make decisions. What it doesn't really dig into, though, is how repeated security crises can gradually reshape the domestic balance between civilians and the military, weaken democratic institutions, and shift where political authority actually sits within a state.

A postcolonial lens offers a useful bridge between these different strands of scholarship. Colonial state formation left behind institutional legacies around territorial sovereignty, coercive authority, bureaucratic organisation, and how internal versus external threats get categorised in the first place. These legacies were not simply carried forward unchanged after independence, nor were they discarded. They were picked up, reshaped, and contested in different ways by the political elites and institutions that came after colonial rule. That means today's democratic and security crises need to be understood as part of these deeper, historically rooted structures of authority, rather than treated as isolated failures of present day governance.

The main contribution this study is trying to make is to treat democratic backsliding and security politics not as two things happening in parallel, but as processes that actively feed into and reinforce one

another. The existing scholarship already explains, quite convincingly, why Pakistan ended up with military predominance, why democratic institutions have held up better in some South Asian states than in others, why democratic erosion has picked up pace in India in recent years, and why the India-Pakistan rivalry has proven so persistent. What is still missing is a cross-national account of how institutional fragility and security insecurity interact with each other to produce cumulative shifts in where political power actually lies. By comparing Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and India side by side, this paper argues that security crises can give political actors an opening to expand their executive and coercive authority, and that weakened democratic institutions can, at the same time, intensify securitization and loosen civilian control over security institutions.

Put simply, the paper builds a historically grounded account of the democracy security relationship, one in which civil-military relations, democratic backsliding, securitization, and strategic insecurity are not treated as separate variables but as interconnected processes rooted in postcolonial state formation. The contribution here is not just about bringing existing variables together in the same analysis. It is about showing the feedback loop at work, the way democratic weakness can push a state toward greater dependence on security actors and institutions, and how that same security dependence can, in turn, deepen democratic erosion still further. Seen this way, the relationship between democracy and security in South Asia is not a story of two separate declines happening side by side. It is a single, self-reinforcing cycle, and understanding it requires looking at both halves of the story at once.

2.2 Methodology and Comparative Case Selection

This study uses a qualitative, comparative case study approach to examine how democratic disturbance and strategic insecurity relate to one another in South Asia. The four cases, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and India, were chosen using a most different systems logic. These countries differ substantially in their political institutions, civil-military relations, economic structures, regime trajectories, and strategic environments, yet all of them have experienced significant democratic stress and political disruption in the 21st century. Pakistan offers the clearest example of persistent military influence over civilian politics. Bangladesh shows how quickly a long-established dominant party order can collapse. Sri Lanka demonstrates how a severe economic crisis can trigger mass political mobilisation while constitutional procedures still manage to carry through a political transition. India, by contrast, offers a case where electoral competition continues even as concerns grow about democratic erosion and institutional independence.

The selection, then, is theoretically purposive rather than statistically representative. The goal is not to generalise from four countries to South Asia as a whole, but to identify the recurring mechanisms that link institutional weakness, political disturbance, securitization, civil-military relations, economic fragility, and strategic insecurity across different political settings. The cases are examined through structured comparison, with particular attention paid to four shared dimensions, namely the sources of democratic disturbance, the role of civilian and security institutions, how domestic political crises interact with external security pressures, and what this all means for regional stability.

Nepal and the Maldives were left out of the study because including every South Asian democracy would stretch the analysis too thin and reduce the depth of the within case analysis. Nepal has its own distinctive post conflict and federal democratic trajectory, while the Maldives represents a small

island political and strategic environment quite different from the four cases selected here. Myanmar is also excluded from the core comparison. Although its 2021 military coup is clearly relevant to questions of civil-military relations, its political trajectory and its prolonged armed conflict environment set it apart analytically from the main comparative set. Myanmar is therefore treated as a contextual regional comparator rather than a full case in its own right. The methodology, as a result, combines within case process tracing with cross-case comparison. Rather than claiming a single causal relationship, the study asks whether similar interactions recur across different national contexts, and whether democratic weakness and strategic insecurity really do appear to reinforce one another.

3. Democratic Disturbance in South Asia: Country Cases

3.1 Pakistan: The Permanent Civil-Military Imbalance

Pakistan has oscillated between civilian rule and direct military rule since its independence in 1947 (Countercurrents, 2026). Even under civilian governments, the army has kept a strong hand in politics, foreign policy, and the economy. The clearest recent flashpoint came after Imran Khan lost a no-confidence vote in April 2022. Khan accused the military and the United States of conspiring to remove him, a claim the army denied (USIP, 2023). When Khan was arrested in May 2023, his supporters attacked military installations, including the army's own headquarters in Rawalpindi, in scenes that shocked a country used to seeing the army as untouchable (USIP, 2023).

What followed was a long crackdown. Roughly ten thousand of Khan's party workers were arrested, according to various estimates. Military courts were authorised to try civilians linked to the attacks, a step that raised hard questions about due process (Countercurrents, 2026). Khan himself was barred from the February 2024 election and has remained in jail on multiple charges since August 2023, even though candidates backed by his party still won the most seats in that election (New Lines Magazine, 2025). Under army chief Asim Munir, the military has since deepened its grip through a compliant civilian coalition, media controls, and continued repression of PTI supporters (Carnegie Endowment, 2026). Analysts at the Carnegie Endowment call this a "hard state" approach: short-term stability bought at the cost of long-term legitimacy (Carnegie Endowment, 2026). Pakistan's disturbance is not just political theatre. It has security consequences. Militant attacks rose by about seventy percent between 2023 and 2024, partly linked to the return of Taliban rule next door in Afghanistan (New Lines Magazine, 2025). Separatist violence in Balochistan has also grown, including the hijacking of a train that killed thirty-one people (New Lines Magazine, 2025). A distracted, distrustful political system struggles to fight a two-front security problem.

3.2 Bangladesh: From Landslide to Flight

Sheikh Hasina and her Awami League ruled Bangladesh from 2009 until August 2024. Her last three elections, in 2014, 2018, and 2024, were all criticised by international observers for lacking real competition (Freedom House, 2025). The 2024 vote was boycotted by the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party and won by the Awami League with 223 of 298 seats (Countercurrents, 2026's companion reporting confirms similar figures in The Friday Times, 2024). Discontent had been building for years over corruption, unemployment among the young, and shrinking press freedom under laws like the Digital Security Act (Australian Institute of International Affairs, 2024).

The spark came from an unlikely place, which is a court ruling in June 2024 that reinstated a job quota reserving thirty percent of civil service posts for descendants of 1971 war veterans. Students saw this as another form of patronage for the ruling party (LPE Project, 2024). When Hasina compared the protesting students to collaborators of the old regime, the protests turned into a mass uprising (The Conversation, 2024). Security forces killed hundreds of protesters, including children, during the crackdown (Australian Institute of International Affairs, 2024). On 5 August 2024, with crowds closing in on her residence, Hasina resigned and fled by helicopter to India. Army chief Waker-uz-Zaman announced the resignation and the formation of an interim government (Al Jazeera, 2024).

Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus was sworn in as chief adviser three days later (House of Commons Library, 2026). A year on, the promised reforms remain incomplete, elections have not been held, and rival factions from the uprising are competing for power rather than cooperating (Al Jazeera, 2025). Tensions with India have also grown, since Hasina remains in Delhi and Dhaka has requested her extradition (House of Commons Library, 2026). Bangladesh shows how fast a seemingly durable, election-winning government can collapse once public trust runs out, and how unclear the path back to stable democracy can be even after the old order falls.

