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Founder
S. S. Shashi

Chief Editor
Dharam Vir

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From Baskets to Manholes: A Socio-Legal Analysis of the Transition of Manual Scavenging and the Technological Paradox of the NAMASTE Scheme

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Abstract

Manual scavenging in India represents a profound socio-legal paradox while the nation pursues high-technology Viksit Bharat goals, its sanitation infrastructure remains tethered to a 2000-year-old caste-based hierarchy. This paper interrogates the transition from the "Basket Era" characterized by the manual removal of waste from dry latrines primarily by women to the more lethal "Manhole Era" of underground hazardous cleaning performed by men. Through a synthesis of Erving Goffman's "stigma-theory" and B.R. Ambedkar's division of labourers, this study argues that the transition is not an evolution of labour but a survival of caste subjugation within modern urban spaces. Utilizing recent secondary data from the National Commission for Safai Karamcharis (NCSK) and parliamentary reports as of July 2024, the study reveals a staggering mortality rate of over 1340 officially recorded sewer deaths since 1993. A critical evaluation of the NAMASTE Scheme (2022) and the 2024-2025 Union Budget indicates a technocratic pivot toward mechanization at the expense of direct human rehabilitation. Furthermore, analysis of January 2025 profiling data exposes a "Digital Identification Gap", where only 15% of the targeted 2.3 lakh workers have been verified, leaving the majority "invisible" and excluded from safety nets. The findings suggest that the government's March 2025 deadline for 100% mechanization remains a technological mask for the invisibilization of Dalit labour. The paper concludes that true eradication cannot be achieved through machines alone; it requires a radical social shift to dismantle the "stigma of touch" and a commitment to the "annihilation of caste" in the public mindset.

Keywords

Manual scavenging, Caste hierarchy, NAMASTE Scheme, Sewer deaths, Social stigma, Digital identification gap, Urbanization, PEMSR Act.

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From Baskets to Manholes: A Socio-Legal Analysis of the Transition of Manual Scavenging and the Technological Paradox of the NAMASTE Scheme

1. Introduction and Background

Social stratification based on caste is an inherent feature of the Indian society. This caste system is characterized by hierarchy with Brahmins at the top and Dalit at the bottom. Just like Brahmins and Kshatriyas, Dalits also had their hereditary occupations but their occupation was not considered as pure as Brahmins and Kshatriyas. This hierarchy made them perform the occupation of cleaning toilets manually and considered them unfit for many civilian rights. This eventually made them an underprivileged social caste called as untouchables, Harijans, Exterior caste, Depressed class, outcaste and Dalits that later comprised under scheduled caste.

The Dalits had two different categories of occupations i.e. cleaning and leather processing. The occupation of cleaning included the sweeping of streets, drains and sewers, removal of human and animal excreta etc. Earlier toilets were not provided with the flush; sweeper had to clean the toilets manually by hand and had to carry the human faces on their head. Valmikis, Dom and Hela were the caste performing this task therefore considered lowest in the caste hierarchy. The other occupation of leather included removing the dead animal skin and making leather goods such as shoes, sandals etc. This occupation was not only undesirable but also polluted. They were paid less for their work and compelled them to collect leftover chapatis from upper caste people as a part of their customary wages.

Manual scavenging is the removal of human excreta without protective equipment. This practice has been deeply rooted in India's caste based occupational hierarchy. The people practicing this inhumane activity are known by different names in the different parts of the country. Scavengers have many synonyms like Chuhra, Khakrob, Up of Dust. As a domestic worker they are called Mehtar, as workers of leather they are called Dhed in Gujarat, as a weaver they are known as Megh in Rajasthan and as an executioner they are known as Jallad and called Khatik in Punjab. Historically, these communities were treated as "untouchables", denied civil rights, and forced into hereditary roles of cleaning and leather processing. Even the hierarchy persists within the lower underprivileged caste, those who work in private houses considered themselves superior than those working in public latrines. The other castes like Doms and Mongd handled activities like sweeping, killing a stray dog. A large number of sweepers changed their caste and religion in order to get better status but this convergence did not bring any real change in their status.

2. Objectives of the Study

Objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To trace the historical evolution of manual scavenging from ancient texts to the colonial era.
2. To analyze the regional distribution and internal hierarchies of scavenging castes across India.
3. To analyze the socio-legal transition from surface-level cleaning “Baskets Era” to hazardous underground work “Manhole Era”.
4. To evaluate the transition from the 1993 Act to the 2013 Act and the current NAMASTE Scheme (2022).

3. Research Methodology

This study adopts a Qualitative Descriptive Research Design based on Secondary Data Analysis. The analysis relies on the National Commission for Safai Karamcharis (NCSK) Annual Report 2021-22, the Status of Sewer/Septic Tank Death Cases and the PEMSR Act 2013 and the NAMASTE 2025-26 projections. A synthesis of Erving Goffman’s Theory of Stigma (1963) and B. R. Ambedkar’s *Annihilation of Caste* (1936) is used to interpret the issue of manual cleaning. It also investigative accounts by Bhasha Singh (Unseen) and Gita Ramaswamy (India Stinking) to provide the historical and modern era analysis about the persistence of manual scavenging.

4. Historical & Regional Context: The Mapping of Caste Labour

The ancient texts have no record of manual scavenging in its literature. However, Dr Bindeshwar Pathak in his book “Road to Freedom” states that ancient scriptures discuss scavenging, especially the disposal of human feces by a particular caste that has been in existence since the beginning of civilization. In Naradiya Samhita, Scavenging was included in the fifteenth duties allocated to the slaves. Vajasaneyi Samhita discusses Chandals and Paulkasa as manual scavengers. During the Mughal empire, scavenging emerged as a formal profession. It is believed that the system of buckets was designed and constructed for the women in purdah. The convicted slaves were forced to clean the dry latrines and carry human feces to throw off at distant places. These slaves, when freed, were not accepted by the society, then formed a separate caste and continued to work as scavengers. This practice was institutionalized during the British period when they had a requirement of a large workforce for army cantonment and urban sanitation. Instead of developing technology they hired the lower caste people to perform manual scavenging. So, it has been a traditional practice persisted since ages in Indian society. Cleaning dry latrines manually has been commonly used practice in earlier societies. The toilets did not equipped with the facility of flush. Therefore, lower castes had to clean by the broom and collect all the human feces in the basket, carrying on their head to the disposal sites. Such jobs were not only considered polluted but also paid less. Primarily this task was performed by lower castes like Valmiki or Mehtar females and was associated with customary arrangement where families performed cleaning to higher castes in exchange of food/grains.

This situation has not changed despite modernization and technological advancement. It seems it is their work in the present modern era too. Those occupied in this profession were not only considered polluted and but also oppressed and repressed by the upper caste people due to their caste and occupation. The transition from the "Basket" (surface cleaning of dry latrines) to the "Manhole" (underground sewer cleaning) marks a shift from social stigma to physical mortality. This paper investigates why, despite modernization, the Dalit person remains the primary mechanism for waste management in India. This transition changed the gender of the scavengers but not the caste.

5. Regional Mapping of Scavenging Castes

The scavengers are known by different names in different parts of India as shown below:

Table-1: Community Names of Scavengers in different Parts of India

Region	Community Names
Northern India	Bhangi, Balmiki, Chuhra, Mehtar, Mazhabi, Lal Begi, Halalkhor
Eastern India	Hari, Hadi, Hela, Dom, Sanei
Southern India	Mukhiyar, Thoti, Chachati, Pakay, Relli
Western & Central India	Ghasi, Olgana, Zadmalli, Barvanshia, Metariya, Jamphoda, Mela

5·1 Scavenging Castes of Northern India

Northern India shows the practice of manual scavenging deeply rooted in the region because of the long survival of dry latrine systems, low sanitation modernization and caste-based occupational continuity. Northern Indian states such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana and Punjab historically contained a high concentration of manual scavengers because dry latrines remained common in old towns, municipal settlements, railway colonies, and semi-urban localities.

The persistence of manual scavenging in northern India was closely linked to traditional sanitation arrangements in which human excreta from dry latrines had to be manually removed every day. Manual scavenging in northern India was a hereditary caste occupation. Communities such as Valmiki, Bhangi, and Mehtar were traditionally assigned this work. The hereditary transfer mean that sanitation labour passed from one generation to another, making occupational mobility extremely difficult. In villages, sanitation workers often received grain, leftover food, or old clothes instead of wages.

Women were primarily engaged in cleaning household dry latrines and carrying excreta in baskets on their heads, while men were more frequently employed in public sanitation spaces such as drains and municipal cleaning. This division demonstrates that caste oppression intersected with gender-based labour distribution. In northern India manual scavengers became socially excluded caste. Workers were denied equal social interaction, segregated in settlements, and treated as untouchable despite providing essential sanitation services. Thus, manual scavenging represented both occupational exploitation and everyday caste humiliation.

An important transition identified in northern India is the gradual decline of dry latrines accompanied by the emergence of new sanitation risks. As urban sanitation systems expanded, workers increasingly moved from surface-level cleaning to septic tanks, drains, and sewer chambers rather than leaving sanitation labour entirely. This suggests that manual scavenging changed form rather than disappeared. Thus, northern India provides strong evidence that manual scavenging persisted because technological change in sanitation was slower than social change in caste relations. It clearly depicts the picture of modern era, how caste-based labour adapted into newer hazardous forms.

5·2 Scavenging Castes of Central India

In states like Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, Central India presents a hybrid landscape where traditional and emerging forms of scavenging coexist. Historically, communities such as the Mehtar, Bhangi, Ghasi, and Jamphoda were the primary managers of the "Basket Era". As these states urbanized, these same communities re-absorbed into the "Manhole Era". Today, they form the backbone of the workforce engaged in drain cleaning and septic pit extraction.

5·3 Scavenging Castes of Western India

The western belt comprising Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Rajasthan reveals a striking Urban Paradox. Despite being home to India's most industrialized hubs, municipal bodies remain structurally dependent on manual labour. In rapidly growing towns, sewer systems often remain poorly maintained, forcing local authorities to rely on castes like the Metariya, Olgana, and Halalkho for sanitation.

