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The research journal has been a tri-annual publication of Panjab University, Chandigarh since 1976. It is a peer-reviewed/refereed initiative that publishes articles, review articles, perspectives, and book reviews drawn from a diversity of social science disciplines. Each of the pieces published is of a very high standard, and lays the groundwork for a systematic exchange of ideas with scholars across the country and the world. The prime objective of the university has, therefore, been to initiate and stimulate debate on matters of contemporary socio-political significance, a vision that the journal endeavours to carry forward.

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Markets beneath the Surface : A Study of Groundwater Markets in Hoshiarpur District, Punjab

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Pampa Mukherjee*
Rajni Bala**

Abstract

In the State of Punjab located in the north-western part of India, one witnesses excessive groundwater extraction which has gradually increased the cost of water withdrawal for irrigation thereby affecting equal access to water. This phenomena has given rise to the gradual emergence of informal and pervasive agrarian institution of groundwater markets in the region. Based on an in-depth qualitative study in select villages of Hoshiarpur district in Punjab, the paper attempts to understand the functioning and dynamics of this informal arrangement . The study highlights how participation in groundwater markets is closely related to landholding size, social relations, and technological access. While these markets provide access to water for some farmers, they also reproduce inequalities rooted in landownership, caste hierarchy, and control over productive resources.

* Professor, Department of Political Science, Panjab University, Chandigarh
** Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, D.A.V. College, Hoshiarpur, Punjab

Keywords: Groundwater, institution, water market, participation, access

Introduction

In understanding agrarian transformations in rural societies, the relationship between natural resources, technological innovation, and social institutions remains crucial. In agricultural regions where water plays a decisive role in determining crop productivity, irrigation technologies often reshape local institutions governing access to resources. The emergence of groundwater markets in many parts of rural India demonstrates the linkage between resource scarcity, technological change, and evolving social relations.

In the agrarian landscape of Punjab, groundwater has become the dominant source of water for agricultural production, particularly with the onset of green revolution. Historically, it was canal irrigation which was the backbone of agricultural expansion in the region. However, over time, the limitations of canal distribution, uneven access to irrigation infrastructure, and the growing demand for water in the wake of intensive agriculture encouraged farmers to invest in tubewells and submersible pumps. These technological interventions significantly transformed irrigation practices and also introduced new inequalities in access to water. The present study draws upon insights from fieldwork in select villages of Hoshiarpur district to examine the dynamics of groundwater market and explore the social and economic relations embedded within it.

Field insights in select villages of Hoshiarpur district reveal that the practice of sharing water from tubewells has often been accompanied by the emergence of informal arrangements through which farmers sell their allocated water turns(*Wari*) to neighbouring cultivators. Such practices have gradually evolved into a localized system of groundwater exchange that functions as a water market at the village level.

In the area under study, one can identity two broad forms of groundwater markets The first is associated with public tubewells established under government schemes and managed through institutional arrangements. The second and more prevalent form is an informal system of groundwater exchange based on private tubewell ownership. The present paper focusses on the second form ,i.e. informal arrangement that operates in several villages of Hoshiarpur district, including Phambian, Pandori, Rampur, and Bilron, which constitutes the empirical focus of this study.

Divided into three main parts, the first section attempts to understand the institution of groundwater market and based on village level information the context in which these markets operate. The second section identifies the reasons for buying and selling of groundwater based on farmers' perception. The role of village panchayats in the overall functioning of these markets has been discussed in the last section

I

Understanding Ground Water Markets

Groundwater markets in Punjab are informal institutions built around private tube-well owners who are generally local cultivators. It is a localized phenomenon which is organized at the village level through an informal arrangement (Saleth 1998, Mukherjee 2007).They exist in places where there are fragmented holdings, parcels of land that are distant from each other, availability of surplus water in the wells which enables tube well owners to sell their surplus to neighbors. Further, such markets are also found in regions where the demand for water is high due to cultivation of water intensive crops of high-yielding modern varieties, use of fertilizers and plant protection chemicals, etc. Studies have also shown that in many other states in India, ground water markets have emerged due to high cost of irrigation, well failures, scarce rainfall, low recharge and non- availability or limited access to other sources of irrigation (Manjunatha et al., 2011; Nagaraj et al., 2005). The price for selling of water is not fixed and depends upon mutual negotiation. The payments are made by buyers through different modes such as cash or kind.

The water markets are very crucial from the point of view of distribution of irrigation water, particularly where state machinery for irrigation is non-existent or where the state has failed to deliver alternatives to small and marginal farmers who cannot afford to construct structures for water extraction to irrigate their small land holdings (K. Srivastava et.al. 2009). Thus by improving access to water for irrigation to poor farmers, these water markets also improve equity in access to groundwater (Manjunath et.all 2011, Nagaraj, 2005).

The practice of buying and selling water is not new and can be traced back to the period of the 1970s. The emergence of markets for water is determined by several socio-economic and cultural factors. Further as far as legal framework is concerned, since water market operates in an informal manner, there is an absence of legal binding around these arrangements. Though groundwater markets are not legally recognized, the sale of water from private tube wells is locally accepted as a form of water allocation. It is to be noted that informal groundwater markets do not represent the trade of water rights, but it might be considered "spot market" in specific areas (Meinzien Dick 1996). Further, in countries like India, these water rights are not clearly stated or defined (Shah, 1993; Mukherji, 2004).

Farmer's Participation in Groundwater Markets: Factors and Determinants

Participation in groundwater markets is shaped by a variety of socio-economic and environmental factors. In order to understand the motivations behind farmers' decisions to purchase irrigation water, this study examined the characteristics of water buyers in four villages of Hoshiarpur district: Phambian, Pandori, Rampur, and Bilron. These villages depend primarily on groundwater for irrigation because canal irrigation facilities are absent. The majority of farmers in the region fall within the categories of small and medium landholders according to agricultural census classifications. For the purpose of analysis, farmers were categorized as water buyers and sellers based on their participation in groundwater transactions.

Table 1

Socio-Economic Profile of Groundwater Buyers (Hoshiarpur I Block)

Village	Total Buyers	Landholding Category	Caste Composition	Buyer-Seller Caste Grouping	Access to Other Irrigation Sources	Leased Out Land
Phambian	16	Marginal: 1 Small: 3 Semi-medium: 8 Medium: 3 Large: 1	Brahmin: 8 Jatt: 4 Tarkhan: 2 Ad-dharmi: 2	Brahmins from Brahmins: 9 Ad-dharmis from Brahmins: 2 Jatts from Brahmins: 1 Jatts from Jatts: 2 Tarkhans from Jatts: 1 Tarkhans from Tarkhans: 1	Yes: 7 No: 9	Yes: 4 No: 12
Pandori	14	Marginal: 5 Small: 4 Semi-medium: 3 Medium: 2 Large: 0	Jatt: 3 Tarkhan: 5 Ad-dharmi: 6	Jatts from Jatts: 4 Tarkhans from Jatts: 4 Ad-dharmis from Jatts: 3 Tarkhans from Tarkhans: 1 Ad-dharmis from Ad-dharmis: 1 SCs from Tarkhans: 1	Yes: 6 No: 8	Yes: 3 No: 11

Source: Fieldwork conducted in villages of Hoshiarpur I (Phambian and Pandori).

Table 2

Socio and Economic Profile of Groundwater Buyers (Garshankar Block)

Village	No. of Buyers	Landholding Category	Caste Composition	Buyer–Seller Grouping (Caste-wise)	Other Sources of Irrigation	Land Leased Out
Rampur	23	Marginal: 2 Small: 8 Semi-medium: 7 Medium: 4 Large: 2	Rajput: 16 Jatt: 2 Addharmi: 5	Rajput–Rajput: 15 Jatt–Jatt: 1 Jatt–Rajput: 2 Addharmi–Rajput: 4 Addharmi–Addharmi: 1	Yes: 16 No: 7	Yes: 3 No: 19
Bilron	26	Marginal: 8 Small: 7 Semi-medium: 11 Medium: 0 Large: 0	Rajput: 16 Gujjar: 5 Addharmi: 5	Rajput–Rajput: 16 Addharmi–Rajput: 5 Gujjar–Rajput: 5	Yes: 14 No: 12	Yes: 7 No: 19

Source: Fieldwork conducted in villages of Hoshiarpur I (Rampur and Bilron).

The above Tables 1 and 2 provide a micro-level socio-economic profile of groundwater participants in villages of Phambian Pandori in Hoshiar-I,Rampur and Bilron in Garshankar Block respectively. From these tables, one can identify certain trends and patterns regarding agrarian structure, caste dynamics, and irrigation access in the study site as discussed below.

Socio-economic differentiation and landholding patterns

The data reflected in the tables 1 and 2 reveals that in all the four villages , groundwater buyers are predominantly **small to semi-medium farmers**. For instance in Phambian village, the majority of buyers fall in the semi -medium category-i.e. 8 out of 16 with only 1 marginal and 1 large farmer. Similarly in Pandori village too marginal and small farmers dominate (9 out of 14 combined), with no large farmers at all. In Rampur (Garshankar Block, Hoshairpur District) which has 23 groundwater buyers (Table 2), the buyers mostly fell in the category of small farmers (8) and medium farmers (11). Similarly in Bilron semi-medium (11) and marginal (8) farmers dominate, with no medium or large farmers present at all.

In all these villages, water buyers were mostly from the upper caste community (Rajput) and also had access to other sources of water for irrigation. One can infer that ground water markets help in addressing the water crisis faced by middle and lower peasantry in the region as large landowners are more likely to own tubewells themselves. It reflects a dependency structure where those lacking capital investment tend to rely on water markets as an alternative.

Caste composition and caste based transaction patterns

Caste continues to play a significant role in structuring access to groundwater at the village level. In Phambian village one finds dominance of Brahmins among buyers(8 buyers). This is followed by smaller artisan community(Tarkhan) and Dalit groups(Ad-dharmi). Compared to Phambian, in Pandori there is a dominant presence of lower caste groups particularly Ad-dharmis (6) and Tarkhans (5), with fewer Jatts (3). In Rampur and Bilron there is a strong presence of Rajputs in both villages (16 in each), indicating their dominance in the agrarian structure. However, the inclusion of Ad-dharm in all the four villages and Gujjars in Bilron shows that groundwater markets are socially inclusive in participation, though not necessarily equal in power. The relatively higher presence of marginalized caste groups like Addharmis suggests their dependence on purchased irrigation for sustaining agriculture.

As far as patterns of water transaction among buyers and seller groupings are concerned, we find that there is a clear tendency toward intra-caste transactions, though there are distinct asymmetries. As per Table 1, we find that in Phambian, Brahmins largely transact within their own caste (9 cases). Similarly , in Rampur, a large number of transactions occur within the Rajput community (15),(Table 2).

Such tendencies indicate existence of closed social network and localised control over water. However, at the same time, there are cases where lower caste groups like Ad-dharmis , Tarkhans often purchase water from upper castes especially Brahmins, Rajputs and Jatts , thus showing vertical dependency. In Pandori village, Jatt farmers are the dominant sellers as buyers are from multiple caste groups. In this village one therefore witnesses a Jatt centric control over irrigation thereby re-inforcing agrarian power hierarchies. The field level data and insights therefore validate the fact that ground water markets are not merely based on economic criteria but are socially embedded.

Land Leasing -Trends and Pattern

In the study villages, land leasing is present but they are not a distinctive feature in the region. In both Phambian and Pandori villages, only a few famers have leased out land - Phambian(only 4 out of 16cases) , Pandori(only 3 out of 14 cases). Such patterns suggest that even though dependence on groundwater exists, it is not limited to tenant farmers only but also included small owner cultivators as well. In Rampur and Bilron we find similar patterns in which Rajputs, occupy a central position as water suppliers, while small and marginal farmer,s who are mostly from lower or intermediate caste, are dependent on them. Thus, while the groundwater market facilitates continued cultivation, it simultaneously reproduces and reinforces existing social and economic inequalities.

In other words, insights from the selected villages reveal certain structural features. First, in the absence of capital intensive irrigation infrastructure in the region, small and medium farmers tend to rely heavily on groundwater market. Second, caste factor tends to mediate access to water. In all the villages water transactions are shaped by local caste hierarchies in which the upper caste farmers who are the sellers of water , control the buyers who are small and medium farmers and are from the lower caste. Third, some farmers may still buy water despite having access to other sources of water for irrigation. One possible reason for this is land fragmentation and the source of water may be at a distance. Fourth, in many cases out- migration from these villages for additional sources of income, forced small and marginal farmers to lease out their land. Finally, it shows that public irrigation systems in the region are weak, creating dependence on informal arrangements for buying and selling water.

II

Reasons for Buying Ground water

Reasons for buying groundwater seem to vary and are thus context specific. For example, in the villages of Phambian and Pandori, which lie in the plain area are relatively more fertile than those located in the hill areas of the district where farmers are less active as buyers. While interviewing the farmers, one found that most of them had either fragmented or small size landholdings. It was also found that many of these marginal and small farmers were not able to buy water from water sellers as these sellers were disinterested in selling despite personal requests from prospective buyers. Such responses not only reflect the high handedness and arrogance of big farmers but also create a situation whereby the small farmers are forced to sell land in desperation. The narratives of some groundwater buyers further reveal that the ground water sellers sometimes are reluctant about giving water for irrigation as they feel that in the absence of irrigation facility, one day the dependent land owners may think of giving their land on lease or may sell the same to them.

In this context , one of the respondents, Resham Lal(name changed), stated the following

> I am a government servant and I own 2 and half acres of land. My land is near the seasonal stream, so it is not useful and is costly for me to install my own tube well. It is difficult when the adjoining farmer is not willing to share groundwater. He makes excuses like, the motor is not working or he has water only for his own crops. The actual reason behind his denial to give me water for irrigation is that I had rejected his offer to give my agriculture land on lease to him last year. What can I do? If it goes on like this I may have to sell my land to him. I know without availability of irrigation water, I will not get a good price.

Similarly, yet another farmer from the SC community from Phambian village stated the following in this regard:

> It is humiliating to depend on others every time for water. At times we do not request to share or ask for selling water to any Zamidar (landlord). We just hope that we get sufficient rain naturally so that it can address our woes.

Yet another reason given by farmers for not installing their own tube well is due to low soil fertility. In this context, one of the respondents stated the following:

> We only have a small portion of land and the costs involved in agriculture are increasing. There are problems regarding the tubewell connection and its maintenance. It is more cost effective to buy water from someone else than to arrange one's own tube well.

Sharma and Sharma (2006) in their study highlighted that in regions where there is ground water market, most water sellers have emerged from the category of resource rich large farmers who have their own private wells. They sell groundwater to the marginal and small farmers after fulfilling their own requirements. Their study, however, noted that even large farmers have been counted as water buyers since they have fragmented landholdings and are thus unable to install wells on each parcel of land. The arguments given by Sharma and Sharma, in their study to a large extent is also applicable in the areas under study in village Garhshankar and Bilron, most of the groundwater sellers are selling groundwater for enhancing their production.

Most of the water sellers in the study villages are from medium and large landholding categories. Discussion with the respondents who are groundwater sellers show that the tradition of *lihajedarri* system is still continuing in their village but *lihajedarri* is functioning between those farmers who have good social and community relations.

In the above mentioned context, the case of Malkiat is worth noting. Malkiat Singh, a farmer from Pandori village is a retired bank employee. At present, he is also a member of farmer union and owner of two tubewells. He gave an account regarding agricultural growth, change in water technologies and also *lihajedarri* for their kins.

> When I joined co-operative Bank, I did not have much knowledge of farming. At that time my father and paternal uncle shared a tubewell. But farming was difficult with wells. Every time someone went inside to repair the motor, there was a danger to his life. At that time our crop production was modest and state of agricultural production was not good. But at that time there was good cooperation among people. Our grandfather installed a common handpump outside the village to be used by all. Labour was

> easy to arrange at that time. Wells were jointly operated and crops were also jointly sown. If any neighboring farmer needed water for crops, neighbors would give it without any hesitation.
>
> Green revolution and technology have changed the rural economy and society. Gradually we witnessed changes in the way farming was conducted. We tried hard to adopt to new technologies. In fact, my cousins who went to Canada did well as they could invest money to develop agricultural techniques. In 1994, we installed one more tubewell. Nowadays, I am the only one in my family who is doing farming. Now, if my neighboring farmers request me for water, first of all, I think of my own crops. If I do not need tubewell water then I agree to give water to those with whom I have good relations.

The above narrative highlights the developments that have taken place in the rural agrarian economy. It reveals how groundwater irrigation is helpful for those farmers who are willing to enhance their agricultural productivity by adopting new technologies. In fact, it was witnessed that with the increase in agricultural output, there has been a substantial improvement in the standard of living among farmers who were beneficiaries of groundwater irrigation. This interview also revealed how foreign remittance has contributed to the growth of agriculture.

Similar views were also apparent from Malkiat Singh who stated the following:-

> When a member of a family immigrates to Canada, the remittances not only help in installing tube wells but the entire agriculture sector undergoes a transformation. When my relatives need water, we can provide them, otherwise there was a time when water was not even sufficient for us.

The above narrative not only highlights the role of foreign remittances but also the important role of tradition and custom based on community relations like '*lehaj*'(respect) in this informal water trading.

Further, the field study revealed that farmers who could afford to sell their quota of water did so to earn extra money. This was found among groundwater sellers in Rampur and Bilron villages. In fact one of the water buyers of Rampur village stated that with the provision of free electricity this trend of selling water has increased many fold. This is reflected from the following narrative:

> Subhash Rana was the first person in our village who started selling water for irrigation. He is a school teacher and has 12 acres of land. Initially, he had one tube well and he refused to share water with anyone. When government started giving concession on electricity, Subhash started selling groundwater to others. He has has installed two tubewells for selling groundwater only which he is selling @ Rs. 60/- per hour. His rate is higher than other tubewell owners because he knows very well that we are needy persons. Secondly, he also knows that there is no tubewell nearby from where we can purchase groundwater.

Reasons for Selling Groundwater

While the demand side of groundwater markets is shaped by the irrigation needs of farmers without tubewells, the supply side is determined by the incentives and capacities of those who possess private irrigation infrastructure. The field study reveals that farmers who sell groundwater typically own tubewells with sufficient pumping capacity to irrigate their own land while still having surplus water available for sale.

One of the most important motivations for selling groundwater is the opportunity to generate additional income. The installation of a tubewell involves considerable investment, and the sale of irrigation water provides a means through which farmers can recover these costs over time. By supplying water to neighbouring farmers, tubewell owners convert their irrigation infrastructure into a productive asset capable of generating regular revenue.

The economic viability of water selling is also linked to the cost structure of groundwater extraction. In many parts of Punjab, electricity used for agricultural pumping is either subsidized or provided at a flat rate. This policy reduces the marginal cost of pumping additional water, thereby encouraging farmers with tubewells to sell surplus irrigation water to others. When the cost of electricity does not increase with greater water extraction, selling water becomes a profitable activity. Another factor influencing the supply of groundwater is the spatial distribution of agricultural land. Tubewell owners whose fields are located near those of neighbouring farmers generally find it convenient to extend irrigation pipes or channels in order to supply water. The proximity of fields reduces the cost of water delivery and facilitates the development of informal water transactions.

In several cases observed during fieldwork, farmers also reported that selling groundwater strengthens social relationships within the village. Providing irrigation water to neighbours or relatives can reinforce networks of reciprocity and cooperation. In return, water sellers may receive assistance in agricultural operations, labour exchanges, or other forms of support during times of need.

However, the decision to sell groundwater is not purely altruistic. Tubewell owners often exercise considerable control over the timing and quantity of water supplied to buyers. Since irrigation water is essential for crop survival, buyers may find themselves in a relatively weaker bargaining position. As a result, water sellers sometimes acquire a degree of economic and social influence within the local agrarian structure.

Another motivation for selling groundwater arises from the underutilization of pumping capacity. Farmers who cultivate relatively small areas of land may not require the full capacity of their tubewells. Rather than leaving this capacity unused, they choose to sell irrigation water to neighbouring farmers. In this sense, groundwater markets represent a mechanism through which surplus irrigation capacity is redistributed within the village economy.

Environmental conditions also influence water selling practices. In areas where groundwater availability remains relatively stable, farmers are more willing to sell water because they do not fear immediate depletion of the resource. Conversely, in regions experiencing severe groundwater decline, tubewell owners may become more cautious about selling water to others.

Overall, the supply of groundwater in these informal markets reflects a combination of economic incentives, technological capacity, and social relations that shape the behaviour of tubewell owners.

Ground Water and Terms of Trade: Cash and Kind Model

Regarding transactions that takes place between buyers and sellers in the context of groundwater market, the study identified two types of transactions i.e. cash based and kind based. In the cash based system, a fixed amount is charged on an hourly basis that is based on the size and capacity of the pump to draw water. Under this condition, groundwater rights are recognized at two levels. At first level, groundwater sellers have primary rights due to their ownership over land and water and the groundwater buyers have a subordinate right as they get water only after the owner's field is fully irrigated. During the time of scarcity, groundwater buyers are the worst hit as their option to buy is curtailed as the choice to do so lies with the owners of the tubewell.

In cases which are governed by kind based system; groundwater buyers generally exchange labour in lieu of the groundwater. However the terms that are mutually agreed upon between the groundwater sellers and buyers vary from village to village.

Table 3

Groundwater Rate for Groundwater Buyers

Villages	Rate(Rupees/hour of supply)
Phambian	100-120
Pandori	100-120
Rampur	150-200
Bilron	150-200

Source: Field Work . Current rate 2026

The system of kind based transaction (labour deal) in groundwater market is *still prevalent in all study villages* and in this kind of transaction, most of the buyers are from lower castes and are marginal farmers. It was noted that in all the villages, water transaction based on kind is linked to personal relations and affinity between the groundwater buyers and sellers. The interviews revealed that many water buyers were not in favour of water transactions in lieu of labour (kind) as there is a tendency to exploit labour by water sellers

In this context a marginal farmer from Ad dharmi caste from village Pandori stated the following:

> I have only 6 kanals of land. Presently, I am working in Sonalika factory and my earnings are meager. This is my ancestral land and generally I lease this out due to non availability of water.

> Since last 5-6 years I have started cultivating myself and whenever I need water I usually plough the fields of Kulvir and in this way both of us are satisfied.

III

The Functioning of Groundwater Market: *Role of Village Panchayat*

The functioning of the informal groundwater market in the study villages is significantly determined by village panchayats and local politics. As has already been argued, groundwater transactions are not merely economic in nature, they are also embedded within electoral considerations, factional politics and patron client relationships that emerge around Panchayat politics.

One of the most visible ways in which local politics influences groundwater transactions is during Panchayat elections. Field evidence indicates that water sellers who are mostly large farmers with access to tubewells, tend to strategically relax or suspend market norms in order to consolidate electoral support. The field study reveals that during this period, groundwater is often supplied free of cost or at highly concessional rates to potential voters. Access to irrigation water thus becomes contingent upon political affiliation and loyalty. Buyers are often compelled to align themselves with particular candidates or factions to secure continued access to water. In several instances, respondents reported concealing their political preferences out of fear that disclosure might lead to denial of water. It therefore indicates that groundwater is used not only as a productive resource but also as a means of subtle political coercion.

The study also revealed that local elites, who have both economic power (ownership of land and tubewells) and political ambitions, generally occupy a central position in this process.

Their control over groundwater enables them to cultivate and sustain vote banks. By extending favours such as free water, they establish reciprocal obligations among dependent farmers. These obligations are not limited to electoral support but often extend to the provision of unpaid labour and other services, thereby reinforcing hierarchical social relations.

The case of Satnam Singh, a small farmer from Schedule Caste community, illustrated the intertwining of political ambition and resource control. A neighbouring farmer from a dominant-caste who was a prospective Panchayat candidate, provided irrigation water without charge. In return, Satnam Singh and his family contributed labour both in agricultural and domestic spheres. Such arrangements reflect a classic patron client relationship, where access to essential resources is exchanged for political loyalty and social compliance. Notably, such support is conditional and therefore any perceived association with rival candidates would lead to an immediate withdrawal of benefits.

Panchayat politics also tend to trigger factionalism within villages, which in turn affects the distribution of groundwater. Competing groups mobilise resources, including water, to strengthen their respective positions. In this context, exclusion from irrigation networks often reflects not just economic incapacity but also political marginalisation. Farmers who are not aligned with dominant factions face greater difficulty in accessing groundwater, even when they are willing to pay for it.

Thus, the informal groundwater market operates within a politicised environment where transactions are shaped by electoral strategies, power hierarchies, and social obligations. The role of village panchayats thus extends beyond formal governance structures. The field study shows that it permeates everyday economic practices, transforming groundwater from a tradable commodity into a tool of political negotiation and controversy

Summing up

In the context of rapid depletion of ground water in the region, the present study shows how informal groundwater market becomes a viable alternative for small and marginal farmers. The tradition of buying and selling water not only ensures equity and justice in water distribution through commonly evolved practice of rationing allocation; it also contributes indirectly in optimal management of this scarce finite resource. However such practices hold true only in those cases where transactions of buying and selling is woven around private tube wells. In the case of public tube well, which is government funded and in which there is absence of individual or community stake or accountability, it has been observed that there is a tendency to over extract or overuse ground water.

It may be reiterated that small and marginal farmers are the key actors in this informal arrangement, particularly in terms of buying groundwater due to their low purchasing capacity in installing tube wells. Nonetheless, it has been found that even farmers with large holding size are also forced to do so, despite having their own tube well, due to land fragmentation. The study has also been able to unravel, how caste matters in such transactions as land and water are inextricably linked together. Apart from socio- economic factors, it has been witnessed that choice of water intensive crops like paddy has further aggravated the situation.

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[1] Respondent from Phambian Village (HSP1 Block, Hoshiarpur District) was interviewed on 23rd January 2025

[2] Respondent from Pandori village (Block HSP- I, District Hoshiarpur) was interviewed on 02nd February 2025

[3] Sympathy or good social and community relations

[4] Respondent from Pandori village (Block HSP- I, District Hoshiarpur) was interviewed on 02nd February 2025

[5] Respondent from Rampur village (Garshankar Block, District Hoshiarpur) was interviewed on 9th July,2025

Article

Ageing Population, Dependency and Support in Later Life: A Macro-level Gendered Analysis

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Chitra[*], **Rinju Rasaily**[**]

Abstract

India is experiencing a rapid increase in its older population, with significant regional and gender disparities. Projections show a further continued increase in the ageing population. Simultaneously, it is experiencing a structural change of the traditional joint family to nuclear family. Drawing on secondary literature and reports such as LASI, NSO, and IIPS & UNFPA, this paper examines patterns of ageing and old age dependency, analysing them across gender and select states in India. The findings reveal the gendered nature of the ageing population, with a greater share of older women experiencing higher economic dependency, reflecting cumulative gendered disadvantages for women. This paper argues that the growing number of disparate old age homes in India is a response to the dwindling emotional

* Research Scholar (Sociology), School of Liberal Studies,

** Assistant Professor (Sociology), School of Liberal Studies, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar University Delhi, Kashmere Gate Campus, Lothian Road, Kashmere Gate, Delhi-110006

and economic support within families across classes. It suggests addressing welfare investments in assisted living arrangements during later life for the older adult, particularly at the nether end of the class order.

Keywords: Later Life, Ageing population, Gender, Dependency, Family support, Institutional living, Macro-level analysis

Introduction

The world is undergoing a transformative shift in the aged population, with people aged 65 and above comprising 1.1 billion (13.9 per cent) of the total population (IIPS & UNFPA, 2023) in 2022. In 2022, India had 149 million people aged 60 and above (10.5 per cent of the total population; IIPS & UNFPA, 2023). It is witnessing not only an increase in the proportion of its older population but also undergoing structural changes, with the erosion of the traditional family structure in which older adults coexisted with younger generations and were collectively cared for within the familial context, to the nuclear family (Agarwal et al., 2016, p. 12). Existing literature on institutional living arrangements often examines family change, migration, and urbanisation (Lalan, 2014; Roy, 2018) but hardly examines such shifts within the broader structural context of economic dependency in later life. Lamb (2020) argued that ageing is a process that is socially constructed rather than just a biological process. Factors such as gender, family relations and changing social roles shaped the ageing process, revealing that cultural meanings are attached to ageing. This paper aims to understand the patterns of the ageing population and the embedded nature of economic dependency, gender, and spatial inequalities within. The paper proposes that increasing old age dependency in later life, when combined with decreasing familial care and support, would lead to reliance on alternative living arrangements such as old age homes for survival. By examining existing macro data and secondary literature, it seeks to question how relationships operate in the context of increasing old age dependency, declining family support, and the parallel emergence of institutional care arrangements.

Data and Methods

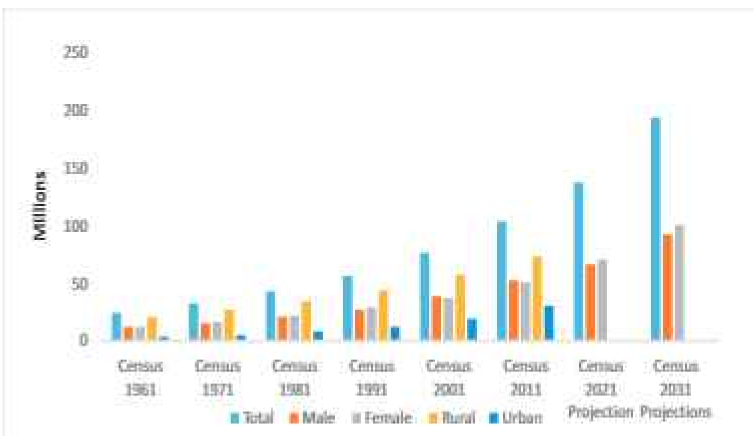
The study employs a critical literature review and data analysis, drawing from secondary sources, including the Longitudinal Ageing Study in India (LASI) by International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) et al., 2020, National Statistical Office (NSO) 2021, and the International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) & United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) 2023. These reports provide comprehensive data on the ageing population, dependency, workforce participation, and gender and rural-urban disparities. Secondary literature on old age homes helps build an argument of how a combination of increasing old age dependency and decreasing familial care and support together leads to reliance on institutional living arrangements. This paper incorporates selected states having the highest and lowest shares of older population to illustrate the range of interstate variation.

Uneven Demographic Ageing across Indian States

Rajan (2010) documented that India is experiencing a rapid and sustained increase in the size and share of its older population. He draws attention to the implications of population ageing for employment and economic vulnerability in later life. India is experiencing a rapid and sustained increase in the size of its older population as a result of long-term demographic transition (Agarwal et al., 2016; Rajan, 2010). Such literature highlights the challenges that come with ageing, including care, health, income security, and social support. Graph 1 corroborates the recent growth, as per the NSO (2021), of the older population in India.

Graph 1 highlights the steady increase in the aged population since 1961. According to the 2011 census, the number of older people was higher in rural areas than in urban areas. It implies regional differences among the aged population. Data (in Graph 1) also shows the gendered nature of the ageing population. The gendered distribution shows a non-linear pattern over the last six decades. In 1961, it was equal; during 1971-1991, older women were more in number and vice versa by 2001-2011. Subsequent projections show a larger older women population than older men after 2011 (NSO, 2021) that could be associated with the higher life expectancy among older women than among older men during 2015-19 (IIPS & UNFPA, 2023, p. 26). However, improved life expectancy for older women may have negative implications, as they are more likely to face economic vulnerability due to limited and informal work histories, lower social security, and longer periods of widowhood (Agarwal et al., 2016).

Graph 1:
Older Adult Population in India (in Millions)



Source: Census of India 2011, as cited in National Statistical Office (NSO) 2021, p. 16.

While population ageing is increasing across all Indian states, the pace and extent are not uniform, as evident in Table 1. In almost all states, the share of the older population was projected to increase from 2011 to 2021, with a higher older female population

Table 1

State-wise size of older population and their share in total population

States	2011				2021(Projections)			
	Per cent of older people in total population	Number (in thousands) of older person			Per cent of older people in total population	Number (in thousands) of older person		
		Total				Total		
		Person	Females	Males		Person	Females	Males
Uttar Pradesh	7.7	15440	7403	8037	8.1	18772	9537	9236
Maharashtra	9.9	11107	5853	5254	11.7	14548	7548	7000
West Bengal	8.5	7742	3891	3851	11.3	11048	5410	5638
Bihar	7.4	7707	3601	4107	7.7	9464	4565	4899
Tamil Nadu	10.4	7510	3849	3661	13.6	10419	5429	4991
Kerala	12.6	4193	2310	1884	16.5	5853	3242	2611
Goa	11.2	163	89	74	-			
Himachal Pradesh	10.2	703	362	341	13.1	965	511	453
Dadar and Nagar Haveli	4.0	14	8	6	-	-	-	-
Arunachal Pradesh	4.6	64	30	33	-	-	-	-
Meghalaya	4.7	139	72	67	-	-	-	-
Jammu and Kashmir	7.4	923	440	483	9.5	1268	630	637

Source: Census of India 2011, as cited in National Statistical Office (NSO) 2021, p. 19-20
Note: States with the highest and lowest shares of older populations are selected to illustrate the range of interstate variation.

except in Bihar, Jammu and Kashmir, and West Bengal. This exception is due to the comparatively low life expectancy of older women at 60 years (16 years) compared to older men at 60 years (16.6 years) in Bihar during 2015-19. This pattern reflects the gendered nature of life expectancy, shaping the different demographic transitions.

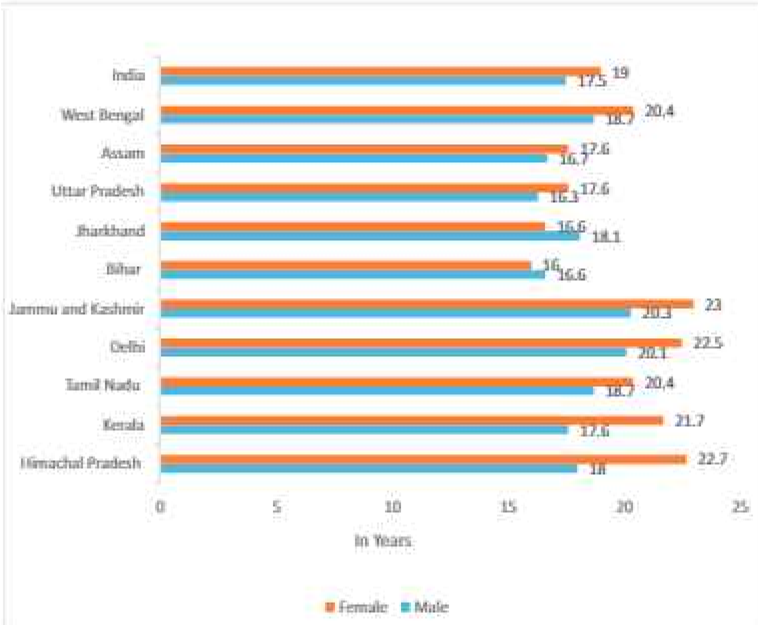
Studies such as Agarwal et al. (2016) have established that the primary factors behind this growing aged population were increasing age at marriage, declining fertility rates, increased longevity (Sen, 1995) and declining infant mortality (Hernard, 1996) with advancements in the health sector (Sen, 1995) sanitation facilities, and nutrition. Reports (IIPS et al., 2020; IIPS & UNFPA, 2023) do support such a claim. The uneven growth across regions and gender draws attention to differences in longevity, as examined in the subsequent section.

Gender Differences in Life Expectancy and the Feminisation of Later Life

Agarwal et al. (2016) emphasise that life expectancy is uneven across Indian states. Studies (Lalan, 2014; Roy, 2018) focusing on later life living arrangements and institutional settings note that, given their greater longevity, women constitute a large share of the older population. These studies highlight that examining life expectancy at age 60 years and its gender differences is essential for understanding and interpreting the feminisation of later life in India. Graph 2 presents the selected state-wise life expectancy of the older population by sex (during 2015-2019).

As shown in Graph 2, average life expectancy has increased drastically, but not equally for males and females. According to an IIPS & UNFPA (2023) report, in India (during 2015-2019), a person aged 60 years is expected to live for another 18.3 years, which is higher for females (19 years) than for males (17.5 years). In states like Himachal Pradesh and Kerala, women at 60 years have a life

Graph 2
Life Expectancy at 60 years Differentiated by Sex across States, 2015-2019



Source: Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India, Sample Registration System-based 'Abridged Life Tables 2015-19', (Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, New Delhi, 2022), as cited in IIPS & UNFPA, 2023, p. 26.

expectancy of 23 and 22 years, respectively, which is 4 years higher than men at 60 years in these states (IIPS & UNFPA, 2023, p. 26). It signifies that the phenomenon of ageing exhibits a gendered dimension. 'The gender inequality in mortality results in a gender imbalance increasing with age and widening along the century' (Arber & Ginn, 1993 as cited in Hernard, 1996, p. 668). This process is known as the 'feminisation' of later age (Arber & Ginn, 1993 as cited in Hernard, 1996, p. 668), which implies a further increase in the older female population. To understand how longevity translates into vulnerability, the next section analyses patterns of old age dependency.

Older Adult Dependency[3] in India

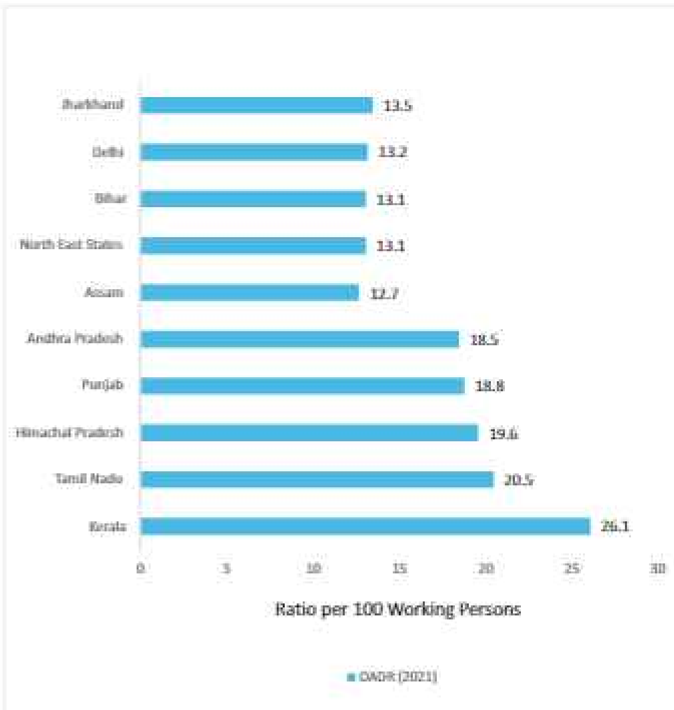
The old age dependency ratio, as defined by the NSO (2021), is 'the number of persons in the age-group 60 or more per 100 persons in the age-group 15-59 years.' Rajan (2010) argues that increasing longevity, combined with declining fertility, has increased the number of dependent older adults, placing pressure on families, labour markets, and support systems. As discussed in the section 'uneven demographic ageing across Indian states' (Agarwal et al., 2016), longevity and ageing pose challenges, making old age dependency a significant concern in later life. Graph 3 presents the across-state old age dependency ratio (2021 projection) to highlight regional differences in the burden of ageing.

Graph 3 shows variation in the old age dependency ratio across states. The difference between the highest (26.1) and lowest (12.7) OADR was large, indicating wide interstate variation. In 2021, OADR was highest in Kerala, followed by Tamil Nadu, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, and Andhra Pradesh, primarily because (as shown in Table 1) these states have a higher per centage share of older adults in the total population in a similar order in 2021, with Kerala having the highest at 16.5 per cent (NSO, 2021, p. 19, table 3.6). However, states having lower OADR have a lower share of older adults: Assam (8.2), north-eastern states (8.8), Bihar

3 The dependency ratio is an age-population ratio of those typically not in the labour force (the dependent part) and those typically in the labour force (the productive part) (National Statistical Office, 2021, p. 113).

$$\text{OADR} = \frac{\text{Population aged 60 years and above *100 (National Statistical Office, 2021, p. 113).}}{\text{Population age 15-59 years}}$$

Graph 3: Across-State OADR (2021 projection)



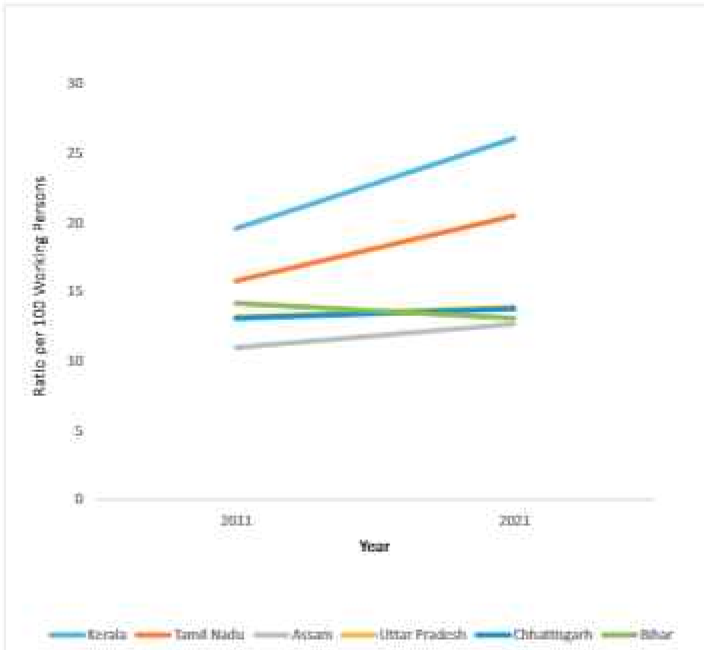
Source: Office of the Registrar General, India, as cited in NSO, 2021, p. 40.

(7.7), Delhi (9.3), and Jharkhand (8.4). A dynamic perspective is necessary to understand how the burden of dependency has evolved, which the next section examines: changes in the old age dependency ratio between 2011 and 2021.

Decadal Change in OADR

Agarwal et al. (2016) opine that the increasing old age dependency in India is an outcome of rising longevity and changes in the age structure. Chattopadhyay et al. (2022) highlight that a substantial share of older adults, especially women, remains outside paid

Graph 4
Change Over Decade (2011-2021 projection, Total OADR) for Select State



Source: Office of the Registrar General, India, as cited in NSO, 2021, p. 40

work and faces constraints in continued labour force participation, which shapes patterns of economic dependence in later life. To understand the increasing old age dependency over time, Graph 4 presents changes in total old age dependency ratios across states between 2011 and 2021, highlighting the emerging social pressures associated with population ageing.

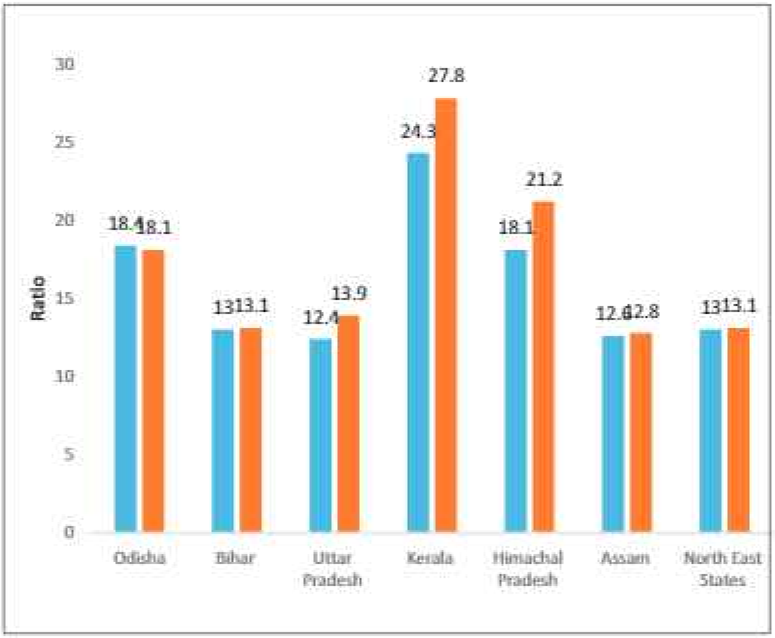
As shown in Graph 4, in most states, the total OADR increased from 2011 to 2021, except for Bihar and U.P., which show decreases from 14.2 in 2011 to 13.1 in 2021 and from 13.9 to 13.2, respectively. Bihar and UP have low OADR since these states have a lower share of older adults in the total population (as shown in Table 1), 7.4 per cent and 7.7 per cent in 2011, which increased to 7.7 per cent and 8.1 per cent in 2021, which shows a minor increase in the older population over the decade (NSO, 2021, p. 19). That may be attributed to the low life expectancy of 68.7 and 64.8 years, respectively, during 2012-2016. The highest life expectancy of 75.1 years was in Kerala, and the lowest was 64.8 years in UP during 2012-2016 (IIPS et al., 2020, p. 4). As the old age dependency ratio is affected by life expectancy, it is indicative of gender difference as well. The gendered nature of economic vulnerabilities among older women and men are highlighted in the next section.

Gender Gap

Sen (1995) argues that placing women in the ambit of 'culture', i.e., 'culture of violence', negates the material and structural basis of gender inequality. As shown in Graph 2, the demographic feminisation of old age is associated with increased pressures on income support, health care and family support systems, indicating greater vulnerability in later life for many older women (Agarwal et al., 2016). Perianayagam (2024) similarly argues that, despite women's longer survival, older women report poorer health and lower wellbeing than men. Increased longevity does not necessarily lead to a better quality of life, reinforcing the argument that older women are more vulnerable. Graph 5 projects the 2021 gender gap in old age dependency ratios across states.

In most states, female OADR is higher than male OADR, except in Odisha, where it increased to 18.1 per cent in 2021, from 15.5 per cent in 2011, while male OADR was 18.4 per cent in 2021, and 15.4 per cent in 2011, even though the life expectancy during 2015-19 was higher among older females (19.5 years) than males (18.1years) (UNFPA, 2024). The gender gap in OADR, as reflected in Graph 5, is higher in states with higher OADR, (as shown in Graph 3) such as Kerala (3.5 per cent) and Himachal Pradesh (3.1 per cent), and lower in low OADR states, such as Assam (0.2 per

Graph 5
Gender Gap (Male VS Female OADR, 2021 projection)



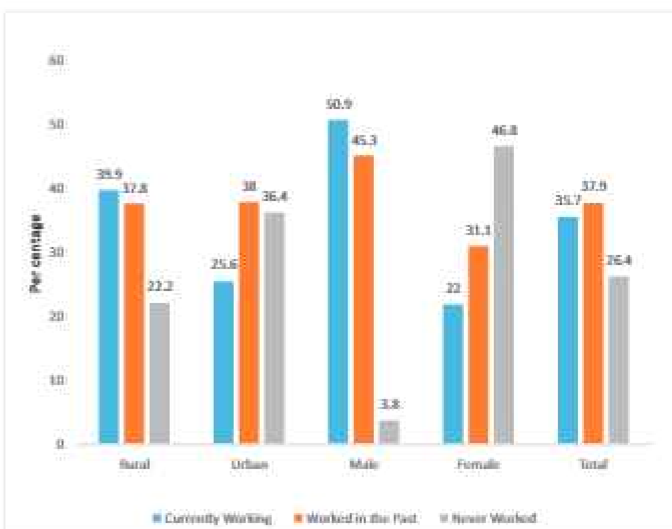
Source: Office of the Registrar General, India, as cited in NSO, p. 40

cent), Bihar (0.1 per cent), and the northeast states (0.1 per cent) that reflect increasing dependency of older women compared to older men. Possible reasons behind this trend include the fact that women outlive men; thus, they have a higher share of dependency on others than men (IIPS et al., 2020; NSO, 2021). Older women experience multiple disadvantages across various aspects of life, including literacy, widowhood, and economic security, compared to men and younger age groups (Agarwal et al., 2016; Perianayagam, 2024). These trends multiply the disadvantages women face earlier in their lives, given the social structure, systematic gender inequality, and social norms (Agarwal et al., 2016; Perianayagam, 2024). The old age dependency ratio captures the dependency of the aged population, but to understand the economic status of the aged population, we also need to examine the share of economically 'self-reliant' older adults. The next section analyses the employment status of the older population, segregated by gender and place of residence.

Employment Status of Older Adults

Chattopadhyay et al. (2022) demonstrate that health and educational status shaped labour force participation among older adults. Participation decreases sharply with age and is significantly lower among women and urban residents. Similarly,

Graph 6
Percentage Distribution of the Older Population by Employment Status in India, 2017-18



Source: Longitudinal Ageing Study in India (LASI) Wave 1, 2017-2018: India Report, by International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) et al., 2020, p. 127

Note: This report (2020: 126) defines work as 'participation in any economically productive activity with or without compensation, wages, or profit.'

Reddy (2016) shows that gender, place of residence, and socio-economic characteristics shape continued engagement in work in later life. The LASI report provides evidence of substantial rural–urban and gender differences in older adults' work participation (IIPS et al., 2020). Graph 6 presents the employment status of older adults by residence and sex to understand patterns of economic activity in later life.

Graph 6 reflects the gendered nature of work participation among older adults. There is a higher share of older women who have never worked (46.8 per cent) than of older men (3.8 per cent). This pattern indicates a higher economic dependency of older women on their families. Such associations were also highlighted in other studies (Chattopadhyay et al., 2022; Rajan, 2010). The next section analyses the economic independence and dependence of the aged population.