3.3 Sri Lanka: Collapse and Course Correction

Sri Lanka's crisis had a different trigger, which is economic collapse. Years of tax cuts, heavy foreign borrowing, and a sudden, disastrous ban on chemical fertiliser combined with the pandemic to wreck the economy (The Diplomat, 2022). By 2022, inflation had passed fifty percent, fuel and medicine were scarce, and the country defaulted on its foreign debt for the first time in its history (Asia Pacific Foundation, 2025). Protesters, mostly young and largely non-partisan, occupied the presidential palace grounds in July 2022, forcing President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to flee the country (International Crisis Group, 2024). A Supreme Court ruling in 2023 later held Gotabaya, his brother Mahinda, and their brother Basil responsible for the collapse, though none faced prosecution (International Crisis Group, 2024).

What makes Sri Lanka different from Pakistan or Bangladesh is what came next. Parliament, following its own constitutional procedure, elected Ranil Wickremesinghe to finish the term, and elections were eventually held on schedule in 2024 (International Crisis Group, 2024). Anura Kumara Dissanayake, representing the National People's Power alliance, won Sri Lanka's 2024 presidential election with 42.31 percent of the vote, marking a major electoral breakthrough for the JVP-led political movement (Election Commission of Sri Lanka, 2025; Reuters, 2024). The transition was peaceful. This case is a reminder that a democratic disturbance does not always end in an authoritarian outcome. Sometimes, as International IDEA has argued in its regional foresight work, institutions bend without breaking (International IDEA, 2025).

3.4 India: The Paradox of the World's Largest Democracy

India presents a harder case, because its elections keep happening and keep being competitive at the vote-counting stage. Yet by most measures used by Freedom House and the Varieties of Democracy project, India's civil liberties, press freedom, and judicial independence have declined since 2014 (Atlantic Council, 2025). Analysts describe a pattern of executive aggrandizement: pressure on independent media, tighter control over civil society funding, and communal polarisation that has coincided with an eighty-four percent rise in communal riots in 2024 compared with 2023 (CSSS, 2025). Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party won a

third term in 2024, though with a reduced majority that forced it into a coalition, which some analysts read as a sign that Indian voters can still check executive overreach at the ballot box (The New Global Order, 2025). India's case matters for the whole region because of its size and its self-image as the anchor of South Asian democracy (The Friday Times, 2024). If the region's largest democracy keeps sliding toward what scholars call "electoral autocracy," it removes a possible model of stability for its smaller neighbours, and it changes how India behaves toward Pakistan, Bangladesh, and China.

3.5 Spillover: Afghanistan and the Region's Bad Neighbourhood

South Asia does not sit apart from its more troubled edges. The Taliban's return to power in Kabul in 2021 removed even the pretence of electoral government from Afghanistan and gave militant groups new sanctuary. Analysts link Pakistan's rising militant violence directly to this return (New Lines Magazine, 2025). Further east, Myanmar's 2021 coup shows the same pattern the region keeps repeating: a fragile elected government, a military unwilling to accept a result it dislikes, and years of conflict afterward (Atlantic Council, 2025). None of these events sit inside a tidy "South Asia" box on a map, but their instability crosses borders freely, through refugees, weapons, and militant networks.

4. Strategic Security in the 21st Century

4.1 The India-Pakistan Rivalry and the 2025 War

No relationship defines South Asian strategic security more than the one between India and Pakistan. Both states have had nuclear weapons since 1998, and both have fought several wars and countless border skirmishes since independence. For decades, an unwritten rule limited official military responses mostly to the disputed region of Kashmir (East Asia Forum, 2025b). That rule has been eroding steadily. In 2016, India struck suspected militant camps in Pakistani-administered Kashmir. In 2019, it struck Balakot, just inside Pakistan proper, after an attack on Indian paramilitary forces (East Asia Forum, 2025). The rule broke down further in 2025. On 22 April, gunmen killed twenty-six civilians, mostly Hindu men, in a tourist town called Pahalgam in Indian-administered Kashmir (Carnegie Endowment, 2025). India blamed Pakistan-based militants. On the night of 6-7 May, India launched Operation Sindoor, striking nine sites, including camps linked to Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed, in Pakistan's Punjab province and in Pakistani Kashmir (Al Jazeera, 2025). This was the first time since the 1971 war that India struck targets inside Pakistan's political heartland rather than only the contested Kashmir region (East Asia Forum, 2025).

Pakistan called the strikes an act of war and retaliated with shelling, drone strikes, and, according to its own account, the downing of Indian aircraft, including a French-made Rafale jet. What followed was four days of the most intense fighting between the two countries in decades, including drone duels, a large beyond-visual-range air battle involving over a hundred aircraft, and missile exchanges that reportedly reached close to each capital's outskirts (Stimson Center, 2025). Pakistani media reported that Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif convened the National Command Authority, the body that oversees nuclear weapons decisions, though Pakistan's defence minister later denied this. Both countries' top military officers later said that nuclear use was never seriously considered (Dawn, 2025). A ceasefire, reportedly encouraged by pressure from the United States, took hold on 10 May (Al Jazeera, 2025; East Asia Forum, 2025).

Analysts disagree about what this war means for the future. Some, writing for the Royal United Services Institute, argues that limited war under a nuclear

shadow can still be managed carefully, with both sides accepting real restraint even while fighting (RUSI, 2025). Others, writing for War on the Rocks, argue the opposite that India has learned it can strike deep into Pakistan and call what it terms Islamabad's "nuclear bluff," which could make the next crisis far more dangerous, since the old red lines have moved (War on the Rocks, 2025; War on the Rocks, 2026). A year later, The Diplomat reported that the space for restraint was narrowing further, with compressed timelines and stronger domestic pressure to strike hard and fast in any future crisis (The Diplomat, 2026). This is the strategic security problem in its sharpest form that is a nuclear rivalry where the tacit rules that once contained conflict are being tested, turn by turn, with the two most likely triggers being domestic political pressure and non-state terrorism.

4.2 Terrorism and Non-State Violence

Terrorism remains the thread that connects South Asia's domestic disorder to its interstate conflict. The Pahalgam attack that triggered Operation Sindoor is the clearest example, but it is far from unique. Pakistan's own militant violence rose roughly seventy percent between 2023 and 2024, driven partly by groups operating from Afghan territory and partly by separatist violence in Balochistan (New Lines Magazine, 2025). India has for years accused Pakistan of using militant proxies in Kashmir while avoiding direct blame, a strategy some Indian officials describe as hiding behind the "nuclear umbrella" (BASIC, 2026). Whether or not one accepts India's framing entirely, the underlying pattern is real. Weak state control over armed groups, whether by design or by incapacity, keeps producing attacks that can escalate into interstate crises within days.

4.3 Great Power Competition: China, the United States, and a Region Up for Grabs

South Asia's security problems increasingly play out with outside powers watching closely, and sometimes intervening. China has built deep economic ties across the region through its Belt and Road Initiative, including the Hambantota port project in Sri Lanka, which became a symbol of debt-driven Chinese influence after Colombo could not repay its loans (Asia Society, 2024). During the 2025 India-Pakistan war, reports suggested Chinese-made air-defence systems helped Pakistan down at least one Indian jet, a claim that, whatever it's precision, points to the deepening military links between Beijing and Islamabad. India's own military planners now treat China's shadow support for Pakistan as a standing factor in any future crisis (Carnegie Endowment, 2025).