A critical transition in Western India is the "Contractualization of Caste". The traditional hereditary service has shifted into municipal contract systems, where large public sanitation complexes still mandate manual cleaning. This formalization of informal labour allows the state to maintain a mask of modern sanitation while keeping the actual work rooted in the manual labour of marginalized bodies.

5·4 Scavenging Castes of Eastern India

In Eastern India, particularly West Bengal, Odisha, Bihar, and Assam, manual scavenging persists within municipal settlements and traditional urban pockets. While the absolute number of dry latrines may be lower than in the North, the social exclusion remains acute.

Drawing from the ethnographies of H. H. Risley (1891) sub-castes such as the Bara-bhagiya, Siuli, and Har Santan continue to occupy the lowest social stratum. The stigma remains so potent that social commensality sharing food or water is still a distant dream and temple entry remains restricted for these communities. In Assam, clans like the Pawar, Sarowan, and Tejia remain trapped in a generational cycle. For these groups, sanitation is not a choice but an inescapable hereditary duty, passed down through clans for over a century.

5·5 Scavenging Castes of Southern India

In southern India most of the scavengers were migrants from northern India. Most of the castes involved in scavenging were Madiga, Mala, Thoti, Paky, Lingayats, Kuruba, Mudaliyars, Adi Andhras, Adi Dravidas and Adi Karnatakas but later they abandoned their traditional occupation and engaged in the jobs of sweepers and employed in municipalities. Southern India saw earlier conversion to sanitary latrines in many cities, but workers were still employed in septic tank cleaning, municipal drains and public toilet maintenance.

6. Theoretical Framework: The Sociological Lenses

Ambedkar's Division of Labourers theory in his book *Annihilation of Caste* explain why the Dalit follows the waste regardless of technology. Ambedkar in his book Annihilation of Caste argued that the caste system is not just about what work is done, but who is allowed to do it. Lower caste people are predestined to handle waste. Whether the waste is in a basket on a woman's head or in a manhole under a man's feet, the caste system ensures that the same "labourer" follows the "waste". The technology changed from dry latrines flush toilets but the social requirement for a Dalit to touch the waste remained fixed. He explains how caste system is built on a hierarchy of purity and pollution. The Brahmin represents the purity, while the

"Untouchable" (Dalit) is considered polluted. Therefore, the caste system pushes the marginalized community into the manhole to keep the rest of society pure.

Ambedkar argues that caste is a closed system which does not permit its members to change their traditional occupation. When dry latrines were banned, the scavengers did not get any other jobs of purity. It left them with no choice but to come back in the same redesigned profession of cleaning sewer and septic tanks. It this way, the manhole became the new basket. As Ambedkar said that caste is not just a state of mind but a disease of the mind. Hence, the mindset needs to be changed in order to change the life the scavengers.

Ambedkar criticized the legal policy and act made for the rehabilitation of manual scavengers. He believed only law implementation could not ensure the dignified life and rights of the workers. Even if the law bans the act of manual cleaning but the contractor has a mindset to hire a Dalit to clean the septic tank. We need to address the religious and social evil practices. The transition from surface to underground work is proof of Ambedkar's warning, unless you "annihilate" the idea of caste, the injustice will simply find a new location to hide (the manhole).

Goffman's Spoiled Identity explain why Rehabilitation fails due to the Purity and Pollution mindset of the "upper" castes. The theory of social stigma state that stigma is an attribute which not only reduces a person from whole to a discounted one but also convert his identity into a spoiled identity due to his hereditary polluted work of dealing with human excreta. He termed it as tribal stigma inherited through their race, lineage or caste. This stigma is like social glue that keeps them stick to sewer. Goffman explains how this stigma is imposed by non-stigmatized people to prove the inferiority of the stigmatized person. Even if they try to change the occupation, they become still unacceptable for a clean occupation hence it forced them to come back into the manhole again because their identities are spoiled. He argues that the work of sewer is hidden but it does not reduce the stigma imposed. Therefore, a worker lives a life of identity management by hiding his identity from society to avoid the social stigma coming from the label of scavenger. It reflects how the worker is legally rehabilitated but socially isolated.

Gita Ramaswamy work on India Stinking focused on why the Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act 1993 failed and why the "Basket" era didn't end by law implementation. Ramaswamy argues that the 1993 Act was a paper tiger. It focused on the banning the construction of dry latrines but ignored the scavenger social life. The government did focus on prohibition rather than rehabilitation. She critiques the government's standard rehabilitation tools like giving sewing machines or buffaloes to former scavengers. Government efforts failed because of Caste Boycotts. If a woman who previously carried a basket tries to sell milk from a government-gifted buffalo, the upper-caste villagers refuse to buy it, citing pollution. The "Transition to Manholes" happened because the 1990s rehabilitation programs were a social failure. Since they couldn't survive in "clean" jobs, the workers had no choice but to follow the waste as it moved into the new underground sewer lines.

Bhasha Singh's book Unseen argues that Modern India is obsessed with looking clean and it achieves the clean status by hiding its shame. Singh argues that the transition from Baskets to Manholes is a move from Visibility to Invisibility. A woman carrying a basket on her head is a visible "stain" on a modern city's image. A man inside a manhole is invisible to the cars driving over him. The city looks modern (no dry latrines), but the "shameful" labour is simply happening 10 feet underground. She highlights the irony of Smart Cities and Digital India and argue that India has the technology for Mars Missions but refuses to invest in Sewer Robots for narrow lanes. This is a deliberate choice to keep using cheap, caste-based labour. Singh documents how the transition changed the victim. While the "Basket" era exploited women, the "Manhole" era kills men.

7. The Transition: From Baskets to Manholes

Manual Scavenging is an inhuman and shameful practice that needs to be fully eradicated because every person deserves a dignified profession. Earlier lower caste people especially women clean the dry latrines by their hands and carry it in a basket to throw off. Later this practice converted into getting in manholes/sewers by men without any protections in order to clean it.

So, the traditional basket era was about cleaning the dry latrines, especially by women with their hands and carrying it in a basket to throw off. Whereas the modern manhole era is concerned with underground hazardous sewer, septic tank cleaning by men. The danger involved in basket era was primarily infections and skin diseases whereas in manhole era the dangers of different toxic gases in sewer water resulted in instant death of the person. The basket era was about social stigma ; the manhole era is about mortality. This transition has made the profession a death trap. The basket era (surfacing cleaning) led to diseases and infection; the manhole era (underground) led to deaths.

Due to increased sanitation in urban and industrial areas problem of manual scavenging in the form of sewer and septic tank cleaning is still persisting in this modern era. Most of the sanitation workers are of scheduled caste and adopted this profession as generational transmission. Earlier sanitation belongs to a certain caste of lower strata and who were considered untouchables due to their unclean work while higher caste enjoyed the privileges in the choice of occupation.

The hardship, humiliation and exploitation these people have faced, are facing is needs to be addressed effectively in order to provide them a better and more dignified life. After independence, the government has taken many initiatives to eradicate this practice by enforcement of legislative act and policy and modernizing sanitation facilities. Modernizing sanitation technology is not a sufficient measure to improve the lives of manual scavengers but their social and economic marginalization needs to be addressed. Government initiatives and efforts should reach every person involved in an unclean profession.

7·1 The Judicial Landmarks: Analyzing the 2003 PIL & the 2014 Supreme Court Judgment on the 10-Lakh Compensation

A PIL was filed in 2003 against the practice of manual scavenging and construction of dry latrines. The petition exposed the persistence of lakhs of dry latrines and forcing of Dalit women to perform manual scavenging. In its judgement on 27-3-2014 supreme court of India declared total prohibition of the practice of manual scavenging and strict implementation of Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act 2013.On the date 27-3-2014 supreme court of India gave its judgement on the horrific conditions of deaths of scavengers occurring every year. It states that manual scavengers are facing the issue of gas poisoning inside the sewer and septic tank due to this a large number of deaths are occurring every year and many go unreported. The sewer is exposed to many harmful chemical gases and a worker entering the manhole is supposed to swim in that dirty sewage and find the blockage in drums which not only resulted in physical diseases but also a mental trauma and social stigma. In most of the cases, authorities hardly take responsibility for these deaths by stating the deceased person is not employed by them resulting in unreported deaths and non- compensated as well.

The supreme court of India directed in its judgement that manual scavenging is more inhuman, unhygienic and dangerous activity and hence should be banned completely. If needed, proper training and safety protection gear should be given to workers and it should be performed under the supervision of specialized engineers. In order to compensate, the supreme court directed all the families of deceased persons since 1993 to provide compensation of 10 lakh for each such death to the family members. Even after supreme court judgement 120+ cases are pending for compensation.

7·2 Grassroots Movements: The role of Safai Karamchari Andolan (SKA) and the "Stop Killing Us" Campaign

The Safai Karamchari Andolan campaign of Stop killing us got highlighted during 2018-22. Its reports show how hundreds of people lost their lives by performing hazardous septic tank and sewer work. With urbanization, practice of manual scavenging has declined but shifted to another form of sewer and septic tank cleaning without any protection. The movement suggested the use of machinery instead of humans to perform sanitation work and argued sanitation work as hate work.

SKA argues that manual cleaning is not just about sanitation but also a human rights issue that not only has degraded the dignity of a person but also affected families.

8. Quantitative Analysis: Decoding NCSK Data (2021-22)

8·1 Trends in Sewer Deaths: Analysis of the Deaths recorded since 1993

It has been a traditional practice persisted since ages in Indian society. Earlier dry latrines were commonly used. These toilets were not provided with the facility of flush. Therefore, lower castes had to clean by the broom and collect all the human feces in the basket carrying on their head to the disposal sites. Primarily this task was performed by lower castes like Valmiki or Mehtar females. This was associated with customary arrangement where families performed cleaning to higher castes in exchange of food/grains.

To end this practice, Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines Prohibition Act 1993 was passed. Despite the ban, dry latrines kept on increasing. The act officially bans to hiring people for manual sanitation work from dry latrines and sewer. It completely prohibits the construction of dry latrines. Due to increased urbanization, cities moved towards flush toilets. Then dry latrines converted into flush toilets attached with septic tanks and sewer lines.