Older Population by State of Economic Independence

As the discussions in the preceding sections have shown, longevity and ageing pose important challenges (Agarwal et al., 2016). Gender, place of residence, and socio-economic characteristics (Reddy, 2016) shape these challenges, with women experiencing poorer health, economic wellbeing (Perianayagam, 2024), and labour force participation. Chattopadhyay et al. (2022) argue that economic insecurity and dependency due to widowhood or income cessation (Rajan, 2010) motivate older adults to work beyond retirement age (Kanfer et al., 2013, as cited in Chattopadhyay et al., 2022). This literature provides the context for examining the status of economic independence across regions and gender. Table 2 presents the distribution of the aged population by state of economic independence.

Table 2 shows a minor difference in the distribution of the economically independent older population among rural and urban areas, with urban older adults showing a slightly higher share of economic independence. This trend shows that access to

**Table 2
Percentage distribution of the aged population by state of economic independence**

Population Sub-group	Survey	Per cent of Older Persons			
		Not dependent on others	Partially dependent on others	Fully dependent on others	Total
Rural male	1995-96	49	18	31	100
	2004	51	15	32	100
	2017-18	48	25	27	100
Rural female	1995-96	12	15	71	100
	2004	14	12	72	100
	2017-18	10	24	66	100
Rural total	1995-96	30	16	51	100
	2004	33	14	52	100
	2017-18	28	25	47	100
Urban male	1995-96	52	17	30	100
	2004	56	13	30	100
	2017-18	57	19	24	100
Urban female	1995-96	12	11	76	100
	2004	17	10	72	100
	2017-18	11	21	68	100
Urban Total	1995-96	31	14	53	100
	2004	36	11	52	100
	2017-18	33	20	47	100

Source: NSS 52nd Round (July 1995-June 1996): The Aged in India-A Socio-Economic Profile; NSS 60th Round (January-June 2004): Morbidity, Health Care, and Condition of the Aged; NSS, 75th Round (July 2017-June 2018)-Social Consumption in India: Health, as cited in NSO, 2021, p. 41.

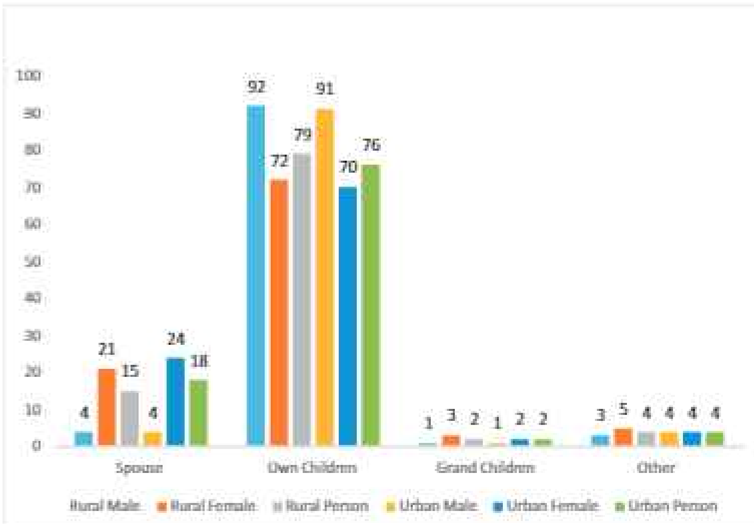
employment opportunities and income sources across different regions shapes the economic independence in old age. While the dependency share was higher in rural areas than in urban areas, the gender gap was very significant in both areas, suggesting that economic dependency was deeply gendered. Despite their locations, older women were significantly dependent on others. One of the reasons behind that could be the gendered disadvantages women faced over the life course. Lower workforce participation, literacy rates, and unpaid labour by women, as analysed in the earlier section on OADR, contribute to disproportionately higher levels of full dependence in later life (Agarwal et al., 2016; Perianayagam, 2024).

The percentage share of the older population who are fully dependent has declined marginally but remains substantial across both rural and urban areas. Full dependency among rural women had declined from 71 per cent in 1995-96 to 66 per cent in 2017-18, but remains persistently high (NSO, 2021, p. 41). The percentage of partially dependent individuals has increased over time, especially among older women, thereby increasing the burden on those they depend on. The next section elucidates the types of family support available to the economically dependent older adult to gauge the primary source of financial support in later life.

Family Members as Primary Source of Financial Support in Later Life

Sen (1995) highlights that family structures determine older adults' economic and social security, and that, especially, women depend more heavily on familial support because of unequal access to paid work, assets, and formal social protection across the life course which is corroborated by IIPS et al. (2020) and UNFPA (2023) reports. To understand this further, Graph 7 presents the distribution of economically dependent older adults by family support type, examining prevailing patterns of intergenerational financial dependence.

Graph 7
Percentage distribution of economically dependent aged persons by category of persons supporting the aged



Source: Office of the Registrar General, India, as cited in NSO, 2021, p. 46

Graph 7 shows that older adults relied most on their own children, regardless of place of residence or gender. Across rural and urban areas, more than 2/3rd of economically dependent older adults rely on their own children for economic support, suggesting that the family is the primary source of old age security. However, data highlighted the gendered patterns of dependency. Older women were more likely than older men to be supported by their spouse, both in rural (21 per cent of older women and 4 per cent of older men) and urban areas (24 per cent of older women and 4 per cent of older men). This pattern reflects women's higher economic dependency within marriage, shaped by gendered labour market participation, wage disadvantages, and unpaid care responsibilities. As a result, women enter old age with fewer independent economic resources, increasing their reliance on family support (Agarwal et al., 2016; Perianayagam, 2024).

Dependence on one's own children remains high for both men and women, but is consistently higher among older men than women across rural and urban contexts. This pattern suggests that while children constitute the primary support system for both genders, older women's dependence is more spread across spouse, children, and others, highlighting different family positioning among genders. Rural-urban differences were comparatively modest but still meaningful. Urban older women show a slightly greater reliance on spouses and a lesser reliance on their own children than their rural counterparts, suggesting differences in household structure and economic arrangements across areas. This pattern reflects that spatial inequalities in access to employment opportunities, social security schemes, and healthcare infrastructure shape economic dependence.

Relatively minuscule numbers of older adults supported by grandchildren or others across all categories point towards the limited role of extended kin networks, reinforcing the dominance of nuclear and immediate family-based support systems. One's own children as the principal source of support underscores the continued centrality of family-based care arrangements (Srivastava et al., 2022, p. 2) in the absence of comprehensive social security systems for older persons (Saha, 2024, p. 11). This reliance on children points to limited pension coverage and inadequate income protection, particularly for older individuals who have spent their working lives in informal and insecure employment.

However, sociological studies (Agarwal et al., 2016; Lalan, 2014; Roy, 2018) have revealed a decline in familial support for older adults, contrary to the data. These data do not necessarily imply sustained family capacity to provide long-term support in the context of demographic ageing and socio-economic changes. Therefore, the next section situates this analysis within the existing literature on changing family structures and examines the growing relevance of institutional living arrangements, such as old age homes, in later life.

Dependency, Family Support, and Growing Relevance of Institutional Living

Studies (Lalan, 2014; Roy, 2018) highlight that the decision to move into an old age home as a living arrangement is shaped less by personal preference and more by families' limited capacity to care for and support older adults in later life. Lalan (2014) argued that urbanisation, modernisation, nuclear family, intergenerational conflict, and economic dependency have weakened the support structure older adults receive from their families. Bansal (2021) has also noted such a claim. Lalan (2014) further highlighted that conflicts with adult children (especially sons), a lack of caregivers, and feelings of neglect and insult by family members are reasons for moving to old age homes. These patterns reflect a shift toward institutional care as family-based support systems become increasingly difficult to sustain amid rapid social and economic changes. Another study by Roy (2018) argues that many middle-class older adults move to old age homes due to spousal death, child dispersal, death of only child, childlessness, or being unmarried, rather than family mistreatment or cruelty of the children. There are strong associated factors, such as class, educational levels, and locations, that determine such inferences, which are beyond the methodological scope of this paper. Table 3 provides a state-wise distribution of government-supported old age homes for the year 2021-2026, indicating a yawning gap between requirements and provisions, an analysis of which requires further examination.

Table 3 reveals significant inter-state disparities in institutional care arrangements for older adults. The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment support 551 NGO-run old age homes, where 16,290 'destitute' older adults were provided accommodation in 2021 (Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, 2021). The number of old age homes has increased

Table 3
State-wise Distribution of Old Age Homes in India

S. No.	State/UT	No. of Senior Citizen Homes (2021)	No. of Beneficiaries	No. of Senior Citizen Homes (2026)*
1	Andhra Pradesh	75	2000	90
2	Arunachal Pradesh	3	150	4
3	Assam	40	1295	40
4	Bihar	1	25	8
5	Chhattisgarh	6	275	3
6	Delhi	3	100	2
7	Goa	2	100	1
8	Gujarat	10	375	5
9	Haryana	15	375	14
10	Himachal Pradesh	2	50	5
11	Jammu and Kashmir	-	-	13
12	Jharkhand	2	100	15
13	Karnataka	39	1195	42
14	Kerala	5	125	8
15	Madhya Pradesh	19	600	32
16	Maharashtra	37	1135	72
17	Manipur	30	800	41
18	Meghalaya	2	100	2
19	Mizoram	2	50	1
20	Nagaland	3	100	12
21	Odisha	91	2500	86
22	Puducherry	1	25	2
23	Punjab	3	75	-
24	Rajasthan	16	600	23
25	Tamil Nadu	66	1795	75
26	Telangana	19	475	22
27	Tripura	3	75	4
28	Uttar Pradesh	28	920	49
29	Uttarakhand	2	50	4
30	West Bengal	26	825	30
Total		551	16290	705

Source: Press Information Bureau, Government of India, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, 2021

*Source: Government of India, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Lok Sabha, 2026

Note: Number of beneficiaries not available in the 2026 report.

from 551 (2021) to 705 in 2026. In 2021, states like Odisha (91), Andhra Pradesh (75), and Tamil Nadu (66) had the highest number of old age homes, and this number increased further in 2026 for

Andhra Pradesh (90) and Tamil Nadu (75). In contrast, in Odisha, the number decreased to 86. States like Bihar (1) and Puducherry (1) have the lowest number of old age homes. The data gives rise to numerous questions. First, are family support systems stronger in states with a low number of old age homes? Second, does this data reflect differences in state capacity for welfare provisioning for older adults? Third, is institutional care now in sync with the accelerating real estate sector of our Indian economy? Along with literature on declining familial support and increasing care needs in later life, the pattern highlights that institutional living is emerging unevenly as a response to growing dependency among older adults.

Discussion

Using statistical data from secondary sources, including the NSO 2021, IIPS et al., 2020, and IIPS & UNFPA 2023, the authors examine the changing demographic, social, and economic status of the older population in India. The analyses reveal steady growth in the older population since 1961 and a significant increase to continue in the coming years. There is, of course, interstate variation in the size and share of the older population. The authors argue that ageing in India is deeply shaped by factors such as gender, regional disparities, employment status, dependency, and access to social protection. As people age, their dependency increases, requiring social, economic, and emotional support in old age, which should be recognised by families, society, and the state.

The inter-state variation in the old age dependency ratio (OADR) reveals significant regional and gender disparities, with several states experiencing faster growth in aged population, while others are experiencing slower growth in their ageing population. The significant gender gap in the dependency ratio and labour force participation uncovers the cumulative effect of deeply rooted gendered disadvantages, especially for women. Lower labour force participation, engagement in unpaid economic activities, household chores, and caregiving are some of the characteristics of the older adults that are deeply gendered. High OADR states require planning for healthcare, income security, and social security, with a focus on older women, given the significant gender differentials. States with rising OADR should invest early in ageing infrastructure.

The findings suggest that the majority of the older population remains dependent on family, especially their children (sons), for economic support in later life, emphasising the centrality of family in caregiving. However, the paper suggests that an increasing ageing population and their dependency, along with their social, economic, and emotional needs, creates growing pressure on families to provide support to their elders in later life. Who cares for the aged people in the hegemonic patriarchal Indian family structures requires a more nuanced social-anthropological exploration. Discussion on class, caste, religion, and location thus requires an in-depth social-anthropological inquiry, which is beyond the scope of this paper. Additional changes in the economy and society, such as migration, urbanisation, and modernisation, have reshaped the younger generation's social world, leading to individualisation and less family time. Increasing old age dependency and weakening family as the prime source of care and support for older people allows the emergence of privatised (in its various forms) institutional care arrangements for older people, especially in urban city spaces. The government must also invest and build support mechanisms for older adults (during later life), given the demographic shift that is taking place in India.

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Development and Housing Style Change: Reshaping the Cultural Landscape of Lahaul Valley

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Sheetal Thakur*
Simrit Kahlon**

Abstract

Cultural landscapes reveal much about our evolving relationships with the natural environment. The advancement of human civilization is manifested in the form of change of the cultural landscape. The fact that landscape is a dynamic entity constantly in the process of being made and that it is a repository of change as well as evolution, makes the study of changing cultural landscapes even more relevant. Perhaps the best locale for studying a cultural landscape would be situated within the mountain environment. The Lahaul Valley, located in the high-altitude tribal region of Himachal Pradesh, is an ideal example of a secluded region that has evolved in harmony with the environment and which is now being subjected to rapid impulses of change. The cultural landscape of Lahaul developed and transformed primarily through the catalyst of external impulses, the most recent among

* Research Scholar, Department of Geography, Panjab University, Chandigarh.
** Professor, Department of Geography, Panjab University, Chandigarh

these being the Atal Tunnel. One of the most visible outcomes of this transformation is the shift in housing styles. Houses are considered the building blocks of a society and play a fundamental role in analyzing the cultural landscape. The style and structure of houses in a locality offer deep insights into its cultural landscape. A house is, therefore a multifunctional artefact which reflects people's needs and hence an essential component of the cultural landscape. The houses of Lahaul were constructed in response to the extreme climatic and geographic conditions, using locally available building material and built to adhere to the local needs. Over time, traditional houses in Lahaul have been undergoing noticeable changes due to ongoing development, making it important to examine this transformation. This paper examines housing historically as well as the transformations it has undergone, particularly over the last few decades.

Keywords: House, Cultural Landscape, development

Introduction

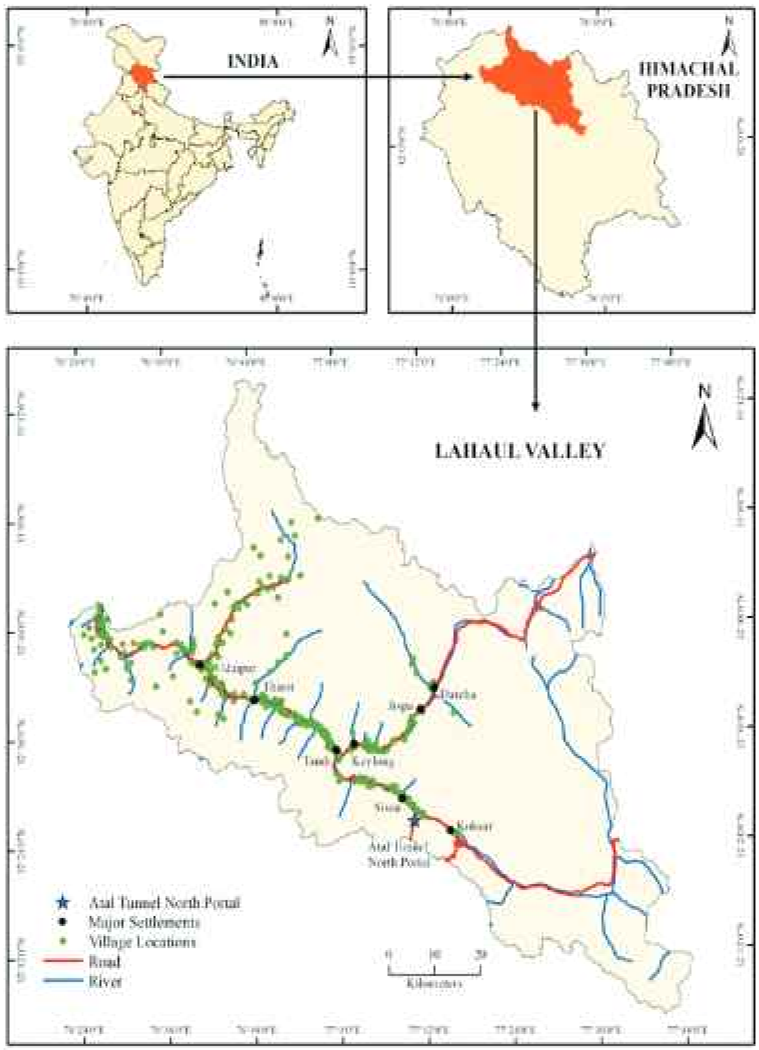
Landscape is a living entity, and is the product of change, dynamic patterns and evolving interrelationships between past ecosystems, history and cultures. A key element of cultural landscape is the continuity of past and present (Brown, 2010). There is a general consensus among social scientists that culture is historically acquired, discovered or created by humans as members of society and is communicated mainly by language or symbolic forms (Bidney, 1947). Thus landscapes have both material and ideological aspects. American cultural geographers influenced by Carl Sauer studied the visible material products of culture. Carl Sauer's landscape studies focused primarily on the material artefacts such as houses and barns of specific cultures. A house is a vital component of the cultural landscape as a tangible expression of the interaction between human societies and their environment. Zelinsky (1973) asserted that a house is as much a sociofact or mentifact as artefact. The changes in the house style are reliable indicators of socio- economic and cultural change (Singh, 2004). The change in traditional housing style is influenced by both internal factors related to the needs of humans and external ones related to socio-cultural development of any region (Vitasurya et al., 2018).

The typical traditional Lahauli house was a reflection of the people's adaptation to the local environment. Traditional houses in Lahaul had unique architectural features like thick walls, small windows, and flat roofs that were designed to withstand the harsh weather conditions. The houses of Lahaul were constructed in response to the extreme climatic and geographic conditions using locally available building material and built to adhere to the local needs. Over time, traditional houses in Lahaul have been undergoing noticeable changes due to ongoing development, making it important to examine this transformation.

Data sources and Methodology

The paper is based on an analysis of primary data collected through field work. For the purpose of field work 596 households of twenty villages were selected. The villages were selected through the technique of stratified purposive sampling method. The sample was proportionately drawn from the three river valleys that form the entire region. These included distinct cultural regions: Tinan Valley (along river Chandra), Gahar Valley (along river Bhaga) and Pattan Valley (along river Chandrabhaga). Each household in the selected villages formed part of the sample surveyed for the purpose of fieldwork. Data were collected with regard to Location of house, Structure of house, Nature of roof, Building material, Relief of house, Number of rooms per house, Nature of kitchen.

The first step was to classify houses as per their period of construction. Time periods were identified prior to 1947, 1947-1971, 1971-1991, 1991-2011, and 2011 onwards. The first period represents traditional housing, located at the core. The second period corresponds to the time when the state of Himachal Pradesh was yet to achieve statehood. The third period marks the phase during which various developmental schemes were introduced in the study area following the formation of the state of Himachal Pradesh. And the last two periods reflect infrastructural development in the valley due to extra-regional impulses. The period after 2011 is marked by significant infrastructure development, largely driven by the construction of the Atal Tunnel.



Source: Kahlon, S. (2014) Unpublished Project Report (Land use land cover change and human- environment interaction: The case of Lahaul valley), Research Project sponsored by ICSSR

Traditional Lahauli Houses

The typical houses in Lahaul have unique architectural features like thick walls, small windows, and flat roofs that are designed to withstand the harsh weather conditions. Traditionally, the houses were built up to three floors with flat roofs. The height of the houses varied from thirteen to twenty feet depending on the number of storeys (Census of India 1968). The ground floor (*po*) of the house was primarily used for keeping cattle and storing cattle feed. It served as a shelter for livestock such as cattle, horses, sheep and goats as well as to store cow dung and fodder. A large box made of wood and slate (*datha*) was used for storing food grains on the ground floor (Kanwar & Sharma, 2006). The upper storey (*nipuri*) functioned as the main living space for the family. The entrance to the structure was through a rectangular porch (*chhinga*) which was reached by a staircase in the middle of the porch. An outer room (*sresla*) was utilized as a sitting area during the summer and rainy season. Adjacent to it was an inner room (*chakthab*) designed to provide warmth during harsh winters. At its centre stood an iron furnace with a chimney, which served both for heating and cooking. This space became the heart of the household during the snowy season, where meals were prepared and the family gathered to stay warm and carry out all indoor activities (Census of India 1968). Ventilators were not installed due to the low ceilings. Small holes in the wall served the purpose of windows as well as chimneys. The iron bars used in windows were the only items sourced from Kullu and Manali in the 1960s. Glass panes not only provided natural lighting, but also protected the houses from cold winds. Lahauli people who follow Buddhism have their worship room on the top floor of their houses, known as '*Chokhag*'. The presence of veranda on the upper floor was considered very important in the houses. The masons and carpenters were hired for constructing a house from outside the village. Manual labour was provided by family members, relatives and fellow locals. The majority of houses had ample space to accommodate joint families and relatives (Kahlon, 2015).

The houses were whitewashed with lime and were constructed in rows in order to stay in touch with each other during heavy snowfall in winter. People gathered in one another's homes, fostering a strong sense of community and cooperation. The season was primarily devoted to sedentary work such as weaving socks and sweaters, spinning wool, and making carpets. These activities were carried out collectively, with household chores, and craftwork shared among families. In the local dialect, this spirit of mutual cooperation is known as '*Besi*' (Bodh, 2016). In this way people enjoyed heavy snowfall while engaging themselves in these activities.

The houses, building materials, and settlement pattern was the outcome of the environmental conditions of the region. The traditional architectural style of Lahaul was therefore an ideal arrangement well suited to the cold dry temperate climatic regime of the place. Ultimately, the entire process of house construction fostered community cooperation and a strong sense of communal living. Such style becomes even more significant in today's world especially when social relations are getting scattered.

Traditional mud house

Source: Clicked by Researcher, June 23, 2023, Village Keylong

Intersection of traditional house and natural environment

The houses of Lahaul were constructed in response to the extreme climatic and geographic conditions using locally available building material and built to adhere to the local needs. The most common building materials used were stone, wood, and mud bricks. A mix of mud, slate-stone, wood, some reeds, and grass were used as building materials. Stone bricks and slate were used to build walls. Thick flat mud roofs were used for insulation on which fruits and grains were laid out to dry. The roof was built over wooden frame resting on the mud walls. The roofs were composed of wooden beams with birch-bark (*bhojpatral*, perfectly waterproof) laid in one or two layers over wooden planks. The roof was finally finished with a layer of mud plaster to provide insulation (Sharma & Sharma, 2013). People preferred constructing houses with flat roofs since they were useful for drying grass, grains and vegetables. It also offered resistance against strong winds. Importantly, flat roofs helped retain snow during winter, which acted as a natural insulating blanket, and maintains warmth within the house. Most of the villages are situated on the banks of rivers Chandra, Bhaga and Chandrabhaga where the slopes are slightly gentler. The structure of Lahauli Villages was based on social needs. The houses here were built like a colony, so that people can stay connected to each another and natural problems can be handled together during the days of snowfall. These structures were designed to withstand the harsh climatic conditions, providing insulation against the cold winters and staying cool during the summers. To combat the scarcity of water the Lahaulis designed a dry toilet structure attached to the main house. The structure was made up of two storeys- the upper one used as defecation room and the lower as a collection chamber. The night- soil was daily covered with mixture locally known as *fot* (a combination of dry cattle/ sheep dung, kitchen ash and dry grass / leaves). This night soil thus preserved was utilized as excellent organic manure for agricultural farms.

Over the years, traditional housing style has undergone significant modifications influenced by the availability of resources as well as the evolving tastes and aspirations of the inhabitants.

Change in housing style

House type "showcases the cultural heritage, functional needs, current fashion and positive and negative impacts of the natural environment" (Kniffen, 1965). A study of house types is, thus, a study of people, their origin and their adaptations to the surrounding environment. Rural house type is an important material trait that distinguishes one cultural region from another (Diddee, 2004). The house type offers the first impression of a particular area, as it embodies the idea of shelter shaped by local conditions. The current section focuses on analyzing the shift in housing types by considering various parameters in terms of location of house, structure of house, building material, nature of roof, number of rooms per house, and nature of the kitchen.

Parameter & Indicator of changing cultural landscape

Sr.No.	Parameter	Indicator
1	Change in housing style	Location of house
		Structure of house
		Nature of roof
		Building material
		Relief of house
		Number of rooms per house
		Nature of kitchen

Source: Devised by Researcher

Location of Houses

While traditionally, Lahaulas would build their houses within the village settlement area only, over time, a tendency to move away from the village settlement has been observed. More and more households are now beginning to construct their houses in the fields and adjacent to the main road. The data shows a significant shift in settlement patterns. 62.26 per cent of houses are still located within village settlement, 36.10 per cent of which were constructed during 1971-91, 13.75 per cent of the houses during 1991-2011, and 12.41 per cent in the period 1947-71. The proportion of houses within old village settlement has been seen to vary across different valleys. The highest proportion, 66.1per cent, is seen in Pattan Valley (Chandrabhaga), followed by Gahar Valley (Bhaga), 65.86 per cent, and then 48.86 per cent in Tinan Valley (Chandra). If viewed over time, 100 per cent of houses built before 1991 were built within the village settlement.

There is an emerging trend towards dispersed housing. 20.97 per cent of houses are now in the fields, showing a clear trend of people moving closer to their agricultural lands. The tendency to build houses in the fields points towards a weakening of the community bonds and a rising tendency towards individualism. Building houses in the fields also points towards decreasing dependence on agriculture.

There is a visible shift in the location of houses from the old settlement to close to the main road. 16.77 per cen tof houses are located adjacent to the main road. Out of 16.77 per cent, 7.38 per cent of the houses were constructed during 1991-2011, and 9.39 per cent after 2011. This trend of building houses near the road highlights a growing preference for better connectivity possibly enhanced due to the development of Atal tunnel. Also it may be in response to increased vehicular ownership by the households as well as increase in influx of Tourists/ outsiders. The highest proportion of houses constructed adjacent to the main road was found in Tinan Valley (26.35 per cent), followed by Gahar Valley (15.22 per cent) and then 12.93 per cent in Pattan Valley. The Tinan Valley being closest to the Atal Tunnel has experienced enormous construction along the road side. Fieldwork and observation revealed that most of the homestays have come up along the Chandra River.

Kishan Devi, 52, of Gondhala village has witnessed increase of homestays near the main road after the development of Atal Tunnel. According to her, homestays are opened by those who are rich. She further added that locals are building new houses as homestay while using their old house for living.

While traditional village settlement still dominates in Lahaul, the rising trend of building houses in fields and along roads signals a transformation in rural life, one shaped by modernization, improved connectivity and evolving socio-economic needs.

Modern style houses spread along the road

Source: Clicked by researcher, June 24, 2023, Village Gemur

Study area: Location of houses by various time periods

Location	Major Valleys	Households surveyed	Period of construction					Location	Period of construction					Location	Period of construction				
			Before 1947	1947-1971	1971-1991	1991-2011	After 2011		Before 1947	1947-1971	1971-1991	1991-2011	After 2011		Before 1947	1947-1971	1971-1991	1991-2011	After 2011
			Number of houses (percent of surveyed houses)						Number of houses (percent of surveyed houses)						Number of houses (percent of surveyed houses)				
Within old village settlement	Tinan Valley	129	0	13 (10.07)	35 (27.17)	15 (11.62)	0	In the fields	0	0	0	11 (8.52)	21 (16.27)	Adjacent to main road	0	0	0	12 (9.30)	22 (17.05)
	Gahar Valley	243	0	27 (11.11)	99 (40.76)	34 (13.99)	0		0	0	0	24 (9.87)	22 (9.05)		0	0	0	15 (6.17)	22 (9.05)
	Pattan Valley	224	0	34 (15.17)	81 (36.20)	33 (14.73)	0		0	0	0	32 (14.28)	15 (6.69)		0	0	0	17 (7.58)	12 (5.35)
Total	All	596	0	74 (12.41)	215 (36.10)	82 (13.75)	0		0	0	0	67 (11.24)	58 (9.73)		0	0	0	44 (7.38)	56 (9.39)

Source: Based on Fieldwork, 2024

Structure of House

A Lahauli house was classified as being Kutcha on account of the use of mud, stone, wood as building material for floor, walls, and roof respectively. Table reveals that 50.17 per cent of the total households were Pucca while 37.42 per cent were classified as Semi-Pucca, meaning thereby that either the wall, roof, or floor were made of Kutcha material while the other parts were made of Pucca material. However, the proportion of Kutcha houses was found to be lower at 12.41 per cent. All the Kutcha houses were seen built in the period 1947-71 reflecting traditional houses built using locally available materials like mud, stones, and wood.

A dramatic transition from Kutcha to Semi-Pucca houses is found in the period 1971-1991. Gahar Valley leads with 40.85 per cent followed closely by Tinan Valley with 38.76 per cent while Pattan Valley stands at 33.03 per cent. The building of the Leh-Manali National Highway provided access to construction material from beyond the Rohtang Pass. Bricks were used instead of stones and cement instead of mud. Pucca housing became dominant after 1991.

Considering the entire valley, 50.17 per cent of the total houses were found to be Pucca, of which 37.42 per cent of the total Pucca houses were built during 1991-2011 and 12.75 per cent built after 2011. The housing transformation in the Tinan, Gahar and Pattan Valleys reflects socio-economic development, infrastructure development accelerated by road connectivity and the Atal Tunnel development. Over time, housing shifted from Kutcha (10-14 per cent) to Semi-Pucca (33-41 per cent), to Pucca structures (up to 50 per cent). This evolution highlights the modernization of rural Lahaul and a gradual narrowing of spatial disparities, indicating a more equitable and integrated pattern of regional development.

Study area: Structure of houses by various time periods

Structure	Major Valley	Households surveyed	Period of construction					Structure	Period of construction					Structure	Period of construction				
			Before 1947	1947-1971	1971-1991	1991-2011	After 2011		Before 1947	1947-1971	1971-1991	1991-2011	After 2011		Before 1947	1947-1971	1971-1991	1991-2011	After 2011
			Number of houses (percent of surveyed houses)						Number of houses (percent of surveyed houses)						Number of houses (percent of surveyed houses)				
KUTCHA	Tinan valley	129	0	14 (10.85)	0	0	0	SEMI- PUCCA	0	0	50 (38.76)	0	0	PUCCA	0	0	0	51 (39.54)	14 (10.85)
	Gahar valley	243	0	27 (11.01)	0	0	0		0	0	99 (40.85)	0	0		0	0	0	88 (36.21)	29 (11.93)
	Pattan valley	224	0	33 (14.73)	0	0	0		0	0	74 (33.03)	0	0		0	0	0	84 (37.51)	33 (14.73)
Total	All	596	0	74 (12.41)	0	0	0		0	0	223 (37.42)	0	0		0	0	0	223 (37.42)	76 (12.75)

Source: Based on Fieldwork, 2024

Nature of roof

Traditionally, houses in Lahaul Valley were built with thick, flat mud roofs that served multiple purposes. However, these traditional flat-roofed structures have been replaced by sloping roofs, reflecting a shift in construction practices and aesthetic preferences. Aggregated data for the entire Lahaul Valley shows that 57.06 per cent of houses have sloping roofs whereas 42.94 per cent have flat roofs. The construction period analysis of flat-roofed houses reveals that of 42.94 per cent, 10.4 per cent were constructed between 1947 and 1971, 24.83 per cent during 1971-1991, and 7.71 per cent during 1991-2011. Conversely for sloping-roofed houses, 37.10 per cent were constructed, between 1991 and 2011, and 19.96 per cent after 2011. The temporal distribution clearly indicates that flat roofs were dominant in earlier decades, particularly between 1971 and 1991.

In contrast, sloping-roofed houses saw significant growth in the post-1991 period with 41.08 per cent constructed during 1991-2011, and 21.70 per cent built after 2011. This suggests a transition in modern architectural preferences towards sloping roofs due to improved access to modern building materials.

The sloping-roofed houses, by contrast, show a construction concentration in the more recent decades, with 39.50 per cent built between 1991 and 2011, and 21.39 per cent constructed post-2011. The data indicates a progressive shift away from traditional flat roofs towards sloped roofing, especially from 1990 onwards.

Of all the houses constructed during the period 1947-71, 100 per cent had flat roofs, conversely 100 per cent of the houses constructed after 2011 have sloping roofs. Despite sloping roofs being unsuitable to climatic conditions, the shift is being seen due to factors such as easy availability of cement, steel, and tin roofing material due to better connectivity, rising incomes, increased exposure to modern architectural designs. The general perception of sloping roofs in settlements of mountain areas may also be a reason for the architectural shift, doubtless this is on account of transformative impulses coming from outside the region. More recently, the development of Atal Tunnel has boosted tourism in the region, so tourism-induced changes have also driven residents to opt for more contemporary housing styles.

			Before 1947	1947-1971	1971-1991	1991-2011	After 2011		Before 1947	1947-1971	1971-1991	1991-2011	After 2011
			Number of houses (percent of surveyed houses)						Number of houses (percent of surveyed houses)				
Flat	Tinan valley	129	0	14 (10.88)	25 (19.37)	9 (6.97)	0	Sloping	0	0	0	53 (41.08)	28 (21.70)
	Gahar valley	243	0	22 (9.05)	55 (22.66)	18 (7.40)	0		0	0	0	96 (39.5)	52 (21.39)
	Pattan valley	224	0	26 (11.60)	68 (30.35)	19 (8.48)	0		0	0	0	72 (32.16)	39 (17.41)
Total	All	596	0	62 (10.4)	148 (24.83)	46 (7.71)	0		0	0	0	221 (37.10)	119 (19.96)

Source: Based on Fieldwork, 2024

Building Material

Traditionally, houses in the Lahaul Valley were built using local materials like stone, mud, and wood. These structures were designed to withstand the harsh climatic conditions, providing insulation against the cold winters and staying cool during the summers. However, with time there is a noticeable shift towards more Pucca housing. The increase in the number of Pucca houses can be attributed to the use of durable construction materials such as bricks and concrete. Bricks are used instead of stones and cement instead of mud. Flat roofs are being replaced by sloping roofs. The new houses in the valley are now constructed using concrete, steel, and glass. These houses no longer source local building material. All surveyed households confirmed that they procure all construction material from Kullu and Manali. As noted by Kahlon (2015), the cost of one brick was Rs. 9, nearly double the price in the plains. Recent findings show that the price has risen to Rs. 12 per brick in Lahaul, while it remains between Rs. 8 and Rs. 9 in Kullu and Manali. These materials, while not as environmentally adaptive as traditional ones, offer durability and a contemporary aesthetic look.

Relief of house

Traditional houses in Lahaul Valley were typically 2 or sometimes 3 stories high with flat roofs. A shift has been observed in recent years in the number of stories in the houses. Fieldwork revealed that double-storied houses accounted for the highest proportion at 47.83 per cent, followed closely by triple-storied houses at 44.29 per cent. A smaller percentage, 7.88 per cent, consisted of multi-storied structures with more than 3 floors. Although currently only a small fraction of houses have more than 3 stories, this reflects a changing preference among locals. The rise in multi-storied houses, once rare, may be driven by the growing need to accommodate tourists, indicating a shift in both economic activity and housing design in the post-Atal Tunnel era.

Number of Rooms per house

A significant majority of houses in Lahaul, 61.4 per cent, have between 5 to 10 rooms. Approximately one-third of houses, 31.2 per cent, have 10 to 15 rooms. A smaller percentage of houses, 6.37 per cent, have less than 5 rooms. Only 1.63 per cent of houses have more than 15 rooms. This indicates that the region has a relatively high average number of rooms per house.

Nature of Kitchen

As already stated, traditional houses in Lahaul Valley did not have a separate room designated as a kitchen. To assess changes in this aspect, data was collected regarding the nature of kitchen spaces. Interestingly, at the time of survey, all the houses were found to have a separate covered kitchen. This clearly reflects the impact of modernization which emphasizes the need for a specially designated cooking area separate from the main living space.

Modern style kitchen

Source: clicked by researcher, June 25, 2024, Village Khangsar

Conclusion

Traditionally, houses in Lahaul Valley were built from materials available in the immediate surroundings. Most were kutcha houses, constructed with an assemblage of local resources. Their orientation, design, and functionality were shaped by the living conditions of the residents, determined largely by the valley's natural environment. Over the years, however, these houses have undergone significant transformation. Traditional houses, once made of stone, mud, and wood with flat roofs adapted to heavy snowfall, are now increasingly being replaced by pucca structures built with concrete, bricks, and metal roofing. These modern houses reflect both changing aspirations and a desire for durability, comfort, and modern amenities. The architectural shift also symbolizes a broader lifestyle change — from subsistence-based living to a more market-oriented and comfort-driven approach. Houses, as the epicenter of cultural activities, now reflect not just material change but also evolving values, perceptions, and lifestyles. A substantial change was seen in the houses in terms of their location from within the settlement towards the fields and adjacent to the main road. The recent development of Atal Tunnel has brought opportunities to the people of tribal valley. The easy accessibility all through the year has led to an unprecedented footfall of tourists in Lahaul. With rising tourism, ways of looking at one's house have changed, perceptions and meaning of the old houses have also changed. Homestays in Lahaul Valley have become a good source of income for the residents. Locals are building new houses as homestay while using their old house for living. Thus, in recent decades, shifts in the economic situation, improved connectivity, and changing aspirations have induced changes in the housing landscape of Lahaul Valley.

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Article

Between Objectivity and Lived Experience: A Neurophenomenological Engagement with Buddhism

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Pankaj Srivastava*

Abstract

Western modern science predominantly emphasises the quantitative analysis of phenomena, especially in the study of the mind and psychological research, which are physically and psychologically verifiable, aiming to develop theoretical explanations of mental activity, consciousness, and the structure of experience. In this pursuit, it prioritises the epistemic rigour associated with objectivist, third-person methodologies, often at the expense of recognising the epistemic value inherent in first-person subjective experience.

This research critically assesses the advantages and limitations of this exclusively objectivist approach to mind and consciousness studies and posits that Buddhist philosophical and contemplative practices offer valuable methodological tools for enhancing it. Specifically, Buddhist practices of contemplative refinement—particularly mindfulness—cultivate disciplined methods of first-

* Dr. Pankaj Srivastava holds a faculty position in the Department of Philosophy at Panjab University, Chandigarh.

person enquiry that can be systematically employed to explore the nature and dynamics of experience. Rather than serving as an alternative to scientific rigour, such practices can be regarded as supplementary epistemic tools that extend empirical research into the domain of experience.

Consequently, this study proposes that a judiciously integrated approach that combines third-person scientific methods with rigorously trained first-person observation techniques can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the mind than either method alone. From this perspective, dialogue between contemporary science and Buddhist contemplative practices offers novel conceptual and methodological resources for further interdisciplinary exploration and research on consciousness.

Keywords: Buddhism, Cognitive Science, Mindfulness, Subjectivity, Objectivity

Introduction

With the advent of Galileo's telescope for observing celestial phenomena and Leeuwenhoek's microscope for the minute examination of living organisms, modern science has consolidated a powerful methodological conviction: reliable knowledge of nature requires increasingly sophisticated instruments capable of rendering phenomena observable with precision. This instrumental turn profoundly transformed the study of physical objects and secured an unprecedented degree of empirical accuracy. At the same time, however, it reinforced the tacit assumption that genuine scientific enquiry must be grounded exclusively in third-person, publicly verifiable data. Within such a framework, the scientific legitimacy of subjective or psychic phenomena became increasingly suspect, as the mind could not be accessed through the same external observational apparatus.

This exclusion of subjective experience assumed a more explicit doctrinal form with the rise of behaviourism in the early 20th century. In its effort to establish psychology as a rigorously objective science, behaviourism rejected introspection as methodologically unreliable and sought to eliminate subjectively defined categories from psychological discourse. John B. Watson's programmatic manifesto famously declared that "psychology as the behaviourist views it is a purely objective experimental branch of natural science" (Watson, 1913, p.158). On this basis, Watson cautioned psychologists against employing terms such as sensation, perception, desire, imagery, thinking, and emotion, since such notions lacked publicly verifiable criteria and therefore failed to meet the standards of scientific legitimacy.

This methodological position was later radicalised by B. F. Skinner, who explained mental life in terms of dispositional behaviour. For Skinner, what is felt or introspectively observed is not some non-physical world of consciousness, mind, or mental life (1974, p.14). The upshot of this development was the exclusion of first-person experience from the purview of science itself. But the "hard problem of consciousness" suggests the limits of this policy of exclusion. As Thomas Nagel later argued, an organism is conscious only if "there is something that it is like to be that organism" (Nagel, 1974, p.436). This remark indicates exactly what objectivism in behaviourism was inclined to obscure: the first-person irreducible aspect of experience. While the cognitive revolution reopened the door to mental states, the behaviourist tradition continues to influence existing efforts to provide an adequate and acceptable explanation of consciousness.

While the emergence of cognitive science reopened the theoretical room for mental states, it did so within the confines of a neurocomputational model that endeavours to correlate or explain subjective experience in terms of neural events. The model assumes a rigid correspondence between neural events (n) and mental events (m), such that whenever there is an *n*, there is an *m* (and vice versa). However, even the most advanced correlations do not shed light on how neural processes come to have a subjective nature, nor do they fill in the familiar explanatory gap between physical mechanisms and subjective experience. Here, we find it necessary to question whether the narrowness of scientific imagination has not been improperly confined by the exclusive use of third-person instrumentation. Intellect (or, more generally, trained consciousness) may be a sophisticated instrument for studying the mind. When systematically developed, the mind can show progressively greater stability, clarity, and reflexive transparency, thereby making inner processes accessible to rigorous study. Perhaps, then, the reason why behaviourism could not satisfactorily explain consciousness is that it did not merely fail in its empirical task but had already decided to reduce subjective phenomena to externally observable processes. In this regard, the question of method needs to be reopened to develop a more adequate science of consciousness.

Cognitive psychologists and neurologists equate subjective phenomena with neural processes. Critiques from philosophers and scientists alike—ranging from Thomas Nagel's analysis of subjective perspective to David Chalmers' articulation of the hard problem—have highlighted the inadequacy of approaches confined to third-person methodologies. The persistence of the explanatory gap indicates that consciousness cannot be fully understood through objective analysis alone, while subjective methods are often dismissed as unreliable or scientifically inadmissible. Despite this, the emergence of cognitive psychology has led to the study of subjective phenomena, which now occupies a predominant place in science. However, the recognition of the role of introspection and perceptual methods in explaining psychic events remains a neglected idea.

Problem Statement

However, the possibility of integrating first-person methods with third-person scientific frameworks remains insufficiently explored. Buddhist thought, with its systematic refinement of attention and introspective observation, presents an alternative trajectory. Rather than treating consciousness solely as an object of measurement, the Buddhist tradition develops consciousness as both an instrument and an object of enquiry, employing contemplative practices to investigate mental phenomena directly. Such an approach opens the possibility of a methodological synthesis capable of addressing the hard problem by combining empirical rigour with disciplined introspective access. Wallace (2002, p. 15–32), in his article "Science of Consciousness: Buddhism (1) and Modern West (0)," questioned the scientific basis of such a correlation and engaged in a debate with contemporary neurologist Antonio R. Damasio (1999) on this issue. He acknowledged that the physicality of mental phenomena has yet to be scientifically identified and may be considered a working hypothesis. It seems that Damasio (1998) probably (in a weak sense) holds that mental phenomena are biological phenomena produced by prior biological phenomena, but Wallace doubts this hypothesis. He further criticises the claim that to say [a] is [b] implies identity rather than a causal relationship. What is evident here is that the distinction between the neural and the mental fades away. Hence, the question of how neural processes (which some neuroscientists equate with mental processes) can be something (subjective) remains unsolved. It is known as the hard problem of consciousness (Chalmers, 1995), and for many philosophers it is a mystery. Responding to the hard problem of consciousness, Damasio says that evolution has crafted a brain that is in the business of directly representing an organism and indirectly representing whatever the organism interacts with. In fact, Damasio's explanation could not throw much light on the topic, except for mystifying the processes of evolution. Dan Lloyd highlights a significant point of convergence between cognitive science and phenomenology by exploring the possible correspondence between the phenomenal properties of consciousness and its underlying biological organisation as investigated within cognitive science (Lloyd, 1989). In this respect, his analysis echoes Husserl's methodological insistence that lived experience, as given in first-person awareness, cannot be straightforwardly reduced to its empirical or naturalistic description (Husserl, 1982). Lloyd's intervention thus opens a conceptual space in which phenomenological description and cognitive-scientific explanation can be engaged in a more productive dialogue without collapsing one into the other.

Methodological Tension: Objective–Subjective Binary

A considerable gap exists between first- and third-person perspectives in most scientific studies of consciousness. Psychic events have palpably revealed a moderate difference between neural events and brain processes. The hard problem of consciousness thus remains a mystery, as most psychologists and neuroscientists confine their research to brain events without considering first-person-observed information. They firmly believe that they have achieved an understanding of the brain through introspection but have failed to develop an understanding of neurological processes.

Dennett expresses deep scepticism toward treating consciousness as a mysterious, self-standing phenomenon that resists functional explanation. Significantly, Dennett's scepticism toward treating consciousness as an irreducible mystery is advanced through conceptual analysis rather than quantitative inference. His project seeks to dissolve the apparent explanatory residue surrounding consciousness by analysing cognitive and functional processes rather than appealing to statistical evidence. Accordingly, the importance of his position within the philosophy of mind must be assessed in argumentative, not statistical, terms. In *Consciousness Explained* (1991), he argues that many philosophical puzzles about consciousness arise from what he calls the "Cartesian Theatre" illusion, the assumption that there must be a single inner locus where experience becomes fully present. Dennett suggests that much of the difficulty can be eviscerated by close scrutiny of cognitive processes. His argument is a healthy reminder of the need to distinguish between ontological and conceptual objections to the hard problem. David

Chalmers argues that Dennett's functionalist analysis, though providing insight into the processes involved in cognition and behavioural report, addresses what he calls the "easy problems" of consciousness. According to Chalmers, a full functional account can explain access, discrimination, and verbal availability; however, the more basic question of why such processes should be accompanied by subjective experience remains unanswered. In this view, Dennett's project risks an explanatory gap, in which the entity to be explained (phenomenality) is methodologically bracketed.

A parallel opposition is voiced by Thomas Nagel, who focuses on the inexplicable evolution of the inexplicable what-it-is-like nature of experience, which remains a challenge for strictly third-person or functional accounts. Nagel's point highlights the epistemic disparity between objective description and lived subjectivity, which, in turn, supports the concern that purelyfunctional explanations might be used to account for the form of cognition without sufficiently addressing its qualitative aspect.

Chalmers (1995) argues that there are strong reasons to doubt that conscious experience can be explained within the framework of physical systems; he further states that our concept of the corporal is tied to the structural dimensions of the functions of physical systems. According to him, this is the case because our conscious experiences are not confined merely to structural forms and functions. In other words, it is beyond the domain of the physical sciences, which are exclusively concerned with such aspects. Churchland (1996), however, rejects Chalmers' claim that the physical sciences cannot explain consciousness; she maintains that this claim depends on a relatively static interpretation of the limits of the physical sciences. We should also be cognizant of the fact that physical science is constantly evolving; therefore, we will eventually need to revise our estimate of its limits. This objection also casts doubt on Chalmers' distinction between easy and hard problems of consciousness, as the problem appears hard or easy depending on our understanding of the physical sciences and their proper domain.

The important issue is to understand that both perspectives are limited in their own spheres; therefore, one must categorise each perspective's limitations. Hence, what is required is an adoption of a more comprehensive and scientific approach to consciousness, encompassing both first- and third-person accounts. It is true that in any scientific enquiry, the apparatus plays an important role, and the scientist is expected to critically examine the instrument used. One of the most important questions is: does the instrument provide true, objective data independent of itself, or does it present its own artefacts, like looking through a kaleidoscope? Therefore, an important concern of the philosophy of scientific enquiry is to examine the nature, design, functioning, and limitations of the instrument. The first and primary instrument used by all scientists is the human brain. Does the brain, as an instrument, provide us with its own artefact without any access to objective reality that exists independently of the mind? If the brain provides information about objective reality, does it distort that information in the process? These are some of the important issues that have constantly challenged the popular scientific approach. Scientists convincingly believe that there is an independent, objective world outside the human mind, and that the reconstruction of this objective world (based on sensory inputs and mediated through the conceptual structure) is the handiwork of the human brain. Accordingly, Wilson (1998) maintains that the task of scientists is to align inner representations with the outer objective world correctly. However, the problem with such a conception of inner and outer arises when we attempt to reconcile it with the noted limitation of the human brain to have direct access to the objective world. It amounts to saying that the empirical data we perceive during scientific observation are mental representations and belong to the mind. It is also true that we do not have any yardstick to compare the inner with the outer.

Hence, Wilson argues that the problem of the outer and inner can be overcome only by empirically investigating the brain's material properties. Similar to Damasio, Wilson assumes that mental processes can be understood in terms of neural processes. This position has been critically questioned by Thomas Nagel, who argues that even if we understand experience from an objective viewpoint distinct from that of the subject who experiences it, we cannot grasp its most specific qualities unless we imagine them subjectively. Nagel locates the central difficulty in the fact that conscious experience is essentially bound to a first-person, subjective perspective. In contrast, physicalist and computational theories proceed by privileging an objective, third-person framework. Conscious states, on this view, are constituted by their qualitative, experientially felt character. Consequently, even a fully developed objective phenomenology of a cockroach's gustatory system would fail to disclose what the taste of scrambled eggs is like for the organism itself. In the broader evaluation of the structure and form of life, this explanatory gap becomes even more pronounced, revealing layers of nuance that resist complete capture within purely objective accounts.