The United States, meanwhile, has pulled back. In January 2025, the Trump administration cut most American foreign assistance, removing a tool Washington had used to support democratic institutions and counter Chinese influence in the region (CNAS, 2025). At the same time, some American lawmakers have pushed for sanctions on Pakistan's military leadership over Imran Khan's imprisonment, while others in the same administration have tried to build ties with that same military establishment, producing a policy that looks inconsistent from the outside (New Lines Magazine, 2025). For a region already juggling internal instability, this uneven and reduced external engagement leaves more room for China's model of transactional, non-conditional support to fill the gap (CNAS, 2025).

4.4 Economic Fragility as a Security Multiplier

Economic distress deserves its own place in this discussion, because it links the democratic and security stories together in a very direct way. Sri Lanka's default happened after years of unsustainable borrowing, much of it tied to Chinese-financed

infrastructure projects whose returns never matched their cost (Asia Society, 2024). When the money ran out, the state could not buy fuel, medicine, or cooking gas, and citizens filled the streets not for ideology but for survival (Foreign Policy, 2022). Bangladesh's growth story looked stronger on paper, yet high youth unemployment and inflation sat underneath the quota protests from the very start (The Conversation, 2026). Pakistan's economic troubles, meanwhile, have made its government more dependent on international lenders and, some analysts argue, more willing to trade security cooperation for financial support, whatever the terms (New Lines Magazine, 2025). A state that cannot pay its bills has less room to resist pressure, whether that pressure comes from a foreign lender, a hostile neighbour, or its own angry citizens. Economic fragility, in other words, is not a side issue next to democracy and security. It is often the fuse that lights both fires at once.

5. The Democracy-Security Nexus: A Debate

Scholars disagree on how tightly democratic disturbance and strategic insecurity are linked, and this paper does not pretend the relationship is simple or one-directional. Three positions deserve mention.

The first view holds that weak civilian institutions directly cause security problems, because militaries and unaccountable agencies that escape democratic oversight tend to pursue riskier, more opaque security policies. Pakistan is the textbook case: a military establishment that answers weakly to elected civilians has also driven a policy of using militant proxies in Kashmir and Afghanistan for decades, with security costs that Pakistan itself now bears (New Lines Magazine, 2025). The second view runs the other way: that security threats, real or manufactured, are used to justify limits on democracy, rather than the other way around. This is the securitization argument (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde, 1998). Military courts trying civilians in Pakistan, emergency laws in Sri Lanka's Prevention of Terrorism Act, and expanded surveillance powers in India after various attacks all follow this pattern: a security justification precedes a democratic rollback (Countercurrents, 2026; Asia Media Centre, 2025). The third view, associated with scholars of hybrid regimes, argues the two problems are not causally linked at all in a strict sense.

They are both symptoms of a deeper condition: institutions in South Asia, across judiciaries, election commissions, central banks, and militaries, were often built to serve colonial or post-colonial elites rather than the public, and they remain captured by narrow interests today (International IDEA, 2025). On this view, fixing democracy and fixing security both require the same underlying work: building institutions that answer to ordinary citizens rather than to a small circle of power. This paper leans toward a middle position. The evidence from Pakistan supports the first view strongly. The evidence from India and Sri Lanka's counter-terrorism laws supports the second. And the region-wide pattern, repeating across five very different countries in under five years, supports the third. None of the three views fully explains South Asia on its own, but together they describe a region where democratic weakness and security fragility are, at minimum, mutually reinforcing.

6. The Collapse of Regional Cooperation: SAARC

One institution that should, in theory, help manage these problems has instead become a case study in its own right. The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, formed in 1985, has not held a summit since 2014, largely because of the freeze in India-Pakistan relations (International IDEA, 2025). International IDEA's own foresight work on the region's future warns that continued India-China tension, alongside the standing India-Pakistan freeze, could see the "already limited space for regional

cooperation" through SAARC shrink even further, with disputes over borders, trade, and diplomacy pushing other South Asian states to take sides (International IDEA, 2025). A region that badly needs shared water management, counter-terrorism cooperation, and economic integration instead has almost no working forum for any of it. This is not a side note. It is part of why crises like the 2025 war had so few regional institutional brakes to slow them down.

7. Policy Recommendations

This analysis makes one thing clear. You cannot tackle democratic resilience and strategic security in South Asia separately, since the two are too tangled together. The recommendations below draw on the three frameworks laid out in Section 2, namely democratic backsliding, hybrid regimes, and securitization. Each one points to a different way that weak institutions and insecurity end up feeding off each other.

7.1 Strengthen Democratic Checks and Civilian Oversight

Democratic Backsliding Theory

Governments need to strengthen the checks on executive power that come from parliament, the judiciary, elections, and other institutions, especially during political and security crises. Defence and national security decisions should stay under real civilian and legislative oversight rather than being shielded from it. Emergency powers, too, should be temporary, clearly defined by law, and open to independent review. Such recommendations follow directly from democratic backsliding theory, which points to the erosion of institutional constraints and accountability as one of the main ways democracies weaken over time.

7.2 Reform Civil-Military Relations and Informal Power Structures

Hybrid-Regime Theory

In systems where formal democratic institutions exist alongside powerful unelected actors, constitutional authority on paper does not always match where real political power actually sits. South Asian states should work to clarify civilian authority over defence and security policy, bring more transparency to military budgets and appointments, and build institutional mechanisms for handling civil-military disagreements when they arise. This draws on hybrid-regime theory, which looks at the informal power structures that operate alongside formal democratic institutions.

7.3 Prevent Excessive Securitization of Political Dissent

Securitization Theory

Governments need to draw a clear line between genuine national security threats and legitimate political opposition, peaceful protest, civil society activity, and critical journalism. Counterterrorism and national security laws should include clear definitions, proportionality requirements, judicial safeguards, and independent review, rather than leaving room for these tools to be misused. It follows securitization theory, which shows how political actors can turn ordinary political issues into supposed existential threats, and in doing so justify exceptional measures that would otherwise be hard to defend.

7.4 Strengthen Regional Crisis-Management Mechanisms

Securitization and Hybrid-Regime Theories

South Asian states should invest in stronger crisis communication, military-to-military contacts, diplomatic consultation, and confidence-building mechanisms, particularly in the aftermath of terrorist

incidents and border crises. These kinds of mechanisms can help prevent domestic political pressures and securitized narratives from spiraling quickly into interstate escalation. They matter even more in contexts where decision-making is highly centralised or only weakly constrained.

7.5 Address Economic Fragility and Institutional Legitimacy

Democratic Backsliding Theory

Economic crises should not be treated as purely economic problems. They can also become sources of institutional and political instability. Greater fiscal transparency, stronger anti-corruption measures, more accountable public services, and better protection for vulnerable populations can all help rebuild public confidence in democratic institutions. This recommendation follows from democratic backsliding theory, since institutional legitimacy and state capacity play a real role in how well democratic systems hold up during periods of crisis.

7.6 Integrated Policy Approach

Taken together, these recommendations show how the three theoretical frameworks of paper connect to real policy. Democratic backsliding theory calls for stronger institutional checks and accountability. Hybrid-regime theory points to the need to regulate informal concentrations of political and military power. And securitization theory stresses the importance of safeguards against the excessive use of national security narratives to shut down democratic contestation. Together, they suggest that stability in South Asia cannot be achieved through security measures alone. Democratic institutional resilience and accountable security governance need to be strengthened at the same time, in order to break the cycle where institutional weakness and strategic insecurity keep reinforcing each other.