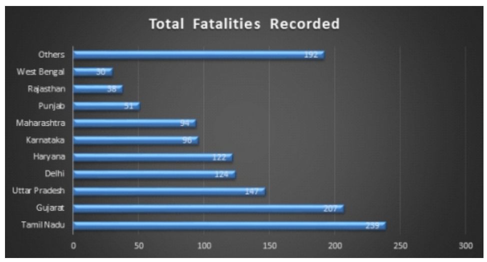
Table-2: State-wise Mortality and Compensation Trends in Sewer Cleaning (1993 - Nov 2025)

Rank	State/Union Territory	Total Fatalities Recorded	Compensation Paid (Full ₹10 Lakh)	Cases Pending/ Under Process
1	Tamil Nadu	239	231	08
2	Gujarat	207	177	30
3	Uttar Pradesh	147	118	29
4	Delhi	124	102	22
5	Haryana	122	95	27
6	Karnataka	96	95	01

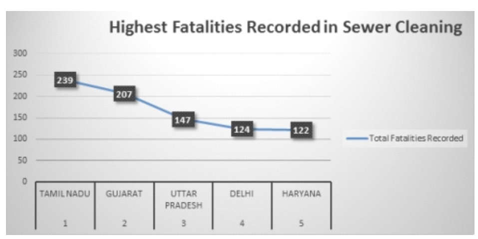
7	Maharashtra	94	82	12
8	Punjab	51	49	02
9	Rajasthan	38	33	05
10	West Bengal	30	27	03
11	Others	192	174	18
All India Total		**1340**	**1183**	**157**

Source: Compiled by the author from the National Commission for Safai Karamcharis (NCSK) Database (updated as of 2025).

The figure-1 of 1340 deaths represent only the officially acknowledged fatalities. Out of 157 cases not paid approximately 55 cases have been closed due to no legal heirs could be located. The remaining 102 cases are still pending under process.



The highest concentration of deaths is found in India's most urbanized and economically advanced states like Tamil Nadu, Gujarat and Delhi (figure-2). This reveals a disturbing paradox as cities modernize their sanitation infrastructure, they become more reliant on hazardous manual labour to maintain underground pipes. Modernity, in this context has not liberated the labourer but it has merely moved their workplace to an oxygen-deprived, toxic environment where the risk of instant death is a reality.



While the Supreme Court (2014) mandated a mandatory compensation of ₹10 Lakhs for every death since 1993 the data shows that 112 families are still awaiting full redressal. In states like Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh, the pendency rate remains high. For a Dalit family that has lost its primary breadwinner to a sewer, the struggle for compensation is a second form of problem. In July 2024, the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment provided a written answer in the Lok Sabha the Statistics revealed that 377 people died while cleaning sewers and septic tanks in the last five years (2019-2023). The Ministry claimed "Zero deaths due to manual scavenging" but admitted to 377 deaths due to "hazardous cleaning of sewers". They claim manual scavenging is gone (the Basket Era) but acknowledge the deaths in the Manhole Era.

Government of India has launched **NAMASTE** (National Action for Mechanized Sanitation Ecosystem) scheme in 2023-24 in order to eliminate manual scavenging by promoting sewer and septic tanks cleaning by machines. It also ensures to provide training, financial assistance and protective gears.

8·2 The NAMASTE Profiling Data (Sewer Employment)

The government has started "profiling" Sewer and Septic Tank Workers (SSWs) under the NAMASTE Scheme (2023-24). The government has identified and targeted 2.3 Lakh sanitation workers for profiling across India. Out of these, only about 89114 have been officially profiled and verified so far. There is a Recognition Lag. While the government knows there are at least 2.3 lakh people in this hazardous "Manhole" profession, the slow pace of profiling keeps the majority of these workers invisible and without health insurance or safety gear.

The Government of India, under the NAMASTE Scheme targeted for 100% mechanical cleaning of sewers and septic tanks in all 4,800+ Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) across India By March 31, 2025. While the government aims for "zero human intervention", reports from early 2025 suggest that many smaller municipalities (Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities) still lack the necessary "Jetting and Suction" machines. "Manhole Era" seems to be in a race against elimination of manual cleaning but without addressing the Narrow Lane problem (where machines can't go), the target remains a Technological Myth.

In the Union Budget the allocation for the NAMASTE scheme was significantly increased to approximately ₹116.94 Crore for the 2024-25 financial year. while in 2025-26 budget the government has focused towards Viksit Bharat goals which include making India Manual Scavenging Free. While the budget for machines is increasing, the budget for direct rehabilitation (cash assistance) for individual workers has been slashed, favoring "contractors" over "community liberation".

As India pursues its 'Viksit Bharat' vision for 2025-2026, the state's approach to sanitation has transitioned into a 'Technological Paradox'. While the budgetary allocation for the NAMASTE scheme is projected to rise toward ₹125 Crore in the 2025-26 cycle, the funds for direct human rehabilitation have been systematically reduced. This fiscal shift prioritizes the procurement of machinery over the social liberation of the worker. In the 2025-26 period If a worker is not profiled on the digital portal by early

2025, they effectively cease to exist for the state's assistance. They are denied access to Ayushman Bharat (Health Insurance) specific to SSWs, Safety Gear and Training mandated by the 2013 Act, Compensation Claims in the event of an accident.

This "Digital Gap" ensures that as we enter the 2025-2026 financial year, the majority of the "Manhole" workforce remains subterranean and invisible. By focusing the budget on "Viksit Bharat" goals through machines, the state has legally "erased" manual scavenging, while the non-profiled Dalit labourer continues to risk their life in the sewer, unrecognized and unprotected.

8·3 Recent Mortality Extrapolations (2024-2025)

Based on the steady rate of deaths reported to the NCSK and by NGOs like Safai Karamchari Andolan the cumulative death toll from 1993 to early 2025 has officially crossed the 1,050 marks. In the 2024 Winter Session of Parliament, the government maintained that "No deaths have occurred due to manual scavenging", but they now track "Sewer deaths" as a separate category. Is reflects the Modernity Mask. In 2025, the state has legally "erased" the term manual scavenging while the actual deaths continue under a different name.

State governments often claim that manual scavenging is finished, but the rising number of sewer deaths proves this is not true. By using narrow legal definitions, officials hide the thousands of workers who still enter manholes every day without protection. The NCSK data reveals a major "Compensation Gap", with over 120 families still waiting for the ?10 lakh promised by the Supreme Court. Many of these cases are stuck because city authorities blame private contractors to avoid paying for the lives lost in their sewers. This "Politics of Denial" means a worker is only recognized by the state once they become a tragic headline. For these grieving families, the delay in compensation is a second form of injustice that keeps them trapped in poverty.

Table-3: Comparison of Anti-Scavenging Laws: A History of Legal Failures

Feature	The 1993 Act (Dry Latrine Act)	The 2013 Act (PEMSR Act)	The 2020/ NAMASTE Move (Mechanization)
Main Focus	**The "Basket" Era:** Focused only on dry latrines.	**The "Manhole" Era:** Included sewers and septic tanks.	**The "Machine" Era:** Focuses on 100% mechanization.
The Goal	Stop people from cleaning dry latrines by hand.	Rehabilitate workers and stop "hazardous" sewer cleaning.	Replace humans with machines and "Sanipreneurs".

Why it Failed	**Ignored Sewers:** It completely forgot that people were also dying in underground pipes.	**The "Safety Gear" Loophole:** It allowed cleaning if gear was provided. Contractors used this to avoid blame.	**The "Narrow Lane" Problem:** Machines don't fit in small streets where humans are still sent in.
Rehabilitation	Almost none.	Provided ₹40,000 and "skill training" (like sewing).	Focuses on giving loans for machines instead of direct help.
Punishment	Zero. Not a single person was ever convicted in 20 years.	Very low. Most deaths are called "accidents," not crimes.	Focus is on "incentives", not punishing the contractors.

The 1993 Act: It officially banned "Dry Latrines" (toilets without flushes) and the carrying of waste in baskets. It completely ignored sewers. Because the law only looked at the "Basket Era," it was blind to the fact that people were starting to die underground in pipes.

The 2013 Act (PEMSR): It admitted that entering a sewer is Manual Scavenging. It promised to give workers new jobs (rehabilitation). It directed that cleaning a sewer is okay if the boss provides safety gear like masks or gloves.

The 2020 NAMASTE Scheme: It aims to replace humans with machines. It tries to turn workers into "Sanipreneurs" (small business owners who own cleaning machines). It ignores the "Narrow Lane" reality. In many old Indian cities, streets are too small for big machines. This means humans are still sent into manholes in secret. A machine can fix a pipe, but it cannot fix stigma. Even if a Dalit worker buys a machine, many people still won't hire them because of their caste. It seems to be hard to change the 2,000-year-old mindset just by purchasing a new robot.

All three legal attempts share one mistake. They tried to fix the "Toilet", but they never attempted to fix the Caste System. The 1993 Act tried to fix the Basket. The 2013 Act tried to fix the Manhole and the NAMASTE Scheme tries to fix the Machine. None of these laws successfully helped the "Person". Because society still looks at these workers with "stigma", they are always pushed back into the waste, whether it is on the surface or underground. This is why the "Manhole" has become the invisible grave for the same people who once carried the "Basket."

9. Conclusion

The primary finding of this study is that manual scavenging in India has not been eradicated; it has simply been "re-located". The transition from the "Basket Era" to the "Manhole Era" is not a sign of urban progress, but a modern adaptation of an ancient system of subjugation. While the visible "shame" of carrying waste on the head has decreased, it has been replaced by a much more lethal, invisible hazard beneath our streets. The 2025 data confirms that despite billions spent on "Clean India" campaigns, the Dalit body remains the final, expendable tool for maintaining urban infrastructure. The manhole has become the modern grave for the same community that society has exploited for centuries.