The above considerations amply illustrate that the hard problem of consciousness cannot be solved by merely attempting certain techniques and methods of purely objective studies or by pure introspective exploration of the phenomenon. The solution may lie in the depth achieved from both these perspectives, reaching a point where the binary of object and subject fuses into a reconciliation. It is noteworthy that many psychologists follow the behaviourist paradigm to study the mind and still seem to achieve results when dealing with immediate problems. William James has given adequate attention to the study of the behavioural and mental correlates of mental processes and thereby emphasised the primacy of introspection in this endeavour. He acknowledged the importance of stability and the intensity of attention required to explore psychic events in depth.

In Eastern thought, especially Buddhism, there is a tradition of methodologically advanced enquiry into the nature of consciousness using disciplined first-person enquiry. However, the systematic synthesis of introspective approaches to modern third-person scientific paradigms has not been well established. In this respect, Buddhist thought provides a unique methodological resource. It does not regard consciousness simply as an object to be measured, but as an instrument of investigation through long-term attentional training and precise phenomenological observations. This dual orientation offers a renewed approach to the difficult problem of consciousness. Instead of assuming an inexplicable explanatory divide, an integrative model–a connection between contemplative phenomenology and empirical neuroscience–can allow for a more detailed explanation of subjective experience.

The ensuing controversy shows that there is a profound methodological rift: is it better to dissolve consciousness through functional explanation, or is its qualitative nature such that it requires an extended ontological approach? This tension has been the focus of modern consciousness studies. The current study discusses the shortcomings of entirely objective theories of consciousness and argues that a full-fledged science of consciousness involves first-person investigative methods in addition to third-person approaches. This study suggests that a combination of subjective and objective perspectives can be important for providing a more comprehensive explanation of the nature and dynamics of consciousness through critical engagement with both modern cognitive science and the Buddhist approach to the contemplation.

Methodological Orientation: Buddhism and Reflective Study of Experience

Buddhist philosophy suggests a unique approach to studying the immediate sphere of conscious experience. Instead of being solely guided by outwards observation, it develops a self-disciplined precision of awareness and uses this precise awareness as a tool to explore both subjective and objective phenomena (Analayo, 2003; Varela et al., 2016). In this context, consciousness is not a subject of experience among others but the medium through which experience is revealed and studied. Therefore, the Buddhist method provides a methodological reformation in which the restructuring of attention is part of the enquiry of the mind and world.

In Buddhist phenomenology, the stream of lived consciousness is conceptualised as *vijnanamana* (consciousness), a dynamic and conditioned stream, rather than an independent mental entity. In the first person, consciousness is the locus of experiential disclosure and is always in the form of awareness of an object. However, early canonical formulations, most prominently those in the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, also emphasise that this immediacy is dependently arisen. Consciousness arises in its reliance on the sense faculties and the objects of these faculties, as well as on the volitional formations that precede it (SN 12.1; Bodhi, 2000), thus placing the experience in a causal nexus. Buddhist phenomenology opposes the absolutisation of subjectivity: the phenomenality of experience cannot be separated from grounded and relational conditioning. This twofold focus is also codified in the *Abhidharma* and Vasubandhu's work, where consciousness is momental, functionally defined, and structurally relational. Contemporary commentators have observed that this scheme provides a strictly processual account of the mind, combining phenomenological description and causal explanation (Johansson, 1979; Waldron, 2003). In modern research, Buddhist phenomenology provides a methodologically noteworthy model in which reflexive awareness and conditioned arising are explored simultaneously, with the expectation of integrative directions in consciousness research.

Dependent Origination: The Framework

This analysis is based on the simple structure of the Buddhist doctrine of dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*), which is considered the main theme of early Buddhism (Gethin, 1998; Ānalayo, 2003). This principle holds that everything comes into being as dependent on other things; nothing exists in or by itself. All events are products of the functional coalescence of causes and conditions that form their immediate antecedents. In this view, consciousness itself must be thought of as contingently generated and dynamically organised, as opposed to being a determinate metaphysical entity.

In the statements of dependent origination, consciousness has two aspects that are closely interrelated. (1). Continuum of sentience: consciousness is presented as a continuum flowing (*vijñāna-santāna*) through many lives with a continuity, but without the causal relatedness of any enduring self (Vasubandhu, 1991). (2). Momentary cognitive awareness: consciousness also occurs in the form of discrete, momentary states of awareness that occur in tandem with a certain cognitive object in the six modalities of cognition (Asaṅga, 2016). In this way, every act of conscious experience is conditioned by earlier processes and functionally directed to current objects. Consciousness is thus at once continuous and momentary--the same as a causal stream, but different in its episodic appearances.

Yogācāra Elaboration: Structure of Consciousness

The systematic analysis of consciousness was most fully developed in the ***Yogācāra*** school of Buddhism. In this paradigm, the continuity of sentience across time is theorised by the doctrine of *ālaya-vijñana* (storehouse consciousness), a subliminal, accumulative layer of consciousness that stores and preconditions *karmic* imprints (Asaṅga, 2016; Waldron, 2003). This basic layer serves as the support system of manifest cognitive activity and is highly pre-reflective. In contrast, the six cognitive consciousnesses (*ṣaṃ-vijñana*) subject to analysis are the episodic and object-oriented functioning of awareness, which are generated in relation to particular sense faculties and their respective objects.

In this theory, mental disturbance is not conceived as a simple episodic phenomenon but as an expression of deeply rooted dispositional patterns. *Anuśaya* is a Sanskrit term referring to the subtle, pre-reflective build-up of affective and cognitive tendencies maintained below the level of explicit awareness. In contrast, *kleśa* is the temporary and experientially relevant outburst of these latent dispositions in the form of anger, craving, delusion, and other afflictive mental states. Buddhist psychology can transcend the superficial description of symptoms by offering a process-based account of the production and maintenance of suffering through a stratified model. More importantly, it also leads to a soteriological understanding that true change must occur at the dispositional level, not by simply regulating episodic emotional episodes. As Waldron (2003) notes, the *Yogācāra* system prefigures modern issues of implicit cognition and affective conditioning by highlighting the structural continuity between latent tendencies and their manifestations. Therefore, this difference offers a philosophically sound and psychologically subtle foundation for examining the emergence, maintenance, and potential mitigation of cognitive-affective disturbances.

As pure sentience, *vijñāna* plays a key role in the process of rebirth in early Buddhist thought. The Buddha specifically associates the formation and development of consciousness with the formation and growth of name and form (*nāma-rūpa*) and, consequently, with the formation and growth of karmic formations (*saṃkhāra*) (Analayo, 2003; Gethin, 1998). This statement indicates that consciousness is not simply a passive observer of embodiment but an active element in the dynamic nature of conditioned existence. *Vijñana* assumes a fresh psychophysical form and enters the process of continual growth of karmic formations. In this view, consciousness does not merely enter into a new embodied being; rather, it shapes and is shaped by karma's continuity.

The inclusion of action (*karma*) in Buddhist ontology is philosophically conclusive because it does not allow for the reification of consciousness (*vijñana*) into a fixed metaphysical principle. In early Buddhist tradition, *vijñana* is frequently the persisting element that perpetuates rebirth through lifetimes (Wijesekera 1964). However, this continuity is not self-sustaining; it is dynamically predetermined by willpower. Therefore, consciousness is inculcated in the moral causal grid in early

Buddhism, whereby volitional actions continue to construct the qualitative texture of experience. This interdependence is systematically developed by Vasubandhu, who states that karmically wholesome *(kuśala)* acts purify and refine the mental continuum, whereas unwholesome (*akuśala*) acts develop defilement. of the same (Vasubandhu, 1991, Vol 3, pp.63-65). On the ontological level, this action is important: it takes the analysis of the mind out of a substantialist scheme and into a procedural account of morally organised becoming. From this perspective, consciousness is not independent and simply epiphenomenal but is recursively determined by intentional and embodied action as part of the causal relations of karma.

This continuity was not necessarily an unequivocal element of the early *Pāli* discourses, which did not explicitly present consciousness as a substance carrier that passed undamaged between lives, but was later systematised by Buddhist scholasticism. According to Johansson (1979), Buddhist thought gradually came to regard existence as a process of accumulation, in which current experience is constantly influenced by previous karmic conditioning. In this later interpretive context, *vijñana* can be thought of as a stream-like process that flows unceasingly across time unless stopped. Although the earlier *Nikāyas* are explicit about the conditional interdependence of consciousness and karmic formations, the theoretical elaboration of this relationship becomes more evident in the *Abhidharma* and *Yogācāra* schools of thought. Later developments are where the problem of conditioning and the conditioning of consciousness, in terms of *saṃskāra*, emerges as a major philosophical issue. The shifting Buddhist discussion of *vijñana* is therefore an effort to balance momentariness, continuity, and karmic causality on a strictly non-substantialist platform.

In both the modern philosophy of mind and Buddhist phenomenology, such a framework emphasises that any satisfactory theory of consciousness should be sensitive to its inherent normative and causal situatedness. Buddhist analysis is thus a precursor to enactive and process-oriented theories of mind, from which it follows that cognition cannot be intelligently detached from the embodied activity and purposive action. From this perspective, consciousness, embodiment, and action are irreducibly complex triadic structures.

Cognitive Awareness and the Structure of Object-Directed Consciousness

The second significant aspect of the mind that Buddhism investigates is cognitive awareness, which emerges from direct reliance on contact with certain cognitive objects. This realisation occurs when a proper object penetrates the respective sense sphere, strikes a healthy sense capacity (*indriya*), and is supplemented with sufficient attention (Ànalayo, 2003; Gethin, 1998). Cognitive consciousness (*vijñāna*) is therefore essentially relational and event-structured, not self-sustaining. This process is examined in classical Buddhist psychology as having six modalities of awareness: visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, and mental.

Notably, mental consciousness (*mano-vijñana*) represents the sixth mode of cognition, which extends beyond the purely sensory domain. According to *Abhidharma* analysis, this form of consciousness arises not only in response to sensory inputs but also in relation to internally generated objects, such as thoughts, memories, and conceptual constructions. Cognitive awareness, therefore, acts on two main object fields: (a) sensory objects revealed by the five senses and consciousnesses, and (b) mental objects (*dharmas*) that are revealed by the mind. In addition, mental consciousness has a reflexive and synthesising ability, in the sense that it is able to record previous instances of awareness as determined cognitions, but at the same time initiate ideational actions derived in the context of initial and persistent thought (*vitarka-vicāra*). This functional extension of *mano-vijnaana* is clearly formulated in Vasubandhu's analysis of mental cognition (Vasubandhu, 1991, Vol. 1, pp. 147–15). This reflexive ability is strongly associated with the workings of *manas* and the importance of language as the channel through which thought and the articulation of concepts occur. In this respect, the organisation of mental consciousness cannot be well comprehended without the mediation of language. The Buddhist school constantly reinforces the idea that conceptual cognition is liable to growth *(papañca)* and the proliferative tendency of thought to produce extended patterns of interpretive making.

The initial discourses provide a specific phenomenological account of this process: consciousness occurs depending on the sense organ and object; the meeting of all three results in contact *(phassa/sparshas)*; contact leads to feeling; feeling to perception; perception to thought; and thought to the proliferation of concepts (*papañca-saññā-saṃkhā*) (Bodhi, 2000; Ānalayo, 2003). This proliferative movement overspreads experience with increasingly complex apperceptive structures that cut across the past, present, and future.

What emerges from this analysis is the inseparable connection between cognitive awareness and linguistic-conceptual activity. Conceptual proliferation reproduces itself by reciprocal implication with (i) contact, which preconditions the emergence of cognitive awareness; (ii) apperception, which is the company and organisation of experience; and (iii) discursive thought itself. In this view, the philosophical and reflective value of Buddhism is not a premature sermon on the coming scientific method but an elaboration of a rigorous, internally consistent explanation of consciousness based on a disciplined first-person exploration. Its continued focus on attentional purification and the immediate study of mental activity provides a different epistemic core to the study of the nature of experience with phenomenological richness and analytical accuracy.

For most, the Buddhist introspective approach to disentangling the conscious mind in a first-person, subjective narrative is problematic, as a paradigm like this seems to erode the subject-object dichotomy on which traditional scientific enquiry is based (Spener, 2017). Spener explains how behaviourism and later cognitive psychology both questioned the scientific status of introspection, stressing the perceived lack of objectivity and replicability. Strappasan (2020) shows how behaviourism rejected introspection as a scientific method, emphasising only observable behaviour as legitimate data, reflecting a deep suspicion of first-person methods in conventional sciences. However, one can introspectively discern the qualitative characteristics of emotional and cognitive states, distinguishing agitation from composure with reasonable clarity. Indeed, we observe not only the object of consciousness but also our own consciousness of the object (Wallace 1999). In response to the rationale for the prerequisite that distinguishes between instrument and object of investigation, we may argue that, though there is no separation in the strict sense between instrument (attention) and object of investigation (psychic events), however, the Buddhist meditative technique of introspection obviates the need to differentiate between the state of consciousness that observes and the state of consciousness that is observed in the object of observation.

Dorjee (2016) argues that the primary methodological difficulty in contemplative science lies in the introspective nature of meditation practices, which makes the reliable capture and validation of first- and second-person data particularly challenging. Buddhist contemplative practice maintains that although a strict separation between attention and psychic events may not exist, disciplined introspection enables one state of consciousness to scrutinise another. This implies that both are states of consciousness, but one becomes an instrument for observing the other. It is also common in quantum mechanics to accept that there is an inextricable relationship between the measuring apparatus and the measured phenomenon. However, no physicist has ruled out such a measurement. According to Buddhist psychology, luminosity and spontaneity are the qualities of a higher state of consciousness, which is the deep substratum ground of one's being, whereas flickering and oblivion are the qualities of the individual mind at the surface relative ground. Buddhist meditative practice aims to penetrate a deep state of consciousness and observe the mind's functioning at the surface level. When attention is settled in a deep state of equilibrium, one is temporally free from slackness and excitement. In such a state of consciousness, one spontaneously experiences inner peace and well-being. To attain such a state of "being," one requires not only constant meditative practices but also harmonious relations with others, which is said to be the central theme of Buddhist ethics (Dalai Lama, 1999). The higher state of consciousness is metaphorically described as being empty and luminous, and the afflictive imbalance of any kind has never unsettled it. This is known as the state of primordial consciousness, in the sense that it is before the conceptual demarcation of subject and object, mind and matter, and even existence and non-existence. However, the description of the higher state of primordial consciousness is questionable. It can be criticised as speculative thinking because Buddhists use metaphor and symbolism to describe such a state of consciousness. However, one should acknowledge that language has its own limitations in describing experiential truths. It is debatable whether there is such a state of consciousness or if it is merely a speculative theory of consciousness. Nevertheless, observations from a Buddhist perspective make it clear that Buddhist insights into the attentiveness of the mind and different states of consciousness serve significant functions not only in demystifying the problem of consciousness but also in a deeper understanding of the relationship between mental representation and its referent in the natural world.

Methodological Integration: Buddhist Contemplation and Neurophenomenology

Unlike many phenomenologists, several philosophers and scientists working at the intersection of neurobiology and cognitive psychology have offered influential conceptual frameworks for the study of consciousness. Most prominent among these is Ned Block, who in 1995 proposed the now-canonical distinction between "access consciousness" and "phenomenal consciousness." According to Ned Block, a mental state qualifies as access consciousness when its informational content is poised for use in reasoning, decision-making, verbal report, and the rational control of behaviour (Block, 1995). Access consciousness thus marks the functional availability of mental content within an organism's cognitive economy. By contrast, phenomenal consciousness refers to the experiential dimension of mentality—the fact that there is "something it is like" for the subject to undergo a given state. This qualitative or felt aspect of experience, often discussed under the rubric of *qualia*, appears to exceed purely functional characterisation.

From a neurobiological perspective, phenomenal consciousness is typically investigated by seeking its neural correlates. However, Block's conceptual distinction suggests that functional accessibility and experiential presence may come apart. This tension invites a fruitful comparison with Edmund Husserl's phenomenology. Husserl's thesis that consciousness is always consciousness *of* something foregrounds intentional structure; when read in an empirical rather than a transcendental register, it resonates with contemporary attempts to map experiential contents onto neural processes. In this light, *qualia* may be heuristically aligned with Husserl's notion of the *noema*, the intended object as experienced. However, this parallel is not exact: Husserl's *noema* is structurally relational and meaning-laden, whereas *qualia* are often treated as intrinsic and non-relational properties. Contemporary neuroscience generally treats both access consciousness and phenomenal consciousness as integral to the architecture of experience, although their precise relationship remains contested. The enduring significance of Block's distinction lies in its capacity to clarify explanatory targets while opening a productive dialogue between analytic philosophy, phenomenology, and cognitive neuroscience.

Hence, as far as the concept of experience is concerned, both notions of consciousness have been accorded importance. In all experiences, the focus of attention goes beyond access consciousness to phenomenal consciousness; that is, the content of experience. The trajectory of contemporary scientific enquiry into consciousness indicates that a purely third-person approach, however sophisticated in its measurement of neural processes, does not yet provide an adequate account of subjective experience or resolve the explanatory gap between physical mechanisms and phenomenality. Conversely, exclusively introspective approaches risk remaining methodologically opaque without systematic frameworks for validation and intersubjective reliability. A comprehensive study of consciousness, therefore, requires an epistemic framework capable of integrating the strengths of both methodological domains. A philosophical analysis of experience is needed to examine the nature and characteristics of its content. Most contemporary theorists agree that both forms of consciousness are important foundations of experience. Access consciousness accounts for the functional role of mental content — its availability for cognition, memory, report, and action — whereas phenomenal consciousness captures the intrinsic qualitative character of experience. Recent developments in the cognitive sciences have begun to open the way to such integrative possibilities. Francisco Varela's proposal of neuro-phenomenology is particularly significant in this regard.. Varela argues that the scientific study of consciousness requires a disciplined incorporation of first-person phenomenological reports into neuroscientific research, achieved through rigorously trained forms of introspection capable of producing stable, intersubjectively verifiable experiential data (Varela, 1996). Neuro-phenomenology suggests that neither third-person neural measurements nor untrained subjective introspection alone can adequately address the hard problem; instead, methodological cooperation between them is required. This approach resonates closely with the Buddhist model of refined attentional training and the introspective examination of mental states, suggesting that contemplative traditions provide a sophisticated methodology that may serve as a resource for contemporary enquiry. The convergence of Buddhist contemplative practice and neuro-phenomenological science illustrates the possibility of a research paradigm in which subjective and objective approaches to consciousness mutually illuminate one another.

Conclusion

Reflecting on the above discussion of contemporary debates on consciousness, the scientific paradigm of the 20th century, largely defined by methodological materialism, has made notable progress in identifying the neural correlates of cognitive functions. However, it has not adequately addressed the realm of subjective experience. The dominance of third-person methodologies in observation, measurement, and modelling within modern cognitive science has led to a tendency to equate consciousness with brain processes or to reduce it to them. Yet the enduring challenge of the so-called hard problem highlights the limitations of this approach. Despite increasingly detailed accounts of the neural correlates of cognition, the underlying reasons and mechanisms of the phenomenology associated with these processes remain unexplained. This explanatory gap underscores the structural limitations of methods that rely solely on third-person perspectives.

In contrast, another methodological extreme, undisciplined introspection, suffers from well-recognised problems, such as epistemic opacity, poor replicability, and limited intersubjective validity. Buddhism provides modern cognitive science not only with simple introspective information but also with a highly rigorous system of first-person enquiry. The classical Buddhist tradition, especially in its *Abhidharma* and *Yogācāra* phases, fine-tunes attention, meta-awareness, and phenomenological discrimination through a prolonged training process. This transforms introspection into a skilful cognitive process that yields reliable, communicable experiential data. The modern dilemma is not to favour either third-person empiricism or first-person enquiry but rather to articulate an integrative research structure. Neurophenomenology is a step in this direction by operationalising the Buddhist insight that disciplined phenomenological observation and empirical neuroscience can be mutually constraining practices in the science of consciousness.

Neurophenomenology is proposed by Francisco Varela aa modern methodological architecture for operationalising this insight in scientific research. It's proposal for "mutual constraints" between disciplined first-person observations and third-person neural measurements offers a solution to the historical separation of phenomenology and neuroscience. Notably, this method does not fragment the experience into neural activity nor is subjectivity extrinsic to empirical research; instead, it aims to establish a dynamically reciprocal connection between the two.

Advancements in consciousness studies are likely to be achieved through the establishment of genuinely interdisciplinary programs. The current challenge is both methodological and philosophical: to develop expert phenomenological observations, advanced neuroscientific measurements, and protocols that facilitate the mutual influence and constraint among these elements. The emerging dialogue between Buddhist contemplative science and neurophenomenology represents a promising avenue for developing a more comprehensive and coherent science of consciousness.

End Notes

[1] The hard problem of consciousness, formulated by David Chalmers, is best understood in contrast to the "easy problems" of consciousness. The easy problems concern the functional and cognitive mechanisms of the mind—such as perception, attention, memory, and behavioural report—which can, in principle, be explained through standard neuroscientific and computational methods. By contrast, the hard problem asks why and how these physical and functional processes are accompanied by subjective experience—why there is "something it is like" to be a conscious subject. This highlights an explanatory gap between third-person accounts of brain activity and first-person qualitative experience (qualia). The distinction remains central to debates in the Philosophy of Mind and contemporary consciousness studies. See [1] Chalmers (1995: pp 200–219)

[2] Cognitive science emerged in the mid-twentieth century as an interdisciplinary effort to scientifically study the mind. Reacting against behaviourism's neglect of

internal mental processes, scholars from psychology, linguistics, computer science, neuroscience, philosophy, and anthropology reconceptualised cognition as information processing. A decisive moment in the cognitive revolution was Noam Chomsky's 1959 critique of behaviourist accounts of language, which emphasised the role of innate mental structures. Cognitive science thus developed as an integrated framework for investigating perception, memory, language, and reasoning through empirical and theoretical methods. See: (Gardner, 1985) and (Chomsky,1959).

[3]*Pratityasamutpāda* (dependent origination) is the Buddhist doctrine that everything arises from conditions. It is formulated in early Buddhist literature and refutes both eternalism and nihilism by depicting reality as a dynamic process known as conditioned co-arising. In the *Saṃyutta Nikaya* (SN 12.61), the Buddha says: "When this exists, that comes to be; with this, that arises." The doctrine is explained in detail using the twelvefold chain (*dvādaśāṅga-pratītyasamutpāda*) from ignorance (*avidyā*) to ageing-and-death (*jarāmaraṇa*). Dependent origination accounts for the continuity of *saṃsāra* without postulating a permanent person, focusing instead on causal continuity within the five aggregates. Philosophically, dependent origination is the ontological and epistemic foundation of Buddhism, justifying the analysis of suffering and the possibility of liberation. Its understanding of conditioned arising grounds the Buddhist commitment to impermanence (*anitya*) and non-self (*anātman*). See: Saṃyutta Nikāya 12.61 (*Paccaya Sutta*), in Bhikkhu Bodhi (trans.), The Connected Discourses of the Buddha. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000.

[4] In early Buddhism, *vijñāna* (consciousness) refers to the momentary, dependently originated phenomenon that arises in conjunction with a specific sense faculty and object. It is counted among the five aggregates (*pañcakkhandha*) and functions as discriminative cognition in cognitive events, rather than as a persistent self. Early canonical literature, such as the *Saṃyutta Nikāya* (SN 12), portrays *vijñāna* as co-conditioning and conditioned by name-and-form (*nāma-rūpa*), thus participating in the dynamic cycle of experience and rebirth. {Bodhi, B. (Trans.). (2000) Semantically, the term supports a processual view of the mind: consciousness is episodic, relational, and dependently arisen, subject to impermanence (*anicca*) and non-self (*anatta*). This interpretation is strongly supported in contemporary research (Johansson, 1979; Wijesekera, 1964).

[5]In Sanskrit - *kuśalākuśalāṃ karmaśayāṃ saṃtānaṃ pariśuddhy-apariśuddhibhyām pariṇāmayanti. See - Vasubandhu. (1991). Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam (L. de La Vallée Poussin, Trans.; English trans. by L. M. Pruden). Asian Humanities Press. See Chapter IV, esp. discussion of karmāśaya and saṃtāna (pp. 63–65).*

[6] In Sanskrit *manovijñānaṃ dharmālambanaṃ manodhātusamanantaram*. For further discussion in this regard, see Vasubandhu. (1991). *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam* (Vol. 1, L. de La Vallée Poussin, Trans.; English trans. by L. M. Pruden). Asian Humanities Press.

[7]Neurophenomenology, as proposed by Francisco Varela, constitutes a research agenda aimed at bridging the explanatory gap between first-person phenomenology and third-person neuroscience. Dissatisfied with solely objective approaches to the study of consciousness, Varela advocated integrating rigorous phenomenological reports with neurobiological findings through a methodology of "mutual constraints." In his essay "Neurophenomenology: A Methodological Remedy for the Hard Problem" (1996), he posited that trained individuals, often influenced by meditative practices, can provide valid reports of subjective experience that enhance the understanding of neurological activity. In "The Embodied Mind" (Varela, Thompson, and Rosch, 1991), he had previously endorsed an enactive approach to cognition, emphasising embodied, enactive experience. Neurophenomenology, therefore, offers a systematic integration of phenomenology with cognitive science, not with the intent to reduce experience to brain processes, but to establish a mutually informative, empirical relationship between the two. See: Varela, Francisco J. "Neurophenomenology: A Methodological Remedy for the Hard Problem." Journal of Consciousness Studies 3, no. 4 (1996): 330–349. Varela, Francisco J., Evan Thompson and Eleanor Rosch. The Embodied Mind. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991.

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Article

Father-Daughter Relationship in the Absence of Mother: Psychoanalytical Reading of the Movie *Anupama* (1966)

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Karuna Abhinandini*
Ritika Beniwal**

Abstract

This paper attempts a psychoanalytic exploration of the 1966 Hrishikesh Mukherjee movie *Anupama,* focusing on the complex father-daughter relationship in the absence of a maternal figure. While situating fatherhood in the Indian cultural context, the analysis explores the consequences of the death of the mother during childbirth on the psychodynamic developmental processes of the psyche. Central to our analysis is the Freudian postulation that a child develops a formative conception of self and identity during the initial carer connection, particularly by the mother. Questions, therefore, arise about the child when the mother is not there to deliver the infant from the dyadic relationship to the Oedipal triad. Does the father function completely collapse because the proper oedipal setting will never be reached? These questions demand better insight as single parenting, especially for fathers, is becoming common in India.

* Karuna Abhinandini, Guest Faculty in Psychology, SOL, University of Delhi.
** Ritika Beniwal, Independent Researcher, New Delhi.

Keywords : Oedipal triad, Introjection, Separation-Individuation, Detached Personality Structure, Ganesha Complex, Drama Triangle

'*The father is decisive in the destiny of the individual.*' (Jung, 1961)

This paper revisits the 1966 critically acclaimed Hrishikesh Mukherjee Hindi film, *Anupama*, through a psychoanalytic lens, that explores the father-daughter relationship in the absence of a mother. The analysis situates fatherhood in Indian culture as a complex and culturally embedded issue, where the paternal relationship plays a central role.

The movie is based on a real-life story. Mukherjee, who delicately handled the emotionally fractured relationship of a father and daughter that never got to bloom, later reflected that the film was based on the life of his cousin. In an interview with a prominent newspaper, *Indian Express*, Mukherjee recounted that: 'My aunt died during childbirth, my uncle became an alcoholic, and he couldn't stand his daughter. For Anupama's relationship with the poet who rescues her, I used my imagination.'

From a psychoanalytical perspective, especially in the Indian context, Kakar (1994) describes the father not simply as a punitive or restrictive figure, but with a range of roles such as a nurturer, moral guide, and a mediator. The father's contribution, according to Kakar, is distinct from mothering. Rather than solely a disciplinarian, the father emerges as a mediator between the mother and child, who tempers the child's emotional turbulence and provides stability. The relief feature is also protective, offering an antidote to excessive maternal enmeshment or 'too much mothering'. This is seen in the concept of '*Ganesha* Complex' (Kakar, 2005) where the father introduces boundaries and 'otherness' to the child, facilitating individuation while maintaining harmony within the family structure. While the inner world is developed by the constant introjection of the mother(ing), the external world is made accessible by the father. The father forms an ideal figure for his child in terms of what and how to think.

In an exclusive symbiotic relationship between the mother and her child, the infant comes to see the world as a safe and secure space. This is the pre-oedipal stage, wherein the mother-child bond is central, and there isn't an awareness of the father as a separate entity for the infant. It is after this stage, with the introduction of the father, that marks a shift towards individuation with his moralising and civilising function. But, in its allegiance to the naturalised hegemonic heteronormative view of parenting, psychoanalytic literature fails to answer such questions as: What happens to the child when the mother dies during childbirth (a theme central to the movie *Anupama*)? What happens when the mother is not there to deliver the infant from their dyadic relationship to the Oedipal triad? Does the father's function completely collapse because the proper oedipal setting will never be reached?

There are many narratives where the baby is made a villain in the mother's and/or the father's story through no fault of its own, except its existence. The movie *Anupama* bears witness to this trope. Mohan Sharma (actor Tarun Bose), a man in his late thirties, is grief-stricken when his wife dies in childbirth. Struggling to make sense of the said loss, and to be a father to his new-born, he finds refuge in work and alcohol. His hatred towards his daughter, Uma (a role played by Sharmila Tagore), during the day when he is sober, is starkly contrasted with the love he permits himself to feel for her in a drunken state. His inability to hold these paradoxical feelings for his daughter translates into his cutting off a part of himself, as if to sever an inner conflict he cannot bear, from his consciousness. He is only able to access this other part when drunk, which suspends both his memory and his ego, making use of splitting as a defence to deal with his reality (McWilliams, 2011). As a movie, *Anupama* is observant, layered, multi-faceted, and ahead of its time with its feminist narrative. It is able to invoke deep sympathy for Uma without demonising Mohan, her father. It shows the complicated relationship of a grieving father with his daughter, who he completely loathes, while simultaneously being aware of the unfairness he subjects her to.

Uma, too, has to cut off a part of herself to maintain her only parental relationship, however terrorising it may be. She keeps herself stoic and silent, a screen for the father to project his hate onto. Even when Mohan, the father, tries showing affection in his drunk state, she remains completely still and inanimate (pretending to sleep) and allows him to unburden his guilty feelings onto her. So much so that we hear Uma's voice for the first time one hour into the movie. Her first communication is, in fact, in the form of a song; '*Kuch dil ne kaha/ kuch bhi nahi// Aisi bhi baatein hoti hai/*' (My heart said something… yet nothing [came out of it]. Some conversations happen this way as well).

The song succinctly conveys her own suppressed and burdened emotions, and inner conflict. It reiterates how she has not needed words so far. Her silence is heavy with meaning. The song further goes on to say that 'nobody stops to ask whether the flower buds (symbolizing Uma) are laughing or crying', underscoring her invisible suffering

Heinz Kohut, D. W. Winnicott, and other psychoanalytical theorists, including Freud, postulated that a child develops a formative conception of self during the initial carer connection by progressively internalising their caregiver(s) care and identity. We might say that the caregiver (mother in particular) is central to the formation of early conception of self and, therefore, identity. In the movie, Sarla (the house-help who stayed in the family even after the mother's demise), performed by Dulari, obtains the position of the primary, but powerless caretaker, in Uma's life. However, still entrenched in the powerful shackles of patriarchy and cognisant of her role as just the caretaker and not the mother, Sarla remains another quiet and passive bearer of Mohan's indifference, a trait also internalised by Uma as a self-preservation technique against his wrath.

Ever since her birth, Uma's life unfolds in the framework of the Karpman Drama Triangle. It is a psychological model that explains a form of a triadic relationship wherein all the three members cyclically shift and oscillate between their roles of a Rescuer, Persecuted, and Victim, and all are shackled by resentment and shame (Karpman, 2007). In this dynamic, Mohan occupies the role of the Persecuted; Uma, the Victim; and Sarla, the Rescuer. These roles, too, are not static. While Mohan emerges as the Persecutor due to his neglect and emotional abandonment of Uma, at the same time he is a Victim of fate; a bereaved man trying to process the loss of his wife. Uma is the obvious Victim, born(e) from this tragedy, who is denied the affection and stability every child craves and deserves. Sarla, then occupies the role of the Rescuer, who tries to provide Uma with warmth, care, and emotional support which she is otherwise deprived of.

What makes this triangle so insidious is that all the characters are so unconsciously bound to their roles, that they also start to reinforce each other's position without realising it. Mohan's apathy and cold demeanour keeps Uma fragile and silent. Her helplessness reinforces Sarla to shelter her, and save her. Under Sarla's protection, Uma refrains from developing her own voice. Uma's stoicism also does not encourage Mohan to confront and reflect on his own conflicted emotions. The triangle, thus, is self-perpetuating and driven by shame and repression.

Infants discover through the father that they cannot possess their mother to themselves, since the father also desires her. This necessary transition from a pre-oedipal to the oedipal state (Freud, 1930), or from 'Symbiosis to Separation' (Mahler et al, 1975) is believed to be a catalyst for the child's gradual separation from the mother. Freud conceptualises this as the reality principle. Separation is crucial in developing a distinct personality, and he asserts that there exists a prior solid entwined bond. In *Anupama*, the mother figure is entirely absent from the daughter's life. Since the dyad doesn't exist, the father has no scope for intervention. Mohan maintains the same distant position that he did in the pre-oedipal state, wherein he is considered the third (to the mother-daughter dyad). Uma already exists in an individuated state by birth, a phase wherein the identity is still malleable. Thus, in the context of a threatening and distant father figure, there is a potential for a skewed identity and self-development. This can be understood through Winnicott's theory of 'true self' and 'false self' (1965) and Horney's concept of 'neurotic self' (1950). Winnicott explains that the 'true self' emerges when the child is able to safely express emotions and desires, fostered by responsive caregiving, ideally the mother. If, due to lack of maternal support and a threatening father, the child cannot develop this authentic core, they construct a 'false self' that can adapt to external expectations and suppress true feelings. Horney describes a related process, where unmet emotional needs and rigidity in parenting leads to 'neurotic self', that is, a distorted sense of identity that compensates for feelings of insecurity.

In *Anupama*, Uma's inability to synchronise her sense of self with authentic care results in withdrawal and difficulty expressing emotions, reflecting both, Winnicott's 'false self': an outward adaptation masking inner invulnerability; and Horney's 'neurotic self': a lasting sense of maladjustment visible across different aspects of life (moving away from the personality of Uma). Uma chooses to keep quiet and withdraws, refusing to express her emotions in their entirety. It is silence that she seeks refuge in and through which she communicates. She also walks slowly and meekly, only occupying the corners of the room, eats separately, and carries a look of haunted fragility. She limits her exploration to what her father and other psychologically significant figures in her life would find acceptable, and feels disconnected from the remainder of the world. In her muteness, there is also a paralysis of language that betrays all her experiences. Her voice and communication would also suggest bringing herself in and breaking the relationship with her father (as dysfunctional as it might be). She would no longer be his blank screen; instead, a mirror that reminds him of his guilt, inadequacy, and hatred for himself, all that he has been trying to evade. Such repression of a huge part of her identity, her perceptions of herself and her father, are distorted. In a way, she is dependent on Mohan to experience herself as a whole.

Since the pre-oedipal state doesn't exist in Uma's case, there is a severe disconnect with the father during the oedipal state, yet she aims at gaining his approval. However, with the Karpman triangle filled with shame and resentment, there is not much room for love. She projects onto Mohan the traits that she concealed in herself. The obedient daughter idealises her father, projecting her own favourable aspects onto him while internalizing his guilt as her own. The father becomes both the object of desire and the persecutory object. This constant oscillation between love and hate during the Oedipal stage is an apprehensive, terrorising, and confused state for the child.

The first experience of a healthy but delayed oedipal state comes with the introduction of Ashok, a role played by prominent actor Dharmendra. The characterisation of Ashok as an enabler, instead of the rescuer of the damsel in distress, is quite a feminist move. He acts as a protective figure that Uma was searching for in her own father, and thus, there is an immediate longed-for attachment. He receives her and becomes a witness to her pain; he lets her deposit her difficult emotions onto him, thereby unburdening herself. Additionally, the emotional quality of Uma's life and her circumstances deeply inspire him so much that he writes a novel called 'Anupama'. For Uma, there is an instant gratification of needs which were previously mishandled and bypassed. She never had an outer witness who could carry her in their thoughts, making her unable to introject them as an inner witness to her inner world (Felman and Laub, 1992). By carrying her in his fiction story, Ashok makes it possible for her to feel the realness and continuity of her existence.

Keeping the nuance intact, the ending of the movie is not an ideal happy one, wherein the father finally, and loudly, accepts the daughter. For Mohan and Uma, it is the first and the only time she speaks to her father with an averted gaze. She announces her decision to leave, stating that this house can never become a home for her. She implies that she realises how difficult it is for both of them to be reminders of deep guilt and pain for each other, and that she wishes to unburden herself finally, and maybe, in that, unburden her father as well. She asks for his blessing, a tender moment in which Uma makes an attempt to reach out to her father by acknowledging how lonely his inner world might be as well.

Conceptualised through the lens of developmental psychoanalysis, Uma's departure operates as a moment of individuation, a process Mahler describes as the consolidation of the child's individuality and separation from the parent (1975). As Uma moves away from the pervasive environment that includes her father, her 'dependence' of experiencing herself through her father transforms into an equivalence, an attempt towards the completion of herself. Uma is no longer defined solely by her father's presence but actively internalises the witnessing and support offered by Ashok. This echoes Kohut's concept of 'transmuting internalization' wherein an empathic response from an external figure (Ashok, in this narrative) is internalised, supporting the emerging sense of self (1971). Uma's decision to leave and face the world marks her movement from a false and distorted sense of self, formed out of adaptation and compliance, to a more authentic self, shaped by her own agency and the consolidating comfort that Ashok provides.

'Ganesh Complex' may be seen as an indigenous alternative to the otherwise western theory. It is an inversion of the oedipal complex. While the focus of oedipal complex is on parricide, the Ganesh Complex, instead, is about filicide. The Oedipal complex underlines the child's desire and closeness to the mother, and the following envious feelings towards the father. The Ganesh complex turns this on its head. The emphasis is on the desire of father to share an intimate relationship with his wife. He inadvertently becomes envious of the intimate bond that the mother and child shares. *Anupama*, interestingly, fits neither the western nor the indigenous psychoanalytic theory. The mother does not exist for the child to want a close relationship with and be envious of the father for his relationship with her. Nor is the wife alive for the husband to be envious of the mother-child bond. The triad, therefore, remains incomplete on all fronts, leaving the father vying for his wife in absentia at the expense of the child; and the child vying for the father at the expense of itself. Might we infer that with an incomplete oedipal triad, the father is arrested in his function as a husband, unable to transform his role of father and, therefore, subjecting the child to a psychical death? He does so by not only failing to provide a secure base, but by essentially being absent to give shape to the child's self-identity. Caught between his roles as a husband and a father, does he unwittingly condemn his child to a similar struggle between a need for closeness and the realisation of inherent individuation? The child tries to survive this symbolic death by constantly introjecting the negative external attributes as their own, and any positive quality onto the other, thereby rationalising their fate and feelings. How can they, then, possibly realise their ideal self when no secure base exists for them to explore? How might they overcome the basic anxiety experienced: the terror of being fragile, incapable, and dependent on an unreliable parent? Isn't their maladaptive use of defences, and lack of identity, inevitable? Cultural norms too hinder the process of role taking. Fatherhood, with its traditional connotations of provision and protection, rarely, if at all, acknowledges psychological assurance and security. If the father cannot function as such, how does the child, in the absence of any other parent, get to be one? The entry of Father into the child's life has always been mediated and guided by the mother, and has hinged on her presence. As a single parent, the challenge, then, is to make them realise the father function, who so far has not been asked to arrive on the psychological plane for the child. These questions acquire salience given the rise of single parenthood in India, especially for fathers.

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Article

Digitisation of RTI Processes: A Study of authorities and citizens' experiences

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Anil Kumar*
Venus**

Abstract

The Right to Information (RTI) Act is regarded as an empowering instrument for citizens, enabling them to access governmental information and consequently hold authorities accountable for their activities. It reinforces democratic principles by cultivating an informed and engaged populace. Further, the integration of digitisation into governance procedures has transformed how governments deliver services, and the digitisation of RTI processes is a significant advancement in promoting transparency, accountability, and procedural efficiency fosters trust between the government and citizens. Digitisation of RTI processes has optimised administrative processes for public authorities, minimised the physical filing of RTI requests and enhanced the monitoring of RTI applications. Nonetheless, there are certain

* Assistant Professor, Department of Public Administration, Centre for Distance and Online Education (CDOE), Panjab University, Chandigarh

**Research Scholar, Department of Public Administration, Panjab University, Chandigarh

problems in the adoption of digitisation, like insufficient technical training, constrained infrastructure and opposition to change. However, citizens value the convenience of online RTI submissions, expedited responses and improved openness, but they also encounter obstacles such as digital illiteracy, language hurdles and unreliable internet connectivity. This study seeks to examine the experiences of both public authorities and citizens in Chandigarh, India, amidst the transition from conventional paper-based RTI processes to online filing of RTI applications. Based on primary data, the research highlights the perceived advantages and challenges encountered by both the public authorities and the citizens.

The study finds that although digitisation presents significant potential to enhance the RTI framework, a nuanced strategy that focuses on inclusion or digital awareness and robust infrastructure development to address the varied needs of the citizens, as well as public authorities, is essential for its sustained success.

Keywords: Digitisation, Transparency, Accountability, Governance, Digital Illiteracy, Inclusion, Democratic

Introduction

Good governance, recognised globally, entails effective and efficient management characterised by transparency, accountability and public engagement. Access to information is crucial for meaningful citizen engagement, enabling informed decision-making, policy assessment and governmental accountability (Borah, 2013; Sultana, 2020). Numerous nations have established the Right to Information (RTI) as a legal framework due to its significance. The concept originated from Sweden's Freedom of the Press Act of 1766. Other nations that implemented it are Finland (1951), the USA (1966), Australia (1982), South Africa (2000), and the UK (2000). The Right to Information Act was subsequently enacted in India in 2005. As reported by the SDG Knowledge Hub (2019), 125 nations have enacted Right to Information (RTI) legislation. International initiatives like SDG 16.10 and Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights acknowledge access to information as a fundamental right (Gole, 2021). The Right to Information (RTI) is a crucial component of democracy since it empowers citizens with the necessary information to self-govern. This parallels James Madison's assertion, i.e. "People who mean to be their own governors must arm themselves with the power that knowledge gives."

Therefore given such an immense importance of this historical development and the rise of e- governance lately among nations, this research paper seeks to assess the impact of digitising RTI processes on the efficacy and accessibility of the Right to Information framework in Chandigarh, India. It aims to comprehend the experiences, advantages and obstacles encountered by both citizens and public authorities throughout the shift from conventional paper-based to digital RTI systems. Ultimately, it examines whether digitisation has enhanced openness, accountability and efficiency, while highlighting the infrastructural and inclusivity challenges that must be addressed for the digital RTI framework to achieve its maximum potential.

Evolution of RTI Act in India

The RTI framework arose as an effort to transition the democratic process towards greater participation, fostering deeper democratic engagement and inclusivity for all (Singh, 2010). In India, the need for the right to information has been felt by the people since independence because of the existence of the Official Secrets Act (OSA) 1923, which was enacted by the British during the colonial era (Second Administrative Reforms Commission, 2006). The Official Secrets Act fostered an environment of secrecy, where confidentiality became standard practice and openness was rarely exercised. Also, the Civil Service Conduct Rules of 1964 restrict the sharing of official documents with unauthorized individuals or entities. Such governments that act with hidden agendas or excessive secrecy risk eroding public trust. Therefore, in response to growing public concerns about increasing governmental secrecy in India, the Janata Paarty government, led by Prime Minister Morarji Desai, initiated reforms by establishing a working group to examine potential modifications to the Official Secrets Act, 1923. But the working group suggested no reforms to the Act. Later, in 2000, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government introduced the Freedom of Information Bill in Parliament. Although it was passed by the Lok Sabha in 2002, it was not implemented. One of the prominent NGOs advocating for a Right to Information law was the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) in Rajasthan. Since 1994, "it persistently campaigned for citizens' right to demand information, emphasizing that "the right to know is fundamental to the right to live." The movement led to the establishment of the National Campaign for People's Right to Information, advocating for citizens' access to information. Eventually, in 2005, the United Progressive Alliance I (UPA I) government passed the Right to Information Act[2].

Relevance of Digitisation in RTI Processes

E-governance is becoming more and more necessary in today's globalised world due to societal shifts and technical breakthroughs, and its primary goal is to guarantee that the government offers a digital solution that enables the efficient and effective delivery of all services that the citizens need (Mandowara & Thomas, 2023). Therefore, to ensure that the conveying of information is transparent and efficient, the digitisation of Right to Information (RTI) processes is very relevant within public administration. Traditionally, RTI requests were filed manually, which was often time-consuming, and there were delayed responses due to inefficient bureaucracy. Digitisation of the RTI

[2]https://egyankosh.ac.in/bitstream/123456789/57236/1/Unit12.pdf

processes tackles these challenges by streamlining the process to file RTI requests for citizens, to track the progress and receive the responses to their RTI applications online, which is cost-effective and time-efficient (OnlineRTI, 2024). Furthermore, accessibility is increased as through digital platforms, citizens can file RTI requests sitting in the comfort of their homes and reducing the need to visit government offices physically. Digitisation for public authorities has been very fruitful in managing the RTI requests by enabling systematic record-keeping, effective tracking and prompt responses, thus reducing the administrative workload (Baroi & Alam, 2020). However, the success relies on addressing challenges such as digital illiteracy, language barriers, as India is a diverse country and the need for user-friendly and simplified portals. Therefore, digitisation is not only a technological upgrade but a vital step in empowering the citizens and fostering a culture of open governance (Singh & Karn, 2012).

Problem and Rationale of the Study

The RTI Act, 2005, is a significant legislation in India that has empowered citizens to demand information from public authorities, aiming at fostering transparency and accountability so as to reduce secrecy and the resulting corruption (Kumar, 2025). In modern times, the digitisation of the RTI processes has been a transformative step. The shift to online modes for filing RTI applications aims to enhance the accessibility, efficiency and ease in usage. It attempts to make information retrieval more accessible to citizens, cut down on delays and streamline the submission and processing of RTI applications. But the move to digital platforms brings with it both possibilities and difficulties. On the one hand, it provides more convenience, faster responses and less inefficiencies in the bureaucracy. However, it also creates obstacles to smooth adoption. Online RTI systems are difficult to implement successfully because of issues like the digital divide, digital illiteracy, infrastructure and technology constraints, insufficient training for public servants and difficulty in adapting to online modes for both the public authorities and citizens.

In this study, by looking into the experiences of public authorities, we shall attempt to understand their adaptation and readiness towards online platforms, focusing on efficiency and seamless digitisation. Simultaneously, the study explores the citizens' experiences that seek to provide an understanding of the inclusivity, accessibility and user friendliness after digitisation of the RTI processes. This study highlights the significance of striking a balance between user-centric methods and technical improvements, making it a crucial investigation in the field of public administration and governance.

The study is limited to the Union Territory Chandigarh[3], India's first planned city that has a population of approximately 1,055,450 and is one of the country's fastest growing urban centres. Serving as the joint capital of Punjab and Haryana, the city boasts one of the highest literacy rates in India at 86.0 per cent, well above the national average. The Union Territory of Chandigarh began implementing the Right to Information (RTI) Act in 2005, alongside other states and Union territories. Due to its status as a centrally administered and highly literate city, it was generally expected that the adoption of digital methods would be efficient, transparent, responsive and widely accepted by both the citizens and public authorities. Thus, Chandigarh was chosen to evaluate how effectively digitization of RTI processes has improved access to information and how dexterously the citizens and public authorities embraced the digitisation of RTI processes.

Research Questions

1. What are the experiences of citizens and public authorities in relation to the digitisation of Right to Information (RTI) procedures?
2. What technical, administrative and user-related challenges arise in the implementation of digital systems

[3]https://chandigarh.gov.in/about-us

for managing RTI requests, and how do these challenges influence the accessibility and overall efficiency of the RTI framework?

Research Objectives

1. To study the experiences of citizens and public authorities with regard to the digitization of RTI (Right to Information) procedures.
2. To study the technical, administrative and user related challenges encountered in the implementation of digital systems for managing RTI requests, and to evaluate their implications for the accessibility and overall effectiveness of the RTI framework.