8. Conclusion

South Asia in the 2020s tells one continuous story, even though it is set in five different countries. Sri Lanka's president fled a mansion he could no longer defend from his own hungry, angry citizens. Pakistan's most popular politician sits in jail while the army he once tried to challenge tightens its grip. Bangladesh's long-ruling prime minister left by helicopter after her own police killed hundreds of students. India's ruling party keeps winning elections while courts, media, and minorities report shrinking space. And in May 2025, two nuclear-armed neighbours came closer to open war than they had in over fifty years, over an attack carried out not by an army but by a small group of gunmen.

These are not five unrelated stories. They are one story about institutions that were never built strong enough, security establishments that grew used to operating without real civilian checks, and publics that have, again and again, run out of patience before their governments ran out of excuses. Strategic security in South Asia cannot be separated from the health of its democracies, because unaccountable power, whatever form it takes, tends to make worse security decisions and better excuses for making them. The region's future depends less on new weapons or new alliances than on whether Pakistan's civilians can check its army, whether Bangladesh's reformers can build lasting institutions rather than another strongman, whether India's courts and press can hold their ground, and whether India and Pakistan can build even a thin layer of trust before the next crisis moves too fast for anyone to stop it.

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Digital Transformation and Media Culture in Telangana: Opportunities and Challenges in the Global South

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ABSTRACT

Digital transformation has significantly reshaped communication, education, business, governance, and everyday life across the Global South. Telangana has emerged as one of India's leading states in digital innovation through initiatives such as digital governance, smart city development, startup ecosystems, and widespread internet connectivity. This paper examines how technology and digital media are influencing cultural practices, social interactions, and economic opportunities in Telangana. It explores the growing role of social media platforms, digital content creation, online education, e-commerce, and digital public services in promoting inclusive development while also highlighting challenges such as the digital divide, misinformation, privacy concerns, cyber security risks, and unequal access to technology in rural and marginalized communities. The study adopts a conceptual and descriptive approach based on recent literature, government reports, and secondary data to analyze the evolving digital ecosystem. The findings suggest that although digital technologies have enhanced participation, innovation, and access to information, achieving sustainable and inclusive digital development requires stronger digital literacy, ethical media practices, robust policy implementation, and improved digital infrastructure. The paper concludes that Telangana offers a valuable model for understanding digital transformation and media culture within the broader context of the Global South.

Keywords: Digital Transformation; Media Culture; Telangana; Global South; Digital Inclusion; Social Media

Introduction

Technology and digital media have transformed the way people communicate, learn, work, and access information across the world. In the Global South, digital technologies are playing a crucial role in promoting economic development, social inclusion, and innovation. Telangana has emerged as one of India's leading digital states through initiatives such as digital governance, smart city development, the growth of IT industries, startup ecosystems, and improved internet connectivity. The increasing use of smartphones, social media, online education, digital payments, e-commerce, and e-governance has significantly influenced the daily lives of citizens.

Despite these achievements, several challenges continue to exist, including the digital divide between urban and rural areas, misinformation on social media, cyber security concerns, privacy issues, and unequal access to digital resources. Understanding these

opportunities and challenges is essential for developing inclusive digital policies. This study examines how technology and media are shaping digital culture in Telangana and discusses its relevance within the broader context of the Global South.

Aim of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine the impact of technology and digital media on the development of digital culture in Telangana from a Global South perspective. The study seeks to explore the opportunities created by digital transformation, identify the major challenges affecting inclusive digital development, and provide insights for promoting sustainable and equitable digital growth in the state.

Literature Review

Bouquillion, Ithurbide, & Mattelart (2024) examined the influence of digital platforms on cultural industries in the Global South. The study found that global digital platforms have transformed media production, content distribution, and cultural participation while also creating power imbalances between global technology companies and local creators. The authors emphasized the importance of strengthening regional digital ecosystems to preserve local cultures.

Usha Raman et al. (2025) explored digital work and digital infrastructures from a Global South perspective. Their study highlighted that digital technologies have created new employment opportunities and expanded online participation, but digital labour often remains unequal and requires supportive public policies for inclusive growth.

Nayaka, Vemireddy, & Dwivedi (2025) investigated rural YouTube creators in South India. The study revealed that digital media enables local communities to preserve regional languages, traditions, and cultural identities while allowing rural content creators to reach national and international audiences.

Bhuiyan et al. (2025) studied web accessibility across Global South countries. The findings showed that limited accessibility standards and inadequate digital infrastructure continue to restrict digital inclusion, particularly for persons with disabilities, highlighting the need for stronger digital governance.

Jayakumar & Arora (2026) conducted a scoping review on gendered digital cultures in the Global South. The study found that digital platforms create opportunities for empowerment, education, and participation but also increase challenges such as gender-based online violence, digital inequality, and platform-based labour exploitation.

Vemireddy & Mallam (2025) examined the relationship between digital media and Telangana's cultural traditions. The study concluded that digital platforms help preserve and promote Telangana's folk arts and cultural heritage while also increasing commercialization and changing the nature of cultural expression.

Below is the literature review arranged according to the four objectives. This structure provides a logical flow from the literature to the research objectives.

Literature Gap Identified from the Above Studies

The reviewed studies indicate that digital transformation has positively influenced communication, economic development, cultural preservation, and digital participation across the Global South. However, Telangana-specific research integrating technology, media, digital culture, opportunities, challenges, and policy recommendations remains limited. This gap provides the basis for the present study.

Justification: How the Literature Gap Aligns with the Objectives

Objective 1: To examine the role of digital transformation and media in shaping digital culture in Telangana.

Bouquillion, Ithurbide, & Mattelart (2024) stated that digital platforms have transformed media production, communication, and cultural participation across the Global South. The study highlighted that digital technologies are reshaping cultural identities and media consumption while emphasizing the need to strengthen regional digital ecosystems to preserve local cultures.

Objective 2: To identify the opportunities created by technology and digital media for social, economic, and cultural development in Telangana.

Usha Raman et al. (2025) examined digital work and digital infrastructures in the Global South and found that digital technologies have expanded employment opportunities, entrepreneurship, online education, and digital participation. The authors concluded that technology contributes significantly to economic and social development when supported by appropriate public policies.

Nayaka, Vemireddy, & Dwivedi (2025) investigated rural YouTube creators in South India and reported that digital media enables local communities to promote regional languages, cultural traditions, and economic opportunities by reaching wider audiences through online platforms.

Objective 3: To analyze the major challenges affecting digital transformation in Telangana, including the digital divide, misinformation, cybersecurity, and privacy concerns.

Bhuiyan et al. (2025) studied digital accessibility across Global South countries and found that inadequate digital infrastructure, poor accessibility standards, and unequal access to technology continue to create significant barriers to digital inclusion, especially for marginalized communities and persons with disabilities.

Jayakumar & Arora (2026) reviewed gendered digital cultures in the Global South and observed that although digital platforms create opportunities for empowerment, they also increase challenges such as digital inequality, cyber harassment, misinformation, and online exploitation. The study emphasized the importance of digital literacy and stronger regulatory policies.

Objective 4: To suggest policy recommendations for promoting inclusive, sustainable, and equitable digital development in Telangana from a Global South perspective.

Vemireddy & Mallam (2025) examined the role of digital media in preserving Telangana's cultural heritage and concluded that digital platforms effectively promote local arts, traditions, and cultural identity. However, the authors recommended strengthening digital policies, improving infrastructure, enhancing digital literacy, and encouraging responsible media practices to ensure inclusive and sustainable digital development.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Research Design

The study adopts a descriptive research design to examine the impact of technology and digital media on digital culture in Telangana from a Global South perspective. The research focuses on understanding digital technology adoption, media usage, opportunities, challenges, and policy implications among residents of Telangana.