10. Strategic Recommendations: Moving Beyond the Machine

To move toward real change, the government must move beyond technological masks and take the following steps:

- **100% Mandatory Mechanization:** The March 2025 deadline for mechanization must be strictly enforced. However, this shouldn't just be for big roads but also for the "Narrow Lanes" where humans are still sent in secret.
- **Direct Accountability for Deaths:** Currently, officials blame private contractors to avoid responsibility. This must stop. The Municipal Commissioner of the city should be held personally and legally accountable for every sewer death occurring under their watch.
- **Stigma-free Rehabilitation:** Giving a worker a sewing machine is useless if the local community refuses to buy their products due to their caste. Rehabilitation programs must include "Social Sensitization" to ensure that former scavengers can enter new professions without being boycotted.
- **Closing the Digital Identification Gap:** The government must fast-track the "profiling" of all 2.3 lakh workers by 2026. Without a digital ID, these workers remain "invisible" and are denied the health insurance and safety gear they desperately need.

The most important lesson from this research is that a flush toilet or a sewer robot cannot fix a broken social structure. As Dr. B.R. Ambedkar warned, as long as the caste-logic remains in our minds, the injustice will always find a new place to hide. Demolishing a dry latrine is easy, but demolishing the "stigma of touch" is the real challenge. True eradication will only happen when we stop seeing sanitation as a job for a specific caste and start seeing it as a professional service for the whole of society. We must realize that until we annihilate the idea of caste, we are merely changing the tools of oppression moving from the basket to the manhole while the victim remains the same.

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Replication of Gandhian thoughts and Practices in the Contemporary Indian Corporate World

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Abstract

This research paper explores the reflections of Gandhian thoughts on ethics, morality, trusteeship and others in the contemporary Indian business world. Mahatma Gandhi, father of the nation of India advocated for ethical and moral principles across all aspects of life, including businesses. Present study investigates the influence of Gandhian philosophy on corporate practices in India, particularly his concept of trusteeship, moral and ethical issues. It examines how businesses in India have embraced or incorporated Gandhi's and principles. Further it analyses the impact of such practices on corporate social responsiveness initiatives, and sustainable development, through an analysis of relevant literature and research. This paper highlights the significance and challenges of implementing Gandhian thoughts in the Indian corporate sector.

Keywords

Gandhian thoughts, Ethics, Morality, Trusteeship, Self-discipline, Truth, Non-violence, Sarvodaya, Simplicity, Local self-reliance, Corporate World, Corporate social responsiveness initiatives, Sustainable development.

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Replication of Gandhian thoughts and Practices in the Contemporary Indian Corporate World

1. Introduction

Mahatma Gandhi, the stalwart of Indian freedom moment had left an indelible mark in the modern day society through his teachings, wisdom and actions. His perspectives on ethics, morality and trusteeship have had a significant impact on various aspects of society, including the corporate landscape. His notion of non-violence and welfarism, continues to resonate with individuals and businesses. It seeks a more ethical, inclusive and sustainable approach to run business. Present study aims to explore and analyze the impact of Gandhian ideas on ethics, morality and trusteeship in the corporate landscape of India. It delve into the ways in which Gandhi's teachings have influenced business practices, corporate social responsibility, stakeholder engagement and sustainable government within the Indian context. Gandhi's emphasis on ethical conduct serves as a guiding principle for businesses in India. His teachings inspired companies to uphold honesty, integrity, and transparency in their operations, thus promoting a culture of trust and accountability. The Gandhian perspective emphasizes that businesses should priorities societal well being over profit maximization; driving a shift towards moral and socially responsible practices.

One of Gandhi's notable contributions to the corporate world is the concept of trusteeship. According to this philosophy, individuals and businesses were seen as custodian of wealth and resources, with the responsibility to utilize them for the welfare of society. This notion has contributed to trigger the corporate social responsiveness (CSR) in India. Today there are companies which era contributing socio-economic welfare, environmental protection and upliftment of the communities. Gandhi's trusteeship concept encourages businesses to adopt inclusive and sustainable business models that address social issues and bridge societal gaps. Moreover, Gandhian thoughts on ethics and morality have led to a transformation in stakeholders relationships. Businesses in India are increasingly recognizing the importance of engaging with, and considering the interest of all stakeholders, including employees, customers, suppliers, and local communities. Gandhi's teachings on nonviolence and harmony form a more collaborative and participating approach in decision making processes, promoting dialogue, respect, and inclusivity.

The impact of Gandhian perspectives is particularly visible in the realm of sustainable development. Gandhi advocated for self-reliance, local empowerment, and the revival of traditional craftsmanship in industries. His vision of decentralized economies, centered on important industries, and has influenced the promotion of sustainable peace, conservation of resources and the precipitation of traditional knowledge and skills. Businesses in India are increasingly adopting environmentally friendly practices, addressing climate change, and working towards the preservation and protection of natural resources. Gandhi and perspectives of ethics, morality and trusteeship has had a profound impact on the corporate scenario in India. It has shaped business practices towards greater ethical conduct, social responsibility, stakeholder engagement, and sustainable growth. The principles of truth, nonviolence, and welfare of society, inherent in Gandhi is teaching, continue to inspire and guide businesses in India as they navigate the challenges of the modern corporate world while driving for a more inclusive ethical future.

2. Key Principles of Mahatma Gandhi's Thoughts on Ethics, Morality and Trusteeship

The principles of Gandhian thoughts on ethics, morality, and trusteeship, are deeply rooted in his philosophy of life and his vision for a just and equitable society. These principles guide individuals and organizations to uphold ethical values in conduct and practice responsible stewardship. The following are fundamental principles, derived from Gandhian thoughts:

- **Truth:** Gandhi emphasized the importance of truth in all aspects of life. He believed in absolute truth and hailed it as foundation of morality and ethics. Gandhi advocated for individuals and organizations to always uphold truthfulness, honesty and transparency in their actions, decision and in communication.
- **Non-violence:** For him the non non violence was an active force of physical love. For him it was not limited to refraining from Physical force. Gandhi describes nonviolence, not just as an absence of physical harm, but also as an active force for love, understanding and compassion. He promoted the solution of conflict through peaceful means and encouraged individuals and businesses to avoid exploiting or causing harm to others. It is the principle, which on had to adhere in resolving organizational conflicts.
- **Self-discipline:** Gandhi believed in the importance of self discipline as a means to achieve personal and societal transformation. He emphasized self control, self restraint and self sacrifice to overcome desires and attachments that hinder ethical conduct. Through self

discipline, individuals can align their actions with their moral principles.

- **Sarvodaya:** It is the concept of universal upliftment of masses and welfare of all. Gandhian thoughts portray well-being of every individual and advocate for social and economic equality. Gandhi believed in eradication of poverty and upliftment of marginalized communities and ensure that the fair distribution of resources be ensured to make ours a just society.
- **Trusteeship:** trusteeship is one of the central ideas in Gandhian philosophy, emphasizing that wealth and resources are not owned by individuals, rather held in trust for the betterment of society. Gandhi encouraged wealthy individual and businesses to consider themselves as trustees and use their resources responsible for the welfare of others.
- **Simplicity:** Gandhi embraced a simple and frugal lifestyle, making simplicity as a means to connect with one's inner self and to prioritize, spiritual and ethical values over material possessions. He advocated for individuals and businesses to adopt simplicity in their lifestyles, consumption pattern, and business practices.
- **Local self-reliance:** local self-reliance or Swadeshi is the principle of promoting local self-reliance and supporting indigenous industries and products. Gandhi believed that economic independence was crucial for the moral and ethical well-being of a society. He advocated for individuals and businesses to support local artists and craftsmen and industries, promoting sustainable and equitable economic development. These principles of Gandhian thoughts on ethics, morality and trusteeship provides a moral compass for individuals and businesses, promoting responsible and sustainable practices that contribute to the greater good of society.

2·1 Gandhi on Ethics

Mahatma Gandhi's views on ethics were deeply rooted in his philosophy of life, and his commitment to, truth, nonviolence, and the well-being of humanity. Gandhi believed that ethics formed the foundation of individual and collective behaviour and were essential for creation of just and harmonious society. Gandhi's believed in longevity of business and society, which is devoid of ethical values.

- **Truth and honesty:** Gandhi considered truth as the ultimate virtue and regarded honesty as the cornerstone of ethical conduct. He emphasized the importance of speaking the truth even in challenging circumstances and believed that truthfulness, was vital for personal integrity and societal well-being. Gandhi practised and advocated for alignment of truth in thoughts, words and in actions.

- **Non-violence:** It was a feeling of love and compassion for him. For him non violence is not limited to physical coercion rather a way of life, which is full of love, welfare and compassion. Gandhi believed that practising nonviolence, require individuals to cultivate inner harmony and extend it to all aspects of their lives.
- **Self discipline and self control:** Gandhi emphasized self discipline as a crucial aspect of ethical behaviour. He believed in restraining one's desires, emotions, and attachments to unethical actions. By exercising self control, individual could align their actions with moral principles and transcend personal interest for greater good.
- **Service and sacrifice:** Gandhi placed greater importance on selfless service (Seva) and sacrifice as ethical virtues. He believed that individuals should dedicate themselves to serving others for the welfare of the community. They should more incline towards societal good rather on personal gains. Gandhi considered service and sacrifice as a fundamental duties and essential for the betterment of society.
- **Equality and social justice:** Gandhi advocated for equality and social justice as ethical imperatives. He challenged social hierarchies and fought against discrimination based on caste, religion or gender. Gandhi believed in the equal worth and emphasized the need to address societal inequalities for a just society.
- **Simplicity and non-materialism:** Gandhi, valued simplicity and non-materialism as ethical principles. He believed that an excessive focus on material possessions could lead to greed, exploitation and an erosion of moral values. Gandhi advocated for a simple lifestyle emphasizing the importance of contentment, frugality and detachment from material desires.
- **Inner transformation and spiritual growth:** for Gandhi ethics were not merely external action but also involved in the transformation and spiritual growth. He emphasized the development of one's character, self-awareness and self improvement as integral aspect of ethical living. Gandhi believed that ethical conduct was closely linked to an individual spiritual journey. His perspective on ethics encompasses truth, honesty and non-violence. He believed that ethical behaviour was not an abstract concept but require conscious effort, personal commitment and holistic approach to life. Gandhi's ethical principle continues to inspire individual around the world to live more conscious life and work towards more just and compassionate society.