To meet the study's objectives, the study focuses on key indicators, including:

- Digital Awareness (E-Readiness)
- Digital Accessibility (Inclusion and Reach)
- User-Friendliness (Local Language Support and Simplified Interfaces)
- Real-Time Website Updates and Maintenance
- Technological Infrastructure

Research Methodology

To achieve the objectives of the study, a mixed-method approach has been employed, i.e., qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques have been used to obtain a comprehensive understanding. The data has been collected through semi-structured interviews, which serves as the main qualitative method, facilitating a thorough examination of personal experiences, challenges and perceptions from both public authorities and citizens. These interviews were supplemented by quantitative measures to identify patterns, trends and the wider implications of digital RTI processes. Further, both primary and secondary data sources have been utilised to gain insights into the experiences of public authorities and citizens in navigating the digitisation of RTI processes. Primary data was collected through 3 different questionnaires with both closed-ended and open-ended questions for PIOs (Public Information Officers), the appellate authority and the citizens.

The research has been conducted across five departments in Chandigarh, selected based on the maximum number of e-services they provide, which leads to higher levels of civic engagement. These departments are:

- Deputy Commissioner's Office
- Estate Office
- Excise and Taxation Department
- Municipal Corporation
- Transport Department

Ten Public Information Officers (PIOs), two from each department, along with five appellate authorities in the respective departments, were interviewed, bringing the total official count to fifteen. Additionally, a total of fifty citizens who were present in

Table-1
Sample size of the variables

Appellate Authority	5
PIOs	10
Citizens	50
Total	65

the departments at the time of the study were interviewed. As the retrieval of personal information of the citizens was not possible, the researcher has therefore employed convenience sampling.

Data Collection And Analysis

Three sets of questionnaires were designed for data collection - one for the citizens, one for the PIOs and one for the appellate authority. The data collected helped assess the experiences of the respondents regarding the digitisation of RTI processes in Chandigarh. After analysing the responses, several suggestions for improving the digitalisation of the RTI processes have been put forward. Primary data was gathered through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with public authorities. Secondary data was obtained from books, publications, annual reports, and records pertinent to the RTI.

Responses from Citizens

When respondents were asked whether they were **aware of the digital RTI filing system**, 36 expressed awareness of the digital RTI filing system, while 14 were unaware of its existence (Figure 1).

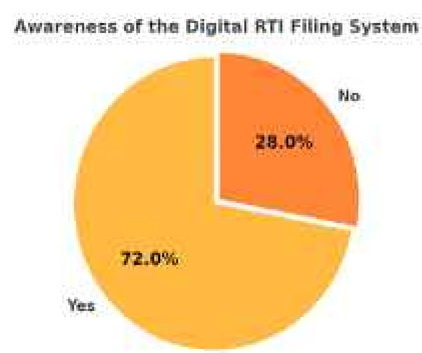

Figure 1

This indicates a promising level of awareness among a majority of the group regarding the availability of online platforms for filing RTI requests. However, the 14 respondents who are unaware highlight the need for increased outreach and education about this system to ensure broader access and usage. Promoting awareness through workshops, campaigns or community programs could bridge this gap, enabling more individuals to leverage the convenience and efficiency of digital RTI filing systems.

Despite increasing familiarity, **many citizens continue to require assistance** when using the online RTI portal. 31 reported that they required assistance while filing RTI requests online, while 19 stated that they were able to complete the process independently (Figure 2). This suggests that a significant portion of individuals may face challenges in navigating the online RTI filing process, possibly due to a lack of familiarity with the platform or procedural complexities. However, the 19 respondents who managed without help reflect a growing comfort and proficiency with digital processes.

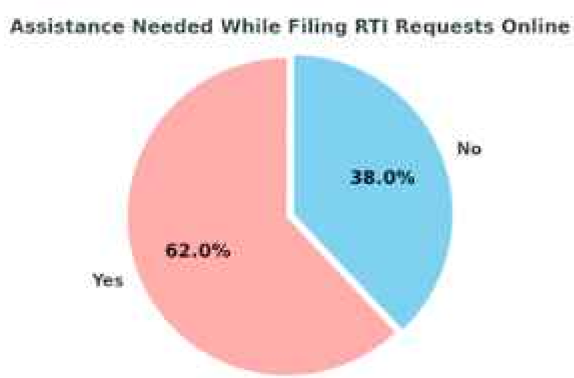

Figure 2

https://chandigarh.gov.in/about-us

Interestingly, **all respondents confirmed having access to the internet and requisite devices** (Figure 3). This highlights that the people surveyed are well-equipped with the required technological resources, such as smartphones, computers or tablets, along with a reliable internet connection. Such access is crucial for ensuring the seamless submission of RTI applications through online platforms, enabling individuals to exercise their right to information effectively and without barriers.

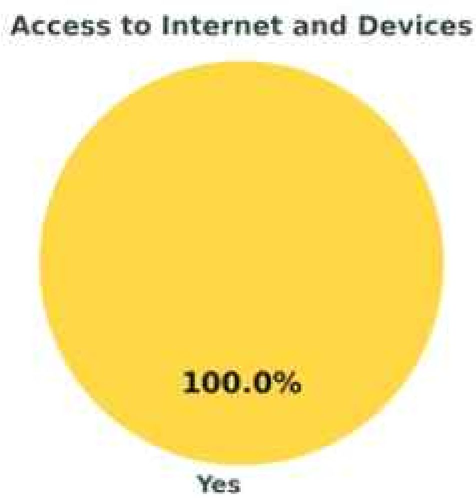

Figure 3

When asked about **barriers to accessing the RTI portal**, respondents cited several recurring concerns. While some respondents mentioned that they did not encounter any barriers, others highlighted various challenges. A significant number cited a lack of awareness about the system as a major issue. Some identified a language barrier as a hindrance, making it difficult to understand and navigate the portal effectively. Others pointed out issues such as the lack of clarity in procedures and the complexity of the portal. Specific technical issues, including server downtime and delays caused by the redirection of queries to state governments, were also mentioned. Additionally, some respondents indicated that the portal's functionality and the absence of clear instructions or proper information further impeded their ability to access and utilize the system efficiently. These insights underline the need for improvements in accessibility, user-friendliness and information dissemination to ensure a seamless experience for all citizens.

Language accessibility emerged as another crucial aspect. 31 participants (approximately 62 per cent) found the language easy to understand, while 19 participants (38 per cent) did not share the same view (Figure 4). This indicates that although the majority perceive the language as accessible, a significant portion of users still face challenges. This feedback highlights the need for further evaluation and potential simplification or clarification of the language used on the platform to ensure inclusivity and effectiveness.

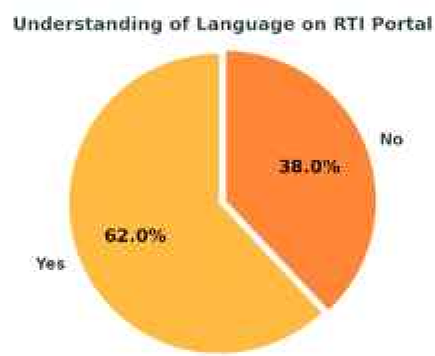

Figure 4

Regarding the **overall ease of filing RTI requests online,** the majority of respondents indicated that filing RTI requests online was either very straightforward or easy, as illustrated in Figure 5. This indicates that the process is predominantly user-friendly. Conversely, other individuals indicated that it was somewhat or exceedingly difficult, suggesting that modifications are necessary to enhance its comprehensibility and use. These insights suggest that while the system performs well overall, targeted enhancements could improve the user experience for a broader audience.

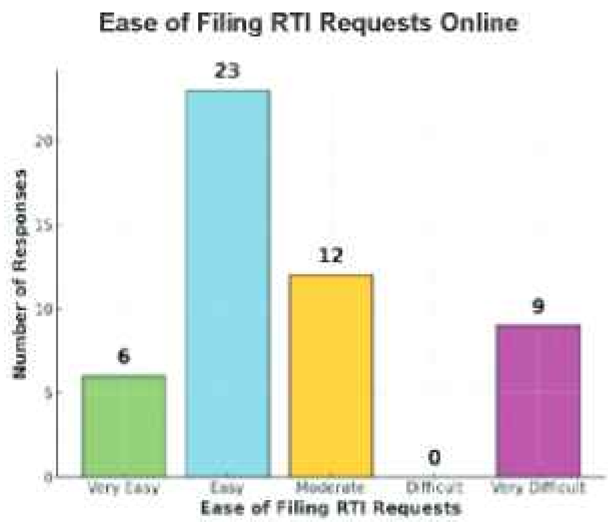

Figure 5

Further, when asked about the **challenges in using the digital RTI system** citizens highlighted several challenges. A significant issue was the **lack of digital literacy**, which hindered many users from effectively navigating the online platform. Others found the **guidelines unclear**, making the process more complex than necessary. Some respondents pointed out a **mismatch between the guidelines and the real functioning of the system**, citing examples such as the inability to access options for fee payment. Additionally, many struggled with the **process of selecting the**

official responsible for providing the requested information, which often led to delays or misdirected requests.

When enquired about their **satisfaction with the digital RTI filing process** (Figure 6), citizens expressed ambivalent sentiments. The majority of respondents reported a positive experience, noting its ease of use and accessibility. Several respondents, however, expressed neutrality, indicating potential for enhancement. A smaller group expressed dissatisfaction due to ambiguous regulations, technical difficulties and navigational challenges.

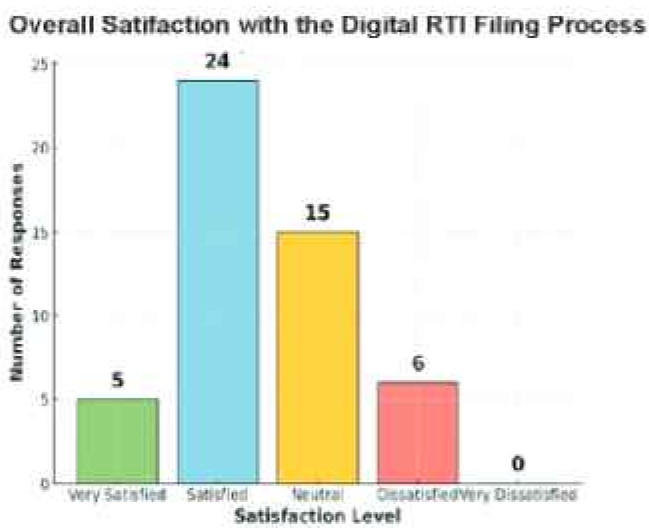

Figure 6

Responses from Appellate authorities

The appellate authorities were asked about the digital awareness or e-readiness through training and they affirmed the implementation of regular training programs on digital tools and technologies relevant to RTI processes, signalling a commitment to fostering digital awareness among staff. However, 60 per cent of respondents highlighted the inadequacy of the current annual training schedule, advocating for more frequent sessions, such as quarterly or biannual, to ensure sustained skill development and the effective adoption of digital practices. When queried about the **digital literacy levels of their staff**, 40 per cent of the respondents expressed confidence in their team's competencies, but the remaining 60 per cent underscored significant gaps in digital skills. They emphasized the need for enhanced training programs and additional resources to bridge these gaps, which they identified as critical to improving staff efficiency in handling technology-driven RTI operations. Regarding the **impact of digitization on the volume of RTI appeals**, all respondents acknowledged a reduction in appeals, attributing this to the increased availability of information online. They noted that digitization has enabled many queries to be resolved at the initial stages of filing, reducing the burden on appellate systems. However, certain groups, such as NGOs and investigative journalists, continued to file appeals seeking supplementary information, reflecting dissatisfaction with the quality or completeness of initial responses. This recurring demand for additional clarification was described as a significant challenge for administrative bodies, pointing to the need for greater precision and transparency in responses to reduce frustration and subsequent appeals.

Further, appellate authorities reported that **notifications and guidelines** on digital RTI processes are generally well communicated within departments, though some noted occasional delays causing brief implementation lags. This highlights the need for timely information sharing and continued focus on training, skill development, and communication efficiency to fully realise the benefits of RTI digitisation.

Responses from PIOs

Public Information Officers (PIOs) were interviewed about their experiences on digitisation of RTI processes and they shared diverse views on the e-readiness of the RTI system, revealing significant insights into its current state and areas for improvement. When asked about their **preference for a fully digitized process versus a hybrid system**, 70 per cent of respondents advocated for full digitization. They emphasized that managing both digital and paper-based systems simultaneously creates inefficiencies, duplicates efforts and complicates operations. In their view, eliminating paper-based work entirely would streamline processes, enhance operational efficiency and allow for better resource allocation. On the other hand, 30 per cent of PIOs supported maintaining a hybrid system, citing the need to offer flexibility to citizens. They highlighted that a hybrid system accommodates varying levels of technological literacy and personal preferences, ensuring inclusivity for individuals who may not be comfortable with digital tools. This division of opinion underscores the complex challenge of balancing the need for streamlined administrative processes with the importance of providing accessible and citizen-friendly systems, particularly in a country with significant digital literacy disparities.

Regarding the **impact of digitization on their workload**, PIOs reported mixed experiences. Half of the respondents (50 per cent) noted that digitization has reduced their workload by simplifying processes, enabling faster responses and reducing manual interventions. However, 30 per cent indicated that their workload has increased because they are required to handle both digital and paper-based requests, leading to duplication of efforts and inefficiencies. Meanwhile, 20 per cent stated that digitization has not significantly impacted their workload, suggesting that its benefits may not be fully realized across all operations. This mixed response highlights the need for a more integrated and seamless digitization framework that minimizes redundancies and ensures efficiency gains for all users. Suggestions from PIOs included the implementation of centralized data archiving systems, which would allow for quick retrieval of historical information and reduce time-intensive tasks, ultimately leading to a more efficient and user-friendly RTI process. Another critical point raised by PIOs is that the RTI portal is currently accessible only in one language; it is not multilingual. This complicates the process of access for individuals who speak regional languages, particularly in a country like India where there are numerous languages. Respondents emphasised that the inclusion of regional language options would significantly enhance inclusivity and promote broader citizen participation.

The PIOs were also questioned about the **regularity with which they update the RTI portal with new information and regulations**. A majority of respondents (90 per cent) affirmed that the portal is updated regularly, ensuring the availability of current and relevant information for stakeholders. However, 10 per cent reported delays in the updating process, often caused by logistical or technical issues. These delays can undermine the reliability and usability of the portal, frustrating users and potentially affecting the credibility of the system. Further, regarding adequacy of the **technological infrastructure supporting the digitization of RTI processes**, PIOs identified several shortcomings. While 40 per cent of respondents believed the existing infrastructure was adequate, the majority (60 per cent) pointed to persistent challenges, including server downtimes, insufficient resources such as printers, and the absence of advanced or user-friendly software tools. These issues not only impede operational efficiency but also contribute to delays. Respondents emphasized that significant upgrades to the technological infrastructure are necessary to ensure the seamless functioning. Enhanced infrastructure support the scalability of the system to accommodate future demands.

Collectively, these findings highlight both the progress and limitations of the RTI digitization process from the perspective of PIOs. While digitization has reduced workloads for some and improved efficiency in specific areas, the dual-system management and infrastructural challenges continue to hinder optimal performance. Addressing these challenges requires a multi-pronged approach, including investing in robust infrastructure, adopting user-friendly and inclusive technologies, and streamlining operational frameworks to reduce redundancies. Additionally, integrating regional languages and ensuring timely updates would foster greater citizen participation. These steps are essential to fully realize the potential of digitized RTI processes in line with the principles of good governance and citizen-centric service delivery.

Table 2
Responses from PIOs

Question	Response
Digitization or paper-based RTI?	Full digitization: 70 per cent Both systems: 30 per cent
Has digitization reduced workload?	Reduced workload: 50 per cent Increased workload: 30 per cent No change: 20 per cent
Is the RTI portal multilingual?	No 100 per cent
How often is the RTI portal updated?	Regularly: 90 per cent Occasionally with delays: 10 per cent
Is the technological infrastructure adequate?	Adequate: 40 per cent Needs improvement (server issues, printers, software): 60 per cent

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Objective 1: Experiences of Citizens and Public Authorities with Digitization of RTI Procedures

The digitization of the RTI system in Chandigarh has improved accessibility and efficiency, as indicated by public authorities and citizens alike. Among public authorities, training programs on digital tools were unanimously acknowledged, but 60 per cent of appellate authorities stressed the need for more frequent sessions to ensure sustained skill development and readiness for evolving technologies. This is consistent with the Second Administrative Reforms Commission (2008), which emphasized the importance of continuous training to strengthen e-governance capabilities. Despite these efforts, 60 per cent of public authorities reported significant gaps in digital skills among their staff, echoing findings from the 1st report of 2nd ARC which noted similar challenges in public departments nationwide and recommended that training programs should extend beyond PIOs and APIOs, ensuring all government functionaries receive at least one day of RTI training annually. These programs should be decentralized and conducted at the block level. Citizens expressed a mixed response, with 72 per cent aware of the digital RTI system, yet 62 per cent required assistance while filing requests online, reflecting gaps in user-friendliness and digital literacy. The OnlineRTI platform (OnlineRTI, 2024) found these similar issues that hinder effective adoption of digital technologies and suggested the need for initiatives and training programs that focus on educating and equipping citizens with the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively use online RTI services. Other barriers such as unclear guidelines, language issues and technical challenges further impede user engagement, which identified a lack of accessibility in RTI portals as a major limitation.

While citizens and public authorities acknowledged the benefits of reduced frivolous appeals due to online systems, specialized user groups like NGOs and journalists remain dissatisfied, underscoring the need for greater precision and transparency in initial responses. These findings highlight the need for ongoing training, multilingual platforms and simplified user interfaces to bridge the accessibility gap.

Objective 2: Technical, Administrative, and User-Related Challenges in Implementing Digital RTI Systems

Technical and administrative challenges continue to hinder the effective implementation of digital RTI systems in Chandigarh. Persistent issues such as server downtimes, outdated software and dual-format management significantly affect efficiency, with 60 per cent of PIOs advocating for improvements in infrastructure. These challenges are mirrored in the 11^{th} Report of 2^{nd} ARC "Promoting e-Governance: The Smart Way Forward"[4] which emphasizes the need for scalable infrastructure and cloud-based

[4]https://darpg.gov.in/sites/default/files/promoting_egov11.pdf

solutions to handle growing demand. The 1st report of 2nd ARC "Right to Information- Master Key to Good Governance"[5] recommends that the Government of India should allocate 1 per cent of funds from all flagship programs for five years to update records, improve infrastructure, create manuals and set up Public Records Offices, with up to 25 per cent reserved for awareness initiatives. Administrative inefficiencies are exacerbated by the coexistence of digital and paper-based systems; while 70 per cent of PIOs favoured a fully digital system, 30 per cent supported hybrid systems to maintain inclusivity. Further a study by (Sen & Jindal, 2022) also showed similar issues that digital records often originate from physical paper-form records that are signed, scanned, uploaded and subsequently digitally signed. This process introduces an additional layer, potentially leading to challenges in verifying authenticity, particularly when discrepancies arise between the paper-form record and its digital counterpart. This highlights the need for more efforts to fully digitize the processes and educating or making the people aware about how to use digital systems.

User related challenges, including low awareness and limited digital literacy, were evident among citizens, with 28 per cent unaware of digital RTI systems and a significant proportion citing language barriers and portal complexity as obstacles. These barriers undermine the essence of the Act to empower the society with information. A study by Sumanadasa (2023), revealed same issues and highlighted that citizens face challenges in benefiting fully due to slow implementation of proactive disclosure, lack of regular updates and poorly navigable digital platforms. Additionally, 1st report on "Right to Information- Master Key to Good Governance" of Second Administrative Reforms Commission (2008) recommended that credible state-level non-profit organizations should be tasked with conducting awareness campaigns. These organizations can design multimedia

[5]https://darpg.gov.in/sites/default/files/rti_masterkey1.pdf

campaigns tailored to local needs and delivered in the local language, utilizing the allocated funds for this purpose. Further the absence of a multilingual RTI portal was highlighted as a key barrier, wherein the Section 4 of the RTI Act, 2005[6] itself advocates for local-language support to increase engagement. Additionally, in a PIL, Writ Petition (C) No. 990 of 2021[7], which sought the implementation of Section 4 of the RTI Act, Supreme Court has stressed the need for proactive disclosure to reduce RTI queries and improve transparency. Citizens and PIOs suggested initiatives such as toll-free helplines, digital literacy workshops and robust tracking systems to address these issues. Addressing these technical, administrative and user related challenges requires targeted interventions, including enhanced infrastructure, better training and inclusive digital tools, to ensure the effectiveness and accessibility of RTI systems.

These findings substantiate broader patterns observed in national reports, such as the the 1st report on "Right to Information- Master Key to Good Governance" of Second Administrative Reforms Commission (2008), the Central Information Commission (CIC) Transparency Audits and the Digital India mission vision to transform India into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy which emphasize the importance of capacity building, infrastructure upgrades and inclusivity in e-governance. The integration of lessons from successful states like Kerala and Gujarat, which have implemented user-friendly portals and proactive disclosure mechanisms, could serve as models for Chandigarh. By aligning its digitization strategy with these best practices and addressing the identified gaps, Chandigarh can enhance its RTI framework, fostering greater transparency, accountability and citizen engagement.

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[6] https://cic.gov.in/sites/default/files/RTI-Act_English.pdf

[7] https://main.sci.gov.in/supremecourt/2021/20285/20285_2021_16_1501_46153_Judgement_17-Aug-2023.pdf

Suggestions And Conclusions

As stated above, information about the digitisation of the RTI Act was sought from both the public authorities and citizens. The suggestions provided by them are relevant for safeguarding the tenets of good governance and service delivery.

Suggestions by Public Authorities

Public authorities have put forward several suggestions to improve the digital RTI system. They recommend conducting periodic audits to ensure the system's efficiency and compliance, alongside organizing regular training sessions to improve staff proficiency in digital skills. A dedicated mobile application should be developed to enhance user accessibility and convenience. Mechanisms must be implemented to ensure that only legitimate appeals are entertained, reduce frivolous queries, and introduce a robust tracking system for users to monitor the status of their RTI applications and appeals. Additional personnel should be allocated to handle the increased workload and ensure efficient system functioning. Some respondents advocated for a system that is either fully digital or fully paper-based to avoid duplication and inefficiencies. In special cases where information dating back 5-10 years or more is sought, authorities should be granted extended timelines to retrieve and provide the data. Finally, a real-time analytics dashboard should be developed for appellate authorities to monitor trends in appeals, identify common issues, and assess the efficiency of the digital RTI process, thereby helping authorities proactively address recurring problems and improve system performance.

Suggestions by the citizens

When citizens were asked whether they would like to suggest improvements to the system or public authorities, they offered a wide range of recommendations across four key areas.

Regarding the attitude of authorities and governance, citizens emphasized the need to adopt a more humane approach in interactions with information seekers and to address the perceived negative public opinion of the RTI Act, which authorities view as a tool of vengeance against good governance. They also called for mitigating bias in attitudes toward colleagues and toward citizens seeking information, and for developing a positive attitude toward information seekers to encourage transparency.

Regarding system and portal improvements, citizens suggested introducing a robust tracking system for RTI applications to monitor progress and setting a definitive response time for authorities to reply to RTI requests. They further recommended expanding the RTI portal to include state government departments for greater convenience, improving the user interface for better accessibility and ease of use, and providing easy tabs and clear options for new users to simplify the process. Additionally, they called for adding a toll-free helpline for real-time support during the filing process and for making the process more inclusive for Divyangs (persons with disabilities).

With respect to proactive measures, citizens suggested conducting digital literacy and RTI filing camps to educate citizens on the process, promoting proactive disclosure of information to reduce the need for RTI filings, providing a clear demarcation of departments and their functions to streamline information requests, and emphasizing language/semantics guidance for filing queries to reduce errors.

Finally, in the areas of public awareness and digital literacy, citizens called for greater digital literacy to bridge the gap in technical proficiency and for highlighting the importance of transparency and good governance through public engagement initiatives.

Conclusion

The digitisation of Right to Information (RTI) processes has brought about a significant transformation in enhancing transparency, efficiency and accessibility of public information. It has modernised the RTI mechanism and improved its reach and its full potential can be realised only through sustained efforts to make the system more intuitive, inclusive and responsive thus ensuring that the constitutional promise of the right to information is both technologically enabled and socially accessible. Ultimately, digitisation should not merely be viewed as a technological upgrade but as a transformative process that redefines the relationship between the state and its citizens and empowers citizens with information, thus reinforcing the democratic ideal of government accountability.

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Article

Awareness about the Tools and Techniques For Debunking Fake News: An Empirical Study

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Gurdeep Kaur*
Japjot Singh**

"We accept the reality of the world with which we're presented. It's as simple as that." - *The Truman Show*

Abstract

The present era of Globalization 4.0 is marked by an unprecedented scale and speed of digital interconnectivity facilitating the spread of ideas, information, and news across borders. This has encouraged inclusivity, networking, and democratization. However, this development invites new challenges; fast and integrated digital connectivity serves as a medium for the spread of misinformation and fake news that threaten communal harmony by inciting violence and societal division. The spread of fake news through social media platforms erodes trust in democratic institutions, distorting the socio-political fabric.

* Assistant Professor, Head of the Department of Political Science, Sri Guru Gobind Singh College of Commerce (University of Delhi)

** Graduated from the Department of Commerce, Sri Guru Gobind Singh College of Commerce (University of Delhi).

The young population is the primary user demographic of social media through which the fake news is often disseminated; it thus becomes important to assess their level of awareness in understanding and identifying news as fake or authentic as well as their knowledge about the tools and techniques through which the spread of fake news can be curbed so that they can be responsible viewers. This empirical study investigates young individuals' understanding of how fake news spreads. It evaluates not only their familiarity with the tools and techniques for verifying the authenticity of digital content but also how frequently they engage themselves in the pursuit of genuine news.

A questionnaire was designed to gather data on the participants' demographics, time spent on social media, frequency of content sharing, and awareness about information verification techniques such as fact-checking websites, reverse image search tools, and browser extensions designed to detect misinformation. The findings aim to inform strategies for enhancing media literacy and fostering critical engagement in the digital public sphere.

Keywords: Fake News, Media Literacy, Social Media, Misinformation, Responsible Digital Citizens

I Introduction

In today's digitally connected world, social media has become an integral part of everyday life. From global leaders to street hawkers, the internet has democratized communication, creating a digital ecosystem where not only media or experts but anyone can share information instantly. Affordable and accessible internet has enabled individuals across socio-economic backgrounds and varied age groups to interact online. The world has never been as interconnected as it is today.

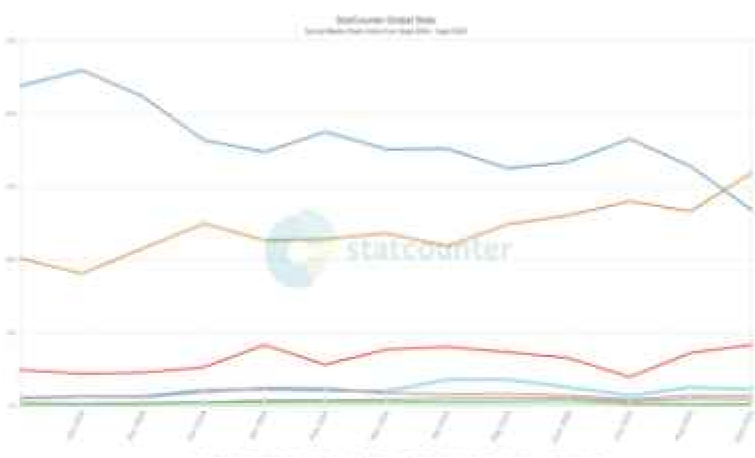
According to a report by Statista, in 2025 global internet users spent an average of 141 minutes per day on social media, underscoring the growing centrality of social media platforms

(Dixon, 2025). With over 5 billion users as of 2024, social media is increasingly replacing traditional media channels, serving as a key source for socialization, learning, entertainment, and public discourse (Dixon, 2025). However, alongside these benefits, social media also facilitates the rapid dissemination of misinformation and disinformation, often collectively referred to as *fake news*, defined by Lazer et al. (2018) as "fabricated information that mimics news media content in form but not in organizational process or intent" (p. 1094).

In India, Instagram remains the dominant platform, accounting for 44.62 per cent of social media usage as of September 2025, followed by Facebook (37.5 per cent), YouTube (11.6 per cent), and Twitter (3.1 per cent) (StatCounter Global Stats, 2025) (see Figure 1).

Figure 1:

Social Media Market Share in India - September 2025.



Source: Social Media Market Share in India - September 2025. Source: Statcounter Global Stats, "Social Media Stats India," accessed October 12, 2025. https://gs.statcounter.com/social-media-market-share/all/india

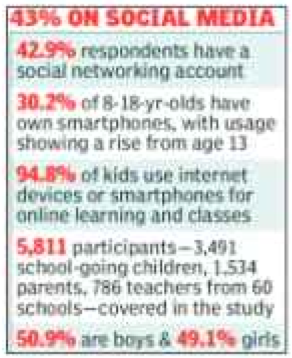
Although social media platforms serve as open spaces for democratic and robust participation paving the way for meaningful global engagement, the associated challenge of the spread of unauthentic and unverified news and information cannot be ignored. Such platforms, while empowering and liberating, also heighten the risks of misinformation and disinformation, particularly among young users.

A survey by the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) involving 5,811 participants, including school students and their parents and teachers, found that 42.9 per cent of school-going children in India have a social networking account, despite the age restrictions. The data showed that 30.2 per cent of children aged 8–18 years own smartphones, with usage rising sharply after the age of 13 years. The findings highlighted that while 94.8 per cent of children use the internet or smartphones for online education, they do not restrict the internet usage to educational purposes. Alarmingly, 37.8 per cent and 24.3 per cent of 10-year-olds surveyed reported having Facebook and Instagram accounts, respectively. (Pandit, 2021) (see Figure 2). Thus, early exposure to social media raises significant concerns about susceptibility to fake news. If identifying false or misleading content is challenging for adults to consume, it is far more difficult to process for inexperienced/uninformed/unqualified children and adolescents because they are not yet intellectually mature to differentiate between fake and genuine news and often do not deal with fake news responsibly.

The concern about the lack of media literacy among youth was also brought into the public domain through research by McGrew et al. (2018), who underscore that while the internet provides unprecedented access to information, young people often lack the media literacy skills required to critically evaluate digital content. Similarly, Duffy et al. (2019) further assert that social media has become a fertile breeding ground for the rapid spread of fake news.

Figure 2:

Social Media Usage Among School-Going Children in India - 2021



Source: Percentage of 10-year-olds on Facebook and Instagram. Source: Times of India, "37% of 10-year-olds on Facebook, over 24% on Instagram: Survey," July 25, 2021. https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/ncpcr-survey-42-9-school-going-children-have-a-social-networking-account-over-30-have-their-own-smartphone/articleshow/84715910.cms

Given that the young users spend significant time online, it is important to equip them with new media literacy skills so that information becomes a tool for empowerment rather than a cause for social division, hatred, and hostility. As Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) argue, the viral nature of social media makes it difficult to assess the credibility of messages, further complicating users' ability to verify authenticity in real time. This substantiates the importance of our youth to grow into vigilant, responsible citizens that sensibly consume online news, as the ones having faced social media exposure for long periods of time.

Although tools and techniques are available for users young and old, ranging from reverse image searches and browser extensions to independent fact-checking websites that can be thoughtfully applied to check for the authenticity of the news, their usage remains quite limited. This study hence not only examines the news consumption habits of the youth and their approach towards content verification but also investigates the level of awareness among internet users regarding fact-checking tools and techniques to debunk fake news. The authors' previous work, *Exploring the Tools and Techniques for Debunking Fake News* (Kaur & Singh, 2022), provides a conceptual framework, a classification of fake news types, and a practical guide to fact-checking tools. The present study adds an actionable descriptive analysis to the informative empirical investigation. While the previous research outlined the available verification methods and highlighted their potential to curb misinformation, it did not assess how widely these tools are known or used among specific age groups. This paper addresses that gap by examining the awareness, adoption, and perceived effectiveness of fact-checking tools among young internet users in India, using primary data collected through a structured survey.

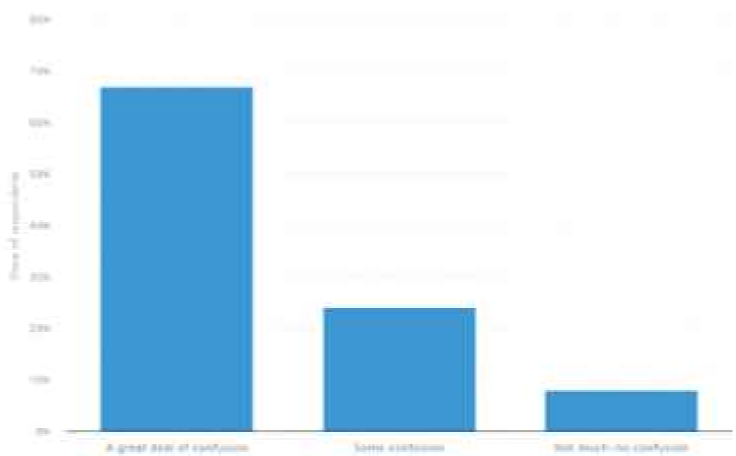
2. Significance of Surveying the Awareness level

2.1 *The Paradox of Information Abundance*

The digital landscape nowadays is a convenient and accessible medium that facilitates abundant information bombardment ranging from greetings to marketing messages, promotional content to urgent news updates. Surprisingly, a significant deficit of genuine, reliable content comes to light. "Water, water, everywhere, Nor any drop to drink" is a famous line from Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem written in 1798 CE, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, an apt description for the paradox of the digital world, an environment overflowing with information, yet often lacking in authenticity and reliability. In other words, we now live in times where the quantity of information has exponentially increased in contrast to the quality and authenticity of that information which often remain questionable. The ease of forwarding, sharing, and reposting content without verification encourages unhealthy and uncivic practices among the masses intensifying the repercussions involved.

The risks generated by fake news are profound and far-reaching, extending beyond the social or political sphere alone. When social media is flooded with misinformation/ fake news, people often are not able to make the right choices in matters that affect their health and well-being. A study by Statista conducted in the United States in 2019 supports this argument, illustrating that 67 per cent of the surveyed respondents experienced a significant amount of confusion due to fake news, while another 25 per cent experienced some confusion.

Figure 3:
Confusion Levels Regarding Fake News.



Source: Confusion Levels Regarding Fake News. Source: Statista, "Fake News Confusion Level," accessed October 12, 2025. https://www.statista.com/statistics/657037/fake-news-confusion-level/

Although the study by Watson (2022) highlights the level of confusion caused by fake news among the population of the United States in particular, it reflects a broader, global crisis. The proliferation of misinformation is not confined to any one country; it is a widespread challenge affecting individuals and societies around the world.

Most people who are well aware of the associated risks of fake news often fail to verify the authenticity of content before sharing it. Several factors account for it: lack of critical reasoning skills, complacency, insufficient knowledge of reliable sources, and cognitive biases, especially confirmation bias, where individuals are more likely to accept and propagate information that aligns with their pre-existing beliefs. People share misinformation to gain social approval, signal perceived awareness, or offer help, inadvertently becoming agents in the fake news chain.

The study seeks to get an insight into the habits and practices of users with regard to online content and information. It also aims to identify key factors that shape an individual's ability to recognize false or misleading content and ways to debunk it. The significance of the study lies in contributing valuable insights towards building a more informed, discerning, and resilient information society.

2.2 Exponential Growth of Social Media Users: Propeller Dissemination of Fake News

The internet is used in every nook and corner of India by people across all demographics. The number of internet users in India has surged to over 800 million, highlighting a foundational shift in the nation's digital engagement (Kantar & Internet and Mobile Association of India, 2023).

The growth of social media platforms over the past few decades is largely responsible for reshaping the country's information landscape. WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter) are predominant channels for news

Figure 4:
Internet Users in India- Current Landscape

Source: Internet Users in India: Setting the Context.

Source: Kantar-IAMAI, "Internet in India 2023," accessed October 12, 2025. https://uat.indiadigital summit.in/sites/default/files/thought-leadership/pdf/Kantar_iamai_Report_20_Page_V3_FINAL_web_0.pdf

consumption, particularly among younger populations, rural as well as urban, and the conventional modes of information spread are gradually becoming obsolete (Kantar & Internet and Mobile Association of India, 2023; Reuters Institute, 2023).

While these platforms have democratized access to information, they have simultaneously facilitated an unprecedented spread of misinformation and disinformation, collectively referred to as "fake news." According to a 2023 Microsoft Digital Civility Index report, India ranks among the top countries in exposure to online misinformation/ disinformation, spread intentionally or unintentionally through social media platforms. (Microsoft, 2023). In this, WhatsApp, with over 535 million users in India takes the lead as it has been particularly identified as a primary channel for the viral spread of fabricated content, partly due to its encrypted, closed-network nature (Banaji et al., 2019).

Figure 5:

Customer Engagement with E-commerce in India

Source: Customer Engagement with E-commerce in India.

Source: Kantar-IAMAI, "Internet in India 2023," accessed October 12, 2025. https://uat.indiadigital summit.in/sites/default/files/thought-leadership/pdf/Kantar_iamai_Report_20_Page_V3_FINAL_web_0.pdf

The unprecedented rise of fake news on social media is rooted in a complex interplay of psychological, social, and algorithmic factors:

- Social Approval and Acceptability: Content and news sharing nowadays are easy routes to become visible and gain recognition from peers, acquaintances, and the online community through likes, comments, and shares. The recognition gained through such practices reinforces the practices of news sharing, and often in the process, unverified news is also shared. Confirmation bias also plays a significant role in the dissemination of fake news, as individuals are more likely to share information that aligns with their pre-existing beliefs (Pennycook & Rand, 2021).
- Important Role of Influencers: People follow the influencers, their preferences, choices, and opinions affect

their followers, conforming to the two-step flow of communication theory, which says that the opinion leaders/influencers, who are trusted individuals with perceived credibility and knowledge, act as gatekeepers and happen to play a central role in disseminating genuine/fake information. Their endorsement of any post/online content can lead others to share content without verification and fact-checking.

- Gamification of Metrics: Influence on social media platforms is quantified through metrics such as follower counts, likes, shares, and subscribers, which are also responsible for the production of the "feel-good" hormone dopamine. The pleasure gained through the activity of posting the content often encourages the users to post and share unverified news and information too.
- Platform Algorithms and Profit Motives: Algorithm-driven content exposes users to emotionally resonant or sensational material that aligns with their preferences, increasing engagement and screen time. As revealed in *The Social Dilemma* (Orlowski, 2020), platforms like Facebook leverage user data to manipulate behavior and drive profits, often at the cost of informational integrity.

In summary, social media makes it easy for misinformation to spread, but individuals are vested with the power and control to ultimately decide how far it goes. The challenge of fake news isn't just technological in nature but largely depends on the behavior, intellect, and approach of humans. Government regulations and stricter platform policies are needed with regular revisions to deal with the catastrophic impacts of the spread of fake news. Nevertheless, policies alone cannot curb the menace without people working reasonably towards it. By thinking critically, checking facts, and holding themselves accountable online, internet users can play a meaningful role in slowing/stalling the spread of false information. The following section presents the research objectives and questions, aimed at understanding participants' awareness of fake news and their familiarity with different methods for verifying information.

3. Research Objectives

The present research is undertaken to:

- Examine the behavior of youth towards fake news, with a specific focus on its detection, debunking, and perceived social, political, and economic consequences.
- Analyze the primary sources, tools, and techniques employed in identifying and countering fake news, and propose recommendations for strengthening media literacy and fact-checking practices.
- Investigate the relationship between individuals' demographic characteristics and their awareness, verification practices, and use of fact-checking tools.

4. Methodology

A questionnaire was designed to collect the basic information of the respondents in addition to the series of research questions aligned with the objectives undertaken for the study. For comprehensive coverage of objectives, the questions were structured under thematic domains. The broad thematic areas of research questions were as follows:

A. Awareness and Perceptions

The questions of this section provide a baseline understanding of the respondents about the fake news and the implications of its spread. It covers questions like the following:

- To what extent are individuals aware of fake news and its potential social, political, and economic consequences?

- How important do individuals perceive the process of debunking fake news to be in contemporary society?
- Is fake news associated with catastrophic societal impacts?
- Should media literacy be an integral part of school or undergraduate curriculum?

B. Information Sources and Exposure

This section attempts to investigate the primary sources of news and information used by respondents and the amount of time they spend on various social media platforms for gathering information and news in their daily routine. Such behavioral patterns and habits help in understanding how and what tools and techniques can be effectively applied for debunking of fake news.

- Which primary sources of news and information are largely preferred by respondents?
- How much time do individuals spend consuming news and information, and how does this duration affect their capacity to identify fake news?

C. Sharing Behaviours and Verification Practices

This section evaluates how frequently respondents share or discuss news with others and whether they verify its authenticity before sharing. Such behavioural patterns are critical to understanding the potential for misinformation spread within social networks.

- How frequently do individuals share or discuss news with others, and to what extent do they verify the authenticity of such news before sharing?

D. Tools, Techniques, and Detection Methods

This domain investigates the awareness and use of specific fact-checking tools, recognition of red flags, and preferred techniques for evaluating the credibility of news content. These findings reveal the extent to which respondents possess the skills and resources necessary to counter misinformation.

- What tools and techniques are currently used by individuals to identify and debunk fake news, and how effective are these methods perceived to be?
- To what extent are individuals aware of "red flags" or indicators that signal the presence of fake news?
- What methods or heuristics do individuals commonly employ to evaluate the credibility of news content?

E. Motivations and Drivers Behind Fake News

This section explores respondents' understanding of the reasons behind the creation and spread of fake news, ranging from political motives to economic incentives. Understanding these drivers is essential for designing effective interventions to curb the dissemination of misinformation.

- What do individuals perceive as the most common reasons for the creation and circulation of fake news?

To ensure the validity and reliability of the questionnaire, a pilot study was conducted prior to the distribution of the final survey. The pilot study served two primary purposes as given below:

1. To assess the response rate and identify any issues in participant engagement.
2. To evaluate the clarity, appropriateness, and comprehensibility of the questionnaire format and individual questions.

Based on the feedback from the pilot study, minor modifications were made to enhance the overall design and effectiveness of the final questionnaire. Responses from the pilot phase were excluded from the final analysis to maintain data integrity.

For data analysis, the study utilized statistical tools such as bar charts, pie diagrams, tables, and simple charts to present and interpret the findings clearly. These visual methods were chosen to facilitate easy comparison between variables and to ensure that the results are both accessible and analytically robust.

5. Results

The findings of this study are presented in alignment with the research questions outlined earlier. Data analysis was conducted on responses from 291 participants across four age groups (17–24, 25–34, 35–44, and 45+).

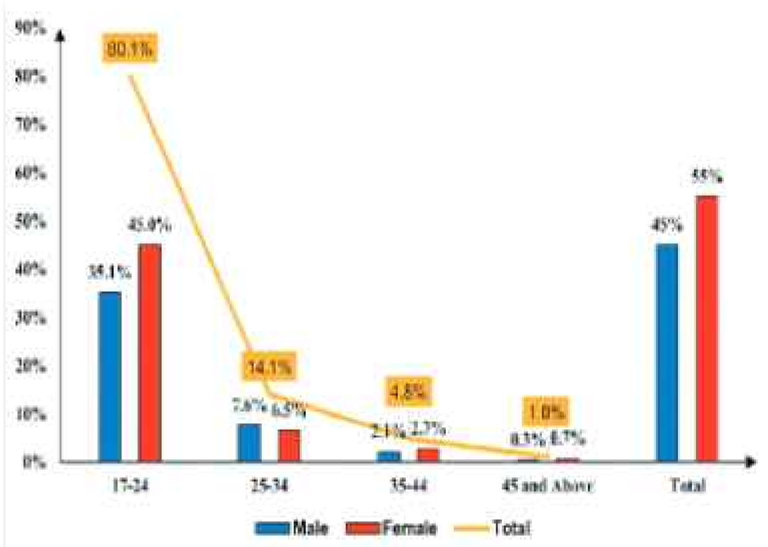
For the purpose of clarity, the results are illustrated using graphs and charts to highlight key patterns and trends. Both percentage distributions and actual respondent numbers (n) are provided, wherever relevant. Each thematic domain is introduced briefly, followed by the corresponding visual representations and interpretations.

5.1 Age Distribution of Participants in the Study

The study involved 291 participants in four distinct age groups, with a higher proportion of female respondents, adding up to 55 per cent as compared to males (45 per cent). The 17-24-year - old age group constituted the overwhelming majority at 80.1 per cent of the sample, with a gender split of 35.1 per cent male and 45.0 per cent female. The second largest segment, 25-34 years, accounted for 14.1 per cent (7.6 per cent male, 6.5 per cent female), followed by 35 - 44 years at 4.8 per cent (2.1 per cent male, 2.7 per cent female), and 45 years and above at 1.0 per cent (0.3 per cent male, 0.7 per cent female).

The predominance of younger respondents is expected, as this group is widely recognized as the most active on social media platforms (Reuters Institute, 2023). Given that social media serves as a principal medium for the spread of fake news in India, the overrepresentation of the 17 - 24 age group proves to be contextually valuable. It enhances the relevance of subsequent findings, particularly in understanding awareness levels, adoption rates, and behavioral patterns related to the use of tools and techniques for debunking fake news. The gender distribution further enables a nuanced exploration of potential differences in misinformation perception and verification practices between male and female social media users.

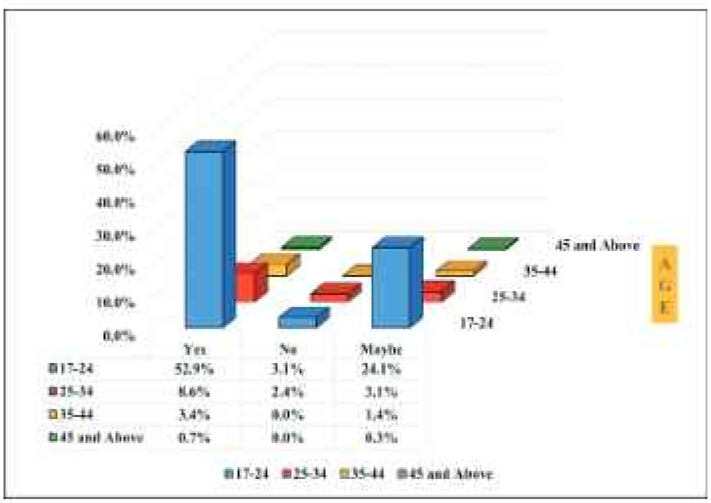
Graph 1: Age Distribution of the Participants



5.2 Awareness of societal happenings among citizens across age groups

Awareness and understanding of societal happenings acts as a foundational layer upon which the ability to evaluate, verify, and counter misinformation can be built. Graph 2 below reveals that 65.6 per cent of all respondents are aware of societal happenings, though 28.9 per cent remain uncertain about their awareness levels. Notably, within the 17–24 age group, 52.9 per cent claim awareness, compared to markedly lower percentages in the 25–34 (8.6 per cent), 35–44 (3.4 per cent), and 45 and above (0.7 per cent) groups. The findings highlight intergenerational disparity in terms of awareness about societal happenings but there is a steep drop in affirmative responses from the older population. While the youngest cohort shows strong affirmative awareness, 24.1 per cent of them reported uncertainty ("Maybe"), indicating that exposure to events does not always translate into complete or accurate understanding; there exists an awareness-action gap. Moreover,

Graph 2:
Awareness of societal happenings among citizens across age groups



	Yes	No	Maybe
17-24	52.9%	3.1%	24.1%
25-34	8.6%	2.4%	3.1%
35-44	3.4%	0.0%	1.4%
45 and Above	0.7%	0.0%	0.3%

self-perception does not necessarily guarantee the ability to critically evaluate information. Therefore, the younger population may form the primary target for advanced training in fake news detection and debunking techniques but strategic outreach to older citizens regarding the same cannot be ignored for establishing a more resilient and responsible society.

5.3 Perception of fake news implications across age groups

The data presented in graph 3 highlights the perception of fake news implications across different age groups. The analysis reveals a significant generational disparity in awareness levels, with the 17 - 24 years age group demonstrating the highest recognition of fake news implications. In this group, 64 per cent of respondents affirmed awareness ("Yes"), while 13 pe rcent expressed uncertainty ("Maybe"), and only 3 per cent indicated no awareness ("No").

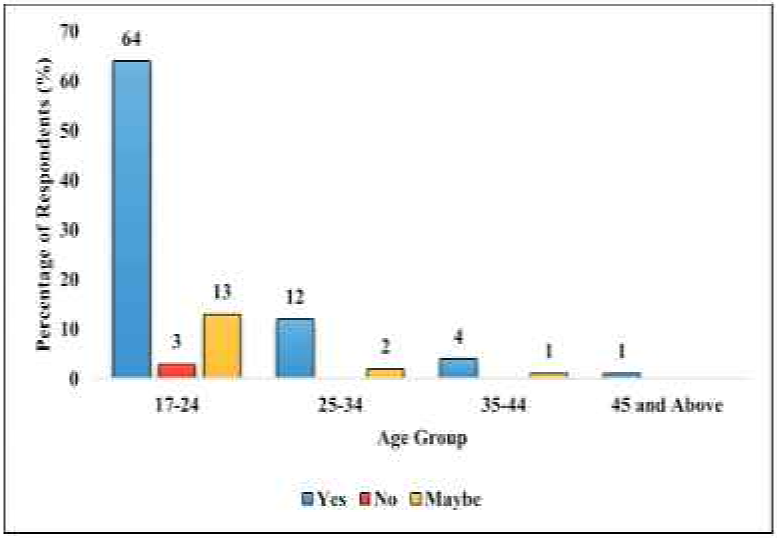
The 25 - 34 years age group reported comparatively lower awareness, with 12 per cent responding "Yes" and 2 per cent expressing uncertainty. The 35 - 44 years age group exhibited even lower levels of recognition, with 4 per cent answering "Yes" and 1 per cent selecting "Maybe." Notably, the 45 years and above category recorded only 1 per cent awareness, with no respondents selecting "No" or "Maybe."