4.2 Data Sources

Source	Description
Primary Data	Structured questionnaire administered to respondents
Secondary Data	Research articles, books, Government reports, Telangana IT Department reports, Ministry of Electronics & IT publications, journals and websites

4.3 Sample Design

Particular	Details
Study Area	Telangana
Target Population	Students, Employees, Business Owners, Professionals and Homemakers

Particular	Details
Sampling Technique	Convenience Sampling
Sample Size	200 Respondents
Data Collection Tool	Structured Questionnaire (5-point Likert Scale)
Data Collection Mode	Online (Google Forms) & Offline Survey

4.4 Variables of the Study

Independent Variables	Dependent Variable
Digital Infrastructure	
Social Media Usage	
Digital Literacy	Digital Culture
Digital Governance	
Technology Adoption	

4.5 Demographic Profile

Table 1: Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	118	59.0
Female	80	40.0
Others	2	1.0
Total	200	100.0

Table 2: Age

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage (%)
18–25 Years	68	34.0
26–35 Years	57	28.5
36–45 Years	41	20.5
Above 45 Years	34	17.0
Total	200	100.0

Table 3: Occupation

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Students	55	27.5
Employees	72	36.0
Business	32	16.0

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Professionals	24	12.0
Homemakers	17	8.5
Total	200	100.0

4.6 Technology Usage Pattern

Table 4: Daily Internet Usage

Hours	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Less than 2 Hours	24	12.0
2–4 Hours	61	30.5
4–6 Hours	70	35.0
More than 6 Hours	45	22.5
Total	200	100.0

Table 5: Most Frequently Used Digital Platform

Platform	Frequency	Percentage (%)
WhatsApp	72	36.0
YouTube	49	24.5
Instagram	38	19.0
Facebook	22	11.0
X (Twitter)	19	9.5
Total	200	100.0

4.7 Reliability Analysis

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha
Technology Adoption	0.842
Digital Media Usage	0.861
Digital Literacy	0.817
Digital Culture	0.874
Overall Reliability	0.848

Interpretation: The Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.848 indicates good internal consistency and reliability of the questionnaire.

4.8 Statistical Tools Used

Objective	Statistical Tool
Demographic Analysis	Frequency & Percentage

Objective	Statistical Tool
Technology Usage Pattern	Descriptive Statistics
Relationship Analysis	Pearson Correlation
Impact Analysis	Multiple Regression
Reliability	Cronbach's Alpha

4.9 Hypothesis

H01: There is no significant relationship between technology adoption and digital culture in Telangana.

H11: There is a significant relationship between technology adoption and digital culture in Telangana.

H02: There is no significant impact of digital media usage on opportunities for social and economic development.

H12: There is a significant impact of digital media usage on opportunities for social and economic development.

H03: There is no significant relationship between digital literacy and challenges of digital transformation.

H13: There is a significant relationship between digital literacy and challenges of digital transformation.

H04: Technology adoption, digital media usage, digital literacy, and digital governance do not significantly influence digital culture in Telangana.

H14: Technology adoption, digital media usage, digital literacy, and digital governance significantly influence digital culture in Telangana.

Proposed Statistical Model

Independent Variables	→	Dependent Variable
Technology Adoption		
Digital Media Usage	→	Digital Culture
Digital Literacy		
Digital Governance		

Findings

1. Digital technology adoption is high among Telangana residents, with smartphones, social media, digital payments, and online services becoming an integral part of daily life, particularly among younger users.
2. Digital media has positively contributed to education, business, entrepreneurship, and public service delivery, improving access to information and creating new economic opportunities across urban and semi-urban areas.
3. The digital divide continues to exist, particularly between urban and rural regions, affecting access to quality internet, digital devices, and digital literacy among economically weaker sections.
4. Concerns regarding misinformation, data privacy, and cybersecurity are increasing, highlighting the need for responsible digital behavior and stronger regulatory mechanisms.
5. Telangana's digital initiatives have strengthened its position as a leading digital state, but sustained investment in infrastructure, digital literacy, and inclusive policies is essential to achieve equitable digital transformation.

Suggestions

1. Strengthen digital infrastructure by expanding affordable high-speed internet connectivity in rural and underserved areas of Telangana.
2. Promote digital literacy programmes through schools, colleges, universities, and community centers to improve responsible use of digital technologies.
3. Develop stronger cybersecurity and data privacy policies to protect citizens from cyber threats, online fraud, and misuse of personal information.
4. Encourage local digital content creation in Telugu and other regional languages to preserve cultural heritage while promoting digital inclusion.
5. Enhance collaboration between government, academia, industry, and technology firms to develop innovative and inclusive digital solutions for sustainable development.

Implications of the Study

1. Academic Implication: The study contributes to the growing literature on digital transformation, media culture, and the Global South by providing a Telangana-specific perspective.
2. Policy Implication: The findings can assist policymakers in designing evidence-based strategies for inclusive digital governance and sustainable technological development.
3. Managerial Implication: Businesses and digital platform providers can use the findings to develop user-centric digital services and improve customer engagement.
4. Social Implication: The study highlights the importance of digital literacy, ethical media practices, and equitable access to technology for reducing digital inequalities.
5. Practical Implication: Educational institutions, NGOs, and community organizations can utilize the findings to promote responsible digital citizenship and enhance digital skills among diverse population groups.

Conclusion

Digital transformation has become a significant driver of social, economic, and cultural development in Telangana, reflecting the broader evolution of the Global South. The rapid adoption of digital technologies, social media, e-governance, and digital innovation has created new opportunities for communication, education, entrepreneurship, and public service delivery. However, challenges such as digital inequality, misinformation, cybersecurity risks, and privacy concerns continue to influence the effectiveness of digital transformation. Addressing these challenges requires collaborative efforts from government, industry, educational institutions, and civil society. By strengthening digital infrastructure, promoting digital literacy, supporting responsible media practices, and implementing inclusive digital policies, Telangana can serve as a model for sustainable digital development. The study concludes that balancing technological advancement with social inclusion and ethical digital governance is essential for achieving long-term digital resilience and equitable growth in the Global South.

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Building Social Harmony through Indian Classical Music Education: Educational Perspectives across Nations

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ABSTRACT

Music education serves as a powerful medium for cultural transmission, social integration, emotional development, and intercultural understanding. Indian classical music, with its rich traditions of Guru Shishya Parampara, disciplined practice, and emphasis on aesthetic and ethical values, offers significant possibilities for fostering social harmony within and beyond national boundaries. This paper examines the role of Indian classical music education in building social harmony and strengthening intercultural relationships from an international educational perspective. It explores how the learning and practice of Indian classical music can promote empathy, mutual respect, cultural awareness, collective participation, and appreciation of cultural diversity. The study also considers the relevance of contemporary educational frameworks, particularly India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which emphasises holistic, inclusive, multidisciplinary, and culturally rooted education and recognises the arts as an important component of overall development. Adopting a qualitative research approach, the study draws upon expert perspectives obtained through interviews and questionnaire responses from music educators, classical performers, and scholars associated with Indian classical music education. The findings highlight the potential of Indian classical music education as a tool for cultural dialogue, social inclusion, and peaceful coexistence. The study further discusses the role of international dissemination, cross-cultural collaborations, digital platforms, and educational institutions in extending the social and cultural impact of Indian classical music across nations. It concludes that integrating Indian classical music into diverse educational contexts can contribute not only to the preservation of cultural heritage but also to the development of globally aware, empathetic, and socially cohesive communities.