Ethics played a central role in Gandhi's vision for business. He highlighted the importance of ethical behaviour and believed that business should operate with honesty, integrity and transparency. Gandhi rejected any form of exploitation or unethical practices, including unfair pricing, deceptive advertising and mistreatment of workers. He pressed for nonviolence and harmony. Gandhi considers nonviolence as guiding principle for all aspect of life including businesses. He believed that businesses should refrain from participating in activities that cost harm or perpetuate violence.

2·2 Gandhi on Morality

Mahatma Gandhi had a profound understanding of morality and its significance in personal and societal life. He emphasized the practice of moral values as a guiding force for individuals and communities. Gandhi believed that morality was not just a matter of personal conduct. It had far reaching implications for the well-being and progress of society. Some of the key aspects of Gandhi's view on morality are:

- **Unity of means and ends:** Gandhi strongly advocated for the unity of means and ends. He believed that the means should justify the ends. The longevity of ends is itself dependent upon the means used to achieve the ends. If means are sacrosanct the ends will be sacrosanct.Means should be aligned with the ends. According to him using immoral or unjust means to achieve a seemingly notable end, would not last long. For Gandhi, moral end could only be achieved through moral means.
- **Self examination and conscience:** Gandhi emphasized the importance of self examinations and introspection. In determining moral course of action, he encouraged individual to listen to their conscience and make decision based on moral principle, rather than external influences of societal pressures. Gandhi believed that an individual's moral Compass should guide their action and choices.
- **Truth and honesty:** Truth and honesty were fundamental principle of Gandhi's philosophy. He hailed truth as an apex virtue and considered honesty as the bedrock of moral
- **Conduct:** Gandhi believed in speaking truth, even in the face of adversity. He maintained that falsehood and deception had eroded the moral fabric of society.

2·3 Nonviolence in Compassion

Gandhian idea of non-violence buds from his moral principles. He believed that one should not hold shallow and wrong view of non-violence. It should not be viewed as absence of physical force rather as compassion love and understanding with one another. Gandhi believed that practising nonviolence requires individuals to cultivate empathy and treat all beings with compassion and respect.

- **Integrity and consistency:** Gandhi highlighted the importance of integrity and consistency in moral conduct. He believed that individuals should align their actions with their beliefs and values, avoiding any contradiction or hypocrisy. Gandhi himself strived to lead a life of integrity. He ensured that his words and actions were in harmony.
- **Duty and responsibility:** According to Gandhi, individuals have a moral duty and responsibility towards society. He believed that each person should fulfill his obligation to their fellow human beings and contribute to the welfare of society. Gandhi considered service to others as an essential aspect of moral living.
- **Moral Courage:** Gandhi placed great importance on moral courage. He believed that standing up for one's principles even in face of opposition or adversity required tremendous moral courage. Gandhi himself exhibited immense courage in his pursuit of truth and justice, inspiring others to do the same. In general, his ideas on morality, aligns the means with ends, the significance of non-violence and truth, the practice of nonviolence and compassion, the need for integrity and consistency, the recognition of duty and responsibility towards society, and the cultivation of moral courage. These principles continue to inspire individuals and community to lead moral and ethical lives.

According to Gandhiji; businesses should run with the dual objective of helping the society and satisfaction of the consumers. The primary purpose of any business should be to serve the society and meet the needs of his customers. He advocated for businesses to adopt an attitude of service towards the society. Profits should be a by-product while serving the community. He envisioned businesses as a vehicle for promoting the welfare of society. He pressed upon the importance of ethical conduct in all aspects of life including businesses. He believes that businesses should be guided by moral principles and operates with honesty, transparency and integrity. Gandhian teaching emphasize the need for businesses to, prioritize well-being of customer and build trust through ethical practices. It focuses on the value of listening and understanding the needs and concerns of others.

2·4 Trusteeship

Trusteeship is of socio-economic concept introduced by M.K.Gandhi, which advocates for the responsible and equitable management of wealth and resources for the betterment and benefit of society. He believed that Good conscious prevails in the heart of all peoples; it is not linked with wealth. In the society man should act like a trustee of the wealth. It is duty of rich men to use their wealth for the betterment of the masses. They have right to take only that portion of the wealth, which is essential sustain their livelihood. Beyond this should be spent on the society and the people around.

Giving his own example he stated that if one have fair amount of wealth through inheritance inheritance or trade and commerce he/she should keep in mind that it does not belongs to them' what belongs is the right to livelihood, enjoyed by millions of others. Wealth which is over and above the needs of oneself should be spent in the welfare of society and community. The industrialists should run the industries and society in the manner as if they are its trustees. They should use their efficiency and expertise with the intension of welfare of the masses. His idea of trusteeship was further refined by his secretary Mr. Pyarelal. Mahatma Gandhi has given approval to this refined version in the year 1942, which primarily contains the following six elements.

Gandhian idea of trusteeship was aimed to create a society based on equity and morality. He opined that rich should perceive it as an opportunity that they are given a chance to help the poor people. It is by serving the poor, they can improve their moral character.

His perspective was based on collective ownership of resources. Though he was not against the than ongoing practice of private ownership. But he opined that the govt. should direct the individual to use the owned resources and wealth to the welfare of all.

According to him private ownership can't be considered as an absolute right. It is dependent upon the will and disposal of the society; which may allow it to use for the betterment of all.

The concept of trusteeship emphasizes that the wealth-holders should refrain from using resources for selfish purposes. Since they are entrusted with the property rights, therefore it is expected from them to use the wealth for the larger purpose of public good.

He supported the idea of capping the upper limit of holding the wealth. As per his opinion the gap between the haves and have not's be reduced.

According to Gandhiji, goods should not be produced to fulfill the desires of individual businesses viz. maximization of profit. They should be produced to meet the legitimate needs of the community. The difference between the minimum and maximum income should be reasonable and equitable. There could be continuous and consistent efforts to eliminate these gaps over the period of time.

2·5 Corporate Businesses and Gandhiji

Mahatma Gandhi had a unique perspective on business which was deeply rooted in his principle of truth, nonviolence, and the welfare of society. While Gandhi was critical of some aspects of modern industrial capitalism he recognized the potential of businesses to serve as instrument of positive change. His philosophy is closely aligned with the present day concept of corporate social responsiveness, which is centered on the accountability of business towards society. The corporates should assess the impact of their activities in the society and environment in which they operate. The term corporate social responsiveness, which is used frequently in today's business world, was not yet popularized during Gandhian era. Still his teachings and practices reflect many of its core principles. He has believed and advocated for socially responsible behavior by the corporate.

- **Ethical conduct:** Gandhi emphasized the importance of ethical behaviour in all aspects of life, including businesses. He believed that businesses should operate with honesty, integrity and transparency. Gandhi advised the businesses to prioritize the well-being of society upon profit maximization and to engage in fair and ethical practices.
- **Service to society:** Gandhi viewed businesses as instruments of service to society. He believed that the purpose of business should be to fulfill the legitimate aspirations and needs of the people, while taking care of their well-being. Gandhi emphasized that businesses should go beyond mere profit making and actively engage in activities that uplift the communities and improve societal conditions.
- **Stakeholder engagement:** Gandhi emphasized the importance of engaging with all stakeholders. It should include the customers, employees, management, owners, and suppliers. It should take care of the environment in which it operates. Business should take its workers and employees into confidence while taking any business decision. Gandhi advocated for businesses to adopt a participatory approach that listens to diverse perspectives and foster inclusive decision-making.
- **Environmental responsibility:** Gandhi recognizes the inter-connectedness between human well-being and the environment. He stressed the need for businesses to operate in a manner that was environmentally responsible and sustainable. Gandhi believed in minimum ecological harm, conserving natural resources in adopting practises that promoted environmental well- being.
- **Workers welfare:** Gandhi placed significant importance on the welfare of workers. He advocated for fair wages, decent working

condition and the elimination of exploitation in the workplace. Gandhi believed that businesses should prioritize the well-being and personal development of the employees, fostering an environment of dignity and respect.

- **Locals empowerment:** Gandhi favoured decentralized economies and the empowerment of local communities. He believed in the role of business to support local development and self-reliance. Gandhi emphasize the revival of traditional craft and industries, which would contribute to the socio-economic progress of communities.
- **Social justice:** Gandhi had firmly advocated for equality and justice. He had challenged the hierarch based on money, caste, religion and gender. He favored businesses to work actively towards reducing social inequalities and creating a more and just inclusive society. He argued that businesses themselves need to play as an instrument in the service to society. Its primary role should be to meet the aspirations of the people and contribute meaningfully to the society. He advocated for businesses to prioritize social benefit over profit maximization. Gandhiji had solicited for the harmonious relationship between businesses, workers and communities. He promoted collaboration, understanding and mutual respect between workers and capitalists. He believed that the centralized economic system, woven around villages and cottage industries, could lead to equitable distribution of resources and prevent the accumulation of power and wealth in the hands of a few peoples. He endorsed for the revival of traditional craft and industries so as to lead sustainable and inclusive development. Gandhi emphasized the importance of recognizing the rights and dignity of workers. He advocated for wage, which is decent, followed with humane working conditions and the elimination of exploitation and discrimination at the workplace.

He realized that the organization should actively engage with the customer; get feedbacks and respond to their expectations. Gandhi believed in the power of dialogue and building relationship based on mutual understanding and respect. Furthermore he advocated for the businesses to provide fair and transparent information to the customer, fostering an environment of empowerment. It was his firm belief that businesses should opt for fair pricing and the production of high-quality goods and services. He believed that businesses should provide value for customer's money and avoid exploiting them for excessive profits. Gandhi emphasized the importance of maintaining the quality and that every customer receive fair and just treatment. According to Gandhi businesses should prioritise services to customer and operate ethically. They need to listen the customer's needs, empower them and provide fair prices and quality. Adhering these principles, businesses can build strong relationship with customers and contribute to the betterment of society as a whole.