The trend indicates that awareness of the societal implications of fake news decreases progressively with age. Younger respondents (particularly those aged 17 – 24 years) appear to be more informed and engaged with the issue, potentially due to their higher exposure to digital media and online fact-checking tools. Conversely, older age groups may have limited interaction with such resources, contributing to reduced awareness levels.

Overall, the findings suggest a need for educational interventions for respondents across varied age groups, with a particular emphasis on the elderly, to bridge the awareness gap and mitigate the societal risks posed by fake news.

Graph 3:

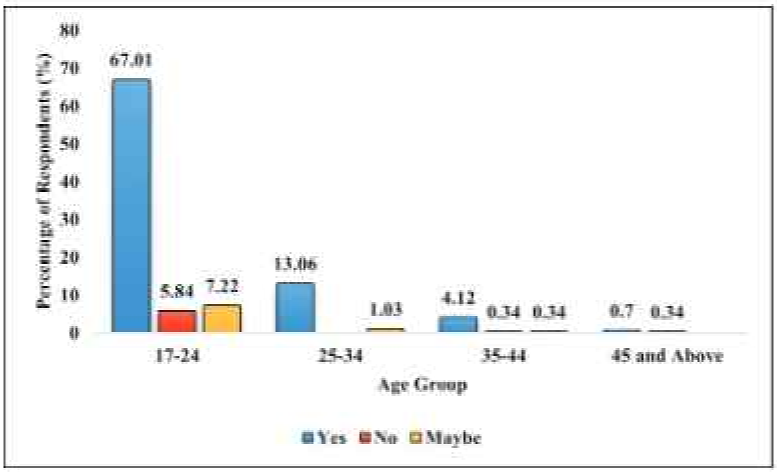
Perception of fake news implications across age groups



5.4 *Importance of debunking fake news*

About 84.89 per cent of respondents agreed that debunking fake news is important. 17 - 24 years age group respondents strongly agreed to this, adding up to 67.01 per cent, followed by the 25 - 34 years group that amounted to 13.06 per cent. Minimal disagreement (5.84 per cent) and low uncertainty (7.22 per cent) were both concentrated in the youngest group. The results suggest that digital literacy efforts among youth may be more effective while older groups may require targeted interventions to strengthen their engagement in dealing with misinformation.

Graph 4:
Importance of debunking fake news



5.5 *Perceived catastrophic impact of fake news*

Graph 5 illustrates respondents' perceptions of whether fake news can have a catastrophic impact on society. The majority expressed strong agreement, with 43.3 per cent strongly agreeing and 41.9 per cent agreeing to this question. The 17 - 24 years age group accounted for the largest share, with 35.4 per cent strongly agreeing and 33.7 per cent agreeing, indicating a heightened awareness and concern among younger individuals.

Neutral responses were minimal at 5.5 per cent, suggesting that most participants hold a clear stance on the issue. Dissenting opinions were rare, with only 7.9 per cent strongly disagreeing and 1.4 per cent disagreeing, again concentrated primarily in the 17–24 years category. Overall, the data suggests broad consensus across age groups, with the strongest conviction evident among younger respondents, potentially reflecting their higher exposure to online discourse and awareness of misinformation's societal risks.

Graph 5:

Perceived catastrophic impact of fake news

5.6 *Opinion on integrating media literacy into curricula*

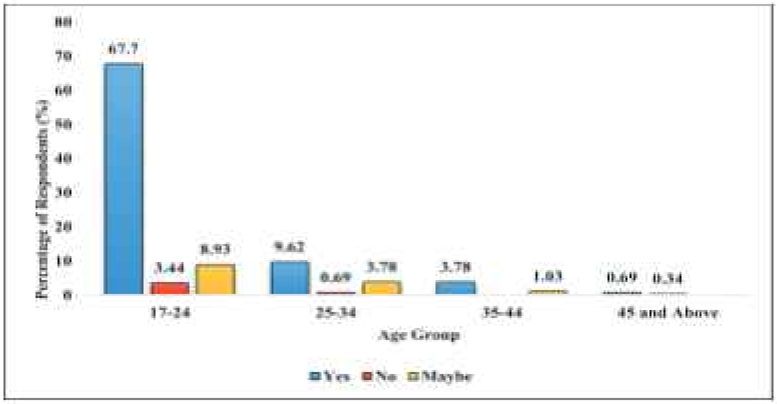
Graph 6 presents respondents' views on whether media literacy should be incorporated into syllabus or curricula. A substantial majority (81.8 per cent) expressed support, with the 17 - 24 years age group forming the largest share at 67.7 per cent, followed by 9.62 per cent from the 25 - 34 years group, 3.78 per cent from 35 - 44 years group, and 1.03 per cent from those aged 45 years and above

Opposition to the idea was minimal, with only 4.5 per cent responding "No," the largest share again in the youngest age group (3.44 per cent). Meanwhile, 13.7 per cent of respondents were uncertain ("Maybe"), with notable proportions in the 17 - 24 (8.93 percent) and 25 - 34 years (3.78 per cent) categories.

These results indicate a strong generational trend where younger respondents, more exposed to online information flows, are significantly more supportive of integrating media literacy into formal education. The relatively higher uncertainty among younger participants also suggests that while the concept is broadly welcomed, there may be gaps in understanding how such programs would be implemented in practice.

Graph 6:

Opinion on integrating media literacy into curricula



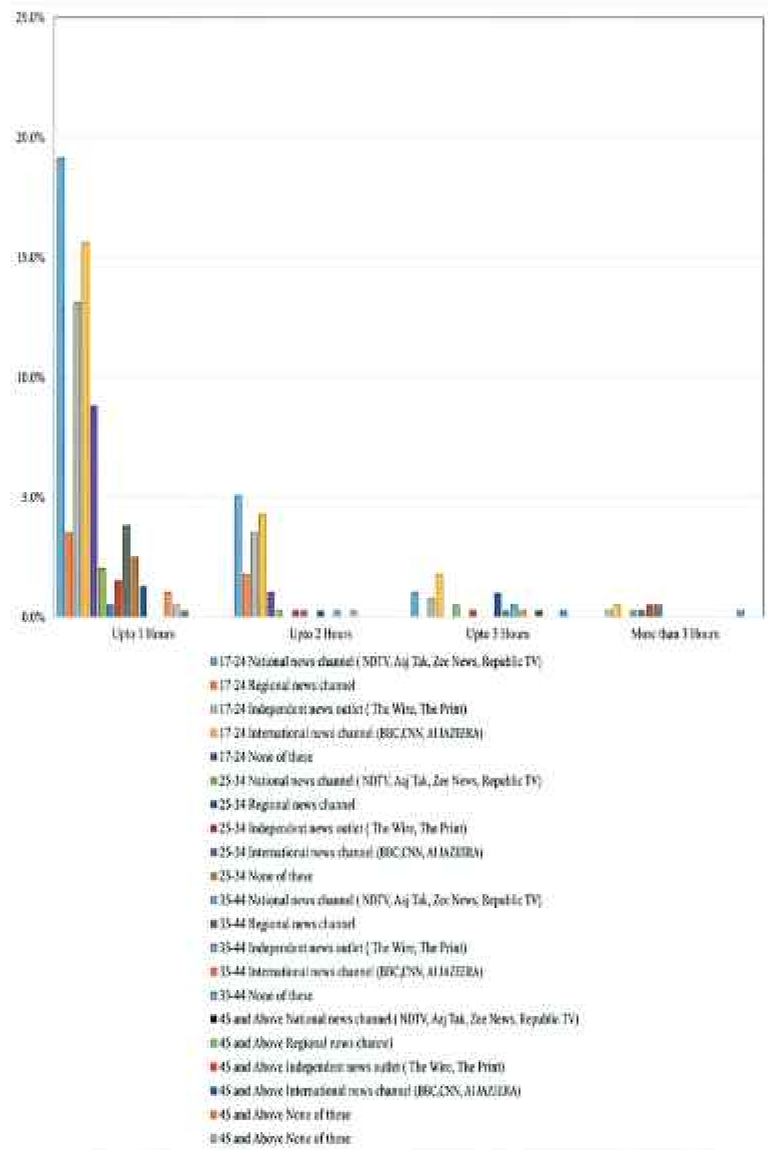
5.7 *News Consumption Patterns and Source Preferences across Age Groups*

The data reflects a combination of participants' daily watchable hours and their preferred news sources, revealing marked generational differences (Refer Graph 7). The 17–24 years age group emerges as the most engaged demographic across all viewing-duration categories. Within this group, 19.1 per cent allocate up to one hour to national news channels (NDTV, Aaj Tak, Zee News, Republic TV), followed by 15.6 per cent for international news channels (BBC, CNN, Al Jazeera). In the two-hour bracket, national news channels remain dominant at 5 per cent, while international channels account for 4.3 per cent. Consumption drops sharply in the "more than three hours" category across all sources.

In contrast, the 25 - 34 years age group shows its highest share (3.8 per cent) in viewing international news for up to one hour, with 2.5 per cent reporting no consumption from any listed sources. Percentages in the 35 - 44 years and above remain minimal, generally below the 1 per cent threshold across categories.

From the perspective of fake news debunking, these patterns have critical implications. The concentration of news engagement among the youth suggests greater exposure to current affairs and potentially to fact-checking resources. However, the prevalence of short-duration viewing (predominantly within the "up to one hour" range) may limit depth of understanding and the ability to critically evaluate information. Additionally, the "None of the above" segment across age groups points to reliance on alternative or digital-first platforms such as social media, WhatsApp, and YouTube—mediums that, while accessible, are more susceptible to the unchecked spread of misinformation. These findings indicate a need for targeted media literacy interventions that not only focus on the younger, more active news consumers but also address the lower engagement among older demographics to strengthen societal resilience against fake news.

Graph 7:
News Consumption Patterns and Source Preferences across Age Groups



5.8 *Patterns in Online News Sharing Across Platforms*

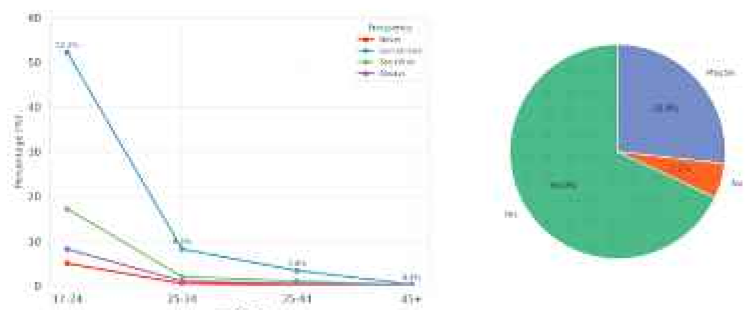
Graph 8 illustrates patterns in news sharing frequency across age groups and the extent to which participants verify authenticity before sharing. The two pie charts compare the proportion of respondents who check authenticity ("Yes") versus those who do not ("No"), while the line chart shows the distribution of sharing frequency categories ("Never," "Sometimes," "Too often," "Always") across age groups.

The 17 - 24 years age group emerged as the most active in sharing news, with over half (52.2 per cent) sharing "Sometimes," 17.2 per cent sharing "Too often," and 8.2 per cent sharing "Always." Other age groups - 25–34; 35 – 44 years and above reported significantly lower engagement in all frequency categories.

Regarding verification, 69.4 per cent of participants aged 17 – 24 years reported checking authenticity before sharing, compared with just 10.7 per cent who admitted they do not verify. The 25 - 34 years age group recorded the second-highest verification rate (10.3 per cent), with 3.8 per cent not verifying authenticity. Older groups demonstrated considerably lower verification levels.

Overall, the data suggest that younger participants (17 – 24 years) not only share news more frequently but are also the most likely to verify its authenticity before doing so.

Graph 8: Patterns in Online News Sharing Across Platforms



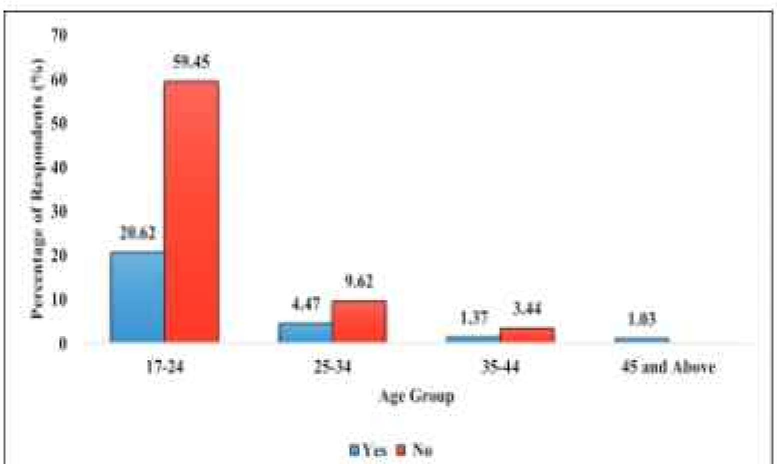
5.9 Awareness about Tools to Debunk Fake News

Graph 9 presents survey data revealing that a substantial 72.5 per cent of respondents lack knowledge of any tools or techniques for debunking fake news. Within this group, the majority belong to the age group of 17 - 24 years (59.45 per cent), followed by the 25 - 34 (9.62 per cent), 35 - 44 (3.44 per cent), and 45+ (0 per cent). These findings suggest that even among younger individuals, who are most active on social media, awareness of verification tools remains low.

In contrast, only 27.5 per cent of respondents reported awareness of such tools. The 17 - 24 years group accounted for the largest share of this informed segment (20.62 per cent), while the 25 -34 and 35 - 44 years groups contributed 4.47 per cent and 1.37 per cent, respectively. Merely 1 per cent of respondents aged 45 years and above reported awareness.

The data presents a paradoxical picture, while younger generations are the most exposed to online content and to fake news, they are the least equipped with the knowledge or resources

Graph 9: Awareness about Tools to Debunk Fake News



to verify it. This gap underscores an urgent need for integrating digital literacy and fact-checking tool training into educational programs, particularly targeting the age group that is the most engaged in online information consumption.

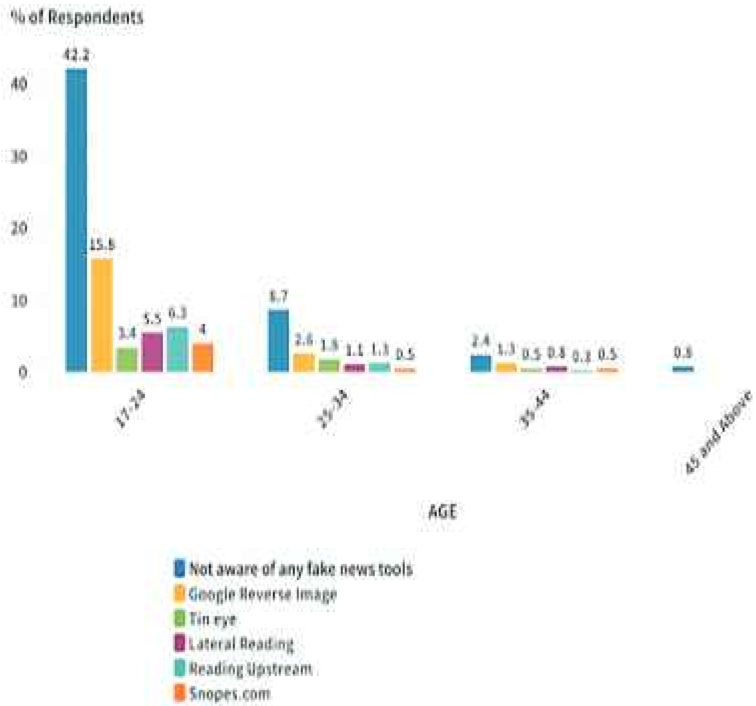
5.10 Ways of spotting fake news

Graph 10 highlights a concerning lack of awareness about fact-checking tools among respondents. Over half (54.1 per cent) reported having no knowledge of any such tools, with the largest share in the 17 - 24 years age group (42.2 per cent), followed by 8.7 per cent (25–34 years), 2.4 per cent (35 – 44 years), and 0.8 per cent (45 years and above).

Among those aware of tools, Google Reverse Image emerged as the most recognized, particularly among the youngest respondents (15.8 per cent), while awareness dropped sharply in older groups. In contrast, Snopes.com was the least known, totaling only 5 per cent overall. Awareness of lateral reading and reading upstream was also low, peaking at 5.5 per cent and 6.3 per cent, respectively, in the 17 - 24 years group. TinEye ranked as the second least recognized tool (5.8 per cent overall), with usage concentrated among younger participants.

These findings reveal a significant knowledge gap, especially in older age groups, and underscore the need for targeted media literacy initiatives to promote the use of verification tools across all age groups.

Graph 10 : Awareness about Tools to Debunk Fake News



5.11 Awareness of Red Flags in News Content by Age Group

As illustrated in graph 11, respondents aged 17 - 24 years exhibit the highest level of awareness regarding red flags in news content, with 46.0 per cent reporting the ability to identify such indicators. Nevertheless, 24.7 per cent within this cohort remain completely unaware of red flags, while 9.3 per cent report having frequently noticed such indicators but deliberately disregarded them.

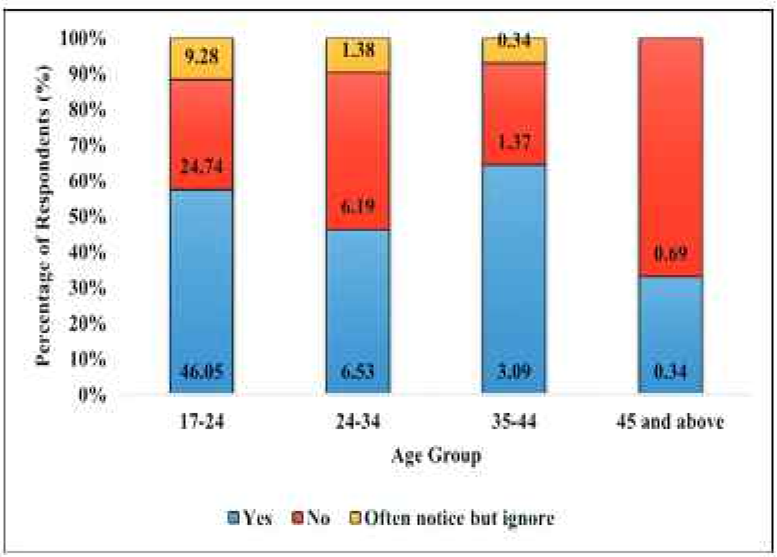
In the 25 - 34 years age group, the proportion of respondents aware of red flags (6.5 per cent) is nearly equivalent to those unaware (6.2 per cent), reflecting a marginal difference of 0.3 per cent. Notably the proportion of individuals who "often notice but ignore" such indicators declines sharply to 1.4 per cent, representing an 86.9 per cent decrease from the 17 - 24 years cohort.

Among older participants, awareness levels diminish considerably, with the 35 - 44 and 45+ years groups reporting awareness rates of 2.7 per cent and 0.3 per cent, respectively. Correspondingly, the proportion of those unaware of red flags in these cohorts is 1.4 per cent and 0.7 per cent.

Overall, the findings indicate that while younger respondents demonstrate higher detection capability, a substantial share either lack awareness or disregard potential misinformation cues. These results underscore the need for targeted media literacy interventions across all age demographics to strengthen the people's ability to identify and address doubtful information.

Graph 11:

Awareness about Red Flag among the respondents



12 Ways to recognise red flags

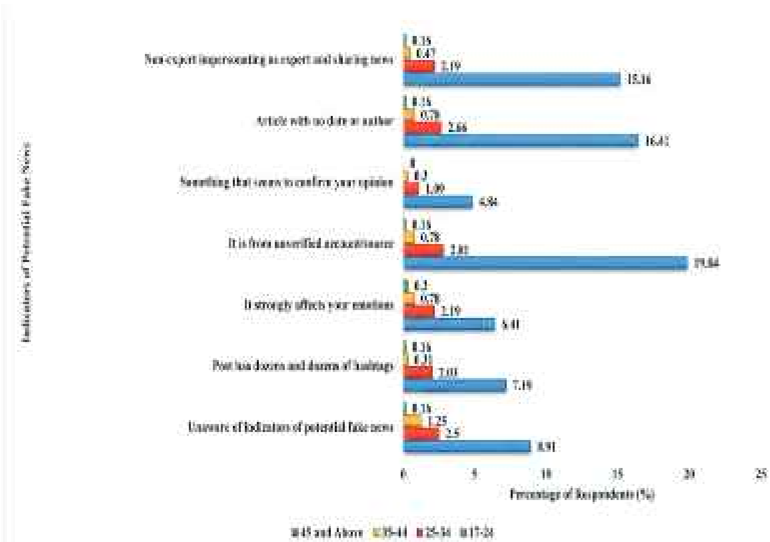
Graph 12 illustrates the proportion of respondents across age groups who can identify specific red flags associated with fake news. The most widely recognized indicator is "From an unverified account/source," identified by 19.7 per cent of respondents aged 17 – 24 years, followed by 3 per cent (25 – 34 years), 0.8 per cent (35–44 years), and 0.3 per cent (45 years and above). The second most common red flag is "Article with no date or author", recognized by 16.3 per cent, 2.8 per cent, 0.8 per cent, and 0.2 per cent across the respective age groups. Similarly, "Non-expert impersonating as an expert and sharing news" is noted by 15 per cent of respondents in the youngest group, with decreasing recognition among older participants.

A notable 12.8 per cent of respondents indicated being unaware of any of the listed red flags, with the largest share (8.9 per cent) from the 17 - 24 years age group. Other indicators such as "Something that seems to confirm your opinion" (6.3 per cent), "Post has dozens of hashtags" (9.7 per cent), and "It strongly affects your emotions" (9.7 per cent) received lower recognition overall.

The findings suggest that while certain high-visibility indicators, particularly unverified sources, are relatively well-recognized, awareness of more subtle cues remains low, especially among older respondents. This underscores the need for educational initiatives to expand understanding of diverse misinformation warning signs.

Graph 12:

Ways to recognize red flags by the respondents



5.13 *Identify the Possible Ways of Spotting Fake News*

Graph 13 presents the distribution of responses on methods used to identify fake news. Across all age groups, the most common verification method is checking the source of information. This approach is used by 15.11 per cent of respondents aged 17 – 24 years, followed by 2.50 per cent in the 25 - 34 years group, 0.78 per cent in the 35 - 44 years group, and 0.17 per cent among those aged 45 years and above.

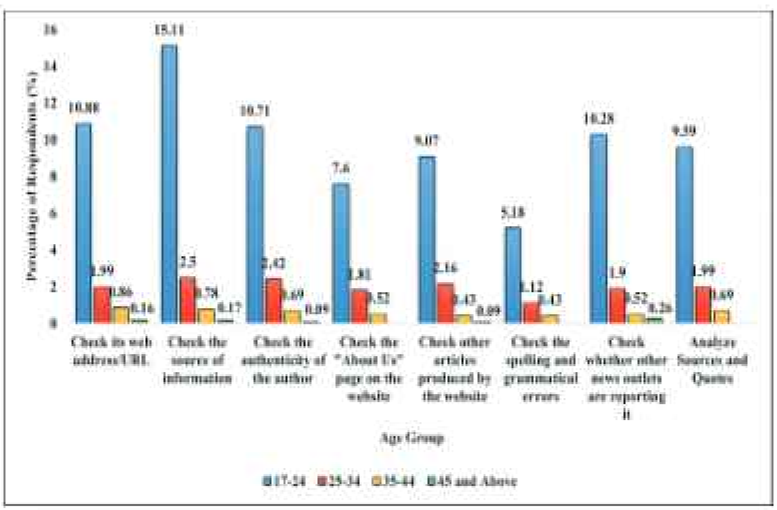
Other prominent methods among the 17 - 24 years cohort include checking its web address/URL, 10.88 per cent,, checking the authenticity of the author, 10.71 per cent, checking whether other news outlets are reporting it, 10.28 per cent, analyzing sources and quotes, 9.59 per cent, and checking other articles produced by the website, 9.07 per cent. These percentages decline sharply with age, with the 25–34 years group reporting between 1.90 per cent and 2.42 per cent across these methods, the 35–44 years group reporting between 0.43 per cent and 0.78 per cent, and the 45+ years group reporting between 0.09 per cent and 0.26 per cent.

Less frequently used methods are checking the "About Us" page on the website and checking spelling and grammatical errors. In the 17 - 24 years group, these account for 7.60 per cent and 5.18 per cent, respectively. Usage drops in older cohorts, with the 45+ years group recording no respondents using these two methods.

The data indicates that younger respondents, particularly the 17 - 24 years age group employ a wider range of verification techniques, showing higher awareness of both content-based and source-based indicators of misinformation. The sharp decline in

Graph 13:

Verification Methods Used to Assess News Credibility by Age Group



these practices with age suggests that older cohorts may lack exposure to or familiarity with digital verification tools. These findings highlight the importance of targeted digital literacy initiatives aimed at increasing fact-checking behaviors across all age demographics, especially for older populations that exhibit limited engagement with such verification methods.

5.14 Reasons for Creation of Fake News

Survey findings (Graph 14) reveal notable differences in the perceived motives for fake news creation among the young and the elderly population. The 17 - 24 years age group reported the highest incidence across all listed reasons. The leading cause identified was to push a point of view/gain publicity (17.84 per cent), followed by to target a specific set of people (12.90 per cent), to influence public opinion (11.84 per cent), and to make monetary gains (11.66 per cent). The lowest reported motive in this cohort was entertainment (4.59 per cent). Importantly, a significant proportion, 20.32 per cent selected all of the mentioned motives, indicating an understanding that fake news often stems from multiple, overlapping objectives rather than a single factor.

The 25 - 34 years age group displayed a similar ranking but at lower magnitudes, with pushing a point of view/gaining publicity at 3.53 per cent, targeting a specific set of people at 2.65 per cent, monetary gains at 2.30 per cent, influencing public opinion at 1.94 per cent, and entertainment at 0.88 per cent. Here, 4.06 per cent identified all the mentioned motives, reinforcing that younger adults recognize multi-factorial motives, though at a lower awareness level than the youngest group.

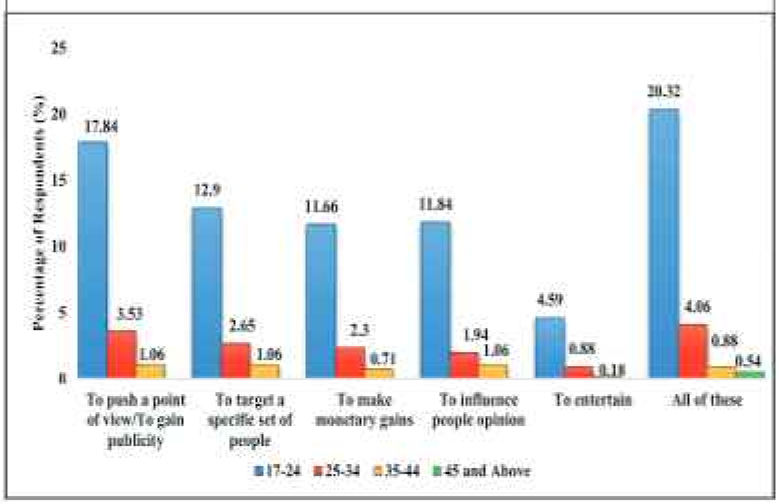
For the 35 - 44 years age group , percentages ranged from 1.06 per cent, to push a point of view/gain publicity and to influence public opinion, to 0.18 per cent, to entertain, with 0.88 per cent believing all the options to be motivational factors. In the 45+ years group, all responses fell below 0.6 per cent, with all of the above at

0.54 per cent, suggesting a considerably lower engagement or awareness regarding fake news drivers.

The data underscores a clear generational divide in the perception of why fake news is created. Younger respondents, particularly those aged 17 – 24 years, exhibit both higher recognition of individual motives and a greater awareness of their combined impact. This heightened perception may be linked to their higher exposure to online platforms where political, social, and economic agendas often converge in the form of manipulated information. Conversely, older cohorts demonstrate limited recognition of these motives, which may be attributed to lower digital engagement or reliance on more traditional information sources. The findings emphasize the need for targeted awareness campaigns and digital literacy programs that not only educate about the existence of fake news but also explain the multifaceted strategies behind its creation, ensuring all age groups are equally equipped to identify and critically evaluate such content.

Graph 14:

Reasons for Creation of Fake News



Conclusion

In conclusion, it is difficult to imagine our world without the internet and social media; they have become an intrinsic part of our lives, making it difficult to imagine a world without them. However, this widespread connectivity also brings new challenges, particularly the spread of fake news, misinformation, and disinformation. Balancing the need for free speech with the dangers posed by unchecked information remains a complex dilemma.

The solution lies in promoting media literacy, critical thinking, and awareness among individuals. It is essential for people to exercise due diligence by verifying information before accepting and sharing it. This study highlights the importance of equipping individuals with tools such as media literacy and critical thinking to effectively combat the spread of fake news.

Interestingly, the study reveals that the 17-24 years age group, who engage the most in sharing and discussing news, also exhibit the greatest lack of knowledge regarding tools to debunk fake news. This underscores the need for targeted educational initiatives to address this awareness gap and equip young individuals with the skills necessary to navigate the digital landscape responsibly.

To counter the spread of fake news, the study recommends practices such as checking the source of information, verifying web addresses (URLs), assessing the authenticity of authors, and cross-referencing information from other reputable sources. Tools like Google Reverse Image Search as well as techniques such as lateral and upstream reading can be instrumental in identifying and debunking fake news, thereby protecting individuals and helping to prevent its further dissemination.

In sum, the study accentuates the importance of promoting awareness and the use of reliable fact-checking tools across varied age groups. It emphasizes initiatives that enhance media literacy and critical thinking skills to empower individuals to make informed decisions and foster responsible news consumption and sharing. Moreover, the study suggests including study materials and training on debunking fake news within the National Education Policy of India.

By addressing these challenges and nurturing a society armed with media literacy and critical thinking, we can work towards a more informed, resilient, and responsible information ecosystem.

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Article

Dispossessed Capitals: A Critical Appraisal of State Welfare for Dalit Women in India

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Dilpreet Singh*

Abstract

Dalit women in India are socially situated at a highly vulnerable and marginalised position because of their intersectional identity. Although the state has provided for numerous legislative and policy measures since independence, Dalit women continue to be socially excluded. This paper critically analyses the legislative and socio-economic measures undertaken by the state from the combined lenses of feminist intersectional theory and Pierre Bourdieu's theory of capital. The study situates these state measures within Bourdieu's paradigm of capital, concluding that they primarily focus on redistributive justice in terms of material resources and fail to enhance social, cultural, economic, and symbolic capital for Dalit women. They are reduced to passive recipients of benefits rather than being agents of change. The intersectional analysis reveals that turning a blind eye to the lived experiences of Dalit women strengthens the existing social hierarchies, thus undermining the transformative intent of these

* Research Scholar at Department cum Centre for Women Studies and Development, Panjab University, Chandigarh

measures. The paper advocates for a paradigm shift in the way policies are framed, implemented, and monitored, through mapping all forms of capital during policy formulation and monitoring the policy's implementation through disaggregated data for gender and caste. Thus, the paper furthers the broader debates on intersectionality, state responsibility and social justice in India.

Keywords: Dalit, Constitution, Legislation, Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes, Social Justice, Untouchability, Social Capital, Economic Capital, Cultural Capital.

Introduction

Caste is a fundamental social institution of modern India (Béteille, 1965). The caste system divides society into closed hereditary groups, ranked according to ritual status. Ambedkar (2014), described the caste system as an "ascending order of reverence and descending order of contempt". The institution of 'caste endogamy' constitutes the essence of the caste system, thus dividing the Indian society into water-tight compartments. It is not merely an ideological notion but a material reality with a material base. It has affected Indian society immensely for ages, and it continues to have economic implications even today (Omvedt, 1982).

In the Caste System, the erstwhile untouchables, Dalits, are relegated to the lowest position, leading to their marginalisation and exploitation. 'Dalit' is a Marathi term that means the 'downtrodden.' These are former 'untouchables' within the traditional varna framework. In the official government language, Dalits are referred to as the Scheduled Caste. They are a mixed population of numerous caste groups throughout South Asia and speak various languages (Geetanjali, 2011). Amongst the Dalits, women are most marginalised as they exist at the bottom of the caste and gender hierarchy. They face a 'triple burden' of gender bias, caste discrimination, and economic deprivation (Sabharwal & Sonalkar, 2015).

Anand Teltumbde (2017) characterises Dalit women as the "Dalits of Dalits," encapsulating their compounded subjugation under the intersecting structures of class exploitation, caste oppression, and patriarchal domination. They suffer from relative poverty, deprivation and sexual abuse with comparatively fewer restrictions on their public visibility. But the fewer restrictions result from extreme poverty rather than a strong conviction in the unalienable right of women to work (Deshpande, 2011). The gendered division of labour influences the lived experiences of Dalit women significantly. They face specific forms of untouchability and sexualized forms of oppression (Shah et.al 2006). The oppression of Dalit women is found in different locations than that of the upper-caste. Given the different social location and experiences of Dalit women, it is imperative to look at them differently through an intersectional lens, especially when caste as an axis of oppression is ignored by mainstream feminism (Sabharwal & Sonalkar, 2015). The systemic and deep-rooted social institution of caste prompted the Constitution makers to frame a Constitution which would usher in a social revolution in India.

The Constitution of India epitomises the notion of Justice. It secures justice in political, social and economic spheres, thus binding and enabling the state to provide special safeguards for marginalised sections. These safeguards span educational, economic, social, political, and legal domains, prohibiting caste-based discrimination (Art. 15(1)), ensuring equality before the law (Art. 14), and abolishing untouchability (Art. 17). It empowers the State to implement reservations in education (Art. 15(4), 15(5)) and public employment (Art. 16(4), 16(4A), 16(4B)), and reserves political representation in Parliament, State Assemblies, and local bodies (Arts. 330, 332, 243D, 340T) (Bakshi, 2010). Legislative measures such as the Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955 (amended in 1976), and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes

(Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, further strengthen protections against caste-based exclusion.

The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment serves as the nodal body for SC welfare, coordinating with other ministries to design schemes aimed at social inclusion. While these measures reflect the State's commitment to social justice, their outcomes remain uneven when examined through the intersectional identity of Dalit women. Studies reveal that Dalit women fare worse than men across socio-economic indicators in all regions (Narasimhan, 1999). This disparity is partly due to policy frameworks that prioritise economic objectives while overlooking systemic patterns of caste, gender, and class-based exclusion.

The present study employs a qualitative method and interdisciplinary approach for critically analysing the policies through intersectional feminist theory and sociological inquiry. Analysis of various documents related to legislation, welfare schemes, data, and policy frameworks is undertaken through an intersectional lens, utilising Bourdieu's theory of different types of capital (economic, social, cultural, and symbolic). Along with the policy documents, the paper also draws upon data from various organisations, including UN Women, Human Rights Watch, CEDAW, the National Crime Record Bureau, the Census of India, NITI Aayog, and various Government Ministries, to contextualise systemic gaps and exclusion.

Theoretical Framework

Intersectionality requires a multivariate analysis of all the possible axes of discrimination. (John, 2015). Kimberlé Crenshaw developed intersectionality theory in the late 1980s, highlighting how different forms of oppression intersect and compound to produce unique experiences of marginalisation and exclusion (Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality is an activist as well as an academic pursuit. In public policy, it leads to critical analysis of how multiple identities intersect to create unique experiences and the ability and effectiveness of public policies in dealing with the unique experiences of inequality and exclusion. It can be applied at the level of policy formulation, implementation and evaluation. Rather than focusing on a single social identity, the intersectional prism is considerate to all possible social identities, their complex intersections with each other, thus coming up with policies which are more inclusive and effective for social upliftment of otherwise marginalised sections. This paper tries to analyse the different measures framed for the empowerment of Scheduled Castes in the light of the intersectional approach and how these policies construct or ignore the types of capital as formulated by Pierre Bourdieu (1986).

Pierre Bourdieu (1986), in his 'theory of capital', identifies four types of capital: Economic, Cultural, Social and Symbolic. Individuals and groups require all four types of capital for access to resources and upward social mobility. The economic capital, in terms of income and assets, enables basic survival and independence. The cultural capital in terms of education, skill, cultural assets, and knowledge builds capabilities for upward mobility and respect. The social capital in the form of networks, connections and community ties leads to inclusion, access to opportunities, information and support. The symbolic capital, constituting recognition, legitimacy, transforms all other capitals into social status and social power. All these capitals are interconnected and enjoy a symbiotic relationship. As rightly stated by Bourdieu, "capital breeds capital". Dalit women, because of their social position, lack all four types of capital. Although many legislations and policies are framed for the social mobility of Dalit women, they fail to ensure access to all forms of capital.

This paper uses Bourdieu's types of capital to reveal the hidden power structures shaping Dalit women's access to resources, and Intersectionality theory to examine how welfare policies address the compounded marginalisation of caste, gender, and class. Together, these frameworks connect structural barriers with lived experiences, highlighting gaps between policy intent and everyday realities.

Critical Analysis of Policies through 'types of Capital' and an Intersectional perspective

As highlighted in the India Exclusion Report (2014), Dalit women experience intersecting and compounded forms of marginalisation that position them at the lowest strata of India's socio-economic hierarchy. They are disproportionately educated compared to both Dalit men and non-Dalit women, face wider gender pay gaps, and are concentrated in stigmatised and exploitative occupations such as manual scavenging and landless agricultural labour. Further, they are more vulnerable to being coerced into various forms of prostitution, reflecting both economic precarity and entrenched caste-gender hierarchies. Beyond these economic and occupational exclusions, Dalit women are subject to intensified forms of caste-based and sexual violence that surpass the oppression faced either by Dalit men or non-Dalit women(India Exclusion Report, 2014). These findings of the report highlight the dispossession of cultural, social, economic and symbolic capital on the part of Dalit women.

Cultural Capital

Pierre Bourdieu (1986) defines cultural capital as non-economic resources instrumental in facilitating social mobility. He classifies cultural capital under three categories, i.e. institutionalised, embodied and objectified. Institutionalised cultural capital is the formally recognised education through possession of degrees, titles, etc. Embodied cultural capital is more implicit as it amounts to language, cultural knowledge, skills, mannerisms and behaviour, often inherited through socialisation within families and communities. The objectified capital is the material possession of culturally valued assets and objects like books, paintings, musical instruments, etc. He further argues that, because of the inherent unequal nature of the society, certain types of cultural capital, belonging to existing elites and dominant castes, are valued over others. For instance, in the Indian context, the

Brahmanical culture, values and way of life are considered to be ideal and superior (Srinivas, 1952)

According to the 2011 census, Dalit women in India have the lowest literacy rate at just 56.5 per cent (Census, 2011). While the enrolment rate is above 95 per cent for SC girls at the primary level, it drops significantly at the secondary level to 55-60 per cent. In higher education, the Gross Enrolment Ratio for Dalit women is 19.2 per cent approximately, while for upper caste women it is 30 per cent approximately. Dalit women constitute less than 2 per cent of Ph.D. holders in India (Ministry of Education, 2022). These figures imply limited institutionalised cultural capital among Dalit women despite numerous measures in terms of scholarships, affirmative action and handholding support through skill development and coaching for employment gains.

The scholarships available for Dalit women are: Pre-Matric Scholarship to SC Students, aimed at reducing the school drop-out rate; Post Matric Scholarship for Scheduled Caste Students (PMS-SC); Scholarships for obtaining Higher Education and Coaching Scheme: These include: Top-Class Education for Scheduled Caste Students; National Fellowship; National Overseas Scholarship; Free Coaching for SC and OBC Students. The Pre-matric schemes suffer from procedural lacunas like absence of gender specific quota allocations, excessive documentation, a lower income threshold at mere Rs. 2,50,000 excludes many candidates. The schemes are often marred by misallocations and delays of funds (Kumar & Choudhury, 2021). They lack gender specific measures like harassment safeguards and funding of critical costs like menstrual hygiene and safe transportation, essential for school retention (Jha & Menon, 2016; Nambissan, 2012; Human Rights Watch, 2014). The structural issues like violence (Rege, 2006), everyday casteism, lack of economic capital and entrenched patriarchy within Dalit households (Velaskar, 2016) make Dalit women more vulnerable to ineffectiveness of these schemes, thus contributing to high drop-out at the secondary level, leading to child labour and early child marriages (IDSN, 2020). This denial of embodied cultural capital feeds into the exclusion of Dalit women from other forms of capital.

The schemes associated with higher education of Dalits do not fare well on intersectional examination. Other than urban bias, the schemes suffer from a lack of gender specific quota (Varghese, 2015); certain schemes give priority to women candidates, but this provision is not mandatory. Procedurally, these schemes suffer from the same challenges as discussed above, like delayed allocations, a lower income threshold which excludes many deserving candidates, excessive documentation, and withholding of documents like Detailed Marksheets, Degrees in case of non-receipt of funds by the institutions (Tribune News Services, 2020). These bureaucratic lapses unfold within an institutionally hostile environment. Deep-rooted casteist structures permeate higher education spaces, where persistent stigma, exclusionary practices, and symbolic violence make academic life intolerable for Dalit students (Subramanian, 2019; Wankhede, 2021). For Dalit women, these challenges intensify through the added layer of gender discrimination, which further marginalizes them and often forces their exit from higher education (Lakshman, 2023; Still, 2017).

The exclusionary tendencies against Dalit women in higher education emanate from their historical exclusion from the valued embodied cultural capital. In earlier times, temples were sources of development of cultural knowledge, its transmission and skills (Dirks, 2001) , and Dalits were outrightly denied access to these cultural spaces (Omvedt, 1982). They were not allowed to learn scriptures and languages, thus blocking the means to acquire cultural knowledge. This historical exclusion is very much visible in present times, also where Dalit cultural scripture and symbols are dealt with contempt (Guru, 2011), thus, leading to caste based cultural marginalisation. Within the Dalit cultural sphere, Dalit Patriarchy denies equal roles and status to Dalit women (Guru, 1995). This exclusion, along with economic deprivations, leads to a lack of objectified cultural capital, essential for symbolic capital and social mobility (Bourdieu, 1986).

The social location of Dalit women leads to their exclusion from resources and networks essential for possessing cultural capital. The denial is further exacerbated by the failure of schemes to rectify the compounded disadvantage of caste and gender oppressions. Consequently, it has deep-rooted implications for the possession of other types of capital (Bourdieu, 1986). It reinforces the existing hierarchies and marginalisation in the society, thus strengthening the prejudices and stereotypes leading to internalised stigma and lack of confidence (Freire, 1970). Dalit women are excluded from influential caste and gender networks, limiting access to social capital, collective resources and symbolic capital. Dispossessed institutionalised cultural capital, alongwith the denied social capital, affects their employability, mostly relegating Dalit women to informal low-paying jobs or traditional caste roles, thus denying economic capital (Thorat & Newman, 2010). The social status and legitimacy of Dalit women are significantly associated with their cultural capital; hence, a dearth of cultural capital leads to their political under-representation (Be?teille, 1991).

Social Capital

Pierre Bourdieu (1986) explains social capital as a web of social relationships, connections, membership of influential groups and networks, which translates into an individual or group's access to opportunities and resources. Robert Putnam (2000) classifies social capital into 'bonding social capital', ties within the homogenous group and 'bridging social capital', ties with other groups in the society. Social capital also amounts to relationships of an individual or group to the state institutions, i.e. 'linking capital' (Woodcock & Narayan, 2000).

The structural exclusion faced by Dalit women results in a profound deprivation of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Within Dalit communities, patriarchal norms silence their voices and restrict their participation in supportive internal networks (Rege, 2006; Guru, 1995). In the wider social sphere, entrenched caste hierarchies and ideas of purity and pollution (Ambedkar, 1936) enforce their isolation, limiting their entry into cross-caste networks, credit groups, and informal channels of information (Still, 2017; Teltumbde, 2018). At the level of the state, institutional casteism and an inadequate understanding of intersecting oppressions (Crenshaw, 1989) lead to policy frameworks and bureaucratic structures that neither acknowledge nor address this network-based exclusion; instead, they frequently reproduce the very biases that prevent Dalit women from accessing formal avenues of capital and opportunity (Rai, 2019; Deshpande & Sharma, 2016).

Access to the linking capital is hindered by the denied cultural capital, systemic casteism and sexism, policy exclusions and bureaucratic apathy towards intersectional experiences of Dalit women. The Protection of Civil Rights Act, (1955), was enacted to enable Article 17, the abolition of untouchability, and ensure 'linking capital' to the state institutions by facilitating access to judicial institutions, but it lacks any women-specific provisions, thus ignoring the gendered nature of untouchability by homogenising the victims in one category (Government of India, 1955). Similarly, the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989), intended to augment linking social capital, and is progressive in a way that it criminalises sexual violence, assault, and humiliation against SC/ST women, access to special courts, thus addressing exclusion. But the legislation lacks a gender-sensitive approach, and is marred by implementation challenges like not filing the First Information Report, police apathy, low conviction rate because of investigation failure (The Wire Staff, 2018), denial of compensation and rehabilitation, judicial delays, and trivialization of sexual violence by not reporting it under the SC/ST Act (Human Rights Watch, 2017). Dalit women suffer at each stage, from filing the FIR to trial in the court of law; they have to relive the horrors of the crime because of the delayed justice. The compensation ensured under the Act is often delayed or denied. All these factors force victims into compromising with the perpetrator, thus diluting the intent of the Act (AIDMAM; NCDHR, 2021).

The forced inclusion of Dalit women in demeaning traditional occupations, such as manual scavenging (Human Rights Watch, 2014), creates a foundational barrier to social mobility. It perpetuates intergenerational poverty that leads to denial of educational opportunities (Nambissan, 2010; Velaskar, 2016), blocks entry into dignified employment and mainstream networks (Deshpande & Sharma, 2016; Rai, 2019), and severely limits their capacity for political participation (Ciotti, 2010). This constitutes a comprehensive denial of mobility, as framed by Guru and Chakravarty (2005). Their engagement in so-called impure occupations excludes them from bridging social capital.

The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013, was enacted to eliminate the inhumane practice of manual scavenging and the rehabilitation of those engaged in this demeaning occupation. It contains special provisions for women concerning their rehabilitation and training in alternative occupations (Government of India, 2013). The legislation intends to enable bridging into new networks and linking to state support. But it fails in the intended transformative justice because of the inherent lack of an intersectional approach, implementation shortcomings and procedural flaws. The absence of an intersectional lens led to a mere tokenistic coverage of women beneficiaries without addressing the structural issues forcing women in this demeaning occupation, even when men of the same household opt for other occupations. The Act is also silent on the caste-based violence faced by Dalit women at the hands of contractors. At the implementation level, the Act utterly fails in identifying and ameliorating the conditions of unpaid manual scavengers (Arif, 2023). Hence, the Act fails to translate the legal protections into means to accord economic capital (through rehabilitation in dignified employment), cultural capital (skill development for alternative occupations), and social capital (facilitating links to the state institution and bridging links to new networks.

The Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana - National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM), conceived as a self-employment initiative, explicitly seeks to strengthen bonding, bridging, and linking forms of social capital to enhance rural women's economic empowerment (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000; NRLM Framework, 2011). Its institutional design-comprising Self-Help Groups (SHGs), Village Organisations (VOs), and Cluster-Level Federations (CLFs)-is meant to cultivate these networks. In principle, the scheme should enable Dalit women to develop all three types of social capital. Yet, its implementation reveals significant constraints. Elite capture remains widespread, with dominant-caste or relatively affluent women monopolising group resources and decision-making, thereby reproducing existing village hierarchies (Ghosh, 2018; Kumar & Prakash, 2021). Dalit women's participation is frequently reduced to quota-driven tokenism, offering little substantive influence and diluting the political urgency of their concerns (Gupta & Gupta, 2020; Sharma, 2008). Caste-based exclusion continues within the groups themselves, restricting Dalit women's access to bridging networks and equitable loan distribution (Still, 2017). As a result, rather than reshaping social relations, the scheme often entrenches prevailing power structures, ultimately failing to translate social capital into tangible economic gains for those it aims to uplift the most (Deshpande & Sharma, 2013).

The political participation of Dalit women significantly enhances their access to all forms of Social capital, particularly symbolic and linking capital (Putnam, 2000). The local self-government bodies are considered to be significant spaces to initiate the incorporation of social justice in governance and politics. The democratic reforms in India in the form of the Constitution (Seventy-Third Amendment) Act, 1992, ensure the representation of marginalised social groups in local governance, including Dalits and specifically Dalit women, through constitutionally mandated affirmative action policy where at least one-third of seats are reserved for women with proportional representation for SC/ST population (Government of India, 1992). But the results are not transformative, despite Dalit women's elections, they face multiple barriers in terms of 'politics of presence', like proxy leadership, resource control and development decisions undertaken by dominant castes as per their interests (Mangubhai & Sydenham, 2009); seat rotation every five years deprives Dalit women of accumulating experience and institutional knowledge (Mangubhai & Sydenham, 2009). These institutions, *per se*, become a site for the practice of untouchability and exclusion, where they face all kinds of discrimination, like denial of permission to hoist national flags, being disallowed from participation in temple festivals and unwanted interference in work (Pandian & Shubhiksha GV, 2023), denial of a chair to sit in council meetings (Nagraj, 2021). These patterns of exclusion inhibit Dalit women from converting their political presence into symbolic capital.