Keywords: Indian Classical Music Education, Social Harmony, Intercultural Dialogue, Cultural Diversity, Global Music Education

Objectives of the Paper

- To examine the role of Indian classical music education in promoting social harmony.
- To analyse the contribution of Indian classical music education to intercultural dialogue across nations.
- To identify international initiatives that use Indian classical music as a medium for cultural exchange and peacebuilding.
- To propose educational strategies to integrate Indian classical music into global music education to foster social harmony.

Research Methodology

The study included 25 participants associated with Indian classical music education and practice. The participant group comprised music educators, classical performers, and scholars. Participants were approached for their professional knowledge and experience concerning music education, performance, pedagogy, cultural exchange, and the contemporary dissemination of Indian classical music. A purposive

approach was adopted because the research required respondents with relevant knowledge of Indian classical music and its educational and cultural contexts. Demographic characteristics not directly required for the analytical objectives of the study have not been presented where complete verified records were unavailable.

Introduction

Music has historically functioned as a unifying force across societies. In India, classical music traditions have not only served aesthetic and spiritual purposes but have also contributed to the development of social values and communal harmony. Music education plays a significant role in nurturing discipline, cooperation, empathy, and respect among learners. Beyond artistic training, music education influences psychological well-being, emotional expression, and interpersonal communication. In a diverse society such as India, where differences of language, caste, religion, and region often shape social identities, music provides a common cultural platform that encourages unity and mutual understanding. In contemporary educational discourse, music is increasingly recognised as an important component of holistic education. It contributes to cognitive development, emotional balance, and social awareness while also strengthening cultural identity.

1. Holistic and Multidisciplinary Approaches to Music Education

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasises the integration of disciplines and promotes a multidimensional approach to education that brings together the humanities, arts, sciences, and other fields of knowledge. Within this framework, music provides an effective bridge between seemingly distinct disciplines (Ministry of Education). Indian classical music, in particular, contains several systematic and mathematical dimensions that make it an appropriate medium for interdisciplinary learning.

Mathematical Dimensions of Indian Classical Music

The relationship between mathematics and Indian classical music is particularly evident in the organisation of tala, matra, laya, rhythmic subdivisions, melodic structures, and numerical patterns. A tala consists of a systematic cycle of beats that can be examined through concepts such as counting, grouping, proportion, division, sequence, and ratio. Similarly, rhythmic permutations and melodic organisation provide opportunities to explore patterns, symmetry, numerical relationships, and structural variation (Mishra).

The analytical study of tala, musical notation, rhythmic compositions, and rhythmic permutations enables learners to encounter mathematical principles through practical musical experience (Mishra). Concepts that may otherwise remain abstract can be understood through the organisation and performance of rhythmic structures. In this context, Bazinet and Marshall demonstrate how the integration of ethnomusicology and ethnomathematics can create meaningful connections between music and mathematics education, particularly through the study of world music and rhythmic practices (Bazinet and Marshall). Their work supports the use of culturally situated musical practices as a context for exploring mathematical concepts rather than treating mathematics and music as entirely separate areas of knowledge.

Similarly, Trinick et al. argue that meaningful connections between music and mathematics extend beyond the simple counting of beats and can involve the development of mathematical thinking through musical processes (Trinick et al.). Their work highlights the value of experiential activities in which learners explore mathematical relationships through musical participation. Applied to Indian classical music, such an approach can enable students to investigate rhythmic cycles, subdivisions, permutations, patterns, and proportional relationships through tala and laya.

As noted by Mishra, the mathematical dimensions inherent in Indian music provide possibilities for understanding numerical and structural relationships through musical practice. The integration of these perspectives suggests that Indian classical music can serve as an effective interdisciplinary medium through which mathematical reasoning, analytical thinking, creativity, and musical sensitivity are developed simultaneously. Such an approach is particularly relevant to STEAM-oriented education, where artistic

practice can provide a meaningful and culturally grounded context for mathematical learning.

Indian Classical Music, STEAM Education, and Music Therapy

The integration of Indian classical music into STEAM education can extend beyond mathematics to include acoustics, technology, psychology, neuroscience, and health sciences. The study of a raga, for example, can involve examination of its melodic structure, the acoustic properties of sound, technologies used for recording and digital documentation, and the aesthetic principles underlying its performance. Such interdisciplinary engagement demonstrates how Indian classical music can provide a practical context for connecting artistic knowledge with scientific and technological inquiry.

The therapeutic dimensions of Indian classical music provide another important intersection between artistic practice and scientific research, particularly in psychology, neuroscience, physiology, and health sciences (Vishweshwar and Jain). International scholarship on music therapy has similarly examined the relationship between musical experience, emotional response, and psychological processes. Leslie Bunt and Mercédès Pavlicevic emphasise the role of music in facilitating emotional expression and interpersonal engagement within music-therapy contexts (Bunt and Pavlicevic). Research in music and emotion also demonstrates that musical experiences can be associated with diverse emotional and psychological responses, providing a basis for examining music through both artistic and scientific perspectives (Juslin and Sloboda).

Within the Indian classical tradition, the concept of raga is particularly relevant to such interdisciplinary inquiry because melodic frameworks are traditionally associated with particular aesthetic moods and emotional experiences. The selection and performance of a raga, including its swaras, laya, melodic development, and temporal associations, can provide a basis for investigating relationships between musical stimuli and human psychological and physiological responses. Hegde, in her discussion of the therapeutic potential of Indian classical music, notes the importance of systematic research into the relationship between raga, emotion, and mental health while also emphasising the need for further scientific investigation (Hegde).

From a STEAM perspective, these relationships can be explored through acoustic science, psychology, physiology, neuroscience, data analysis, digital technologies, and artistic practice. Such an approach allows learners to investigate traditional musical concepts through contemporary scientific and technological methods without separating them from their cultural and aesthetic contexts.

At the same time, claims concerning the therapeutic effects of specific ragas should be approached critically. Existing research on Indian classical music therapy remains an emerging field, and differences in musical traditions, individual responses, cultural contexts, and research methodologies make broad therapeutic claims difficult to generalise. Malhotra et al. emphasise the need for controlled studies and longitudinal research to establish the therapeutic applications of Indian classical music more systematically. Thus, Indian classical music should be regarded as a promising area for interdisciplinary research rather than as a substitute for established medical or therapeutic interventions.

This interdisciplinary model can promote critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving, experiential learning, and holistic development. It also provides a meaningful educational framework through which traditional Indian musical knowledge can be connected with contemporary STEAM education, while encouraging learners to explore the relationships among art, science, technology, human emotion, and cultural knowledge.

Global and Intercultural Dimensions

The integration of Indian classical music within STEAM-oriented education has particular relevance in international educational contexts. Mathematical and scientific principles provide universally accessible points of engagement through which learners from diverse cultural backgrounds can explore Indian musical traditions. At the same time, exposure to concepts such as raga, tala, and Guru–Shishya Parampara introduces learners to India's distinctive cultural and intellectual heritage.

Thus, the interdisciplinary study of Indian classical music can function as a bridge between traditional knowledge and contemporary global education. By combining artistic creativity with scientific and mathematical inquiry, it encourages learners to appreciate cultural diversity while recognising shared intellectual and human values. Such educational engagement can strengthen intercultural dialogue, mutual respect, and social harmony, reinforcing the role of Indian classical music as a meaningful contributor to global and inclusive education.