Mahatma Gandhi famously stated that "earth provides enough to satisfy every man's needs but not every man's greed". This quote encapsulates Gandhi's perspectives on the relationship between human needs, desire and availability of natural resources. Gandhi believed in differentiating between genuine human needs and insatiable human desires driven by greed. He emphasized that earth resources were capable of satisfying the basic need of every individual, such as food, shelter, clothing and health care. However, he cautioned against the uncontrolled pursuit of material, wealth and excessive consumption that could lead to exploitation and depletion of natural resources. He advocated for lifestyle of simplicity and self restraint while believing that individuals should cultivate contentment and to learn to live with less, rather than constantly seeking to accumulate more material possession. He emphasized the need to align our desires with our genuine needs; recognizing that a simple and sustainable lifestyle would promote well-being and preserve the depletion of resources. Gandhi stated that there is need of equitable distribution of the resources. He criticized systems that perpetuated the non judicious use of resources. Here a few individual accumulated excessive wealth at the expense of others. He believed that in promoting a just society we need to fulfill the basic needs of every individual and use the resources in shared and more equitable basis.

Mahatma Gandhi recognized that the finite natural resources be of preserved for future generation. He stressed that the need for sustainable development practices that minimize harm to the environment and ensure the long-term availability of resources. Gandhi advocated for a harmonious relationship between human activities and natural world. His model of development was blessed with ecological preservation in parity with modern day concept of sustainable development. He emphasized that individuals should use the resources responsibly and judiciously while avoiding wastefulness and over consumption. He promoted a mindset of respect and care for the environment, recognizing that human are dependent upon the natural world. Highlighting the distinction between genuine need and excessive need Gandhi emphasize the importance of responsible and sustainable living. Gandhi's views continues to inspire discussion on sustainable development, responsible consumption and establishment of symbiotic relation between environment and humans.

His idea of trusteeship tries to minimize the gaps between haves and have not's. It tries to eliminate the effects of inequality. He wished businesses to change their attitude by voluntarily surrendering their surplus wealth. In context to India and the world, he propounded that businessmen have no moral right to accumulate unlimited wealth while most of their fellow countrymen live in poverty and misery. Wealth of the society should be distributed equally among all its members. Doctrine of trusteeship is expected to reduce concentration of wealth in the society. In the wider canvas, the state would regulate the trusteeship, as it reflects the will of the people, Gandhi wrote "under my plan, the state has to carry out the will of the people not to dictate to them or forced them to do its will. They will bring in the economic equality through non violence.

He had expected businessmen and industrialists to outgrow their greed for possession of extra wealth. Reflecting the concept of welfare of all, Gandhiji wrote that; rather producing those goods and services which are consumed by a few individuals, businesses should focus to those goods and services which are useful to all members of the society. The concept of trusteeship is quite useful to the businesses. It solicits the need of industries and labourers to work together in synergy with one another. It promotes healthy relationship between two. Both of them are producing goods and providing services which will be useful for all. Further the industrialist/business man will get as per their needs and to use the extra wealth as to the welfare of the masses. The industrialist should work as they are the custodian and trustees of the businesses and to avoid behaving as their owners.

In context to modern businesses, the doctrine of trusteeship has grey areas as well. The modern corporates and companies are created by the shareholder so it is expected by them to earn as much dividend as they can provide for their shareholders. Besides, there are others like government investors, financiers, management, debtor and creditor etc. which are in constant conflict with one another. It is equally beneficial for the government; if turnover and the profit earned by company are high as it will receive much more corporate taxes. At the same time, more profit is expected to harm the customers as they have to pay more for the goods and services they purchase. This concept may de-motivate the businesses to grow beyond a limit as most of them draw rewards and satisfaction while increasing their profits. The business man may lose their creativity and hard work to become lazy. All this will ultimately have negative effects on the economic development of a country. Moreover, in modern welfare state, it is the responsibility and accountability of the government to fill the void of economic inequality and to provide social justice to all. After the introduction of progressive taxation system, the individual with higher income are charged with more taxes and with the lower income with lesser taxes. The idea of trusteeship does not hold much water in context to modern businesses, but its objectives of economic equality and social justice are the ultimate ends which are strived to be achieved by successive governments.

Gandhiji has advocated for cordial relations between labour and management. In his views, labour should have the same status and dignity as capital. Employees should be treated as the co-owners of the mills and should have the access to information taking place among different stakeholders. There is symbiotic relation between these two. The capitalists should reflect their morality with the labour by taking care of their economic and social security. At the same time the trade unions are also expected to be the key institutions for the workers in their moral, material and social development. In this context, strike is the inherent constitutional right of worker for the purpose of security, justice and liberty. Both capitalist and labourers should accept the principle of trusteeship. The capitalist should refrain from considering themselves as the only owner of the industries.

Famous industrialist of the time, JRD Tata was greatly influenced by the Gandhian concept of trusteeship. Though there were also some glaring differences in the understanding of wealth between two. For Gandhi ji, everything including wealth came from God, therefore, it, belongs to all and not to a particular individual; so anything surplus belongs to the larger society. JRD tata did not explicitly hold this view. For him, nation is a larger society and it is moral and ethical duty and responsibility of an individual to distribute the surplus wealth in the welfare and upliftment of all. The moral and ethical approach adopted by JRD Tata was in resonance with a larger view of Gandhian way of living. For both Gandhiji and JRD Tata, the meaning of ownership is not aligned with the normal connotation of ownership, which gives the beholder right to use the property in his and her own liking within the limits of the law. For Gandhiji and JRD Tata, the means of earning wealth are quite important as the business should refrain from using unethical way of earning the profits.

Gandhiji's social responsiveness is reflected at three levels ranging from individual to organizational to institutional level. On individual level, he emphasized that individual duties should be paid higher priority to individual rights. As an individual one should follow nonviolent methods to correct injustice, serve the community and country, and follow the path of moderation of wants and self-reliance. At organizational level, the entrepreneur may own material and nonmaterial wealth in his name provided the objective is the betterment of the society. Business owners are expected to support the workers' rights of wages, work and humane working conditions. They need to have reciprocal obligations, where one is dependent upon another. Workers on the one hand must render proper and honest services while the owners of industries should fulfill their economic social and security related needs. At institutional level there should be minimum government intervention in the market while giving chances to private entrepreneurship. Together the labour and capital should create shared value through ethical capitalism.

In context to industrial workings of Tatas; Gandhji wrote that they have institutionalized the concept of trusteeship by creating many trusts. It is the mechanism by which they have since years, leaving their personal wealth to the public. At the same time they have been following the principles of better governance in terms of employees, labour and other workers welfare. In this context, they are helping the larger community and country by observing the central idea of trusteeship. Gandhiji reiterated the role played by Jamna Lal Bajaj, in adhering the principles of trusteeship in true sense and the spirit. Mahatma Gandhi was able to influence many of Indian corporation to follow ethical way of doing businesses. After First World War, many of Indian industrialists have contributed in terms of opening of schools, hospitals, technical training centers, health care facilities and rural development. Jamshedji Tata of Tata group of companies has started a lot of philanthropic ventures for the welfare of the community and society. They have also provided better facilities and working conditions to the employees working in their group of companies. The Tata group of companies, till date is considers as some of the most philanthropic business entity of India.

Along with Tatas, Gandhiji has hailed the role of famous businessmen of his time Jamnalal Bajaj as his true disciple of the principle of trusteeship. In a tribute to him, in his newspaper in the year 1942, he described that Jamna Lal Bajaj was Seth (rich man) and a Saadhak (practitioner). According to Gandhiji he had both, business skills and generosity at the same time. He adored him as the men of the people, whose mind was mostly busy and in imaginations and thoughts but at the same time he was grounded as to have accessibility or everyone. Many of present day, Indian corporations follow the ethical model as was envisioned by Gandhiji under his principles and theory of trusteeship.

3. Conclusion

Gandhian ideas of morality, ethics and trusteeship have greatly influenced the corporate landscape in India. His teachings find indelible mark in the corporate landscape of India. His ideas on dignity of labour, judicious use of resources and upliftment of the poor masses are the foundation stones of the concept of corporate social responsiveness and labour laws. The doctrine of trusteeship offers valuable insights and guidance in the context of business. It emphasizes the responsibility of business leaders and owners towards society, advocating for a more inclusive and equitable approach to wealth and resource distribution. Trusteeship calls upon business leaders to recognize that they are mere custodian or trustees of the resources and wealth they possess. Instead of viewing their ownership as absolute, they should consider themselves as agents, working for employees, customers, communities, and the environment alike. By embracing the principles of trusteeship, businesses can move beyond the profit driven mindset. They may adopt a more holistic approach that takes into account the well-being of every stakeholder. This perspective encourages a shift towards sustainable and socially responsible practices. It emphasizes the need to minimize harm and maximize benefit to society at large. It encourages businesses to pro-actively contribute to the betterment of society, whether through philanthropy, ethical business practices, or environmental sustainability efforts. Furthermore, Gandhi and trusteeship highlights the importance of addressing economic inequalities. It is recognizes that business leaders have a moral obligation to bridge the wealth gap and promote social justice. In today's rapidly changing business scenario, the Gandhian idea of justice, can serve as a guiding principle for fostering a more compassionate, inclusive and sustainable approach to business. By embracing the ethos of trusteeship, businesses can become positive agent of change. It may provide for a better society, which have a level playing field for all, while simultaneously achieving their own success. Along with trusteeship, the Gandhian idea of morality and ethics holds significance in corporate world. Gandhiji emphasized the importance of upholding moral and ethical principles in all aspects of individual life, and businesses. His teachings provide valuable insights for promoting integrity, responsibility and social consciousness within the corporate environment.

By embracing Gandhian principles of morality and ethics, companies may establish themselves as trusted entities, fostering long-term relationships and goodwill among the stakeholders. Moreover, a real morally and ethically driven approach can contribute to the overall reputation and sustainability of companies attracting socially conscious consumers and investors. In today's complex and interconnected world, trusteeship, morality and ethics offer a guiding framework for corporate decision-making. By embracing these principle into practice, companies can contribute to a more just and sustainable society, while realizing their own success in growth. Ultimately, the Gandhian idea of trusteeship, morality and ethics serve as a reminder that businesses have a responsibility to operate with integrity and prioritize the greater good over individual gains.