In India's national Parliament, Dalit women remain severely under-represented. In the 18th Lok Sabha (2024), only 11 women were elected from the 84 constituencies reserved for Scheduled Castes-just 13.1 per cent (Bodwal, 2024). This marginal presence reflects the broader underrepresentation of women in Indian parliamentary politics, where women constitute only a small proportion of elected representatives overall. This political exclusion can be understood as a direct consequence of their systematic deprivation of key forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Their limited economic capital-reflected in substantially lower asset levels compared to male candidates (ADR, 2024)-is rooted in structural disadvantage and restricts their ability to finance electoral campaigns. They also lack the cultural and social capital embedded in dominant caste-gender networks that shape candidate selection and voter mobilisation (Chandra, 2016; Ciotti, 2010). As a result, they are denied symbolic capital, or political legitimacy, both in mainstream parties and within Dalit political formations that are often shaped by patriarchal norms (Guru, 1995; Pai & Kumar, 2018). Their under-representation thus becomes both a symptom and a driver of further marginalization: their absence in legislative spaces delays their access to policy benefits and deepens the symbolic violence structuring their social location (Wankhede, 2021). This produces a self-reinforcing cycle in which dispossession of various capitals leads to political exclusion, which in turn intensifies the dispossession itself.

The exclusion of Dalit women from the political sphere is not only a consequence of denied capital, but it furthers the cycle of structural exclusion from social, economic, cultural and symbolic capital.

Economic capital

According to Pierre Bourdieu, economic capital implies economic resources which are directly convertible to money and institutionalized property rights, serving as the foundational resource that can be transformed into other forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986). It is vital for social mobility as it determines life chances-access to quality education, healthcare, and secure housing. For Dalit women, the possession of economic capital is disproportionately low due to historical and structural exclusion from the very processes of wealth creation. The caste system, historically relegated Dalit women to degrading, non-accumulable occupations (Ambedkar, 1916), a legacy sustained by ongoing discrimination in land, credit, and labour markets (Thorat & Newman, 2010). This economic deprivation is not simply a sum of caste and gender disadvantage but a unique, compounded burden arising from their intersectional identity (Crenshaw, 1989). As Deshpande (2011) empirically demonstrates, Dalit women face a 'double disadvantage,' manifesting in severe asset poverty, segregation into informal and stigmatized work, and exclusion from formal credit. This profound lack of convertible economic resources is the primary material barrier that constrains their ability to acquire other forms of capital needed for full social participation.

The employment status and wages drawn by Dalit women point towards the present-day imitation of their historical and structural exclusion. In the rural setting, gender, caste, and landlessness significantly govern the employability of Dalit women. It is overwhelmingly informal: casual agricultural labour, informal non-farm daily wage work, and unpaid family labour. They are concentrated in low-paying, precarious agricultural labour with a highly exploitative relationship with the employer (Sabharwal & Sonalkar, 2015). Gendered caste discrimination leads to low wages, concentration in demeaning, stigmatised occupations (Deshpande & Sharma, 2016; Thorat & Newman, 2010), like manual scavenging, attached labour, excreta cleaning, carcass disposal, piggery, butchery, cleaning soiled clothes, etc (Human Rights Watch, 2014; Still, 2017). Those employed in upper caste households are restricted to arduous and less-paying tasks outside the residential area of the house (Shah, Deshpande, Thorat, Baviskar, & Mander, 2006). This occupational segregation is not accidental but a mechanism of social and economic control that enforces caste hierarchy through the devaluation of Dalit women's labour, a process theorized as institutionalized humiliation (Guru, 2011).

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005 plays an important role in augmenting social and economic capital with Dalit women, as it provides guaranteed access to work and wages and equality of wages to Dalit women. But factors like declining budgetary layouts for the scheme, delayed payments and local elite capture dilute the potential of the scheme for Dalit women (Desai, 2018). In the urban setting, Dalit women are disadvantaged because of a lack of cultural and social capital. They suffer from low income, informalisation and denial of opportunities for entry in formal employment (Thorat and Newman, 2011). Even those who get salaried employment, despite the denial of social and cultural capital, face a staggering wage gap.

According to the State of Working India 2023 report, salaried employed SC/ST women earn only 54 per cent of the income earned by upper-caste women (Azim Premji University, 2023).

Access to institutionalised economic capital is highly skewed against Dalit women, resulting from their caste and gendered identity. NSSO's Land and Livestock Holdings Survey highlighted the fact that 58.4 per cent of rural Dalit households are entirely landless, while for the general population, the figure is 31 per cent (NSSO, 2014). At the structural level, the higher proportion of landlessness amongst Dalit women is a result of an inherently patriarchal and patrilocal society, under-enforcement of land reforms, social coercion and violence faced by Dalit women when they try to insist on their right to ownership (AIDMAM; NCDHR, 2021). Within Dalit households, women are denied institutionalised economic capital amid 'Dalitisation of Patriarchy', especially in socially mobile households, where Dalit men appropriate the upper caste patriarchy (Still, 2017).

The lack of institutionalised economic capital among Dalits, compounded by entrenched caste-based discrimination in labour markets and the absence of cultural and social capital, severely restricts their access to formal and institutional credit. In response, the Indian state has introduced a range of targeted financial empowerment schemes, such as the National Scheduled Castes Finance and Development Corporation (NSFDC), the National Safai-Karamcharis Finance and Development Corporation (NSKFDC), the Special Central Assistance (SCA) to the Scheduled Castes Sub-Plan (SCSP), the Scheme of Assistance to Scheduled Castes Development Corporations (SCDCs), the Venture Capital Fund for Scheduled Castes (VCF-SC), the Credit Enhancement Guarantee Scheme for Scheduled Castes (MoSJE, 2019), the Stand-Up India Scheme, and the Dr. Ambedkar Young Entrepreneur League 2022 (DICCI, 2022). In addition, the promotion of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) involving Dalit women aims to build collective agency.

While these initiatives are designed to enhance economic capital, their outcomes remain constrained due to the interplay of absent social and cultural capital, alongside a lack of gender-sensitive and intersectional design. For example, NSFDC and NSKFDC have women-specific provisions-Mahila Samriddhi Yojana and Mahila Adhikarita Yojana-yet these often reinforce traditional gender roles and fail to address structural disadvantages such as caste-patriarchy intersections (Kalpana, 2017). In the case of SCA to SCSP, guidelines recommend preferential targeting of SC women, but the provision is non-binding, and resources are frequently diverted towards general infrastructure, side-lining gendered needs (Centre for Equity Studies, 2020). Similarly, the SCDCs nominally prioritise women in concessional loans and training, yet implementation gaps, particularly the requirement for male co-signers, systematically limit Dalit women's access to credit, perpetuating both caste and patriarchal control. Dalit women lack collateral, business registration and credit history, thus making them virtually invisible in the start-up ecosystem (Deshpande & Sharma, 2016) (OECD, 2021) (Rai, 2019). Venture Capital Fund for Scheduled Castes (VCF-SC) encourages women-led start-ups, but it does not provide for a women-specific quota for equity support. The Credit Enhancement Guarantee Scheme for Scheduled Castes also lacks gender disaggregated targets and reporting. Stand-Up India Scheme mandates loans between Rs 10 Lakh to 1 crore for one SC/ST borrower and one-woman borrower per bank branch. But the scheme does not specify any quota for SC/ST women as well, and their participation is not tracked separately.

The policies and schemes for economic empowerment are ignorant of the compounded deprivation of Dalit women, at worst, or redistributive at best. They lack the transformative zeal, amounting merely to formal inclusion but substantial exclusion of Dalit women from Bourdieu's (1986) forms of capital. At the policy level, focusing merely on the Dalit households as a unit of analysis and benefits, without recognising the gendered power relations, is putting Dalit women at a disadvantage despite the economic mobility of the household because of Dalitisation of Patriarchy (Still, 2017). This exclusion from economic capital leads to dispossession of other forms of capital, thus feeding into inherently hierarchical social order rather than dismantling it.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has critically analysed legislative and policy measures, ranging from protective laws to socioeconomic schemes, by employing Bourdieu's 'types of capital' along with intersectional feminist theory. The findings make it evident that Dalit women suffer from a stigmatised existence, dispossessed of all forms of capital, emanating from the structural exclusion of their intersectional identity (Crenshaw,1989). The state measures have failed to transform the lives and conditions of the most marginalised section of society. They might have addressed material deprivations through redistributive justice, but failed to change power relations or cultural hierarchies, or to have a transformative impact on the 'structure of the field' (Bourdieu,1966). Dalit women are reduced to passive recipients of benefits rather than being agents of change.

The common limitation of the policy measures is the tokenistic inclusion of Dalit women without catering to their intersectional existence and lived experiences. De-segregated data for caste and gender is never collected to facilitate effective formulation, efficient implementation and critical analysis of the policies. The homogenising tendencies dilute the effectiveness of the policy measures. Additionally, all the measures lack a comprehensive and collaborative approach to address the denial of forms of capital. Bourdieu's (1986) observation that 'capital breeds capital' manifests itself in the case of Dalit women, where denial of one form of capital leads to denial of all.

In the pursuit of ensuring substantive empowerment of Dalit women, policy design must move beyond economic transfers. It should adopt a holistic capital-building approach by pairing schemes like MGNREGA with literacy, financial training, leadership workshops, and mentorship networks that strengthen cultural and social capital. Intersectional data collection, disaggregated by caste and gender, alongside independent monitoring, can expose and address tokenistic participation. Strengthened enforcement of laws such as the SC/ST Act through Dalit women-led oversight bodies, victim support services, and targeted educational interventions like simplified scholarships and bridge courses in bureaucratic and digital literacy can reduce systemic barriers. Transformative representation in governance requires both reserved seats and capacity-building to translate presence into influence, while institutional reforms must address symbolic violence through mandatory anti-caste, gender-sensitivity training and public campaigns that reframe Dalit women from passive victims to active agents of change

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Article

Distribution Patterns of Urban Centers in Haryana: 1971-2011

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Kuldeep*
Smita Bhutani**

Abstract

Urbanization in India is not characterized by rapid pace alone but by its massive scale and extensive spatial spread. Conventionally, urbanization is assessed through the size and growth of the urban population as well as the increase in the number of urban settlements. The number of towns in India increased substantially from 2,219 in 1951 to 7,935 in 2011, reflecting a significant expansion of the urban system. By 2011, approximately 377 million people resided in these towns and cities, accounting for about 31.2 per cent of the country's total population. At the state level, Haryana exhibits a relatively higher degree of urbanization, with 154 urban centers accommodating nearly 35 per cent of the state's population. This pattern underscores the growing importance of urban areas in India's demographic and spatial transformation. This study examines the spatial dynamics of urban expansion in Haryana between 1971 and 2011 using Nearest Neighbor analysis,

*Research Scholar, Department of Geography, Panjab University, Chandigarh.
**Professor, Department of Geography, Panjab University, Chandigarh.

average spacing, and town-size hierarchy. The results reveal an overall shift towards a more random distribution of towns accompanied by increasing clustering among lower-order settlements, indicating the influence of agglomeration processes. A marked decline in average inter-town spacing reflects urban densification driven by a substantial increase in the number of towns. The concentration of settlements along national highways and around Class I towns highlights the critical role of transport infrastructure and urban hierarchy in shaping regional urban growth and integration.

Keywords: Urbanisation, Urban Centres, Special Distribution, Nearest Neighbor Statistic, Special Pattern

Introduction

One of the most profound transformations induced by human activity since the Industrial Revolution has been the accelerated conversion of natural landscapes into built-up urban environments to accommodate expanding urban populations (Hu et al., 2025; Ouyang et al., 2022). Urban centers are important hubs where people tended to congregate (Yu et al., 2020). Since urban centers (UCs) are essential nodes of an urban system that continually support the functioning of urban functions, urban centers identification has been emphasized as a crucial stage for urban spatial structure analysis (Huang et al., 2017; Yu et al., 2020). Urban centers are essential to sustainable development because they house middle-class and upper-class populations whose consumption drives global resource demand and greenhouse gas emissions, host a growing portion of the world's population, and concentrate the majority of economic and industrial activities with high resource use and waste generation (McGranahan & Satterthwaite, 2003). Urban living has increased rapidly in recent decades, and currently around 55 per cent of the global population resides in urban areas. According to United Nations estimates, this share is expected to grow to nearly 68 per cent by the middle of the century, with the possibility of continued expansion thereafter (Institute of Social Sciences, 2019). The most recent UN projections show that between 1975 and 2025, there was a significant increase in the percentage of people living in urban areas, rising from 31 to 45 per cent. Urbanization is expected to keep growing until 2050. As cities are growing, new challenges are also coming along with them. India, the world's most populous country, has the second-largest urban system, with pronounced state-level disparities: economically advanced states are more urbanized, while less developed states show limited urban growth (Sarif & Roy, 2024). As of 2025, urban areas are home to roughly 44 per cent of the population in India (United Nations, 2025). At the regional level in India, growth of cities are abnormal (Chakraborty, 2017) that results in burden over urban infrastructure and housing (Jain & Korzhenevych, 2019). Variations in the distribution and growth of urban populations contributes to sub-national socio-economic inequality, with highly urbanized regions hosting numerous and rapidly growing cities, while low-urbanized areas have sparse urban centers and limited growth (Balasubramanian et al., 2021). Analyzing the distribution of urban centers helps identify regional inequalities, supports efficient planning, guides policy decisions, and promotes balanced and sustainable urban development.

Objectives

To study the spatial distribution and pattern of urban centers in Haryana.

Study Area

Haryana is a prominent state located in northwestern India, extending between 27°39' to 30°55' North latitudes and 74°28' to 77°36' East longitudes. It was formed on 1 November 1966 after its separation from Punjab. The state shares its boundaries with Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and surrounds the national capital territory of Delhi on three sides, giving it a strategic geographical advantage. According to the 2011 Census, Haryana has a population of about 25.35 million, with a high population density in districts adjoining Delhi. The state shows a mixed demographic structure, dominated by rural population, though urbanization has increased rapidly in recent decades. About 35 per cent of the population resides in urban areas, concentrated mainly in cities such as Gurugram, Faridabad, Panipat, Hisar, and Karnal. Haryana's urban growth has been strongly influenced by industrialization, transport corridors, and proximity to Delhi, making it one of India's fastest-developing states.

Data and Methodology

The present study is based on data that was collected from the Census of India, 2011; Administrative Atlas Haryana, 2011 and Google earth Pro. The data was analyses and maps were created by using Gis software (ArcGIS). To understand the spatial distribution pattern of urban centers in Haryana the Nearest Neighbor Statistic (Rn statistic) was applied and the result was analyzed to understand the patterns of distribution of urban centres in terms of three extreme types of location distinguished as uniform, random, clustered. The Nearest Neighbor analysis was done by using spatial statistical tool of ArcGIS. The location of different size towns around class I towns are analysed by creating buffer around the class I towns.

Results

The data on the Nearest Neighbor statistic (Rn value) and Average Spacing by Size Class of Towns in Haryana for the years 1971 and 2011 provides a detailed insight into the spatial dynamics and urban expansion over these forty years. The examination of Nearest Neighbor statistic indicating a tendency towards random distribution of towns and also suggests a lack of strong spatial patterns. There was variation in the degree of randomness

Table 1
Haryana: Nearest Neighbor Ratio and Average Spacing by Size Class of Towns, 1971 and 2011

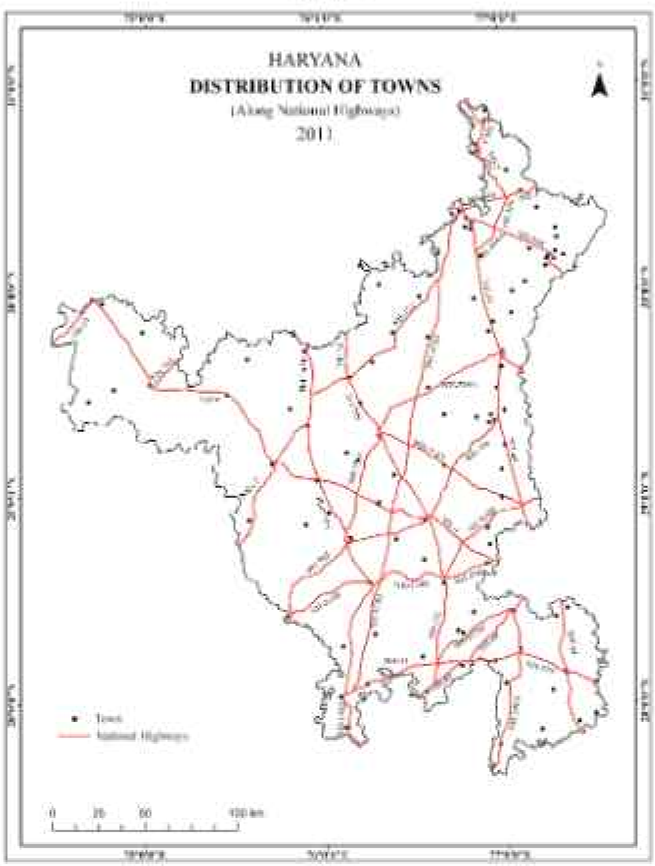
Year	1971			2011		
Size Class of Towns	Number of Towns	Nearest Neighbor Statistic (Rn)	Average Spacing (km)	Number of Towns	Nearest Neighbor Statistic (Rn)	Average Spacing (km)
I	2	1.85	112.89	20	1.44	33.95
II	9	1.38	59.63	11	1.99	63.16
III	14	1.54	41.85	45	1.29	20.22
IV	15	1.58	46.17	34	1.13	20.55
V	20	1.33	33.16	36	0.86	15.2
VI	5	1.74	75.03	8	0.68	25.49
All towns	65	1.42	19.18	154	1.13	9.62

Source: Computed by using ArcGIS

between 1971 and 2011 (Table 1). The towns are tended more towards random distribution in 2011 (Rn=1.13) as compared to the towns in 1971 (Rn=1.42). After the analysis of nearest neighbor in different hierarchical classes it was observed that the Class I towns (Rn=1.44) showed a tendency towards random pattern of distribution in 2011, while in 1971 Class II towns showed tendency towards random but in 2011 it shows towards uniform. The distribution of Class IV (Rn=1.13) and Class V (Rn=0.86) towns in 2011, showed random pattern, while the pattern of distribution of towns belonging to Class VI (Rn=0.68) showed clustering pattern. This suggests that the process of agglomeration works behind such a pattern. Thus, the higher order towns were found to be more dispersed while the lowest hierarchical class showed a tendency to cluster.

In 1971, the urban landscape of Haryana was less dense and more spread out, as evidenced by the higher average spacing values across all town classes but it became denser in 2011. The analysis of the average distance between towns in different categories revealed a correlation between the size and spacing of urban centers. The average spacing of towns witnessed a decrease in distance from 19.18 km in 1971 to 9.62 km in 2011(Table 1). The decrease in distance was due to the increase in the number of towns from 65 to 154 during 1971-2011. The average spacing of class I towns was 33.95 km in 2011 among the 20 towns. The average spacing of Class II towns was 63.16 km. The Class III towns had an average spacing of 20.22 km. Similarly, the Class IV towns were spaced at a distance of 20.55 km and Class V towns were spaced 15.2 km apart. The average spacing of class VI towns was 25.49 km

Map 1



Source: Administrative Atlas Haryana, Google Pro 2024 and it was more than the spacing of class III, IV & V towns. The spacing of towns in Haryana decreased from 1971 to 2011 as the number of towns increased during this period.

The map showing distribution of towns in Haryana along national highways (Map 1) reveals that the towns are strategically spread throughout the state. As the topography of Haryana comprises mostly flat and extensive plains, there are minimal natural constraints affecting the location of these towns. Towns are spread throughout the state. As such, the positioning and distribution of towns along the national highways suggest a deliberate urban planning strategy influenced by many factors. These factors include the desire to enhance connectivity and economic efficiency by situating such towns along major transportation routes. This setup not only facilitates easier access and distribution of goods and services but also aims to stimulate economic growth and development by linking these towns directly to the broader national road network.

The concentration of urban centers along these routes highlights the importance of infrastructure in urban planning

Table 2

Haryana; Number of Towns along National Highways

S. No.	National Highway	Number of Towns
1	NH 44	35
2	NH 52	6
3	NH 152	6
4	NH 9	10
5	NH 48	6
6	NH 344	12
7	NH 248 A	8
8	NH 7	8
9	NH 11	4
10	NH 709	6
	Total	101

Source: *Census of India, Administrative Atlas Haryana, 2011* within the state. The distribution of towns along the national highways in Haryana as of 2011 illustrates a significant pattern in urban development and connectivity across the state. One hundred one towns were located on various National Highways in Haryana. NH 44 (India's longest national highway) had the highest number of towns with 35 towns, indicating this route as the major urban corridor that facilitates not only vehicular and logistic movement but also acts as growth vectors for urbanization and economic activities in the region. NH 52 with 6, NH 152 with 6, NH 248A with 8, NH 9 with 10, NH 344 with 12 and NH 7 with 8 towns showed considerable urban density highlighting their role in connecting various parts of the state to the main economic hubs (Table 2). Meanwhile, NH52, NH152, NH 248A and NH 11 had relatively fewer towns, with 6, 6, 8 and 4 towns respectively; these highways might be serving more as transit routes with less urban aggregation but must be crucial for connecting smaller towns and facilitating economic exchanges between them and larger urban centers. NH 709 supports 6 medium sized towns, possibly linking agricultural hinterlands more directly to nearby urban markets. National highways in Haryana thus played a crucial role in the development of towns located along their routes by enhancing connectivity, fostering economic growth and improving accessibility. These highways serve as vital arteries for transportation, enabling the efficient movement of goods, services and people, which in turn stimulate trade and commerce. This network of towns along these national highways experienced increased economic activity, as businesses benefit from better access to markets and resources. Additionally, improved connectivity attracted investments, tourism and industries, that lead to job creation and infrastructure development. The presence of these national highways also encouraged the establishment of educational institutions, healthcare facilities and other essential services and contributed to the overall socio-economic progress of these towns. Thus, national highways in Haryana acted as catalysts for regional development by transforming towns into thriving hubs of activity and opportunity and contributed to urban

Table 3

Distribution of Towns around Class I Towns, 2011

Size of Towns	Distance From Class I Towns		
	(0-10 km)	(10-20 km)	(0-20 km)
Medium Size (Class II & III)	9	17	26
Small Size (Class IV, V, VI)	34	14	48
Total	43	31	74

Source: Computed by using ArcGIS software

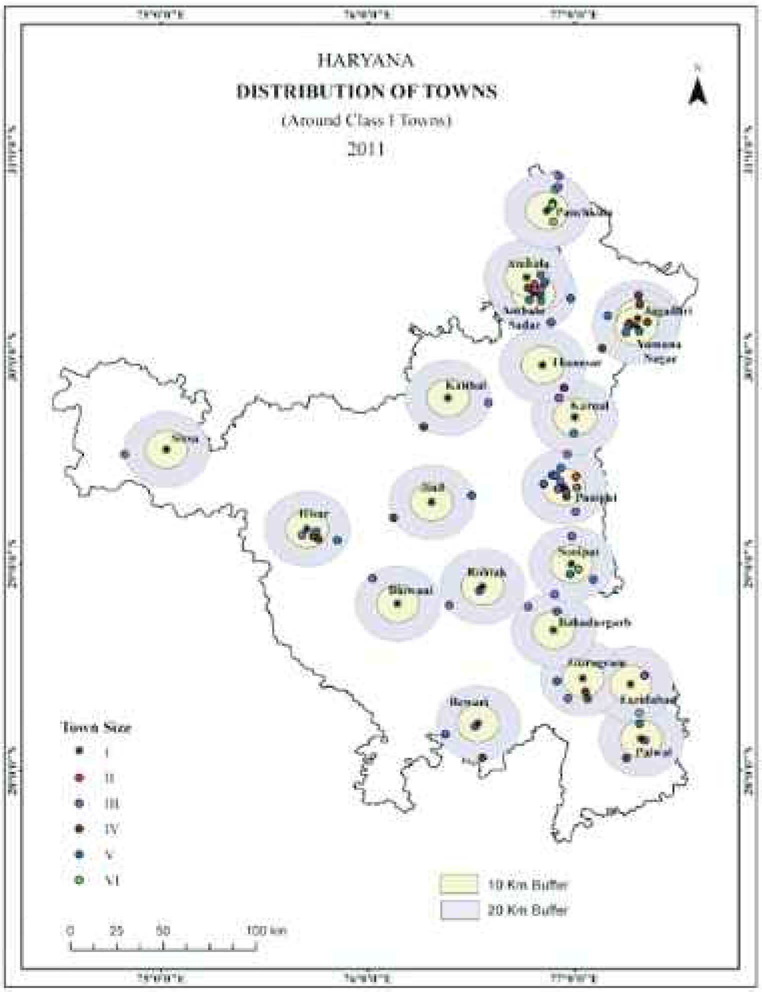
growth.

The data on the distribution of towns around Class I towns in Haryana for 2011 provides a clear insight into the spatial arrangement of medium and small-sized towns in relation to the largest urban centers (Table 3). Class I towns, being the largest and most significant urban hubs, naturally exert a considerable influence on their surrounding areas. Within a radius of 0-10 km from Class I towns, there are 9 medium-sized towns (Class II and III) and 34 small-sized towns (Class IV, V and VI). This close proximity indicates that these smaller urban centers benefit from their nearness to major cities, enjoying better access to infrastructure, services and economic opportunities. The clustering of smaller towns around Class I cities is strategic, enhancing connectivity and supporting the spillover of population and businesses from the major urban centers, which helps in managing congestion and distributing growth more evenly.

Extending the radius to 10-20 km from Class I towns, there are 17 medium-sized and 14 small- sized towns, bringing the total number of towns within 20 km of Class I cities to 26 for medium-sized and 48 for small-sized towns. The tendency for intensive clustering, driven by the emergence of several new urban centers, became more pronounced, especially around Ambala, Panipat, Yamunanagar, Hisar, Gurugram and Faridabad (Map 2). This

Map 2

Distribution of Towns around Class I Towns, 2011



Source: Census of India 2011 and Researchers analysis.

wider spread indicates a broader zone of influence of Class I towns, facilitating regional development and towns to their peripheries enhance mobility and resource sharing, creating an integrated urban network. The presence of these towns within a radius of 20 km supports a dynamic interaction between major urban hubs and their peripheries, fostering economic linkages, labor mobility and shared resources. This distribution highlights the importance of Class I towns as central nodes in urban hierarchy which exert a significant influence on smaller towns. Economic activities in Class 1 towns, such as industries, retail and services, create a ripple effect, stimulating growth in smaller towns by fostering trade, supply chains, ancillary businesses and driving the growth and development of smaller towns within their orbit. The spatial pattern also reflects the strategic urban planning efforts aimed at promoting balanced regional development and preventing excessive concentration of population and activities in the large cities alone. Smaller towns often adopt developmental trends, cultural practices and technological advancements from Class 1 towns, leading to gradual modernization. The importance of Class 1 towns lies in their ability to drive regional development, reduce urban-rural disparities and act as centers of innovation and progress, ultimately uplifting the socio-economic conditions of their surrounding areas.

Conclusion

The analysis of spatial distribution, spacing, and hierarchical relationships of towns in Haryana between 1971 and 2011 reveals significant transformations in the state's urban structure, reflecting processes of urban expansion, densification, and regional integration. The Nearest Neighbor analysis indicates an overall tendency towards a random pattern of town distribution, with an increasing degree of randomness observed over time. The decline in the Rn value from 1971 to 2011 suggests a gradual weakening of rigid spatial ordering as the number of towns increased and new urban centres emerged. Higher-order towns exhibited relatively dispersed patterns, whereas lower-order towns demonstrated increasing clustering, highlighting the role of agglomeration economies in shaping the spatial organization of smaller settlements.

The reduction in average spacing between towns over the study period further underscores the intensification of urbanization in Haryana. The substantial decrease in inter-town distances reflects both the growth in the number of towns and the progressive densification of the urban network. Variations in spacing across town-size classes reveal a clear relationship between urban hierarchy and spatial proximity, with smaller towns located closer together and often in the vicinity of larger urban centres. This pattern points to the growing interdependence among towns and the emergence of a more integrated urban system.

The distribution of towns along national highways emphasizes the critical role of transport infrastructure in directing urban expansion. National highways have acted as major growth corridors by enhancing accessibility, stimulating economic activity, and encouraging the concentration of settlements along key routes. Additionally, the clustering of medium and small towns around Class I cities highlights the expanding spheres of influence of major urban centres. These cities function as regional growth poles, facilitating spillover effects in terms of population, economic activities, and infrastructure development. Overall, the findings demonstrate that urban expansion in Haryana has been strongly shaped by hierarchical urban interactions, transportation networks, and agglomeration processes, contributing to a more connected and dynamic regional urban system.

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Article

The Impact of UN Peacekeeping Missions: A Case Study of the Balkans in Kosovo

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Mohammad Hussain Mir*
Manish Sharma**

Abstract

Kosovo is in the center of the Western Balkans and has been in the news much throughout the 1990s for its attempts to break away from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (now Serbia). The name Kosovo is derived from the Serbian language *Kosovo Polje*, meaning "field of black birds". Kosovo is seen by Kosovo Albanians as the heartland of their long fight for political and cultural rights. Intense war with the then Yugoslavia (now Serbia) started in 1998 - 99, culminating in the intervention of the United Nations and the passing of resolution number 1244 in June 1999. This was followed by the establishment of the United Nations Mission for Interim Administration (UNMIK) for restoring peace and managing the affairs in Kosovo. Kosovo finally got the status of an independent country in 2008. This paper attempts to trace the course of Peacekeeping in Kosovo through UNMIK, effectiveness in

* Research Scholar, Dept. of Gandhian and Peace Studies, Panjab University, Chandigarh.

** Professor, Dept. of Gandhian and Peace Studies, Panjab University, Chandigarh

bringing stability and security to Kosovo in turbulent and challenging times, and its present state of democracy and institutional building, besides economic reconstruction and development. The methodology adopted is based on a qualitative case study approach, such as UN reports, archival records, books, and other published material available in the public domain. The findings indicate that the intervention of the UN through its interim administration mission (UNMIK) has been impactful both in terms of restoring security as well as initiating and consolidating socio - political development.

Keywords: Balkans, Kosovo, UN, UNMIK, NATO, OSCE, EU, Peacekeeping, Peacebuilding, Security and Stabilization, Post Conflict Reconstruction.

1. Introduction

The word Balkans is of Turkish origin, meaning a chain of wooded mountains (Haemus Mountains, Year not defined n.d.). The countries in the Balkan region are Albania, Bosnia- Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, and parts of Turkey.

World Atlas (2021) specifies the area of the Balkan peninsula as 4,70,000 km^2. The Balkan Peninsula is surrounded by four seas (Aegean, Ionian, Adriatic, Black Sea) and the Turkish Straits. Human footprints trace their origins to the Paleolithic period in the Balkans, through which farming practices from the Middle East spread to Europe during the Neolithic period. Historically, the area was known as a meeting point between Christianity and Islam, as mentioned in the Encyclopedia Britannica (1974, 15th edition).

1.1. History and geography of Kosovo

The name Kosovo is originally derived from the Serbian language, in which it is called Kosovo Polje, literally meaning "field of black birds". The term is also related to the epic battle of Kosovo (1389), when the clash between the Ottoman Empire and Serbian forces occurred in its fields. This event consolidated the Serbian pride and nationalism, to which they are still glued. This symbolism of Serbian nationalism was used significantly during the 1980s and 1990s by Serbs to consolidate their position in Kosovo. Albanians prefer to use the name Kosova, instead of Kosovo, and presently the place is known by this name.

The book Kosovo: "A Short History" by Malcolm (1988) and another book titled "Between Serb and Albanian: A History of Kosovo" by Vickers (1998) give a detailed account of the history of Kosovo. Archaeological findings point out that the first inhabitants in this area were 'Illyrians', who were a group of ancient Indo-European tribes, who lived in the western part of the Balkan peninsula, primarily what is today Albania, Bosnia- Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, and parts of Serbia. Known for their warrior culture, tribal structure, and seafaring abilities along the Adriatic coast, 'Illyrians' were prominent from around 2000 BCE to the Roman conquest, 1st century CE.

Reka (2003) in the book "UNMIK as an International Governance in Post War Kosovo" has, in his introductory remarks about the history of Kosovo, stated that "Dardanians" were a subtribe of "Illyrians", who lived in the central Balkans, primarily in the area which is now Kosovo, parts of Southern Serbia, and North Macedonia. Dardanians were known for their agriculture, metallurgy, and warfare. They became part of the Roman Empire in 28 BCE after much resistance. Albanians trace their origins to the Dardanians. Reka (2003) further points out that Slavs, another Indo-European tribe, came down to the Western Balkans in the 6th to 7th century CE from what is today Bulgaria, South of Romania, and parts of Moldova. Anthropologically, they are classified as people of the East Balkans. Bradt Travel Guides Ltd in the book Kosovo by Wanderer & Knaus (2025) describes Kosova as the center of the Balkans, with an area of 10,887 km^2 and a population of 1.7 million, of which 95 per cent are of Albanian origin. The rest of the population is divided into Serbs, Romans, Turks, Egyptians, Bosniaks, Croats, and Gorani, etc. Prishtina is its capital city, and other major areas are Prizren, Ferizai, Gijlan and Peja. Kosova was fully conquered by Ottomans after the 2nd battle of Kosova and they ruled it for five centuries until 1912. After the 1st Balkan War (1912-13), it was ceded to the Kingdom of Serbia. It became an autonomous province after World War 2 within Yugoslavia. Tension between Kosovo Albanians and Serbs simmered during the late 20th century, culminating in the Kosovo War of 1998 and 1999, which resulted in the withdrawal of the Yugoslav army and the establishment of the UN-mediated Interim Administrative Mission (UNMIK) in Kosovo (eight and a half years, from June 1999 to February 2008), when Kosovo declared independence. A skeletal presence of UNMIK staff still exists in Kosovo.

1.2. The United Nations Peacekeeping Missions

The United Nations came into existence in 1945, post-World War II, as an Inter- Governmental Organization (IGO) with the aim to maintain International Peace and Security, develop friendly relations among states, promote international cooperation, and serve as a center for coordinating global action. United Nations Peacekeeping Missions represent one of the most visible and complex tools of international diplomacy and conflict resolution, with attendant Peacebuilding, Peacekeeping, and Peace enforcement operations. In the UN HQS at New York, there has been a full-fledged Department of Peace Operations since 1992. So far, 71 Peacekeeping Missions have been undertaken by the UN in all continents of the world, some of them being highly successful. At present, there are 12 Peacekeeping Missions operative in Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. Since the end of the Cold War (1960-1990), Peacekeeping has evolved from traditional ceasefire monitoring to multidimensional operations encompassing governance, elections, human rights, protection of civilians, and economic recovery. Among these, the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), established in June 1999 under UNSC Resolution 1244, stands as a critical example of an ambitious post-conflict state-building project in the Balkans.

The Kosovo case occupies a significant place in the UN history of Peacekeeping Operations, where the UN tried a new approach in coordination with other international agencies such as the Kosovo Force (KFOR), the European Union (EU), the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and many specialized agencies of the UN itself. UNMIK was tasked with governing post-war Kosovo, facing multiple challenges of institutional breakdown, absence of peace and security, displaced population, ethnic strife, and discontent. UNMIK'S legacy has been debated for years. While it is credited with stabilizing the region and preventing renewed hostilities, critics argue that it created a dependency on international governance and failed to foster genuine ethnic communities. The most important task of UNMIK was to infuse a sense of peace and security for all Kosovans and help create circumstances for building a nation-state from a State battered by war. This was no easy task given the history of the region, ethnic diversity, mistrust between communities, and international power play.

This paper explores the impact of UNMIK as a Peacekeeping Mission by examining both its theoretical framework and its empirical outcomes. This analysis is structured around three primary objectives:

- To evaluate the UNMIK as an effective instrument in achieving sustainable peace and governance.
- To assess the extent of local participation and legitimacy in the mission's implementation.
- To analyze the long-term institutional and political consequences of UN Peacekeeping in Kosovo.

The study adopts a neutral analytical approach, combining theoretical and empirical perspectives to offer a comprehensive understanding of the mission's impact. It argues that while the UNMIK met with phenomenal success in Kosovo in Peacekeeping, ensuring a sense of security for all Kosovars and administrative order, its structural limitations and external dependencies hindered the full realization of democratic governance and self-sufficiency, at least in the short term.

2. Literature review

2.1. The evolution of UN Peacekeeping

The UN has undertaken 71 Peacekeeping Missions since 1948, reflecting a dynamic evolution in mandate, scope, and strategy. The early missions focused on monitoring ceasefires, United Nations Monitoring Group for India and Pakistan, (UNMOGIP), United Nations Truce Supervising Organization (UNTSO) and separating combatants (Suez Canal or Cyprus), while post-Cold War missions such as those in Namibia, East Timor, and Kosovo adopted a novel approach in integrating civil administration, human rights, democracy and institutional building, economic reconstruction, and development.

Pasricha (2003) in the book "Peace Studies: The Discipline and Dimensions" has given an elaborate definition of Peace, which she states is "freedom from strife". She has commented on negative and positive peace as conceptions of John Galtung, the pioneer in Peace Studies. Pasricha, while agreeing with Galtung on negative peace, has categorized positive peace with social justice and development. According to Doyle & Sambanis (2006), modern Peacekeeping requires a complex balance between enforcement, legitimacy, and reconstruction.

Howard (2008), in the book "UN Peacekeeping in Civil Wars", states the importance of UN requirements in civil wars. Chapter VII of the UN charter gives the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) the powers and responsibility to handle conflicts and restore peace. With the establishment of the Department of Peace Operations in the UN HQS in New York in 1992, the Peacekeeping Operations became the centerpiece of conflict resolution, more focused on the prevention of conflict breakout and a proactive approach towards peace.

Since 1948, almost 130 nations have contributed military and civilian police personnel to the UN peace operations. Almost one million soldiers, police personnel, and civilians have served as UN Peacekeepers (blue helmets) during the last 77 years and counting. Despite institutional reforms, many missions still face the implementation gap between international expectations and local realities (Paris, 2004).

2.2. Peacekeeping as a mechanism for international conflict resolution

The UN defines Peacekeeping as an intervention by a neutral third party to maintain peace in conflict-affected areas. Paris (2004) in the book: "At War's End: Building Peace Together after Civil Conflict" cautions that liberal Peacebuilding models may not always be context-appropriate and lays more emphasis on alternative dispute resolution mechanisms for fulfilling peace. Fortna (2008), in the book "Does Peacekeeping Work? Shaping Belligerents Choices after Civil War," posits that Peacekeeping serves as a forceful conflict resolution mechanism.

2.3. Critical Components in UN Peacekeeping

A clear mandate, cooperation between geopolitical powers, ample resources, host country cooperation, troop quality, and pre-hand sensitization are some of the important ingredients of an impactful Peacekeeping mission.

Doyle & Sambanis (2006) in the book "Making War and Building Peace: UN Peace Operations" make it amply clear that mandate design and clarity, allocation of adequate resources and logistics, host nation cooperation, troop contributing countries, together with regional and international politics, play a crucial role in successful UN Peacekeeping operations anywhere in the world. The authors further propose in the book that Peacekeeping success is contingent upon three dimensions. Securing peace, building stable institutions, and fostering long-term growth with social justice.

Hutman et al (2013) in the article "UN Peacekeeping and Civilian Protection in Civil War" argue that vague or overly ambitious mandates, such as in Somalia (1992-95), often lead to failure. Conversely, clearly defined objectives, such as in Namibia, contributed to success.

2.4. Realization of UNMIK objectives, goals, and factors affecting the impact/outcomes

UNSC resolution 1244 of 1999 sanctioned the establishment of UNMIK with vast powers to bring back peace and security, initiate democracy and institutional building, and economic reconstruction and development in Kosovo. The mandate for the UNMIK was very clear to ensure conditions for peaceful and normal life for all inhabitants of Kosovo and advance regional stability in the Western Balkans.

Clark (2000) in the book "Civil Resistance in Kosovo," points out the slow return of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), which led to somewhat slow-paced stabilization in the beginning.

Independent International Commission for Kosovo (2000) points out that UNMIK successfully coordinated with other international agencies and other donors for liberal funding to the cause of providing relief to the affected citizens, rebuilding infrastructure as quickly as possible, and providing an adequate support system for the traumatized and displaced population.

World Bank (2004) in the report "Kosovo Economic Memorandum," also echoes the success of UNMIK in economic reconstruction and development.

Caplan (2005) in the book "International Governance of War-Torn Territories: Rule and Reconstruction," elaborates on the significant contributions of UNMIK in rebuilding administrative capacity, public services, and provisional institutions of self-governance (PISG) in post-war Kosovo.

The EU Commission progress report (2008) has noted the efficiency of the pillar system adopted by UNMIK as a deliberate and dedicated effort of working in Kosovo. This was a unique functional mechanism, whereby UNMIK worked on the ground under a four-pillar system of Police and Justice, Civil Administration, Democracy and institutional building, and Economic reconstruction and development. Visoka (2017) in the book "Shaping Peace in Kosovo: The Politics of Peacebuilding and Statehood". states that Kosovo Albanians viewed UNMIK as a colonial entity and a force that was between their goal of becoming an independent country, post 2005, when Kosovo Albanians became restless about the status of Kosovo. UNMIK's working in secrecy and alienation from local leadership, at least in the beginning, fostered this feeling, observes the author.

3. Theoretical framework

The theoretical foundation for analyzing UNMIK draws from five interrelated frameworks:

- Liberal Peacebuilding theory with emphasis on liberty, democratization, market-based reforms, human rights, and rule of law. This theory is based on the works of Locke (1689) and Kant (1795).
- Local ownership and hybrid Peacebuilding theory rests on the premise that peace is more sustainable when the local actors have meaningful control over political, legal, and social processes. This theory is prominently associated with Richmond (2011).
- Strong institutional and impartial frameworks theoretical concept is essential for Peacebuilding. This theoretical concept is based on the works of Paris (2004).
- War and Peace theory has substantial links to the UNMIK mission actions that go deeper into the causes of war, conditions of peace, and the dynamics that set conflict and cooperation between states or individuals. This theory owes its origins to Thucydides (460-400 BC) and Kant (1795).
- Gandhian conflict resolution theory adds a decolonial, ethical, and moral dimension to Peacebuilding with a focus on Satya, Ahimsa, and Dharma, Sarvodaya, and community building through self-reliance as spelled out by Parekh (1991) and Sharma (2006).

These theoretical frameworks have been used to lay a strong foundation for a critical analysis of the nature of conflicts and their consequential adverse impact on the affected population. The theoretical concepts further facilitated the proper understanding of peace, its dimensions, and the way the different agencies, particularly the United Nations, approach peacekeeping, peace-enforcing, and peacebuilding in the conflict areas. The theoretical concepts also gave inputs to understand UNMIK's impact during the early post-war period of Kosovo, when it was trying to grapple with the fluid security situation amidst institutional breakdowns.

4. Empirical Studies on UNMIK's Impact

Empirical research on UNMIK reveals mixed results. Several studies, (King & Mason ,2006; Knudsen & Laustsen, 2006), credit the mission with preventing renewed violence, rebuilding infrastructure, and facilitating elections. Conversely, others, such as Chandler (2006) and Berdal & Zaum (2013), highlight shortcomings such as weak judicial independence, bureaucratic inefficiency, and limited legitimacy among the Serb minority. The transition from UNMIK to the EU Rule of Law Mission (EULEX) in 2008 further complicated governance dynamics. While EULEX aimed to localize administration and strengthen the rule of law, it inherited many of UNMIK's unresolved challenges, including Political fragmentation and inter- ethnic mistrust point out Visoka & Richmond (2017).

Thus, the literature reflects a dual reality: UNMIK succeeded phenomenally in restoring peace, security, and stability but fell short of nurturing a self - sustaining political order. This paper situates itself within this scholarly debate, combining theoretical perspectives and empirical data to evaluate UNMIK's comprehensive impact.

5. Methodology

5.1. Research design

This study employs a qualitative case study approach focusing on Kosovo as a representative example of multidimensional UN Peacekeeping efforts. The case study method facilitates an in-depth exploration of complex phenomena, contextualized within historical, political, and institutional frameworks (Yin, 2018). This research design integrates both the theoretical analysis and empirical observation, examining how Peacekeeping principles were implemented and what outcomes resulted in Kosovo's post-conflict environment.

5.2. Data sources

Data were drawn from many sources to ensure triangulation and fidelity.

These include:

- Primary sources: UNSC resolutions, UNHCR, WB, Human Rights Watch, and periodically published UNMIK reports.
- Secondary sources: Scholarly books, Journal articles, and Policy papers on UN Peacekeeping, such as Brahmi and HIPPO reports.
- Empirical evidence: Quantitative and qualitative findings from international organizations like UNDP, OSCE, EU Commission, and regional institutions regarding governance and development indicators and public perception.

6. Analytical framework

The analysis carried out in this research paper broadly follows four thematic aspects;

6.1. Peace and security

Assessing how UNMIK influenced peace and security.

6.2. Institutional and administrative impact

Assessing how UNMIK shaped administrative institutions.

6.3. Governance and rule of law

Evaluating democratization, political participation, and rule of law.

6.4. Socio - economic reconstruction and development

Understanding local attitudes and perceptions towards UN presence and legitimacy.

6.5. Transition to European Rule of Law Mission (EULEX) and Legacy

These aspects are analyzed based on Peacebuilding theories and empirical data, facilitating a balanced evaluation of UNMIK's contributions and shortcomings.

Peace and security

The cooperation between UNMIK & KFOR was crucial in ensuring and maintaining post conflict peace and security. KFOR's presence and expertise deterred renewed hostilities, while UNMIK's civilian Police supported law enforcement. In combination, they reduced violent incidents dramatically between 1999 and 2002 (UN, 2002). Nonetheless, the riots of 2004 exposed the fragile inter-ethnic relationship and deep divisions between Albanians and Serbs. This also revealed the international authority's limitations in the short run in fostering ethnic relationships. Ker-Lindsay (2009) points to the criticism UNMIK faced in its slow response to this emerging crisis. The various reports reveal that the UN, through its interim civil administration and NATO's support through military efforts, has been able to handle the fragile security situation very aptly. This infused confidence in the displaced population comprising various ethnicities to return to their homes and start a new life. This is no mean achievement, given the amount of strife the population had to undergo over a period of intense fighting.

The successful support system and an integrated approach, which was new to the UN itself, paved the way for a suitable ecosystem for other international and donor agencies to engage in the remodeling of Kosovo. The lessons thereof are replicable in other peace missions of the UN.

Institutional and administrative impact

Caplan (2005) states that UNMIK was a unique decision of the UNSC, for which there are few parallels. It is a comprehensive exercise in international governance with precise details as to what is to be done and what is not to be attempted. By the middle of the year 2000, the mission had assumed legislative, executive, and judicial authority over Kosovo. This exercise led to the formation of organized structures like Ministries, local self-governments, and different public agencies staffed largely by international personnel. UNMIK achieved significant stabilization, rule of law, border controls, return of refugees, and IDPS. Normative situation, as far as possible, was restored within a year of deployment. The creation of the Kosovo Police Force (KPS) and provincial institutions of self-government (PISG) represented significant steps towards local administration. UNMIK report (2003) broadly testifies to the confidence these arrangements brought to the population at large.

Zaum (2007) states that institutionalization was sometimes hampered by the mission's fragmented structure, which demanded enormous coordination efforts between the UN, OSCE, EU, and NATO through KFOR, generating bureaucratic overlap and implementation gaps. However, the deft work approach and administrative acumen of various Senior Representatives of the Secretary General (SRSGs) smoothened out the differences with a combined focus on the objectives set by the UNSC resolution 1244. Consider a situation in which the views and working approach of the SRSG and the KFOR commander were seriously at variance with one another. That situation would surely have jeopardized the whole UN mission, leading to renewed and sustained violence with enormous adverse consequences for the whole of Kosovo. That scenario would also have led to the instability of the entire region of the Balkans, near a strategically important part of the world that is Western Europe. Socio - economic and political impact of such a scenario would have created havoc far beyond the shores of the European continent.

Governance and rule of law

While reviewing the challenges that could be faced by UNMIK in its mission objectives, the UN concluded that governance reform was a central pillar in the overall architecture of UNMIK functioning. The mission dedicatedly sought to create transparent institutions, ensure human rights protection, and promote democratic participation.

OSCE report (2005) reveals that the multiple elections under UN supervision – municipal (2000, 2002) and general (2001, 2004) - demonstrated the procedural democratization. However, reports by the International Crisis Group (ICG) (2002) noted that judicial independence was a cause of concern, both based on structural inadequacies, political interference, and ethnic bias.

Nevertheless, measurable improvements occurred in Public Administration and Civil Society engagement. Transparency International (2007) appreciated a gradual reduction in corruption perceptions, while the UNDP (2008) report demonstrated increasing confidence in local governance, though still below regional averages. This renewed confidence in the overall stability of Kosovo laid the foundations for the consortium of aid packages for the overall benefit of Kosovans.