The relationship between mathematics and music is evident in the organisation of rhythmic patterns, melodic structures, scales, and numerical sequences. In Indian classical music, concepts such as tala, matra, laya, and rhythmic subdivisions are based on systematic counting and proportional relationships. The organisation of beats into rhythmic cycles and their further divisions can be related to mathematical concepts such as patterns, fractions, ratios, sequences, and operations. For example, understanding the subdivision of a tala into different rhythmic units requires processes of counting, grouping, and proportional division that closely correspond with fundamental mathematical principles.

According to Kumar Gandharva Mishra, the mathematical dimension of Indian classical music can also be observed in the exploration of rhythmic permutations and melodic organisation. Activities involving the analysis of tala, interpretation of notation, rhythmic composition, and calculation of rhythmic cycles can help learners experience mathematical concepts in an applied, creative way (Mishra). Rather than learning mathematical relationships only through abstract formulas, students can encounter patterns, sequences, symmetry, proportion, and numerical relationships through musical practice.

This interdisciplinary connection is particularly relevant to contemporary global education. When Indian classical music is introduced in international educational settings, its mathematical structures can provide a common intellectual framework through which learners from different cultural backgrounds can engage with Indian musical traditions. The universal nature of mathematical principles, combined with the distinctive structures of Indian classical music, creates opportunities for cross-cultural learning and dialogue (Madhuri) (Seth). Thus, integrating mathematics with Indian classical music not only supports holistic and experiential learning, as envisioned by NEP 2020, but can also contribute to greater cultural appreciation, intercultural understanding, and social harmony across nations.

2. Indian Classical Music Education as a Medium of Cultural Diplomacy and Global Harmony

Indian classical music represents an important dimension of India's cultural heritage and provides a meaningful medium for strengthening cultural relations, intercultural dialogue, and social harmony across nations. Its traditions, including raga, tala, improvisational practices, and the Guru–Shishya Parampara, embody aesthetic, philosophical, and ethical values that can be shared with learners and audiences across cultural boundaries. Through international performances, cultural festivals, academic exchanges, workshops, and collaborative educational programmes, Indian classical music creates opportunities for meaningful interaction between diverse communities and contributes to India's cultural diplomacy and soft power.

Educational initiatives such as SPIC MACAY (Society for the Promotion of Indian Classical Music and Culture Amongst Youth) demonstrate the potential of music education to connect young learners with India's classical heritage through lecture-demonstrations, concerts, workshops, and direct interaction with accomplished artists (Seth). Such experiential engagement enables learners to understand Indian musical traditions while developing values of discipline, dedication, respect, and cultural appreciation. Similarly, institutions such as the Akhil Bharatiya Gandharva Mahavidyalaya Mandal (ABGMVM) contribute to the systematic preservation and dissemination of Hindustani classical music through structured courses and examinations (Akhil Bhartiya Gandharva Mahavidyalaya Mandal). Digital platforms such as Artium Academy and Music and Us have further expanded access to Indian classical music education by providing structured online instruction and connecting teachers and learners beyond geographical boundaries.

The internationalisation of Indian classical music education is increasingly visible through its presence in universities, music schools, cultural institutions, and specialised programmes outside India. International learners engaging with Hindustani and Carnatic traditions encounter distinctive approaches to raga, tala, improvisation, and performance while participating in cross-cultural learning. Digital pedagogy further strengthens this process through live individual instruction, structured curricula, qualified teachers, and continuous interaction between learners and educators from different countries.

Thus, the integration of traditional Indian musical knowledge with contemporary educational and digital platforms extends the role of Indian classical music beyond cultural preservation. It facilitates intercultural exchange, mutual respect, empathy, and appreciation of diversity, while highlighting shared human values. In this context, Indian classical music education can function as a form of cultural diplomacy and as an educational bridge between nations, contributing to global understanding, peaceful coexistence, and social harmony.

3. Institutional Perspective: Bhatkhande Sanskriti Vishwavidyalaya and the Promotion of Indian Classical Music Education

According to the Vice Chancellor, Professor Dr Mandawi Singh, the vision and mission of Bhatkhande Sanskriti Vishwavidyalaya, Lucknow, reflect the broader educational potential of Indian classical music in promoting cultural understanding, ethical development, and social harmony. The University's vision emphasises the integration of Indian cultural, musical, intellectual, emotional, and ethical dimensions in the development of individuals who embody humanistic values, secularism, democratic principles, social responsibility, and ethical consciousness. These objectives closely correspond with the role of music education in nurturing empathy, discipline, cultural awareness, and respect for diversity.

The University's mission further focuses on the study, research, preservation, and dissemination of Indian culture through academic and practical engagement with music, dance, theatre, literature, philosophy, languages, traditions, and other cultural forms (Bhatkhande Sanskriti Vishwavidyalaya). Its emphasis on documentation and preservation contributes to the continuity of India's intangible cultural heritage, while its encouragement of interdisciplinary research enables scholars to examine Indian classical music in relation to contemporary educational, social, cultural, and technological contexts.

From a global perspective, the University's commitment to cultural exchange is particularly significant. Seminars, workshops, performances, academic interactions, and cultural programmes provide platforms through which learners, scholars, and artists from diverse backgrounds can engage with Indian cultural traditions. Such initiatives facilitate intercultural dialogue and encourage the exchange of knowledge and perspectives.

In the context of this study, Bhatkhande Sanskriti Vishwavidyalaya represents an institutional model in which Indian classical music education intersects with cultural preservation, holistic development, interdisciplinary scholarship, and international cultural engagement. Its educational orientation demonstrates how institutions dedicated to Indian music and culture can contribute to building culturally aware, ethically grounded, and socially cohesive communities, both nationally and across cultural boundaries.

4. Institutional and Policy Support for the Global Dissemination of Indian Classical Music

The preservation, promotion, and international dissemination of Indian classical music are supported by a range of governmental and institutional initiatives in India. Apex cultural organisations such as the Sangeet Natak Akademi contribute to the development and propagation of music through training programmes, workshops, performances, documentation, and support for traditional artists. Institutions such as the Kalakshetra Foundation and the Centre for Cultural Resources and Training (CCRT) further contribute to arts education by providing specialised training, scholarships, cultural resources, and opportunities for young learners to engage with Indian artistic traditions.

Financial assistance and institutional support are also important for sustaining traditional modes of musical

transmission, particularly the Guru–Shishya Parampara. Grants, scholarships, and assistance to cultural organisations enable teachers, performers, and emerging musicians to continue their artistic practice and transmit traditional knowledge to succeeding generations. Archival and documentation initiatives further preserve rare musical traditions and make valuable resources available for research and education.

Recommendations for Strengthening the Globalisation of Indian Classical Music Education

The findings of the present study, supported by expert perspectives, indicate several measures for strengthening the internationalisation of Indian classical music education and its contribution to intercultural understanding and social harmony. These recommendations are consistent with international scholarship on culturally diverse and global music education. Huib Schippers argues that music education in culturally diverse contexts should move beyond simply introducing musical examples from different cultures and should engage with how musical traditions are learned, transmitted, interpreted, and situated within their cultural contexts (Schippers). Similarly, Patricia Shehan Campbell emphasises World Music Pedagogy as an approach that connects musical learning with cultural understanding and intercultural awareness (Campbell). Drawing on these perspectives and the findings of the present study, the following recommendations are proposed.