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Administrative Traditions and Parliamentary Challenges in India: A Historical Perspective

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Abstract

The evolution of governance in the Indian subcontinent reflects continuity rather than rupture, with contemporary democratic institutions developing upon long-established administrative traditions that have shaped state-society relations over centuries. This study examines the persistent tension between state-led centralization and the socially fragmented structure of Indian society, a dynamic that has consistently influenced the trajectory of Indian political development. Through an examination of the Mauryan and Mughal administrative systems, the paper highlights how pre-modern states balanced revenue extraction and political control by relying upon intermediary social structures. The analysis then turns to the contemporary challenges confronting India's parliamentary institutions, focusing on legislative performance, declining deliberation, and the criminalization of politics during the 17th Lok Sabha. Finally, the paper evaluates major structural reforms currently under debate, arguing that the realization of the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047 depends upon reconciling historical centralization with the demands of a pluralistic and deliberative democracy.

Keywords

Indian administration, Parliamentary democracy, Mauryan empire, Mughal mansabdari, One Nation One Election, Criminalization of politics.

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Administrative Traditions and Parliamentary Challenges in India: A Historical Perspective

1. Introduction

An informed assessment of prospective reforms in India's parliamentary democracy—such as proposals for electoral synchronization and the expansion of women's representation—necessitates a deeper engagement with the historical evolution of administrative institutions in the subcontinent. The contemporary Indian state is not an isolated construct but rather the outcome of a long institutional continuum, wherein successive regimes adapted and reconfigured governance structures while preserving certain enduring features, notably centralized authority and embedded social hierarchies. Pre-colonial administrative systems, often simplistically characterized as either despotic or politically fragmented, in fact exhibited considerable institutional sophistication. These systems developed nuanced mechanisms to govern a territorially vast and socially heterogeneous society, balancing local autonomy with overarching central control. Such arrangements reflected a pragmatic engagement with diversity, enabling rulers to accommodate regional variations in customs, economic organization, and social stratification. Therefore, a historically grounded understanding of these administrative traditions provides critical analytical insight into the structural continuities and constraints that shape present-day parliamentary functioning and reform trajectories in India.

2. Theoretical Foundations of Stratification & Administration

In the Indian context, social stratification—most prominently articulated through the caste system—has historically functioned not merely as a social ordering principle but also as an embedded mechanism of governance (Dirks, 2001; Thapar, 2002). Rather than existing outside the administrative domain, caste-based hierarchies were deeply intertwined with the organization of authority and the regulation of social and economic roles. Evidence from early urban formations and later Vedic social structures indicates a gradual yet systematic institutionalization of hierarchy, wherein distinctions of status, occupation, and ritual purity became integral to the broader governance framework. Over time, these roles were normatively anchored within the moral and philosophical construct of Dharma, which provided a legitimizing basis for both social obligations and political authority. This normative embedding enabled governance to function through internalized social codes and customary practices, thereby reducing the need for continuous coercive intervention. Consequently, authority was often exercised in an indirect and decentralized manner, with rulers relying on caste elites, local notables, and community leaders as intermediaries. Such a system not only facilitated administrative reach across territorially expansive and culturally diverse regions but also contributed to a relatively stable form of social control rooted in legitimacy rather than force.

3. Historical Evolution and Contemporary Challenges of Administrative and Parliamentary Institutions

3·1 The Mauryan Administrative State

The Mauryan Empire marked a significant transformation in the history of Indian administration by attempting to establish a centralized political structure across a large and diverse region. Kautilya's Arthashastra conceptualized the state as an integrated system composed of interdependent elements, each fulfilling a specific administrative function (Kangle, 1965). Governance under the Mauryas was characterized by extensive bureaucratic specialization, with officials overseeing agriculture, trade, taxation, and industry. This centralized structure was reinforced by a formal intelligence network designed to monitor both internal administration and external threats.

Table-1: The Saptanga Theory of Statecraft

Element (Anga)	Administrative Significance	Modern Parallel
Swami (Head)	The Sovereign; apex of executive power bound by Dharma.	Head of State/PMO
Amatya (Eyes)	Council of Ministers; implementers of policy.	Civil Service/Cabinet
Janapada (Legs)	Territory and Population; revenue and labour base.	Citizenry/Economy
Kosha (Mouth)	The Treasury; lifeline of administration.	Ministry of Finance
Danda (Brain)	The Army/Force; instrument of coercion.	Military/Police

3·2 The Mughal Administrative Synthesis

Mughal governance combined military organization with Persian administrative practices, producing a highly structured system of rule. The Mansabdari system integrated civil and military responsibilities within a graded hierarchy that regulated service obligations and remuneration (Richards, 1993). Financial administration was conducted through the Jagirdari system, wherein officials were compensated through revenue assignments rather than land ownership. Frequent transfers of jagirs prevented local entrenchment but also limited long-term investment. The system relied heavily on locally embedded administrative specialists who translated imperial directives into effective governance at the village level.

3·3 Crisis of the Legislative Institution

The post-independence transformation of subjects into citizens marked a significant constitutional shift; however, recent parliamentary data indicates growing institutional strain. An assessment of the 17th Lok Sabha reveals a contrast between high legislative productivity and declining deliberative quality (PRS Legislative Research, 2024). Reduced committee scrutiny, limited debate, and deviations from constitutional conventions collectively point toward an erosion of parliamentary accountability.

Table-2: 17th Lok Sabha Performance Metrics (2019-2024)

Metric	Statistic	Implications for Democracy
Productivity	~97%	High volume of legislation passed; efficient but potentially hasty.
Committee Referral	16%	Historic low (down from 71% in 15th LS); lack of expert scrutiny.
Hasty Passage	35%	Bills passed with less than one hour of discussion.
Deputy Speaker	Vacant	Violation of Article 93 convention; weakened checks on the Speaker.

3·4 Criminalization of Politics

Recent electoral trends reveal a steady increase in the number of legislators facing criminal charges (Association for Democratic Reforms, 2024). Candidates with criminal backgrounds demonstrate significantly higher electoral success rates, often driven by perceptions of influence and winnability. This phenomenon undermines democratic accountability and constrains bureaucratic independence, as administrative officials may hesitate to act against politically influential individuals.

3·5 Structural Reforms and Future Trajectories

In response to these challenges, several major reforms have been proposed. Electoral synchronization aims to reduce administrative disruption and fiscal expenditure, though concerns regarding federal balance remain. Similarly, the proposed reservation of legislative seats for women has the potential to reshape parliamentary representation, but its implementation remains contingent upon delimitation and census processes. Strengthening opposition institutions and revisiting anti-defection provisions are also essential for restoring parliamentary deliberation.

4. Conclusion

The historical trajectory of Indian governance reflects a continuous negotiation between central authority and social diversity, as evidenced in administrative formations from the Mauryan and Mughal periods to the present constitutional framework. These enduring patterns demonstrate that contemporary parliamentary challenges are not isolated developments but are deeply rooted in long-standing institutional arrangements that privilege administrative control alongside mediated representation. While administrative efficiency has remained a consistent objective, contemporary parliamentary trends raise concerns about the diminishing role of deliberation and legislative oversight. This shift underscores the need to critically reassess the balance between executive dominance and parliamentary accountability in sustaining democratic vitality. The sustainability of Indian democracy depends upon harmonizing strong administrative capacity with meaningful legislative debate and institutional accountability. Achieving the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047 will require reinforcing constitutional morality alongside effective governance, while also revitalizing participatory institutions that can mediate between state authority and societal diversity.

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Mapping Digital Sociology: An Introduction to Its Themes, Scholarship, and Growth

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Abstract

Most of us now live in a society increasingly shaped and mediated by digital technologies. This reality has led to the intellectual recognition of digital sociology as a significant and evolving subfield within the broader discipline. While the West has taken an early lead-evident in citation indexes and scholarly output-Indian sociology is only beginning to engage seriously with the vast possibilities of the digital domain. This article offers a needed systematic introductory overview to the emerging field of digital sociology, tracing its scholarly development and thematic contours. Aiming for both global and contextual relevance, it positions the subfield not as a radical break from traditional sociology, nor as a marginal or trivial pursuit. Instead, it presents digital sociology as a legitimate and necessary area of enquiry deserving sustained, focused, and critical engagement. The article concludes by outlining four key domains of engagement through which digital sociology can be meaningfully developed in India-thus serving both an informative and developmental purpose.

Keywords

Digital sociology, Digital anthropology, Digital society, Scholarship, Themes.

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1. Introduction

For many practicing sociologists, the emergence of a sub-field termed digital sociology may naturally evoke the question-why?—and often triggers a degree of skepticism. After all, we are living in an era confronted by urgent global challenges such as environmental degradation, climate change, ethnic conflicts, democratic erosion, and the rise of populism. In response, one might argue that such crises are not entirely new; they have long occupied the sociological imagination. Moreover, critics may contend that sociology already possesses a well-established repertoire of theories, methods, and analytical frameworks—so what justifies the need for yet another addition to the discipline? Others might dismiss the digital realm as a hyperreal spectacle, dominated by vulgar memes, fleeting reels, and viral videos that appear to erode traditional socio-cultural values rather than enhance them. Given these reservations, the proposition of a sociology dedicated to studying digital technology may seem both novel and contentious. Yet, addressing this skepticism requires a return to sociology's historical foundations and a deeper examination of its evolving relationship with technological change.