Kosovo, as of date, has a multiparty political system based on a liberal outlook with a market-based economy, respect for human rights, and the rule of law. Such an outlook is no mean achievement in the Balkan region, which, hitherto, has centuries of instability amidst an inherent warrior culture among its inhabitants.

Socio- economic reconstruction and development

In post war Kosova, economic revitalization and development were expectedly major challenges. UNMIK successfully managed the transition from a war-torn economy to a market-based framework, including the introduction of a new currency (Euro) and the start of the privatization of state assets. According to the World Bank (2005), GDP rose steadily in the early 2000s, though unemployment remained quite high at 30 per cent.

King and Mason (2006) point out that the privatization process attracted some criticism for a lack of transparency and insufficient local consultation. Several Serb-majority municipalities resisted participation in economic transformation, fearing marginalization. Consequently, economic growth was lopsided, contributing to persistent ethnic and regional disparities. International aid, particularly from the EU, played a vital role in reconstruction, in terms of technology, management practices, and funding. Berdal and Zaum (2013) observe that donor-driven reconstruction models often prioritize macroeconomic stability over inclusive development, leading to a limited local ownership pattern evident in Kosovo as well.

Transition to the European Union Rule of Law Mission (EULEX) and legacy

The declaration of Kosovo's independence in 2008 changed the UNMIK's role. As per the agreement, authority gradually passed on to the European Rule of Law Mission (EULEX). This transition underscored both the successes and incompleteness of the cherished UN mission. While peace and security were largely maintained, the issue of sovereignty remained contested internationally. Visoka & Richmond (2017) state that EULEX was facing the same challenges as UNMIK had faced before the takeover. The transition, as per the agreement, paved the way forward for more intense intervention of the EU. The financial push in the shape of massive aid, technical and managerial experience of the EU personnel, consolidated the efforts and legacy of the UNMIK and the KFOR, which ensured the smooth transition of Kosovo from an unstable nation state to a stabilized one. EULEX continues to be at the forefront of the stability of Kosovo in the critical area of the Western Balkans. The mindset of most Kosovans has undergone a semantic change over a period of time. This stems from the fact of continuous requests and push for Kosovo to be part of the European Union.

8. Discussion

There is little doubt that UNMIK has been a phenomenal success story in the recent history of the Department of Peace Operations in the UN. This mission exemplifies the "sovereignty paradox", says Krasner (1999). External actors promote self- governance while exercising overarching control. Circumstances in post war Kosova were so precarious that any laxity would have jeopardized the entire mission. Such confronting situations demand commanding leadership and an authoritarian approach in the beginning. The same is echoed by Chesterman (2004) in the book "You the People: The United Nations Transitional Administration and State Building". In the absence of any institutional framework, external and imposing authority was a *sine qua non*, argues the author. The mission's effectiveness in preventing flare-ups of conflict was inseparable from its intrusive governance model. The authoritarian model had a grey side in hindering the organic development of political capacity. This paradox reflects a broader tension in Peacekeeping between liberal Peacebuilding and local ownership, argues Richmond (2011). The experience of Kosovo shows that legitimacy cannot be imported. Local people and leaders must own the institutions as their part in an enduring peace.

The UN had first deployed a couple of Peacekeeping missions in the Balkans. Comparing with the United Nations Protection Force, UNPROFOR (1995) in Bosnia and the United Nations Transitional Administration for Eastern Slovenia, Baranja and Western Sirmium UNTAES (1996) in Croatia reveals intrusive contrasts. Unlike UNPROFOR's limited mandate and operational failures in Bosnia, UNMIK enjoyed far-reaching authority and resources. Yet its centralized approach reproduced some of the replica legitimacy deficits. On the other hand, UNTAES succeeded in reintegrating Eastern Slovenia, with the gradual transfer of power to local authorities, argues Jett (2001). These comparisons highlight that mission design, not only resources, determines outcomes. A flexible approach that mingles international oversight with local empowerment yields more sustainable results.

Local ownership emerged somewhat late in UNMIK's scheme of things and timeline. Only after 2001 did the PISG gain a foothold in governance. Major policy decisions continued to be taken by the top brass of UNMIK. Donais (2012) argues that genuine ownership requires early inclusion of local stakeholders, albeit at the risk of slower progress. In Kosovo, delayed local participation contributed to the political alienation of Albanians, while Serbs distrusted the UN's neutrality. This dangerously damaging perception impeded reconciliation. EU initiatives partially addressed this problem by promoting inter-ethnic dialogue and decentralization, states the EU Commission report (2010).

UNMIK supported women's participation after 2003 and created an ecosystem of gender equality offices. By 2007, women held about 28 per cent of parliamentary seats, points UNDP (2008) report. Civil society organizations also flourished, giving succor to the tormented people and providing local channels for transparency and accountability. Nonetheless, inclusion was often instrumental rather than transformative.

Paffenholz (2015) notes that peacebuilding treats civil society as a service provider rather than a political actor, risking superficial engagement. Kosovo's experience demonstrates the specific need to move beyond token participation towards structural empowerment.

The Kosovo case supplements peacekeeping theories by underlying the intersection of governance, legitimacy, self-reliance, and temporality. Paris (2004) argues that peacekeeping must transition from emergency control to sustainable governance through adaptive phases. UNMIK's gradual transition illustrates both the necessity and difficulty of timing. Premature withdrawal risked instability, while prolonged presence could breed resentment. The ability to optimize the balance remains a key challenge for future missions.

9. Conclusion

UNMIK's nearly two decades of involvement and legacy embody both the promise and the limitations of UN Peacekeeping in the Post cold war period in Kosovo. The mission spectacularly achieved its primary mission objectives: preventing renewed conflict, rebuilding administrative structures, and enabling democratic elections. It also laid the groundwork for total independence of Kosovo, ending decades of subordination to Serbian imperialism. It also paved Kosovo's way for international integration and engagement. However, its deeper peacebuilding goals of reconciliation, rule of law, and self – reliant governance were only partially realized during its intense engagement period between 1999 and 2008.

Policy implications emerging from this analysis include:

- Early integration of local actors to foster ownership and accountability.
- The coherence of the mandate is to be supplemented with unified command structures with clear roles and accountability.
- Gradual transfer of authority timing should be planned with sensitivity to local capacity and perceptions of legitimacy.
- Holistic Peacebuilding in the shape of economic, socio - cultural dimensions of reconciliation must be co - terminus with political stabilization to prevent latent tensions.
- Enhanced functional coordination with neighboring states and regional organizations
- (EU, OSCE, OECD) strengthens legitimacy, ownership, and sustainability.

The Kosovo case offers enduring lessons for international peacekeeping. Durable peace cannot be engineered solely through external authority, despite its advantages of expert personnel, technological, and managerial capability. It must be won through inclusive governance rooted in local ownership. Local partnership and sustained involvement speed up the development (growth with social justice) and reconciliation efforts to gel the differing ethnicities together.

10. Limitations and ethical considerations

As a qualitative analysis, this study relies on documented evidence rather than field interviews. While this approach facilitates a comprehensive review of existing data, it may limit access to nuanced, contemporary local perspectives. Kosovo's situation, even to date, creates challenges for assessing sovereignty-related outcomes. The authors have maintained impartiality, avoided political or personal bias, and acknowledged the evolving nature of this newly formed nation-state

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Article

Social Commerce and the Rise of Women Digital Entrepreneurs: A Study of Motivations and Challenges in Select States of North West India

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Kanika Chaudhary*

Abstract

The digital revolution has fundamentally reshaped the landscape of entrepreneurship, offering opportunities for individuals especially women to launch and scale their businesses through social commerce platforms. The convergence of social media and e-commerce, known as social commerce has created a dynamic transformation in entrepreneurship. Women entrepreneurs are increasingly leveraging social commerce platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn and Facebook marketplace to build and grow their businesses. This is driven by a combination of motivational factors, such as desire for flexibility, access of low-barrier to entry and exit from the platforms. However, this digital entrepreneurial landscape is not without challenges such as lack of digital skills, cyber fraud, and online harassment to the persistent gender biases that impact funding and credibility. This research paper aims to explore the motivations that propel women into the realm of social media and

* Senior Research Fellow, Department-cum-Centre for Women's Studies and Development, Panjab University, Chandigarh

challenges women entrepreneurs face on adopting social commerce platforms. By analysing these factors, we seek to understand the role of social commerce in empowering women digital entrepreneurs. The study explores the consequential effects of the digital entrepreneurship on human development indicators, including income, education, and social status of women in North West India. The findings suggest that while social commerce reduces entry barriers and fosters empowerment, significant constraints remain in terms of access, gender-based discrimination, and resource availability.

Key words: Social commerce, e-commerce, digital entrepreneurship, motivational factors, digital skills, social media platforms

Introduction

The digital revolution has changed the landscape of commerce, giving rise to social commerce, a form of e-commerce that leverages social media platforms for online transactions. In North West India, this shift has coincided with a notable increase in women's participation in digital entrepreneurship. Imagine being able to run a business from your phone, right from your home. That is what social commerce is doing for women entrepreneurs i.e. it's not just about selling goods and services online; it's about breaking down barriers and creating new opportunities for women entrepreneurs. Social commerce offers several advantages for women entrepreneurs (Megha Shree, n.d.), including access to global markets, financial independence, and the flexibility to manage businesses remotely. Through social commerce platforms, women can list products online, process digital transactions, and fulfil orders using local delivery firms, family networks, or direct seller-to-buyer interactions. Cash on delivery remains a popular mode of payment, making transactions more accessible to those who may not have digital payment options.

The digital revolution has thus fundamentally transformed the landscape of entrepreneurship worldwide, especially for women in emerging economies such as India. One of the major catalysts of this transformation has been the proliferation of social commerce-a hybrid model enabling commercial activity via social networking platforms and digital marketplaces. North West India, a region encompassing states of Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, NCR, and Union Territory Chandigarh, has witnessed a surge in women-led digital enterprises, particularly in Tier-II and Tier-III cities, propelled by increasing mobile penetration and targeted government interventions (IFMR LEAD, 2024; Singh, 2008)

Compared to traditional e-commerce, social commerce has gained more popularity among women entrepreneurs due to its user-friendly nature and ease of access. Social commerce leverages the interactive and social features of online platforms to facilitate transactions and build customer relationships (Kavrana, et al., 2020). The rise of digital entrepreneurship, especially among women, is intrinsically linked to the democratizing potential of the internet, enabling individuals to circumvent traditional barriers and access wider markets (Katiyar, 2024b). According to GSMA e-commerce survey 2023 report, social commerce is the mostly used channel of e-commerce by MSMEs in Egypt (54 per cent), Ghana (77 per cent), Kenya (49 per cent), Nigeria (56 per cent) and South Africa with 39 per cent usage of social media (Shahid, 2023). Similarly, in Indonesia, 58 per cent of women-led MSMEs (Micro Small Medium Enterprises) use social media for trade (UNCTAD, 2023). Evidence from Asia further suggests that informal e-commerce, or social commerce, has deepened women's engagement with financial services (Hernandez, et al., 2023). Digital entrepreneurship in India is marked by the democratization of access to markets and the emergence of new business models. Social commerce leverages platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram, allowing women to capitalize on low-investment, flexible, and scalable commercial opportunities (IFMR Lead, 2024). Many women are involved not only as product originators but also as resellers-building local brands by aggregating products aligned with community needs and preferences. The sector's informal nature and community-driven networks provide a launchpad for those previously excluded from the formal workforce (Indian Retailer, as cited in IFMR Lead, 2024).

India has also seen a significant transformation in retail and e-commerce due to social commerce, with a 31 per cent compound annual growth rate (CAGR) in 2023, particularly driven by expansion in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities (IBEF, 2024). A study by Nasabi & Mendon, (2023) highlights that India has approximately 300 million women in the 20-49 age group engaged as resellers on social commerce platforms like Meesho.

India has witnessed a notable rise in women-led startups. According to the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI), the proportion of women-led startups increased from 8 per cent in 2014 to 18 per cent in 2022 (IAMAI and Kantar, 2024). A report by Bain & Company and Google, (2019) estimates that women-owned businesses in India number between 13.5 and 15.7 million, accounting for 20 per cent of total enterprises, and are expected to reach 31.5 million by 2030, driven by initiatives under Digital India.

Women's participation in entrepreneurship has been significantly encouraged through initiatives like Start-up India, with 68 per cent of loans sanctioned under the PM Mudra Yojana going to women, who constituted 77.7 per cent of its total beneficiaries as of May 2024 (PIB Delhi, 2024). This upward trend in women-led startups can be attributed to multiple factors, including social media, e-commerce, financial schemes, increased internet penetration, and the growing use of smartphones that facilitate access to evolving social commerce platforms. As a result, women digital entrepreneurs are reshaping business landscapes and communication through emerging technologies.

The interplay between technology and women's empowerment has been extensively studied, revealing that access to ICTs can significantly enhance women's economic and social agency (Gurumurthy & Chami, 2014). Human development, as articulated by Amartya Sen (1999), emphasizes the expansion of capabilities and freedoms.

The rapid digitalization of entrepreneurship is redefining the necessary skills and capabilities for business success. Women entrepreneurs now require expertise in digital marketing, social media marketing, networking, leadership, and social media influence (Pan, 2023). Digital entrepreneurship has expanded opportunities for women by creating new markets, enhancing consumer access, providing work-from-home flexibility, and reducing startup costs through low-investment, low-cost advertising on social commerce platforms (Pan, 2023).

Previous studies have shown that social media adoption among women entrepreneurs is driven by hedonic and utilitarian motivations, self-efficacy, and social support (Al-Omoush & Al-Qirem, 2023). Digital entrepreneurship fosters skill development, confidence building, and societal recognition for women (Verma et al., 2024). The rise of social media usage by women entrepreneurs globally has created a new revolution in digital entrepreneurial culture, transforming women from technologically challenged to technologically savvy (Ukpere et al., 2014).

On the other hand, the heavy reliance on digital platforms also exposes women entrepreneurs to cyber scams and fraud, making cybersecurity a crucial challenge. Women, who already face disadvantages in digital literacy, are particularly vulnerable to online threats and fraud. The limited access to digital technology as well as prominent gender gap in internet access and mobile ownership function as prominent barriers in women's participation in digital trade. It is imperative to acknowledge the persistent digital divide, which can disproportionately affect women in rural areas and those from marginalized communities.

Despite these challenges, women's digital entrepreneurship holds the potential to drive economic empowerment (Malhotra et al., 2024) and bridge gender gaps in multiple spheres. Its benefits are far-reaching, offering:

- Flexible learning opportunities
- Elimination of mobility constraints, which often hinder women-led businesses
- Cost-effective business operations
- Easy access to domestic and global markets
- Social and economic empowerment
- Straight forward approach than E-Commerce

At a national level, expanding women's participation in digital entrepreneurship can act as a catalyst for economic growth, job creation, and greater financial inclusion. Overall, social commerce and digital platforms play a significant role in women's empowerment and innovation, particularly during crises (Al-Omoush & Al-Qirem, 2023).

Against this backdrop, the present study aims to assess the motivations, opportunities and challenges faced by women digital entrepreneurs in the selected states of North West India. By understanding these factors, we can identify ways to enhance their participation, bridge digital gaps, strengthen their economic contributions and also contribute to broader human development outcomes, fostering a more inclusive and equitable society.

Scope of the Study

This study aims to identify the demographic profile of the digital businesses such as type of business, mode of business, minimum investment required for starting digital business, type of digital entrepreneurs, type of social commerce platforms and mode of payment adopted by women digital entrepreneurs. It also provides an insight into the opportunities and challenges faced by women digital entrepreneurs by adopting social commerce business model in their existing businesses or new startups through social commerce platforms in select states of North West India.

Objectives Of The Study

1. To map social commerce platforms as an evolving digital marketplace adopted by women digital entrepreneurs.
2. To investigate the motivating factors and opportunities for women to start digital business.
3. To analyse the specific challenges faced by women digital entrepreneurs.

Research Methodology

This study is exploratory in nature. It employs mixed methods approach to provide insight into the demographic profile of the digital businesses and opportunities for women entrepreneurs on social commerce platforms as well as the challenges faced by the women digital entrepreneurs.

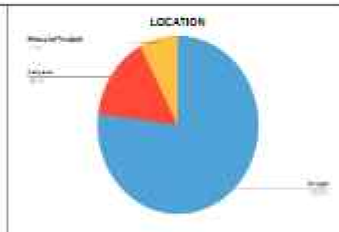
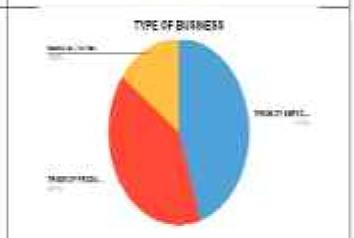
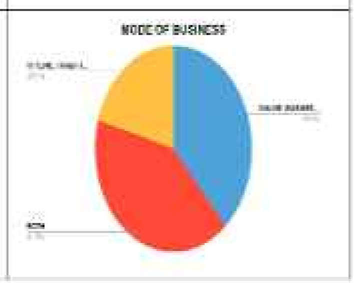
Data Collection

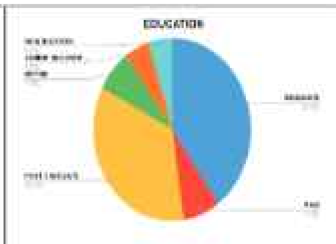
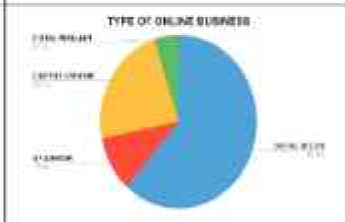
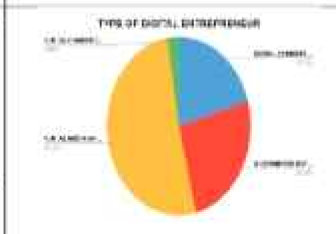
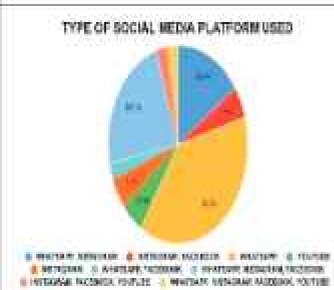
The primary data was collected through purposive and snowball sampling technique on the respective research area using semi-structured questionnaire on social commerce platforms and the rise of women digital entrepreneurs.

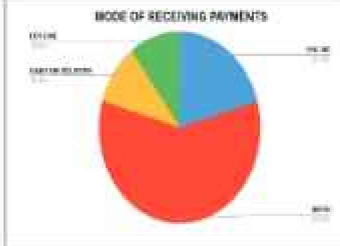
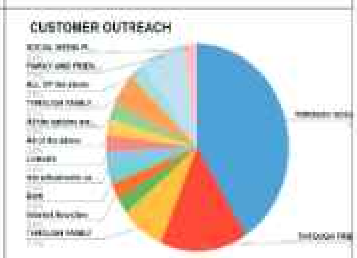
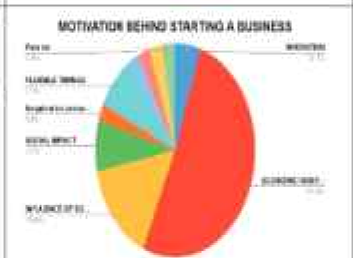
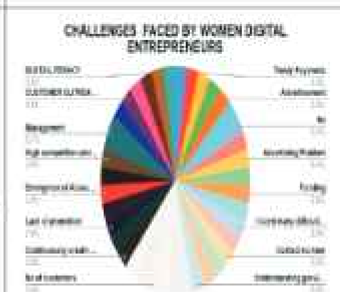
A total of 40 women digital entrepreneurs and 5 experts (stakeholders, e-commerce experts, digital marketing expert, women entrepreneurship expert and data analyst) were engaged in the process of study through purposive sampling. These respondents were selected according to the type of digital business (social media entrepreneurship, e-commerce entrepreneurship, and social commerce entrepreneurship) as well as the amount of investment and type of business models included in the study.

The secondary data was collected from the social media platform content analysis, WEP (Women entrepreneurship platforms), NGO, State of India's Digital Economy Report, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Women Chamber of Commerce Chandigarh, NSSO report, and World Bank reports.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Location	• Punjab • Haryana • Himachal Pradesh	
Type of business	• Manufacturing • Trade of products • Trade of services	
Mode of the business	• Offline • Online • Both	

Education	• Matric • Senior secondary • Graduate • Post Graduate • Ph.D. • No education	
Type of online business	• Digital reseller • Digital seller • Content creator • Influencer	
Type of Digital Entrepreneur	• Social commerce entrepreneur • E-commerce entrepreneur • Social media entrepreneur	
Type of social media platforms used by women digital entrepreneurs	• WhatsApp • Instagram • YouTube • WhatsApp + Instagram • WhatsApp + Facebook • WhatsApp+ Instagram+ Facebook • Instagram+ Facebook+ YouTube	

Mode of receiving payments	• Online • Offline • Both • Cash on delivery	
Customer outreach	• Through friends • Through family • Through social media • Others	
Motivation behind starting business	• Economic independence • Innovation • Influence of social media • Social impact • Flexible timings • Passion • Others	
Challenges faced by women digital entrepreneurs	• Digital literacy • Time management • Emergence of AI • Lack of promotion • Timely payments • Lack of knowledge of digital marketing • Social barriers • Economic barriers • Financial barriers	

The pie charts collectively present a clear picture of women digital entrepreneurs in North West India. The data shows that the women are entering digital business through social media platforms. A total of 40 women digital entrepreneurs (respondents) and 5 experts were engaged in the process of this study through snowball sampling and purposive sampling.

Respondents

Respondents included women digital entrepreneurs who have online or offline businesses and use social media platforms for their business growth and development. These women digital entrepreneurs have more participation on social media platforms than e-commerce platforms.

Location

The highest proportion of respondents were from Punjab (77 per cent), followed by Haryana (15 per cent) and Himachal Pradesh (8 per cent). This indicates a strong regional concentration of women digital entrepreneurs in Punjab, suggesting that digital business activities are more developed in the areas with better connectivity, strong social media platforms usage and familiarity, and wider market exposure. The smaller representation from Himachal Pradesh was due to lack of connectivity, long distance between market and customers, lack of digital awareness, and weaker access to the digital business ecosystem among local community. On the other hand young digital entrepreneurs who came back after completing studies from other states have started their digital businesses as compared to local business owners.

Education

Almost all the respondents were well educated. Amongst the respondents graduates form the largest group at 40 per cent, followed by postgraduates at 35 per cent, while a smaller proportion hold Ph.D. degrees (7 per cent). Those who had completed senior secondary were 5 per cent, while those who had studies only upto matric were 8 per cent of the total respondents. 5 per cent of the respondents had no formal education. This suggests that women with higher education are more likely to participate in the digital entrepreneurship because they are more comfortable with the digital tools, and more confident with social media platform usage and market communication. The presence of respondents with lower educational backgrounds shows that digital commerce entrepreneurship is not limited to highly educated women. At the same time, dominance of graduates and postgraduates implies that education still strengthens confidence, digital inclusion, and business decision-making. Therefore, digital platforms enable entry for businesswomen across different educational levels.

Type of business

45 per cent of the respondents are engaged in trade of services, followed by trade of products at 40 per cent and manufacturing businesses accounts for the smallest proportion at 15 per cent. This reveals that women tend to engage in business activities that require lower capital and are easier to manage digitally. Service-based businesses can be started with limited investment and can be promoted effectively through social media platforms as compared to product-based businesses and manufacturing businesses as the latter need more infrastructure, larger investment and stronger supply-chain and marketing skills. It also suggests that digital commerce is currently functioning as a channel for low-risk enterprise than for capital-intensive enterprises.

Mode of business

The mode of business chart indicates that 39 per cent operate their business online only, 20 per cent run their traditional businesses and 41 per cent respondents operate both online and offline businesses. Women are not abandoning traditional business structures, but are promoting their business through social media platforms. The online mode allows for wider reach and easier promotion, while the offline mode continues to support trust-building, customer interaction, and delivery coordination. This combination suggests that digital entrepreneurship is being integrated into existing business practices rather than replacing them completely.

Investment

The chart indicates that the minimum investment amounted to Rs. 5000 whereas the maximum amount of investment is more than Rs. 4 crores as per the size of the business. Social media enterprises require minimum investment whereas e-commerce enterprises need to have maximum investment. Therefore, women entrepreneurs entered social media entrepreneurship and social commerce entrepreneurship rather than e-commerce entrepreneurship.

Type of online business

The chart depicts that 62 per cent of the respondents are digital sellers, 10 per cent are influencers, 23 per cent are content creators and 5 per cent were digital resellers. This distribution shows that the women digital entrepreneurs are using digital platforms primarily for direct selling rather than digital branding, or reseller-based businesses. However, the presence of content creators and influencers also shows that women are entering newer digital roles which involve promotion, communication, and audience engagement rather than simple product selling. The very small share of digital resellers points to limited platform training and digital safety.

Type of digital entrepreneurs

The data reveals that 51 per cent of the respondents are social media entrepreneurs, 26 per cent are e-commerce entrepreneurs and 23 per cent are social commerce entrepreneurs. This confirms that the most accessible entry point is still social media entrepreneurship, not e-commerce participation. It suggests that women adopted social media platforms for customer communication and then moved towards social commerce structured systems after learning from family and friends. The distribution also suggests that women are adopting digital business in stages, with social media acting as the initial platform of engagement.

Social Media Platforms Used

The charts indicates that 78 per cent digital entrepreneurs use WhatsApp which is one of the most widely used platforms by the respondents, followed by Instagram at 54 per cent, Facebook at 42 per cent, YouTube at 24 per cent, Pinterest at 9 per cent and 20 per cent use other type of social media platforms. WhatsApp's dominance reflects its simple usage, direct communication features and strong suitability for informal business networks due to trust and safety. Instagram, Facebook and YouTube are also important because they support visual promotion and broader customer reach and monetization of channels. The lower use of Pinterest, LinkedIn and other platforms suggests that women prefer platforms that are familiar, easy to access, and immediately useful for customer interaction and less time consuming rather than simply following social media trends.

Mode of receiving payments

The data shows that 21 per cent of respondents receive payments online only, 10 per cent offline only, and 10 per cent through cash whereas 59 per cent of respondents use both online and offline mode of payments. This reveals a transitional payment ecosystem where digital payments are growing but are not fully adopted by women. The dominance of mixed payment methods suggests that trust, convenience, and customer readiness are still important in women-led digital businesses. The data shows that entrepreneurship is digitally enabled but not yet fully digitalized. This suggests that the business environment is still in transition, with digital payments growing but not yet fully replacing traditional payment modes. This pattern also shows that women are adapting flexibly to the realities of their markets.

Customer outreach

41 per cent of respondents reach their customers through social commerce platforms, 16 per cent through friends, 8 per cent through family and others by various modes like digital marketing, collaboration with influencers, etc. This indicates that women's business networks are both digital and social. Social platforms help in expanding audience reach, but personal networks remain crucial for building trust and finding real customers who want to purchase these products and services. The combination of digital and social outreach suggests that women entrepreneurs are using relational capital alongside platform-based visibility. This pattern is particularly relevant for women digital entrepreneurs who often build trust through known relationships before expanding to wider digital audiences.

Motivation behind starting digital business

The data reveals that more than half of the respondents started business for economic independence while the rest were motivated by flexible timings, innovation, passion, social impact, and the influence of digital platforms. This is the strong empowerment signal because it shows that women are not only entering business for passive income but also to gain autonomy. At the same time, the importance of flexibility shows that women value business models that can fit into domestic and caregiving responsibilities. The presence of passion and innovation as motivations suggests that digital entrepreneurship is also a platform for self-expression and personal growth of women in this digital era.

Challenges faced by women digital entrepreneurs

Majority of women digital entrepreneurs faced similar challenges such as lack of digital literacy and digital marketing knowledge, inability to access global markets, cross border trade facilities not available easily, time management, emergence of AI, delay in payments and some believed digitalisation has increased competition as many of them lack digital knowledge. In brief, women digital entrepreneurs faces social barriers, economic barriers, financial barriers and technological barriers. Women digital entrepreneurs face a combination of skill-based and structural barriers. The data suggests that entry into social media, social commerce, mobile commerce is relatively easy, but sustaining business growth requires stronger digital capability and institutional support. These challenges highlight the need for training, mentoring and policy support to make digital entrepreneurship more inclusive and sustainable.

Thus, digital entrepreneurs can be categorised as per the type of social media platform, type of digital business, investment required for the digital business and type of digital entrepreneur i.e. social media entrepreneur, e-commerce entrepreneur and social commerce entrepreneurs. The findings indicate that women are primarily involved in social media entrepreneurship as against e-commerce and social commerce entrepreneurship as the former can be started with low investment as women often lack access to funds. Social commerce has provided accessibility of digital platforms, flexibility, low barriers to entry and exit, increased economic participation, enhanced financial autonomy which foster empowerment of women leading to greater participation in community affairs by breaking socio-cultural barriers.

DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that social commerce has become a practical and accessible entry route for women digital entrepreneurs in North West India. Most respondents were concentrated in Punjab, with smaller proportion from Haryana and Himachal Pradesh, suggesting that participation is stronger where digital connectivity and market exposure are relatively better developed. The presence of women across different educational levels also shows that digital entrepreneurship is not limited to highly educated women, but is being adopted across a broad socio-educational range. This supports the idea that social commerce lowers the threshold for business entry and allows women to participate without the heavy resource requirements of conventional entrepreneurship.

A key pattern in the data is the dominance of service trade and digital selling activities. Women are primarily engaged in service businesses, followed by product trade and manufacturing, which indicates a preference for ventures that require lower capital and can be managed flexibly. Similarly, the large share of digital sellers, along with content creators and influencers, shows that women are participating in multiple digital roles rather than a single business model. This is important because it reflects the evolving nature of entrepreneurship in digital spaces, where selling, promotion, branding, and customer engagement are often closely connected. In this sense, social commerce is not simply a sales channel but a broader business environment that allows women to build visibility and income simultaneously.

The classification of respondents into social media entrepreneurs, e-commerce entrepreneurs, and social commerce entrepreneurs shows that social media entrepreneurship remains the most common form. WhatsApp is the most widely used platform, followed by Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube, which suggests that women prefer platforms that are familiar, low-cost, and easy to use for direct communication with customers. This finding is significant because it shows that women are adopting tools that fit their existing social and business routines rather than relying only on formal e-commerce systems. The use of both online and offline payment methods also points to a transitional digital economy in which trust, customer preference, and accessibility remain central. Many respondents still combine digital methods with cash or offline transactions, indicating that complete digital replacement has not yet taken place.

Customer outreach patterns further highlight the importance of social networks in women's entrepreneurship. While many respondents rely on social commerce platforms to reach customers, friends and family remain important channels for initial promotion and business support. This suggests that women's digital businesses are deeply embedded in relational networks, where trust and personal recommendation continue to shape commercial success. The business model, therefore, is both digital and social, combining platform visibility with interpersonal credibility. This dual structure may be one reason social commerce is especially suitable for women who are entering entrepreneurship gradually and with limited formal support.

The motivations behind starting business are strongly linked to economic independence. More than half of the respondents said they began their business to achieve financial autonomy, while others mentioned flexible timings, passion, innovation, and the influence of digital platforms. This shows that women are not only using social commerce as a survival strategy, but also as a means of self-expression and agency. The flexibility of digital business appears especially important for women balancing paid work with domestic and caregiving responsibilities. Social commerce therefore functions as a way to negotiate time, space, and social expectations while still participating in income generation.

At the same time, the study reveals serious constraints. Respondents reported low digital literacy, weak digital marketing knowledge, financial barriers, delayed payments, time management problems, and increased competition as major challenges. The mention of AI and technological change shows that women are also aware of the fast-moving nature of digital business and the pressure it creates. These difficulties suggest that access to platforms alone is not enough to ensure success. Women need training, support, and institutional guidance to convert digital presence into stable and sustainable enterprise. Without that support, the same digital spaces that create opportunity can also reproduce inequality.

Overall, the study suggests that social commerce has strong empowerment potential because it offers flexibility, low entry costs, and wider market access. However, this potential is still limited by gaps in skills, finance, and technological readiness. The findings therefore show both progress and constraint: women are entering digital entrepreneurship in greater numbers, but they continue to face barriers that shape the quality and sustainability of their participation. Social commerce should thus be understood as an enabling platform, but not yet a complete solution to women's economic inequality.

Link to literature

The findings are consistent with earlier studies that describe social commerce as a flexible and low-cost route for women's business participation. Pan (2023) argues that digital entrepreneurship enables women to work from home, reduce startup costs, and access wider markets, which closely matches the motivations reported in this study. Al-Omoush and Al-Qirem (2023) also highlight the role of social commerce in women's empowerment and innovation, and the present findings support this by showing that women use digital platforms for income generation and autonomy. The dominance of WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook further aligns with the view that social media platforms are central to women's entrepreneurial engagement.

The study also confirms earlier observations that digital entrepreneurship can improve women's visibility and social recognition. Verma et al. (2024) note that digital entrepreneurship contributes to women's social empowerment, while Ukpere et al. (2014) emphasize the rising use of social media by women entrepreneurs to unlock business potential. The current findings extend these arguments by showing that women in North West India are not only using social media for promotion but are also building actual business models through these platforms. This suggests that social media has moved beyond communication into a core entrepreneurial infrastructure.

At the same time, the challenges reported by respondents reflect the continuing digital divide. Gurumurthy and Chami (2014) stress that access to information and communication technologies must be supported by gender-sensitive capability building, and the present study confirms this need. Women still face barriers related to literacy, financial access, and digital marketing competence, which means that technological access alone does not guarantee inclusion. Malhotra et al. (2024) similarly note that digital entrepreneurship can empower women only when structural barriers are reduced, and this study reinforces that conclusion. Overall, the evidence suggests that social commerce is a promising pathway for women's empowerment, but its full benefits depend on stronger training, policy support, and ecosystem development.

Conclusion

This study shows that social commerce has become an important pathway for women's digital entrepreneurship in North West India. The findings indicate that women are using accessible platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook to start and sustain businesses with relatively low investment, greater flexibility, and wider market reach.

The study also reveals that women digital entrepreneurs are not a uniform group. Their participation varies by location, education, business type, and digital readiness. Most respondents were engaged in service and product trade, and many operated through hybrid online-offline models, showing that digital entrepreneurship is being adopted in practical and gradual ways rather than as a complete break from traditional business structures.

A major conclusion of the study is that economic independence is the strongest motivation driving women into digital business. Social commerce gives women an opportunity to earn income, manage time more flexibly, and balance business with domestic responsibilities. In this sense, it supports not only entrepreneurship but also women's agency and social participation.

At the same time, the study makes it clear that social commerce is not free from barriers. Women continue to face challenges such as low digital literacy, weak digital marketing knowledge, financial constraints, delayed payments, and rising technological complexity. These barriers show that access to platforms alone is not enough; women also need skills, support systems, and better institutional backing to grow sustainably.

Overall, the study concludes that social commerce has strong potential to empower women and expand their participation in the digital economy. However, its long-term impact will depend on reducing the digital divide, improving financial inclusion, strengthening training in digital skills, and creating a more supportive ecosystem for women entrepreneurs. With the right support, social commerce can become a powerful instrument for women's economic empowerment, social mobility, and inclusive development.

This research underscores the transformative potential of social commerce in empowering women digital entrepreneurs and fostering human development in North West India. By harnessing the power of social commerce i.e., sale of goods and services through social media platforms, women are overcoming traditional barriers and contributing to their economic and social well-being. However, addressing the digital divide and provide targeted support are essential for ensuring inclusive and sustainable growth. Social commerce has changed the patriarchal mindset of the society. Future research should explore the long-term impact of digital entrepreneurship on women's empowerment and the role of policy interventions in creating a supportive ecosystem for women's digital entrepreneurship.

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Article

Brutal Realities of People with Intellectual Disabilities: Insights from All India Pingalwara Charitable Society

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Harpreet Kaur*

Abstract

Intellectual disabilities refer to a group of conditions characterized by limitations in intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior. They affect every day social and practical skills. These disabilities vary in severity, ranging from mild to severe levels. Aforesaid medical complications bring multiple social and political hurdles for the affected individuals. Persons possessing intellectual disabilities not only struggle with their medical conditions, but numerous misconceptions and prejudices impose an additional burden upon them. The worst part is that their realities remain undocumented and ignored. Hence, this research paper gives an account of those unheard and unseen realities of the lives of people with intellectual disabilities. An attempt has been made in this study to present a clear picture of their lives. The evidence of their harsh realities has been collected from one of the oldest charitable organisations of Punjab, namely All India Pingalwara Charitable

* Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, Panjab University, Chandigarh.

Society. Both primary and secondary sources of data have been used to collect the evidence that clearly indicates the social marginalisation of people with intellectual disabilities.

Key Words: Intellectual disabilities, Pingalwara, marginalisation, stigma, prejudices

Comprehending Mental Disorders and Neurodevelopmental Disorders

Mental disorders are a diverse group of conditions varying in their presentation, ranging from acute to recurrent to chronic, mild to severe, multiple disorders to single illness, morbid or co-morbid conditions and so on. As per the 11th revision of the International Classification of Diseases, various types of mental disorders include anxiety, depressive disorders, bipolar disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, schizophrenia, disruptive behavior and antisocial disorders, eating disorders and neurodevelopment disorders. Out of all these mental disorders, anxiety and depression disorders are the most common mental disorders. A significant rise in these disorders was seen during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. (International Classification of Diseases Eleventh Revision, 2022)

Taking the data into account, one in every eight persons, which comprises nearly 970 million people around the world, suffers from mental disorders as of 2019. In 2019, 301 million people were living with an anxiety disorder, 280 million people were living with depression, 40 million people experienced bipolar disorder, 24 million people around the world were affected by schizophrenia, 14 million people experienced eating disorders, and 40 million people were affected by disruptive behavior and antisocial disorders around the world. (World Health Organisation, 2022) Paying attention to neurodevelopmental disorders, the global report on children with developmental disabilities shows that there are approximately 317 million children and adolescents with neurodevelopmental disabilities. (World Health Organization and United Nations Children's Fund, 2023) Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is one of the most frequent neuro-developmental disorders found in children. There is a predominance of American research into ADHD; therefore, the prevalence of this disorder is accurately calculated in the context of America. The research shows that ADHD affects upto one in every twenty children in the USA. Regarding specific learning disorder, the percentage of children experiencing specific learning disorder has risen from 21.5 per cent in 1976-77 to 34.8 per cent in 2014-15 in the USA. (Kena, 2016)

As far as India is concerned, the prevalence of mental disorders is found to be 10.6 per cent as per the data available from the National Mental Health Survey, 2015-16. It shows that nearly 150 million individuals suffer from mental disorders and require medical intervention. The prevalence of mental disorders varies in different states. It is found to be highest in Manipur (14.1 per cent) and lowest in Assam (5.8 per cent). Apart from Manipur, Madhya Pradesh (13.9 per cent) and Punjab (13.4 per cent) are ranked second and third, respectively, when it comes to the high prevalence rate of mental disorders in states. Considering various kinds of mental disorders, there is 5.0 per cent prevalence of mental and behavioral disorders caused by psychoactive substance use, 4.6 per cent prevalence of alcohol use disorder, 13.1 per cent prevalence of tobacco use disorders, 0.6 per cent prevalence of other substance use disorder, 0.4 per cent prevalence of schizophrenia and other psychotic disorders, 2.8 per cent prevalence of mood disorders, 0.3 per cent prevalence of bipolar affective disorder, 2.7 per cent prevalence of depressive disorder, 3.5 per cent prevalence of neurotic stress related disorder, 1.9 per cent prevalence of phobic anxiety disorder, 1.2 per cent prevalence of other anxiety disorders, 0.8 per cent prevalence of obsessive compulsive disorder and 0.2 per cent prevalence of post traumatic stress disorder in India. The data also brings forth the fact that the prevalence of mental morbidity is high in Indian urban metros. At the same time, common mental disorders (CMDs), including depression, anxiety disorders and substance use disorders, are a huge burden affecting nearly 10.0 per cent of the population. Although the prevalence of severe mental disorders, including schizophrenia, other non-affective psychoses and bipolar affective disorder, is low as compared to common mental disorders, severe mental disorders are equally important. Children and adolescents are found to be vulnerable to depressive episodes and recurrent depressive disorder (2.6 per cent), agoraphobia (2.3 per cent), intellectual disability (1.7 per cent), autism spectrum disorder (1.6 per cent), phobic anxiety disorder (1.3 per cent) and psychotic disorder (1.3 per cent). It is further traced that three out of four persons with a severe mental disorder experience significant disability. Considering epilepsy among the major public health issues, the survey shows that 2 million persons suffering from epilepsy require medical intervention, and nearly 4 million persons with intellectual disabilities require medical services. (Gururaj, 2016) It should be underlined that the data regarding the conditions of persons with intellectual disabilities is scarce, and it calls for extensive research to be conducted around the latter issue. It should further be noted that the updated data regarding the prevalence of mental disorders is still awaited, as the second phase of the National Mental Health Survey is underway. (Yasmeen, 2024) The second phase will uncover the emerging issues, including COVID-19 and its impact on mental health in India.

Considering the situation in Punjab, the current mental morbidity was found to be 13.42 per cent, and the total lifetime prevalence of mental morbidity was 17.94 per cent. It is found that the lifetime prevalence of mental morbidity was higher among the poor families. Mental disorders were seen to be highest among people in the age group of sixty years and above. There are approximately double as many males as compared to females when it comes to mental disorders. At the same time, the prevalence of mental disorders is higher among persons residing in rural areas as compared to urban areas. 0.72 per cent of people had schizophrenia, and 0.30 per cent of persons had other psychotic disorders. Lifetime prevalence of neurotic and stress-related disorders was found among 3.45 per cent of persons. Around 17 per cent participants of the National Mental Health Survey, Punjab, reported that they lead restricted lives due to mental morbidities. Apart from that, 0.5 per cent of the people above the age of eighteen years had intellectual disability, and 0.7 per cent of the people above the age of 18 years suffer from epilepsy. It is also mentioned in the survey (National Mental Health Survey, Punjab) that the prevalence of intellectual disability and epilepsy might be higher in the case of children. Although updated data with respect to India is awaited, the existing evidence strongly suggests that there is a considerable proportion of the population that is affected by various mental morbidities.

The lived experiences of individuals with intellectual disabilities remain largely undocumented, leaving their voices unheard and their realities invisible in policy and public discourse. Therefore, this study significantly tracks the lived experiences of persons with intellectual disabilities as they continue to face significant barriers to inclusion and well-being. The first-hand accounts will offer the reality attached to intellectual disabilities and highlight the need for bringing change at the social and political levels. In addition to that, this paper provides a detailed discussion of the legislation framed for the protection of the rights of persons with intellectual disabilities. The research paper further goes on to depict a complete picture of the marginalised lives of people with intellectual disabilities.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

The statistics regarding various mental morbidities in India and around the world could be traced through the existing literature. Intellectual disabilities form one of those mental morbidities that are not trackable due to the scarcity of data. The explicit focus upon the marginalisation of persons possessing intellectual disabilities is found to be missing in the literature. Hence, this study focuses upon tracing the vulnerabilities of persons with intellectual impairment through the narratives collected from the field for this study. The study emphasizes those social aspects that not only restrict the growth and development of persons with intellectual impairment but also create isolated living conditions for them. This study will contribute to shedding light upon the aforesaid unexplored area by getting an in-depth understanding of their marginalised conditions and prioritising the voices and perspectives of people with intellectual disabilities. Through this study, the unspoken, unheard and unseen realities associated with the lives of people possessing intellectual disabilities will come to the fore.

Research Methodology

To trace the lived experiences of people with intellectual disabilities, the primary focus is laid upon the qualitative method of investigation. The narrative approach has been used for uncovering the unique perspectives. Both primary and secondary sources of data provided an extensive understanding of the issue. Primary data was collected from one of the largest and oldest charitable organizations of Punjab (All India Pingalwara Charitable Society, Amritsar), which is working for the well-being of persons with disabilities. The head branch of Pingalwara, situated in Amritsar along with other branches in Sangrur and Chandigarh, was visited for tracking the mental morbidities and associated social stigma. An interview schedule was prepared to gather information regarding the living conditions of persons with intellectual disabilities. To get more valuable insights into the reality attached to their vulnerable lives, the interview schedule included questions regarding the social exclusion of persons with intellectual disabilities. A total of twenty staff members working in selected branches of the Pingalwara organisation were interviewed with the help of purposive random sampling. Nevertheless, attention needs to be drawn here towards the fact that this study has some limitations as the people with intellectual disabilities could not present their side of the story so the attendants were questioned about their lives. As far as research ethics are concerned, this study maintains the confidentiality of the respondents. The names of the respondents have not been mentioned anywhere in this paper. Hugs and smiles were warmly shared with the inmates (Persons with intellectual disabilities), creating a moment of genuine connection and joy. The narratives attained through the research offer a unique lens to examine the problem and capture the realities.. On the other hand, secondary sources of data, including books, research articles, governmental reports, official websites, etc, were used for providing a backdrop to the study.

Area profile

Punjab is one of the highest-ranked states in terms of the prevalence of mental morbidities. Primary data is collected through Pingalwara, which is one of the oldest and largest charitable organizations in Punjab. Along with the head branch situated in Amritsar, the other branches of Pingalwara, situated in Chandigarh and Sangrur, were also visited for the study. The organisation holds the objective of serving humanity. Pingalwara is a home for homeless, a hope for the forlorn, a hospital for the sick and a cradle for the orphaned and abandoned children. The foundation stone of the organization was set by the crusader of humanity, Bhagat Puran Singh. He is also known as 'Educated Beggar' and 'Father Teresa of Punjab'. He has selflessly served the sick and disabled people. He dedicated his life to the service of humanity. His journey of service towards humanity began when he adopted an abandoned and physically impaired child at Gurudwara Dehra Sahib in Lahore (before the partition of India). He had to escape to Amritsar amid the chaos that followed the 1947 announcement of partition. He witnessed the vulnerability of sick and physically impaired people during those harsh times. That is when he decided to work in their service by providing them food, shelter, medicines and other necessities of living. The foundation of Pingalwara was set by him in the year 1948, before he acquired the permanent place where the present building of Pingalwara is situated. Throughout his lifetime, his priority did not shift from serving the helpless and abandoned sick people. He stood day and night in their service. All thanks to his efforts that we now have numerous Pingalwara branches spread across Punjab and overseas. (Anand, 2001)

Rights of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities: Legislative Framework

There are several laws in place to protect the rights and interests of those with intellectual disabilities. The aim of promoting their inclusion and providing equal opportunities in society lies at the core of these legislations. To begin with, the Mental Healthcare Act, 2017, is landmark legislation in India that aims to protect the rights and dignity of individuals with intellectual disabilities. It provides them with access to mental healthcare services. It ensures that people with mental health issues live with respect and dignity in society. Following the provisions of the 'United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities', the Act supports raising awareness regarding the rights of persons with disabilities and, most specifically, of persons with intellectual impairment. The legislation lists down the procedures for ensuring accessible mental health care for all and promotes equal treatment for persons possessing mental disorders. Along with recognizing the capacities of persons with mental disorders, the Act places them at the center and ensures that steps are taken to create an enabling environment for them. (Mental Health Care Act, 2017)

In addition to that, the Indian government has been conducting the National Mental Health Programme (NMHP) since 1982 to address the significant burden of mental diseases. Availability and accessibility of minimum mental health care are ensured through this programme. The programme aims to raise awareness regarding mental health. It stresses the issue of a lack of skilled experts in the field of mental health. Training of health workers is considered a priority. Hence, the programme encouraged short-term training programmes for the general physicians so that they can diagnose and provide treatment for certain common mental illnesses. The district mental health programme was also launched in the year 1997, which emphasizes early detection and treatment. The programme started with 4 districts in the beginning and progressed towards covering 765 districts across the country. Initial efforts towards improving mental health facilities began with the upgradation of ten existing mental hospitals, institutes and medical colleges. For the upgradation, the emphasis was placed upon strengthening courses in psychiatry, clinical psychology, psychiatric social work and psychiatric nursing. Even financial support was provided to the institutions for attaining the required outcomes. Mental health institutions are also encouraged and funded to upgrade as a centre of excellence in mental health. (National Mental Health Programme, 1982)

Along with that, the National Tele Mental Health Programme was announced in the Union Budget 2022. It is a digital version of the National Mental Health Programme that ensures uninterrupted, around-the-clock and universal access to equitable, affordable and quality mental health care. Apart from providing online counseling, integrated medical and psychosocial interventions, including video consultations with mental health specialists, e-prescriptions and follow-up services are ensured. To enhance the facilities for the patients, Tele MANAS helpline has been generated that is toll-free in nature. These services are provided not only at the primary health centers but the services are extended at the community health centers, district hospitals and medical colleges. (Ministry of Health & Family Welfare-Government of India, n. d)

Apart from that, the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 also protects the rights of persons with intellectual disabilities along with various other categories of persons with disabilities. Equality and non-discrimination are ensured while protecting them from cruelty, inhumane treatment, violence and abuse.