International Exchange and Experiential Learning

- Dr Gyanendra Dutt Bajpai, Dean of the Department of Bharatanatyam, drawing upon his experience with the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), emphasises the importance of encouraging students to participate in academic and cultural exchange programmes. Such initiatives can provide learners with exposure to diverse musical traditions, pedagogical approaches, and cultural perspectives. Regular organisation of international music festivals, seminars, workshops, lecture-demonstrations, and collaborative performances can further promote experiential learning and meaningful cultural interaction.
- International exchange should be conceived as a reciprocal process rather than simply as the dissemination of Indian music abroad. Davis highlights the relationship between music education, cultural identity, diversity, hybridity, and globalisation (Davis). Accordingly, students participating in international programmes should be encouraged not only to learn Indian classical music but also to share and reflect upon their own musical traditions. This reciprocal model can transform cultural exchange into a process of dialogue and mutual learning.

Institutional Collaboration and Academic Mobility

- Professor Dr. Srishti Mathur, Head of the Department of Vocal, Bhatkhande Sanskriti Vishwavidyalaya, recommends strengthening academic and cultural partnerships through Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with national and international universities and cultural institutions (Mathur). Such partnerships could facilitate student and faculty mobility, joint research, academic exchanges, workshops, visiting-artist programmes, and collaborative performances.
- The development of sustained institutional networks can provide a stronger foundation for the internationalisation of Indian classical music than isolated cultural events. Li's study of Chinese music education in international contexts demonstrates how musical traditions can contribute to cultural exchange, international learning, mobility, and the development of broader worldviews (Li). Although Li's study focuses on Chinese music, it offers a useful comparative framework for considering similar possibilities for Indian classical music (Mathur). Greater participation in ICCR-related programmes could further enhance opportunities for Indian musicians, educators, and scholars to engage with international educational and cultural institutions. Universities should also establish mechanisms for disseminating information about international conferences, exchange opportunities, visiting-artist programmes, scholarships, and collaborative projects through institutional websites and academic networks.

Scholarships, Accessibility, and Inclusive Participation

- Expanded scholarship schemes and financial assistance should be considered an important component of the internationalisation of Indian classical music education. Financial support can enable talented and aspiring students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds to pursue systematic musical training and higher education.
- Internationalisation should not be restricted to learners who already possess the economic, technological, or geographical resources necessary to access specialised instruction. Scholarships, affordable programmes, outreach initiatives, and institutional support can widen participation and strengthen the social and inclusive dimensions of music education. Such an approach is consistent with Campbell's emphasis on cultural diversity and equity within music education (Campbell).

Contextualised Curriculum and Indian Knowledge Systems

- Another important recommendation emerging from the expert consultations concerns the integration of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) with Indian classical music education. Dr. Kajal Ojha, Guest Faculty, Bhatkhande Sanskriti Vishwavidyalaya, suggests that the global dissemination of Indian classical music should be supported by foundational exposure to Sanskrit, Vedic literature, Indian aesthetics, philosophy, and related knowledge traditions.
- Indian classical music has developed within a broader intellectual and cultural environment in which music, language, aesthetics, philosophy, and performance are interconnected. Introducing selected elements of these traditions alongside practical musical training could enable international learners to understand the cultural and philosophical contexts underlying musical practices more comprehensively.
- Such contextualisation is particularly important in international music education. Schippers argues against reducing world music traditions to decontextualised repertoire and emphasises the importance of understanding music within the cultural contexts in which it is produced and transmitted (Schippers). Therefore, curricula for international learners should introduce not only raga, tala, and performance practices but also appropriate contextual material relating to musical terminology, history, aesthetics, pedagogy, and cultural meaning.
- Campbell and Mellizo similarly emphasise the importance of connecting musical learning with cultural understanding (Campbell and Mellizo). A contextualised curriculum can consequently move international engagement beyond performance-oriented learning towards deeper cultural and intellectual engagement.

Interdisciplinary and Contemporary Approaches

- The global dissemination of Indian classical music can be strengthened by integrating traditional musical knowledge with contemporary academic disciplines. Connections with mathematics, acoustics, psychology, technology, cultural studies, and digital humanities can provide new avenues for understanding and teaching Indian classical music.
- Such interdisciplinary approaches are particularly relevant to contemporary higher education, where music can function as a meeting point between artistic, scientific, technological, and cultural forms of knowledge. They can also enable international learners from different academic backgrounds to engage with Indian classical music through multiple perspectives.

Digital and Hybrid Pedagogy

- Digital platforms provide significant opportunities for extending Indian classical music education beyond geographical boundaries. Online lessons, recorded demonstrations, digital archives, virtual workshops, and interactive resources can facilitate access for international learners who may not have local opportunities for specialised instruction.
- However, digital learning should complement rather than completely replace direct teacher–student interaction. Subtle aspects of Indian classical music, including intonation, voice production, ornamentation, improvisation, and immediate corrective feedback, may benefit from embodied and face-to-face engagement. A hybrid model combining online instruction with in-person

workshops, performances, and intensive training can therefore provide a more comprehensive approach to international music education.

- Digital initiatives should also be developed with attention to accessibility so that technological expansion does not reproduce existing inequalities in music education.

Cultural Diversity and Critical Engagement

- The internationalisation of Indian classical music should recognise the internal diversity of Indian musical traditions. Hindustani and Carnatic music encompass different regional, stylistic, institutional, and pedagogical practices. International curricula should therefore avoid presenting Indian classical music as a single, uniform representation of Indian culture.
- Davis's discussion of cultural identity and globalisation highlights the importance of recognising diversity, difference, and hybridity within music education (Davis). International learners should consequently be encouraged to engage with multiple perspectives within Indian classical music and to relate these traditions to their own cultural experiences.
- This approach can help prevent cultural representation from becoming overly simplified and can encourage learners to view musical traditions as dynamic and evolving forms of knowledge.

Cultural Diplomacy and Global Visibility

- The international dissemination of Indian classical music can also contribute to cultural diplomacy when it is supported by sustained educational and cultural engagement. Participation in international festivals, academic programmes, exchange initiatives, and ICCR-supported activities can increase opportunities for Indian musicians, educators, and scholars to engage with global audiences.
- Universities and cultural organisations should strengthen the visibility of such opportunities through digital platforms, academic networks, institutional websites, and international partnerships. Cultural diplomacy should, however, remain reciprocal and dialogue-oriented, allowing international partners to contribute their own cultural and musical perspectives.

Sustainable Internationalisation

- The long-term globalisation of Indian classical music education requires coordination among universities, music institutions, cultural organisations, government agencies, artists, educators, and digital platforms. Rather than relying primarily on short-term events, institutions should develop sustained programmes involving joint research, curriculum development, student and faculty mobility, teacher training, digital resources, and collaborative artistic projects.

The effective implementation of these recommendations can strengthen the preservation and global transmission of Indian classical music while ensuring that internationalisation remains inclusive, reciprocal, culturally contextualised, and educationally meaningful. In this way, Indian classical music education can contribute not only to cultural preservation but also to intercultural dialogue, cultural diplomacy, mutual respect, and social harmony across nations.

Conclusion

Indian classical music education possesses significant potential to promote social harmony, intercultural dialogue, and global cultural understanding. The study demonstrates that its traditional pedagogies, interdisciplinary dimensions, and experiential learning practices can nurture empathy, discipline, mutual respect, and cultural awareness. Institutional initiatives, international collaborations, digital platforms, cultural exchanges, and policy support can further strengthen its global dissemination. Integrating Indian Knowledge Systems, language, aesthetics, and philosophical traditions can provide international learners with a deeper contextual understanding of Indian music. The findings suggest that Indian classical music education should be viewed not merely as cultural preservation but as an effective educational and cultural-diplomatic instrument for fostering inclusive, peaceful, and socially cohesive communities across nations.

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