Duties of the educational institutes are enshrined in the Act, which will further help in creating an accessible environment for them in schools. Specific measures to promote and facilitate inclusive education are highlighted in the Act. Vocational training and skill development are prioritised, along with the provisions of non-discrimination in employment and equal opportunity policy. Arranging adequate living conditions for the abandoned cases is accentuated through this Act, as the state is directed to extend social security by establishing community centers. Healthcare, rehabilitation and recreation are counted among the major areas of focus that lead the way towards their emancipation. The Act lays down the standards of accessibility for the physical environment, transportation, information and communications. For the said purpose, appropriate technologies, other facilities and services are provided to the public in urban and rural areas. (The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016) For the implementation of the provisions of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, the SIPDA Scheme (Scheme for Implementation of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act) was formulated in 2016. It ensures that all the provisions safeguarding the rights of persons with disabilities are implemented systematically.

The National Trust was constituted in the year 1999 for the welfare, protection and empowerment of persons with autism, cerebral palsy, intellectual disability and multiple disabilities. The trust extends support to the registered organisations that work for the welfare of persons with the aforementioned medical complications and deal with the problems of those who do not have family support. (Ministry of Law, Justice and Company Affairs, 1999)

Despite the prevalent legal provisions, the lives of persons with mental disorders, particularly those with intellectual disabilities, continue to be marked by hardship, exclusion, and emotional distress. These individuals continue to live on the margins of society, and their rights are recognized in theory and denied in practice. This study aims to illuminate the lived experiences of persons with intellectual disabilities while shedding light upon the overlooked aspects of their realities.

Pingalwara: A Blessing for the Needy

Pingalwara is widely regarded as a boon for society, especially for individuals who are abandoned, disabled, sick, or in need of care and protection. The institution provides a safe shelter, medical assistance, rehabilitation services, and emotional support to people who often have nowhere else to go. Its work reflects compassion, humanitarian values, and a strong commitment to social welfare. For many vulnerable individuals, Pingalwara is a lifeline that restores dignity and ensures their basic needs are met. The organisation works to ensure that individuals who may not be able to care for themselves receive continuous protection, proper supervision, and compassionate assistance. They offer safe residential spaces where inmates are treated with respect and empathy, and where their physical, emotional, and social needs are addressed. At present there are a total of 7 branches of Pingalwara, each one at Chandigarh, Sangrur, Jalandhar, Goindwal, Manawala and Pondari Waraich. The head branch is situated at Amritsar. There are a total of 1700 inmates who are residing in all the branches. The main branch accommodates the largest number of patients, being the biggest in size. For the study purpose, various visits to the head branch of Pingalwara situated in Amritsar and other branches in Sangrur and Chandigarh were made for getting enriching insight into the vulnerabilities of people with intellectual disabilities. Based on the information collected from the head branch and other branches of Pingalwara, it was found that separate wards have been made for accommodating different categories of patients including males, females, old age and children. In head branch, there were a total of 124 female patients with intellectual disabilities. In the male ward, 46 patients were identified with such conditions, while in the children's section, 40 children were found to be living with intellectual disabilities. Altogether, this brings the total number of individuals with intellectual disabilities to 210. In Sangrur branch of Pingalwara, all the inmates had intellectual disabilities and Chandigarh branch accommodates a total of 85 patients which includes mentally impaired persons and homeless old aged persons.

All the branches of Pingalwara operate in a similar manner under the aegis of the main head branch. Langar halls have been set up in all branches, where food is prepared for the inmates, ensuring that all their nutritional needs are met. Medical rooms and physiotherapy centers are available to address their healthcare requirements. The institution ensures that doctors conduct weekly visits to facilitate regular monitoring of the patients' medical conditions. Spacious rooms have been provided with 20 to 25 beds arranged in each room. The cleanliness of their beds is ensured by *sevadars*. Spacious lawns in the institutions provide for their recreation and refreshment. The structured routine created by the organisation promotes stability and comfort for individuals with intellectual disabilities.

A specific daily schedule has been designed for them. Their day begins with yoga, with 2 to 3 hours in the morning dedicated to the practice. The patients requiring physiotherapy are taken to the physiotherapy centre for therapeutic activities and movement training. It was revealed that physical activity significantly contributes to their overall happiness. Once their physical activities are completed they proceed to their bathing and grooming routines. After that, Sevadars serve the morning meals in their rooms. After their morning meals their medical checkups are conducted if needed. It was noted that sevadars assist them with their daily needs in a very warm and cheerful manner. Afternoon meals are served in their rooms after which they take nap for relaxation. In the evening some of them prefer to watch TV, while others are taken in the open lawn for light recreational and social activities. At night *Sevadars* bring their meals in the rooms and they end their day with prayers and music. Overall it was seen that Pingalwara is committed to the well being of the inmates.

The institution ensures that their basic needs are fulfilled and provides necessary physical and emotional support to help them live with dignity. Staff members who are often called as *sevadars* are trained to interact politely and patiently. Inmates are never reminded of their traumatic past experiences, as this can affect their mental and emotional stability. Individual differences are also acknowledged as each inmate is handled differently based on their abilities, limitations, and emotional needs. Some of the inmates require full time assistance, some of them require partial assistance and the rest are independent as they can manage their basic activities by themselves. Inmates who need more help are supervised closely, especially during meals, bathing, and movement. Apart from that, social care is provided to them as staff keeps them engaged in meaningful activities. Festivals and special events are celebrated to promote their social bonding. The organisation also makes continuous efforts to reintegrate them back with their families by trying to locate and contact their families. So far, multiple inmates have been successfully reunited with their families, after consistent efforts made by the organisation. At last it could be said that by offering a secure environment and individualised care, organisations like Pingalwara help people with intellectual disabilities live with dignity, reducing their vulnerability and ensuring that they are not neglected or marginalized. Their efforts contribute significantly in creating an inclusive society where every individual, regardless of their abilities, is valued and cared for.

Unheard and Unseen Realities of the Persons with Intellectual Disabilities

A life without dignity is not caused by disability itself, but by barriers that society creates. The undignified lives of many people with disabilities are the result of systemic neglect, discrimination, and exclusion. Despite the existence of international frameworks like the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the infringement of the basic rights of persons with disabilities around the world often goes unnoticed and ignored. Human rights violations are widespread and underreported. Legal protections are weak and poorly enforced. On the top of it all, public awareness is low, so injustices often don't spark outrage. Their educational rights are violated as they are less likely to attend schools and more likely to remain deprived of basic literacy skills. (UNESCO, 2018) They confront additional challenges, such as fewer employment opportunities and lower rates of wages. (Ananian, 2024) Looking at healthcare barriers, it is noted in 'Sustainable Development Goals Report 2024', that almost 50 per cent of the population lacks access to basic healthcare and the vulnerability of persons with disability is even higher in this case. (Sustainable Development Goals Report, 2024) Persons with mental disorders specifically face a lot of barriers across different spheres of life. Some major ones include attitudinal, communicational, educational, social, physical, legal, employment and healthcare barriers. (Kaur, 2025) There is a scarcity of research that specifically focuses on the marginalization of people with intellectual disabilities. Hence, this study sheds light upon the unspoken truths associated with the lives of persons with intellectual disabilities.

The increasing number of patients in various branches of Pingalwara indicates towards the stigma associated with such medical conditions. The reality of our culture is shaped by stigma and negative prejudices that are attached to various forms of disability. The truth associated with stigma was reflected through the conversation with one of the volunteers from the organization, as she said, *"Ehojay bachean nu lok gate vich hi rakh kay chale janday nay, asi ohna nu palday vi han tay padhaunay vi han"*

We usually find the abandoned children left at the gate of our organization. We look after the basic needs of these children and provide them with various educational opportunities. (English translation of the statement)

A medical staff member added,

> *"Bohot patients nay ji, 20 -20 sal ale patients vi nay ethay, jihna da koi nahi hai. Other state ale vi bohot nay, koi Chennai ton hai koi Karnataka ton koi UP ton."*
>
> Many patients have been staying here for twenty years or longer, and they have no family support. There have also been patients from other states; they come from various states like UP, Karnataka and Chennai. (English translation of the statement)

The discussion showed that leaving a disabled child behind is a very common practice. Persons with intellectual disabilities are forced to live in seclusion and without any family support. It was revealed that there are numerous parents who quietly leave their child near the entrance gate of their organization. Children with intellectual disabilities have also been found at the railway stations, temples and streets. Without any means of their identifications, tracing their family becomes impossible. More gruesome details regarding the practice of abandoning people with intellectual impairments were disclosed during the discussion when the volunteer of the organization disclosed the reality of Gurdev Singh (Pseudonym),

Case study 1: Practice of abandoning people with intellectual disabilities

Name: Gurdev Singh (Pseudonym)

Medical condition: Intellectual disability

Context: Gurdev Singh, a man in his 50s, has intellectual disability. The exact factors that lead to this condition remain unknown. With no information about his early life and medical history, it is impossible to determine what may have contributed to his condition. He was discovered living in a small, broken home, and with no family members present or traceable. His neighbors were the only source of information about his family history. They revealed that he had lived with his wife and son. Due to his disability his wife decided to get separated, thus she remarried another man. His son also followed his mother and Gurdev was left alone. Gurdev was left isolated after his family abandoned him. He endured hardships without any support of a caregiver. Deprived of food, care and attention, his life was turned into a living hell. After observing his solitary state, his neighbors contacted Pingalwara. Subsequently he was brought to Pingalwara. The members of the organisation made several sincere attempts to contact his family through phone calls, messages, and even by reaching out to relatives and neighbours. However, despite their continued efforts, no one from the family responded or came forward to take responsibility for him. Members of the organization observed that even if he cannot fully express himself, he can still feel the pain of rejection. Abandonment has brought sadness, confusion and anxiety in his life. Absence of his speech clearly does not mean absence of feelings. It was further observed that emotional reality of these people is more devastating as confusion, fear and trauma are found to be common in non verbal and medically fragile cases like that of Gurdev Singh. Gurdev has been living in Pingalwara for the past ten years, during which he has received consistent medical care and support. Over this period, his health has shown significant improvement, thanks to the regular treatment, monitoring, and rehabilitative services provided by the institution. The dedicated medical staff ensures that his needs are addressed promptly, contributing to his overall well-being. A Sevadar said,

> *"Asi ehna nu purana kuj yad ni karwaunday, kyonki ehh fir ussi purani medical condition tay pohunch janday nay"*
>
> We make a conscious effort not to remind him of his past, as revisiting difficult memories negatively impact his mental and emotional well-being. (English translation of the statement)

The organization focuses upon creating a supportive and comforting environment that helps them feel safe, valued, and at peace in the present. The case of Gurdev Singh (Pseudonym) shows that exclusion of individuals with intellectual disabilities brings them profound hardships and denies their opportunity to live with dignity and equality. The real suffering brings isolation, poverty, poor health, and a lack of dignity and independence. It sends a message in society that their lives are less valuable, which is deeply harmful, not just emotionally, but also socially and economically. It is not just a matter of ignoring the vulnerable lives but it is a matter of human rights violation.

Along with that, the people with intellectual impairment are at higher risk of going missing, as revealed by the members of the visited organizations. Many inmates of Pingalwara were found to be wandering on the streets. They struggle to ask for any kind of help from others. Without any safety plans and effective communication tools, society often neglects them literally and figuratively. The stories regarding the missing cases surfaced during the interaction.

Case study 2: Missing persons crisis

Name: Shyam (Pseudonym)

Medical condition: Intellectual disability

Context: Shyam is a middle aged man who came from Tamil Nadu. He was found to be wandering around aimlessly moving from place to place without any clear direction or purpose. His confused state and lack of guidance highlighted that he was in need of help, as he appeared unable to care for himself or find a safe environment on his own. He accidently landed up in the state of Punjab. After someone noticed him wandering alone, they approached him with concern and realised that he needed support and a safe place to stay. Understanding his vulnerable condition, the person took the initiative to bring him to Pingalwara. Their timely intervention ensured that he received immediate care, protection, and the attention he required for his well-being. He has been living in Pingalwara for the last 10 years but he could never share his side of the story due to his intellectual issues. His intellectual issues have made it difficult for him to communicate his thoughts, feelings, or past experiences clearly. As a result, no one truly knows what challenges he faced before arriving at Pingalwara. His silence reflects the struggles many individuals with intellectual disabilities experience, where their inability to express themselves leads to their stories remaining unheard. This also highlights the importance of compassionate care, patience, and understanding from caregivers who must interpret their needs through observation and empathy rather than relying solely on verbal communication. The conversation about Shyam ji (Pseudonym) also showed that they face difficulties in understanding danger or navigating unfamiliar places. Out of curiosity, stress or confusion, they have a higher tendency to wander around, and this makes them more vulnerable in public places. Since his arrival at Pingalwara, his progress has been gradual yet encouraging. With regular medical care, proper nutrition, and a stable environment, his physical health has shown noticeable improvement. The caregivers and staff interact with him patiently, helping him with daily activities and encouraging him to participate in simple routines. Over time, he has also become more comfortable in the surroundings, responding better to familiar faces and showing signs of emotional stability. While he still faces challenges in communication due to his intellectual disability, the structured and compassionate environment has enabled him to live with a sense of belonging. On the other hand, the search for his family continues, as Pingalwara remains committed to find his relatives in the hope of reconnecting him with his roots. Despite limited information and communication barriers, staff has made repeated efforts to reach out through local authorities, community networks, and public announcements. Although no positive response has been received so far, the organisation has not given up. The ongoing search reflects the institution's belief that every individual deserves the chance to be reunited with their loved ones, and until that happens, they continue to provide him with care, safety, and emotional support in place of the family he is unable to return to at present.

There are multiple cases in Pingalwara who were found to be unconsciously wandering around. Hence, the organization tries its best to help those persons who are wandering around without any safety nets. Members of the organisation further discussed their vulnerability through the case of Manvinder Singh (Pseudonym)

Case study 3: Missing persons

Name: Manvinder Singh (Pseudonym)

Medical condition: Intellectual disability

Context: Manvinder Singh is a young teenage boy who was found wandering alone and lost on the streets of Sangrur near Gurudwara Mastuana Sahib. He had been out on his own for some time, unsure of where to go or how to return home. His condition reflected his vulnerability. He never speaks anything. A mobile number is inscribed on his arm, due to his limited expressive ability. His family does not answer the calls made by the organisation which suggests neglect or abandonment. Despite repeated attempts to reach them, there has been no response, communication, or inquiry from their side regarding his well-being. This silence indicates a lack of concern, responsibility, or willingness to reconnect with him, raising serious questions about the support system he once had. Their absence at such a crucial time further highlights how alone he has been left, and how the Pingalwara has now become his primary source of care, attention, and protection. For a person like Manvinder Singh, who has an intellectual disability and limited expressive ability, it becomes very difficult to know the past experiences and struggles. This lack of communication can hide a great deal of emotional, physical, or psychological pain. Caregivers in the organisation struggle to understand because they don't have reliable information about the person's history. In such a case, empathy and understanding are absolutely critical for them because they might not speak but they feel scared, abandoned, frustrated or helpless. It was observed that caregivers need to be trained not just in 'what to do' but 'how to care' for such critical cases. It has been 7 months since Manvinder was brought to Pingalwara, and during this time his treatment and care have been initiated with consistency. He has been placed on regular medication as prescribed by the medical team, and efforts have been made to monitor his progress closely. However, despite the ongoing intervention, only very minor improvements have been observed so far. His response to treatment has been slow, and noticeable changes in his behaviour, communication and overall condition have been limited. This suggests that his challenges may be deeper and may require longer-term therapeutic support, structured routines, and continuous patience. It was evident from the case of Manvinder that many limitations in self-sufficiency aren't just biological but they further stem from lack of accessible infrastructure and societal support. Inadequate awareness in society, lack of family involvement, and social stigma surrounding intellectual disabilities can together create barriers that compound an individual's difficulties. The growing number of missing cases shows a disturbing social trend that point towards deeper systemic issues. It reflects how vulnerable individuals especially people with intellectual disabilities often do not receive the protection, monitoring, and support they need.

Besides that, disability is associated with a number of myths. Intellectually impaired persons are perceived as violent individuals. Sadly, that is a common and very harmful stereotype. Even though the research shows that they are more likely to be the victims of violence rather than perpetrators, people with intellectual impairments are often unfairly labeled as violent or unpredictable. It is observed that people are unaware of the potential benefits of medical intervention in cases where they show hyper behavior issues. A medical staff member in the organisation elaborated about the medical intervention required for the patients with intellectual impairment that can prove effective for their well-being,

> *"Sadi medication nal chaldi hai, har Tuesday doctor aunday nay, jo patients hyper hunday nay ohna di ussi hisab nal medication chaldi hai, tay patient stable rehenday nay. Medicine nal bohot farak painda"*

> We provide them with right medication. The team of doctors visits every Tuesday. Proper medical treatment is provided to the patients exhibiting hyper behavioral problem. It brings in their mental equilibrium. These medications work incredibly well for the patients. (English translation of the statement)

In addition to providing patients with necessary medical care, the organization stresses upon promoting the well-being of people with intellectual impairment through yoga, physical activities and physiotherapy, etc. It was further suggested by the members of Pingalwara that the government should focus on bringing meaningful change in the lives of individuals with intellectual impairments. The government must implement comprehensive strategies aimed at erasing stigma, dismantling harmful myths, and confronting the negative stereotypes that continue to marginalise this community.

Discussion

This section discusses the main findings of this study along with some important suggestions for the policy makers. The problem of missing person's crisis surfaced as a major concern while interacting with the respondents. People with intellectual disabilities who go missing face unique and serious challenges that increase their vulnerability. Due to limited understanding of danger they may not recognise danger and unsafe spaces. They can't even ask for assistance by providing personal details for their identification. In such circumstances they face increased risk of exploitation and abuse. Considering their vulnerability, Pingalwara organisation ensures that these missing cases are provided adequate shelter and safe living conditions in their premises.

It was truly shocking and heartbreaking to see the families who are supposed to be closest support, abandon the persons with intellectual disabilities. It was found out that it's a mix of social, emotional and systematic factors that makes the families to abandon persons with intellectual disabilities. People lack the understanding of disability. The health conditions of persons with intellectual disabilities are believed to be untreatable. People hold this common belief that there is no cure of intellectual issues hence fastening them with chains is the only way to tackle the violent cases. Stigma and prejudice against them are deeply rooted in our culture due to which people assume someone with disabilities as burden. Hence people prefer to distance themselves from them.

At the same time, there is a misconception that people with intellectual disabilities cannot build relationships or contribute meaningfully in the society. This stigma leads to their exclusion. People avoid them in the conversations, social activities and community events. Isolation often leads to anxiety, depression and low self esteem. This makes social engagement more difficult that creates a vicious cycle for them. This truth surrounding the living conditions of those with intellectual disabilities is unimaginably grim. Their realities take us into the darker spaces. They are fastened tightly with the chains of isolation, and breaking those chains seems impossible. The failure of our society as a whole is depicted through the brutal realities that came up during this study. A few recommendations may be put forward for alleviating their trauma.

First of all, addressing the treatment gap in mental health care is urgent and essential. Huge treatment gaps were found, which shows the difference between the number of persons who require medical intervention and the number of persons who actually receive the treatment. A treatment gap of more than 60 per cent is seen in most of the mental disorders in India. The findings of the National Mental Health Survey (Punjab) show that a great number of persons with mental morbidities were not availing any treatment. For common mental diseases, the treatment gap was 79.9 per cent, for severe mental diseases the gap was found to be 57.1 per cent, for alcohol use disorders the gap was 81.4 per cent and 82.1 per cent was the gap found for depressive disorders. There are several reasons for these disparities. Health-related services for persons possessing mental disorders are limited to the extent that availing basic mental healthcare is inaccessible. There is less than one psychiatrist in the state of Punjab for per 100,000 persons. There is a total of 127 psychiatrists in the state, and if we talk about the number of clinical psychologists and psychiatric social workers, their number is even lower than the number of psychiatrists. The existing staff is often overwhelmed, leading to longer waiting hours and lower quality of care. Without enough trained personnel, many mental health conditions go undiagnosed or untreated until they become severe. At the same time, the statistics depict the high prevalence of mental disorders in the state; therefore, the state government should increase manpower in mental health services. It should also be underlined that remote and rural areas possess little access to mental health professionals, so effective measures need to be undertaken to bring a significant change at the grassroots levels as well. Expanding needs for mental health services could only be addressed if the severe shortage of mental health professionals is tackled adequately. (National Mental Health Survey, 2017) There are multiple other factors, including a lack of awareness and affordability for care, that contribute to these treatment gaps. Hence, along with providing affordability, raising awareness is equally necessary for closing the current treatment gap in mental health services.

Secondly, the vulnerability of persons with mental disorders calls for bringing some crucial systemic changes to ensure their well-being. Every district in the state of Punjab should be included in the District Mental Health Programme. Mental health should be prioritized in the budget of the state as well. Training in mental health should be provided to medical workers. In addition to that, the state government needs to focus on creating its own mental health strategy. At the same time policy framework needs to be strengthened for protecting the rights of persons with intellectual impairment. All these distinctive measures undertaken by the state of Punjab will bring out a remarkable impact at the regional level.

Thirdly, combating the stigma associated with intellectual impairment is essential for creating a society that is more compassionate and inclusive. Stigma frequently results in humiliation, exclusion, prejudice and delayed treatment. Several crucial actions are required to deal with the prevalent misconceptions regarding mental disorders. Awareness could be raised through mass education and open conversations on mental health issues. It should be noted that combating stigma involves more than just altering perceptions. It also entails altering systems and everyday interactions to ensure that individuals with mental issues are treated with respect, dignity and equality.

Lastly, there is an urgent need to start special services for the vulnerable groups of persons with intellectual disabilities who have no family support. They face compounded barriers that demand targeted support from the side of the government. Without tailored services, these groups remain excluded; they suffer from preventable harm and struggle to access their basic human rights.

Conclusion

Exploring the area of mental disorders brings out the dark reality associated with the lives of persons with intellectual disabilities. Hearing the personal stories of individuals with mental health conditions was profoundly eye-opening and revealed the depth of their vulnerabilities. Tragically, many individuals with mental disorders, particularly those with intellectual or psychosocial disabilities, are abandoned by their families. The root causes lie in societal stigma, lack of inclusive services, and inadequate government support. Therefore, there is an urgent need for prioritizing their issues and creating an environment where they could feel included in society. Exercising basic human rights should not seem like a luxury or an exception for them; rather, they should enjoy their rights as it is their rightful due.

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Aruna Roy, Personal Is Political: An Activist's Memoir, HarperCollins Publishers India, 2024. ISBN-10: 9356998590, pp. 304. Price: Rs. 599

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Aruna Roy's The Personal Is Political: An Activist's Memoir is both a reassurance and an uphill battle in a time when democratic norms are shifting, state surveillance is getting more extreme, and the general public are losing faith in institutions. The author is best recognized for co-founding the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) and for playing an important part in enactment of India's landmark Right to Information (RTI) Act of 2005. Her memoir goes beyond what is typical for activist autobiographies. It is both an analysis of power, a feminist reflection on human vulnerability and a tribute to collective resistance. Roy uses personal stories and presents sharp political criticism forcing readers to see democracy not as an abstract or idealistic goal, but as a real, everyday practice that is imperfect, relational, and always being worked on.

The memoir tells the story of Roy's life, from growing up in a Tamil Brahmin family in South India after independence to becoming a leader of grassroots movements in rural Rajasthan. Roy's parents went against caste norms and raised her in a progressive humanist way. This exposed her to Marxist and Dalit ideas at a young age. But she is rather open about how her privileges, English fluency, elite education at Miranda House, and entry into the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) shaped her life. Roy's disappointment with the civil service didn't come from one event, but from a growing awareness of how the state's system wasn't working to deliver justice to the most vulnerable. As she states, "My search for a system of delivery of justice to the common citizen reads like a list of predicaments and obstacles that prevented that from happening. I left the civil service in 1975, frustrated by the status quo's failure to deal with good honest people fighting a daily battle and its injustice." This moment is an important turning point in the memoir, showing her change from bureaucrat to dissenter.

Roy's memoir of how she started MKSS with a group of landless workers, women, Dalit farmers, and artisans is the main focus of the memoir. Roy uses Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970) to show that the MKSS is a place for democratic teaching. Public hearings (*jan sunwais*) were places where women and workers with little formal education spoke out against theft in public works, and street plays (*nukkad nataks*) satirised dishonest officials. People didn't use sit-ins and hunger strikes as protests; they used them to teach.

In this book, she talks about wage theft and the relentless pursuit of justice by a male labourer through the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) providing a substantive, empirical counterargument to Gayatri Spivak's pivotal work *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988). Instead of portraying the subaltern as constantly silenced by dominant discourse, she illustrates how subaltern individuals actively assert their presence in public hearings, express their grievances, and affirm their political agency.

Roy does not romanticize this resistance. She is honest about the internal turmoil and ideological divisions within MKSS as well as her own failures. "Struggle does make us aware of both our capabilities as well as incapabilities," she states. The memoir provides an open and candid account of the difficulties in working together across different areas of difference, especially involving caste and gender. Her openness about these issues adds depth to the book as it illustrates some of the ethical work that goes into carrying out sustained collective work.

One of the most captivating sections of her memoir concerns her ten-year struggle to get the Right to Information (RTI) Act enacted into law. Throughout, she presents transparency as a means by which society can elevate the condition of its most marginalised citizens, which aligns with James C. Scott's assertion in *Weapons of the Weak* (1985). Roy further asserts that the RTI legislation was not created by some elite cadre of legislators in closed-door meetings; rather, it was born out of the long experiences of India's poorest citizens with regard to unpaid wages, land rights denial and bureaucratic opacity. This documentation complements Alasdair Roberts *Blacked Out* (2006), who describes transparency in governance as an antidote to government secrecy. But where Roberts is focused mainly on the need for government accountability in relation to financial transparency, Roy, on the other hand, is as frank about the limitations of the RTI as Roberts is about its potential for accountability. Drawing upon the observations made in Akhil Gupta's *Red Tape* (2012), Roy gives several examples of the ways in which bureaucracies neutralise progressive legislation to create endless red tape.

It is an intersectional feminist text that critiques conventional models of political acts. She centres her vulnerabilities (illness, exhaustion, emotional burden from organizing) as a means of framing her activism in contrast to the traditional and male-centric model of the selfless, heroic act. Her experience corresponds to Sandra Harding's (1987) *Feminism and Methodology*, which asserts that lived experience can be regarded as a source of authority on knowledge.

Though the memoir does acknowledge Brahmin privilege and support of the Dalit community, it does not provide an adequate treatment of the concept of caste. That is, it does not critique the fact that Brahmins still constitute a major portion of the leadership of movements that claim to support equity. Scholars such as Gopal Guru (2002) and Anupama Rao (2003) have shown that upper-caste dominance continues even in spaces committed to equity. Roy's lack of commentary on internal caste hierarchies in the MKSS suggests that she missed an opportunity to reflect more deeply on these issues. Sharmila Rege (2013) asks upper-caste feminist women to decentre their narratives from the forefront and give more prominence to the voices of Dalit women. Roy points toward this goal, but she does not fully engage in it. While her openness regarding her own privilege is commendable, a thorough analysis of the way caste operates would have enhanced her feminist praxis.

For Roy, the desire for community and collective living among farmers in rural India has become something of both sorrow and joy. On the one hand, she expresses deep concern over how the bonds of people working together toward the common good have been destroyed; but ,on the other hand, she does not critically examine the effects of neoliberal policies such as the deregulation of land use, unregulated markets, or increasing influence from large corporations' charitable donations, which have divided rural people into isolated individuals. In *The Politics of the Governed* (2004), Partha Chatterjee points out that neoliberalism has broken down political organizations and replaced the movement of large groups of people acting together with each being left to themselves to create ways to survive.

Roy's failure to link certain structural changes occurring within society with the declining effectiveness of movements such as the MKSS indicates a major gap in their thinking. Gupta and Ferguson's (2002) critique of development as a depoliticised form of governmental activity could possibly have enriched Roy's account of bureaucratic inertia. Furthermore, their view that RTI will still be relevant does not take into account the impact that welfare systems linked to Aadhaar and the surveillance of individuals through digital means will have on grass-roots transparency.

Despite this, *The Personal Is Political* offers three critical contributions to contemporary political theory and political practice. The first is that her memoir highlights the political agency of Dalits, as they utilize the Right to Information Act as a means of contesting the power of the state, and holding state authorities accountable. This complicates Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's well-known assertion about subalterns' silence, but also supports the work of Partha Chatterjee in developing the notion of "political society" as spaces where marginalized groups are able to negotiate their relationship with the state through sub-legal and informal means. The second is a significant contribution to feminist epistemology; by centres of embodied vulnerability (i.e., illness, emotional turmoil, ethical ambivalence) as legitimate sources of political knowledge. In this manner, Roy builds on Harding's theory of situated knowledge and experience and provides use of a model for organizing based on notions of care and interdependence, as opposed to a model of organizing based upon the individualistic or heroic. Thirdly, Roy emphasizes transparency not simply as an institutional reform, but as a practice that is also active in the everyday lives of those who face struggles (especially for those who are rural or poor). Her support for the RTI Act correlates with Roberts' position of transparency as an avenue against state secrecy. But, Roy does so in a more grounded and ethical way, drawing from her experiences with grassroots organizing. Collectively, these contributions add depth to our understanding of subaltern resistance, feminist ethics, and democracy and at the same time, they encourage us to take a closer look at some of the exclusions and conflicts in activist working models.

In the closing sections of *The Personal Is Political*, Roy acknowledges not only the failures of state institutions but also the fractures within social movements and the contradictions that exist within leadership. By articulating her own moments of error, exhaustion, and monetary conflict, she critiques the widespread myth of an activist being invincible. In doing so, she challenges the performance-related piousness often praised of progressive communities, choosing instead to promote a humble and reflective-based approach to politics.

Roy's memoir is both a political testimony and an analytically rich text; as such, it adds to the feminist, subaltern and policy literature. It also provides a model for situated epistemology, in that it illustrates how knowledge is produced inextricably from one's lived experiences. For academics, it illustrates that intellectual labour is a product of the lived experience of the field; rather than simply interpreting the field of study, scholars can produce knowledge. For practitioners, it also provides a timely response to the commodification of dissent: it reminds practitioners that resistance is not dependent on time and place but rather occurs continuously, not through acts of heroism but through the acts of a collective, and is frequently the result of negotiation rather than being pure action.

In a time where the democratic process is becoming less visible and focused on the things we see, read, hear, and perform digitally, Roy's memoir serves as a vital lens. It encourages us to stay with the problems and contradictions as the basis for good political life. Instead of moving away from politics, this memoir is a eminder to look back into it with patience, humility, and a focus on caring that does not depend on guaranteed outcomes or immediate satisfaction.

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Reviewed by

Gurmeet Kaur,
Post-Doctoral Fellow,
Department Cum Centre for Women's Studies & Development,
Panjab University, Chandigarh.

Roy Arundhati, Mother Mary Comes to Me, Penguin Random House India, 2025. ISBN- 978-0-143-47306-0 Pages: 374

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Arundhati Roy's *Mother Mary Comes to Me* is an extraordinary and deeply reflective memoir that revisits the author's turbulent yet inseparable relationship with her mother, Mary Roy. Roy, internationally celebrated for her Booker Prize-winning novel 'The God of Small Things' (1997), is widely recognised for her fearless engagement with the political and social realities of India through both fiction and non-fiction. She has written numerous essays and non-fiction works addressing issues such as caste, gender, communalism, displacement, environmental justice, and state violence in India. In *Mother Mary Comes to Me*, Roy moves away from overt political commentary and enters the intensely personal terrain of memory, grief, family, and identity. Nevertheless, the memoir remains deeply political in its exploration of gender, power, class, caste, and familial structures within Indian society.

The title of the memoir is derived from the famous song "Let It Be" by The Beatles, and symbolically evokes the image of a mother figure who is simultaneously comforting and overpowering. The memoir can be described as a chronological narrative that combines autobiographical reflection, social commentary, and vivid descriptive storytelling. Roy's lucid and compelling prose style makes the work emotionally engaging and intellectually stimulating. Since its publication, the memoir has attracted considerable attention because of its candid portrayal of one of the most complicated relationships in Roy's life.

At the centre of the memoir is Roy's mother, Mary Roy, whom the author frequently refers to as "Mrs Roy." A pioneering women's rights activist and a single mother, Mary Roy played a significant role in challenging discriminatory inheritance laws for Syrian Christian women in Kerala. Yet, despite her public image as a courageous reformer, her personal relationship with her daughter remained fraught with tension, emotional volatility, and conflict. Roy captures this paradox poignantly when she writes:

> "Perhaps even more than a daughter mourning the passing of her mother, I mourn her as a writer who has lost her most enthralling subject. In these pages, my mother, my gangster, shall live. She was my shelter and my storm."

This statement encapsulates the emotional complexity of the memoir. Roy neither idealises nor condemns her mother; rather, she presents her as a deeply layered personality whose influence shaped every aspect of the author's life and identity. The memoir demonstrates how the contradictions within this mother-daughter relationship became foundational to Roy's intellectual and emotional development.

Although the memoir primarily focuses on Mary Roy, it simultaneously becomes a journey of self-exploration for Arundhati Roy herself. Through the narration of childhood memories, familial conflicts, and personal struggles, the text reveals the formation of Roy's worldview and literary consciousness. The memoir explores broader themes such as intergenerational trauma, violence within families, gendered expectations, emotional inheritance, and the functioning of patriarchal power structures. In many ways, the narrative transcends the conventional boundaries of memoir writing and becomes a social history of postcolonial India seen through the lens of personal experience.

One of the most striking features of the memoir is its narrative style. At several points, the reader almost feels that the text is autobiographical because Roy narrates events from her life with richness and perfect detail. The memoir itself becomes a source text for 'The God of Small Things', as Roy acknowledges the connections between her lived experiences and her fictional world. While reading the memoir, readers gradually discover that the character of '*Ammu*', the protagonist's mother in the novel, is closely related to the figure of Mary Roy. The landscapes of *Ayemenem* in Kerala, where Roy spent her childhood with her mother and brother, are described with remarkable sensitivity and nostalgia, further revealing how deeply her personal experiences informed her literary imagination.

Roy's portrayal of her mother is balanced and nuanced. She openly acknowledges that Mary Roy was a difficult and often emotionally harsh mother, and that their relationship was marked by recurring conflict. However, the memoir does not encourage readers to reduce Mary Roy to the image of a "bad mother." Instead, Roy carefully illustrates the ways in which her mother supported her education, intellectual growth, and creative ambitions. Even amid anger and emotional distance, Mary Roy remained one of the strongest influences on Roy's personality and career.

The memoir also provides insight into Roy's early adulthood and the experiences that shaped her as a writer and political thinker. After completing her schooling, Roy pursued architecture at a time when the profession remained largely male-dominated. Her years in Delhi are portrayed as a period of struggle, experimentation, and self-discovery. Refusing financial dependence on her mother, Roy survived through various odd jobs while navigating complex personal relationships and professional uncertainties.

An important phase of the memoir concerns Roy's association with filmmaker Pradip Krishen. Through her involvement in the film *Massey Sahib*, directed by Krishen, Roy entered the world of cinema, acting, and scriptwriting. Her professional collaboration with Krishen gradually developed into a personal relationship, which became controversial because he was divorced and already a father. The relationship was also disapproved of by Mary Roy. Nevertheless, Roy recounts these experiences with honesty and introspection, presenting herself as flawed, vulnerable, and searching for meaning.

As the memoir progresses, Roy reflects on the emergence of her literary career. While working on scripts and documentaries, she quietly began writing what would later become 'The God of Small Things'. Roy recalls that when she showed the manuscript to Pradip Krishen, who had become her husband by then, he immediately recognised its brilliance and remarked that the book would change her life. The novel's eventual success, culminating in the Booker Prize, transformed Roy into an international literary figure. Yet the memoir suggests that behind this public success remained an enduring desire for maternal validation, a desire that Roy perhaps never fully attained.

The memoir also traces Roy's transition from novelist to political activist and public intellectual. Following the publication of The God of Small Things, Roy increasingly engaged with issues of social justice, state violence, environmental destruction, and religious intolerance. Her controversial essays, including "The Great Indian Rape Trick," and works such as 'Walking with the Comrades' reflect her deep involvement with political struggles ranging from the Narmada Bachao Andolan to the Kashmir conflict and the Gujarat riots. Her second novel, 'The Ministry of Utmost Happiness', also emerges from this political and social engagement, reflecting her understanding of the complexities of the Indian state, marginalisation, violence, nationalism, and questions of identity. Roy's activism and writings often invited criticism, legal challenges, and public controversy, yet the memoir suggests that these political engagements emerged organically from her lived experiences and moral convictions.

Interestingly, as Mary Roy aged and her health deteriorated, the emotional distance between mother and daughter appeared to lessen. Although Roy continued to seek approval from her mother, she gradually came to understand the silences, contradictions, and emotional complexities that had defined their relationship. The memoir concludes not with complete reconciliation, but with a mature recognition of mutual dependence, admiration, and unresolved love. Mary Roy, despite her disagreements with her daughter's politics and life choices, remained deeply supportive of Roy's achievements and public courage.

Ultimately, *Mother Mary Comes to Me* is much more than a memoir about a mother-daughter relationship. It is a meditation on memory, inheritance, identity, creativity, and resistance. The text demonstrates the extent to which personal histories are intertwined with broader political and social realities. Roy's narrative reveals how family relationships can simultaneously nurture and wound, shelter and destabilise. The memoir's greatest strength lies in its refusal to offer simplistic emotional resolutions. Instead, Roy presents human relationships in all their ambiguity and contradiction.

The memoir is intellectually rich and emotionally demanding. At times, it feels less like an intimate family narrative and more like a socio-political history of contemporary India. This complexity may challenge some readers, yet it is precisely this expansiveness that makes the work remarkable. By the end of the memoir, readers may remain uncertain about how fully they can trust either the narrative or the narrator; however, this ambiguity contributes to the authenticity of the text. Roy's memoir resists sentimentality and instead offers an honest, layered, and profoundly human account of love, anger, memory, and survival.

Reviewed by

Veerdeep Kaur
Project Assistant
Department cum Centre for
Women's Studies & Development
Panjab University, Chandigarh

Yogendra Yadav, *Ganrajya ka Swadharma,* Setu Prakashan, 2026. ISBN:978-93-6201-120-6 Pages. 333

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Ganrajya Ka Swadharma by Yogendra Yadav distinguishes itself within contemporary Indian political literature through its integration of philosophical reflection, constitutional morality, cultural introspection, and political critique. Rather than offering conventional political commentary, the book systematically explores the moral foundations of the Indian Republic. Central to the text is the question of the "*swadharma,*" or intrinsic moral duty, of the Indian Republic. Through this inquiry, Yadav addresses various themes including nationalism, democracy, secularism, constitutionalism, culture, federalism, and the future trajectory of Indian politics. The work is both analytical and reflective, merging political theory with civilizational inquiry.

Ganrajya Ka Swadharma is organized into eight sections, each addressing critical issues facing contemporary India. The book opens by interrogating the "idea of India," positing that its essence is fundamentally embedded in the Constitution. Yadav asserts that India's current challenges are not solely administrative or economic but are deeply ideological and political. He further contends that the paradigms of modernization and development have not adequately addressed India's distinctive social and political contradictions. Yadav argues that Indian society is frequently analysed through frameworks derived from Europe's turbulent historical experiences, particularly those related to nationalism, secularism, and modernity. He maintains that these imported categories are inadequate for comprehending India's civilizational complexity.

One of the most important formulations in the key structure appears early in the text, where Yadav states, "The essence of India's '*swadharma*' will be found not just in formal documents, written ideals, or established ideologies, but in the language of movements" (Yadav, 2026, p. 27). This assertion encapsulates the book's broader argument that democracy and constitutional morality require more than institutional frameworks; they must also arise from social struggles, ethical commitments, and collective aspirations. Yadav further elaborates on the historical depth of India's civilizational experience by noting that January 26, 1950, marked the foundation of its '*swadharma*', which was laid some 3000 years ago. "If the Republic of India has been nurtured by the currents of Bharatvarsh, Hindustan, and India, then the remnants of every stage of this journey of civilization are present in our collective subconscious. The 'swadharma' of the Republic of India is not static or eternal; it is propelled by both internal and external dynamism. Our 'swadharma' is fluid" (Yadav, 2026, pp. 28–29).

This passage is significant as it conceptualizes the Indian Republic not merely as a modern constitutional arrangement but as a civilizational project shaped by historical continuity and cultural plurality. Yadav's interpretation of *swadharma* is dynamic rather than rigid. He rejects both static traditionalism and purely procedural constitutionalism, advocating instead for a living democratic ethos grounded in historical consciousness.

Another major strength of the book is its engagement with constitutionalism. Yadav interprets the Constitution not simply as a legal document but as the ethical culmination of India's freedom struggle and civilizational values. He writes:

> An attack on the Constitution is not just an attack on a document or an institutional framework. The Constitution is the nectar that emerged from the ideological churning of our freedom struggle, a confluence of our civilization's heritage and the gift of the modern world. The Constitution is a philosophy, the essence of India's values, and a blueprint for India's future. Therefore, an attack on the Constitution is an attack on the soul of India, and thus, the campaign to save the Constitution must transform into the politics of saving India's 'swadharma'" (Yadav, 2026, p. 73).

This interpretation elevates constitutional morality beyond procedural legality, situating it within the broader ethical imagination of the republic. For Yadav, defending the Constitution is inseparable from upholding India's moral and civilizational foundations.

Part Two of the book raises three central questions: What is India? Is India simply a political entity shaped by historical coincidence, or does it represent a deeper cultural and civilizational formation? Should citizens feel pride in being Indian, and what duties do they owe to the nation? These questions enable Yadav to critically engage with competing conceptions of Indian nationalism and national identity. He further examines the idea of "New India," exploring the tensions between cultural identity, democratic pluralism, and political modernity.

Part Three addresses controversial and politically significant themes, including Vinayak Damodar Savarkar's concept of Hindutva, the Akal Takht, Khalistan, and the idea of a Hindu Rashtra. Yadav's discussion is rigorous and thought-provoking, as it avoids superficial dismissal and simplistic ideological binaries. Instead, he seeks to understand the historical and political anxieties underlying these movements while simultaneously critiquing exclusionary nationalism.

Part Four provides an extensive discussion of secularism in contemporary India. Yadav critically evaluates both communal politics and the shortcomings of secular political formations. He contends that secularism in India has often been reduced to electoral calculations or symbolic gestures, rather than developing into a genuine culture of coexistence. According to Yadav, *dharma* or tradition forms the moral foundation of most Indians' ethical consciousness. While labels and practices may differ, the underlying ethical principles remain interconnected. He encourages individuals to develop personal interpretations rooted in this shared moral tradition.

Significantly, Yadav argues that envisioning India as a conscious political and civilizational project necessitates rejecting majoritarianism. He also cautions against constructing a "New India" based solely on superficial cosmopolitanism that is disconnected from indigenous realities. Instead, he advocates a framework grounded in indigenous modernity that reconciles democratic values with cultural continuity. Yadav identifies resolving this tension as the principal challenge for secular politics in India.

Part Five examines issues of national security and federal challenges, including the crisis in Manipur, the Kashmir question, the removal of Article 370, and India-China relations. Yadav's discussion of Manipur is particularly compelling and morally charged, arguing that the crisis represents not only a regional conflict but also a deeper crisis in the nation's moral conscience. He asserts that what is being lost is not only Manipur but also the dream of India itself. Similarly, his analysis of Kashmir underscores the necessity of empathy, dialogue, and democratic accommodation. Yadav maintains that if Kashmir is genuinely considered an integral part of India, the suffering and aspirations of its people must be recognized. Drawing on the ideas of Sheikh Abdullah, Jayaprakash Narayan, and Atal Bihari Vajpayee, he invokes Vajpayee's formulation of "*Insaniyat, Jamhooriyat, Kashmiriyat*" as a potential framework for peace and democratic reconciliation.

Section Six addresses internal conflicts, including the North-South divide, the Punjab-Haryana water dispute, and the NRC issue in Assam. Yadav advocates for approaches that transcend narrow religious or regional divisions, emphasizing the importance of cooperative federalism and humane governance. His reflections on Assam and Bihar also underscore the persistent problem of floods and the inadequate governmental response to ecological crises, as well as the idea of indigenous modernity. Yadav argues that India requires a modernity rooted in its own civilizational experiences rather than one based entirely upon Western intellectual frameworks. This section also engages with debates surrounding the Hindi language and the Indianization of education. According to Yadav, cultural development and nation-building can only occur when India develops intellectual confidence in its own traditions while remaining open to democratic and modern values.

The final section presents an "eight-fold path" designed to guide India toward *Swaraj* in the twenty-first century. This framework encompasses national sovereignty, political self-governance, world peace, harmony with nature, social equality, cultural autonomy, individual liberty, and spiritual liberation. Yadav's Gandhian influences are especially apparent here. Like Mahatma Gandhi, Ram Manohar Lohia, and Jayaprakash Narayan, Yadav focuses not only on state power but also on ethical citizenship and democratic participation.

A major strength of *Ganrajya Ka Swadharma* is its moral seriousness. Unlike many contemporary political works that focus narrowly on electoral competition or media spectacle, this book addresses foundational questions concerning the ethical purpose of politics. Yadav consistently emphasizes that democracy is not simply a mechanism for selecting governments but a moral framework for collective life. His reflections on democracy, diversity, and development are significant because they redefine development as inclusion and participation rather than solely economic growth.

Stylistically, the book adopts a reflective and analytical tone, avoiding polemics. Yadav writes as a teacher and public intellectual rather than as a partisan political actor. His prose is thoughtful, introspective, and philosophically engaged, resulting in a text that is intellectually rich, though at times demanding for readers unfamiliar with constitutional theory, political philosophy, or debates in Indian political thought.

However, the book is not without limitations. At times, Yadav's vision appears overly idealistic. While his advocacy of ethical politics and democratic renewal is intellectually persuasive, the text offers limited institutional detail on how such a transformation might be realized within the constraints of electoral politics, identity mobilization, and institutional decline. Additionally, some readers may find the work theoretically dense due to its extensive engagement with philosophical and historical reflection.

Despite these limitations, *Ganrajya Ka Swadharma* constitutes a significant contribution to contemporary Indian political literature. It integrates political analysis with philosophical reflection and develops an alternative vocabulary for discussing democracy, nationalism, and constitutional morality in India. The book's principal achievement is its assertion that politics cannot endure without ethical foundations. In an era characterized by polarization, institutional distrust, and exclusionary nationalism, Yadav's work serves as a crucial reminder that the Indian republic is fundamentally a moral and civilizational experiment rooted in plurality, coexistence, and democratic aspiration. For students of political science, scholars of democracy, and engaged citizens, this book offers an intellectually substantive and timely intervention in debates about India's future.

Reviewed By

Aarti Yadav
Research Scholar
Dept. of Political Science
Panjab University, Chandigarh

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    - Use terms like "twentieth century" and "1990s" (not 20th century or '90s).
    - Notes should be serially numbered footnotes, providing substantive information beyond mere references (except for website citations).
    - The journal reserves the right to make stylistic and editorial changes in accepted manuscripts.

7. Figures, Tables, and Illustrations

    - Prepare graphs, tables, and charts in MS Word or Excel (or equivalent formats).
    - Label all tables and figures with a number and title (e.g., Table 1: Student Performance).
    - Submit each table/figure on a separate sheet at the end of the manuscript.
    - Cite all figures and tables sequentially in the text.

8. Footnotes and Endnotes

    - Use footnotes numbered consecutively throughout the article.
    - Notes should provide substantive information, not just references.
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9. Reproduction of Copyright material

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10. References and Citation Style (APA 7th Edition)

- PURJSS follows the **APA 7th edition** referencing style strictly.
- **In-text citations** should include the author's surname and year of publication, for example:
  - Single author: (Sarkar, 1987)
  - Two authors: (Ahmed & Gupta, 2010)
  - Three or more authors: (Sharma et al., 2021)
- For direct quotations, include the page number: (Sarkar, 1987, p. 145).
- For multiple citations within parentheses, separate by semicolons and arrange alphabetically by author surname:
  - (Ahmed, 1987; New York Times, 2005; Sarkar, 1987)
- The **References list** should be alphabetized by the surname of the first author and double-spaced with a hanging indent.
- Examples for common source types:

Book:

Author, A. A. (Year). *Title of book: Subtitle if any* (Edition if any). Publisher.

Example:

Sarkar, R. (1987). *Social change in India*. Oxford University Press.

Journal Article:

Author, A. A., & Author, B. B. (Year). Title of the article. *Title of Journal, Volume*(Issue), page range. https://doi.org/xxxx

Example:

Ahmed, S., & Gupta, R. (2010). Education and social change in rural India. *Journal of Social Sciences*, 15(2), 123–145. https://doi.org/10.1234/jss.v15i2.5678

Newspaper Article:

Author, A. A. (Year, Month Day). Title of the article. *Title of Newspaper*. URL

Example:

New York Times. (2005, March 15). Changing trends in urban development. *New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2005/03/15

Website:

Author, A. A. (Year, Month Day). Title of webpage. Site Name. URL

Example:

World Health Organization. (2020, June 25). Mental health and COVID-19. WHO. https://www.who.int/news-room

11. Ethical Considerations

- Authors must ensure that their research adheres to ethical standards, including informed consent and confidentiality where applicable.
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- Any form of plagiarism will lead to rejection or retraction.
- Authors must avoid the use of AI in writing the paper and submit a certificate to the effect.

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