There is no wonder that sociology, since its formative days, has been fascinated with the role of technology in society. Social changes initiated by the mighty industrial revolution and rapid developments in modern sciences shaped the ideas of early sociologists. Comte integrated the technology within his idea of a positive age of the mankind, a threshold of his law of three stages, where he celebrated the rise of techno-scientific apparatuses. Marx went even further, analyzing technology within his conception of mode of production and rise of capitalism. He referred to tools such as plough, handlooms, steam mill etc. and emphasized their role in and relationship within production process. Along with studying implications of machines on production, pricing, costs of commodities and labour, he offered an account of the intertwining nature of technology and society. Initially, emphasizing their historical role and contribution to social development, he quickly took a critical stance towards technologies which perpetuate alienation and exploitation of the labour. Drawing upon Marxian streak, Weber also studied industrial, architectural, military even music technologies (e.g. Piano). However, he showed his ambivalence, regarded them subsuming in the mighty force of rationalization. Simmel placed them under his study of objective culture, which tends to dominate the subjective culture, leading to the tragedy of culture and loss of internal meanings. Durkheim framed technologies within his theory of division of labor in society, where technologies perpetuate specialization and more complexity in the task divisions. Later, sociologists such as Veblen, Ogburn, Merton, Mumford etc. have said a great deal about the role of technologies in society.

Though, now sociological classics, majority of early sociologists framed these reflections under their broader generalized schemes, where they were trying to divulge into the circuits of modernity and emerging structures and processes of the period of great transformation. They were certainly not thinking about the internet, computers, the smartphone, or platforms like Google or Youtube, forget about the artificial intelligence (AI), the internet of bodies (IoB) or internet of things (IoT), who nowadays, likely to invoke a feeling of awe and wonder but often tinged with skepticism and fear. However, some of their thoughts have stood the test of time and remained relevant in theorizing technologies and their social consequences.

Surely, early ideas on technologies, despite being relevant, have gaps in the context of the digital turn (Ritzer, 2013). Selwyn (2019) argues that the true inheritor of classical and modern sociological reflections on technology has been Science and Technology Studies (STS). It developed during 1970s, where previous insights were further sharpened to offer fresh ideas, such as Winner (1986), who formulated his conception of Technological Politics, which questioned the common-sensical notion of technological neutrality and the role they play in the reproduction of power relations. However, quite contradictory, Bijker, Hughes and Pinch's (1987) Social Construction of Technology (SCOT), questioned prevailing technological determinism and privileges society, culture, and community in shaping technology usages. Meanwhile, the idea of a 'gendered technology' was also pushed by emerging techno-feminist scholarship during 1970s and 1980s, which raised questions over the marginality of women in technology, and their role in furthering patriarchy. To solidify perspective, examples were given of domestic technologies such as dishwashers. The field enriched by the posthumanist contribution of Haraway's (1985) A Cyborg Manifesto. However, a more optimistic work was done by Plant (1996), where cyber-feminism was seen as challenging patriarchy through alternative channels of communication and articulations.

Where early antecedents of STS comprise schools such as history of technology, philosophy of science and sociology of knowledge, later, during mid 1990s, ethnographic studies and cross-cultural, comparative analysis of folk usages and peripheral populations de-eliticizes the whole field. Remarkable contributions were made by Latour (1993), Forsythe (1994) and Pfaffenberger (1992). The anthropological interventions into STS helped bridge the rift between science and culture, which was more prevalant in early studies, and brought the question of man, users, experiences and the mundane into centre of attention.

Parallel scholarship also flourished under substantive headings such as information society, knowledge society, informationalism and post-industrialism. Sociological works such as Bell's (1973) The Coming of Post-Industrial Society was regarded as a major contribution in capturing a new mode of social organization geared around the centrality of machines and technologies in the production process, flourshing of service sectors, science-based industries and rise of data processing. A work of seminal importance came from Castells' (1996, 1997, 1998) Information Age Triology (The Rise of the Network Society; The Power of Identity and The End of Millenium) where he became successful in conceptualizing the empirical basis of a new techno-social paradigm as Informationalism, where information production, processing and channelization has gained a central position in productivity and power. Later, he published additional works such as The Internet Galexy (2001), where he traces the development of the internet and political, economic, and techno-scientific forces behind it. Also important are the Communication Power (2009), and particularly, Mobile Communication Society: A Global Perspective (2007), which was written in a collaboration with the co-authors working in the field of mobile communication studies. The main part of the work is that it has referred to scholarly works in non-western countries and eastern societies from Asia and African countries and gave specific attention to the empirical investigations of mobile media.

Alongside aforementioned endeavours, interdisciplinary fields such as New Media Studies, Mobile Communication Studies, Internet Studies also flourished with the share of contributors from different fields of social sciences in general and sociology in particular. Scholars such as Rheingold (2000, 2002), who popularized neologisms such as 'virtual community' and 'smart mobs'. Wellman (2004), who is well known for his work on the internet and network. Baym (2015), who addressed the popular myths surrounding digital media implications. Livingstone (2002, 2009), widely recognized for her work among children and young people's digital media usages, including social concerns on children's parenting in digital society (Livingstone and Blum-Ross, 2020). And Wajcman (2014) and Bittman and Co-authors (2009), now cited for interrogating time pressure in digital society and work-home spillover debate, are classical works, capturing different dimensions overlapping with digital sociology scholarship. These intellectual developments were published in many dedicated book series and journals with specific reference to new media, mobile communication and digital technology and society.

Such an overview demonstrates that technology has long been a central concern of sociological theorizing, and digital sociology should not be viewed as disconnected from earlier developments in the social sciences broadly, and sociology specifically. Interest in the digital arose due to the speed and depth of contemporary transformations, which pre-digital sociology often struggled to explain. The novelty lies in the particular historical moment when a group of enthusiastic scholars recognized opportunities in prior insights and the constantly evolving social and research context-connecting the digital sphere with sociology and envisioning new possibilities across methodological and empirical domains. Consequently, a distinct body of scholarship emerged as digital sociology, aiming to understand how new communication technologies shape our social, cultural, political, and economic lives—and how, as bearers of social structure and culture, we in turn respond to them. It draws upon an existing foundation of scholarship, with its own concepts, methods, procedures, questions, debates, and evolving empirical themes.

2. The Term and Emerging Research Themes

The term digital sociology first appeared in French literature as a keyword—'digital visual sociology' (Losacco, 2007). However, its formal origins can be traced to American sociologist Jonathan Wynn's (2009) work, where he reflects on the integration of digital technologies in sociological teaching and research, highlighting emerging challenges and opportunities. A major milestone came with Orton-Johnson and Prior's (2013) edited collection, which collectively explores the incorporation of the digital into everyday life and calls for moving beyond conventional binaries like virtual/real and presence/absence. Their volume offers a nuanced and insightful account of the complex and often messy terrain of digital society, focusing on key sociological themes such as social relationships, spaces, community in the digital age, inequalities, finance, networks, mediation, as well as education and healthcare practices.

In addition, the first monograph came from the Australian Sociologist, Deborah Lupton (2014) whose work titled ***Digital Sociology*** has become the basic text of the field. Besides attempting to theorize emerging aspects of digital society, it also reconceptualizes the whole idea of sociological practice and conducting social research itself. Her definition of digital sociology encompasses a four-fold typology. *Firstly*, professional digital practice, based on incorporation of digital tools by sociologists to conduct and share research outputs, build their professional profile, and direct students. *Secondly*, analysis of digital technology use, referring to the study of how technology usages affect people's sense of themselves, their implications for relational configurations and production and reproduction of social institutions and structures. *Thirdly*, digital data analysis, using digital data which is either quantitative or qualitative. And *finally*, critical digital sociology, a reflexive analysis of digital supported by the insights of social and cultural theories (Lupton, 2014: 15-16). Other books in the field such as Jessie Daniels and Collegues' (2016) edited work titled Digital Sociologies, Noortje Marres' (2017) Digital Sociology: The Reinvention of Social Research, and Neil Sylwyn's (2019) What is Digital Sociology? are foundational works. A comprehensive reading of studies and traversing across references of digital sociology gives a glimpse into four classical and analytically separable areas of investigation; socio-cultural; politico-administrative; economic-consumptional and methodological-procedural.

Socio-culturally speaking, digital sociology has focused on the nature of social interactions, relationships and emerging digital cultures. In the socio-interactional area, the main question lies in their reconfigurative implications on physicality of social interactions. It has been observed that digital, particularly mobile communication, has transformed our traditional sense of presence by allowing ubiquitous social connectedness, where social actors are permanently reachable and addressable (Ling & Donner, 2009), which is consequential for the way people interact, organize and negotiate relations, bringing new layers of complexities in everyday social accomplishments. Inspired by the anthropological work of Marcel Mauss, Taylor and Harper (2003) extends the notion of gift in text messaging among young people, which helps in establishing reciprocal ties. Wajcman (2015) also maintains that digital usages foster connections between social groups such as friends and family. However, this line of enquiry build upon old school philosophy of social functions of materiality has been critically interrogated by Turkle (2011), fearing that digital interactions may fall into shallow relations and loneliness. Besides, it has increasingly associated with the theme of bodies, self and identities where digital devices such as mobiles, smartwatches etc. were seen as culturally wearable technologies like ornaments of tribes, which remain tied to the body as an an extension of it. The question of self expression has taken another dimension where scholars have reflected upon offline and online selves and often mutual and contradictory relationship between them. Some have attached digital technologies and their personalizations such as wallpaper, ringtones and overall visual themes with sociological variables like gender, age, religion etc. Additionally, digital has been related to topics such as social capital, public-private dynamics, social solidarity, rituals, cultural reinforcement-change, qunatified self, digital avatars etc.

In the politico-administrative sphere, the major issue relates to the changing dynamics of power and control in digital society. Studies have incorporated insights from the works of post-structuralists such as Michel

Foucault and Gilles Deleuze. A reinvention of Foucauldian work on Panopticon, disciplinary power, biopolitics and governmentality required decluttering the operationalities of new technologies and techniques of control in the digital society. School (Hope, 2016) and state agencies and private advertisements (Lyon, 2014) were seen indulging in perpetual monitoring of their subjects through microrecording and evaluating the digital data. Additionally, digital tracking devices also allow self regulation techniques, where people microregulate their thoughts and conduct. The debate on more participatory, normalized and familial surveillance practices (Lupton, 2016; Marciano, 2022) were also built on extending early insights on empirical data.

Additionally, it was asserted that in such post-panopticon times, control no longer has physicality, but is more distant, combined with new techniques of remote control via digital technologies. Many worked on Deleuzian ideas and explained that there is an individual body and a data body in cyberspace, and the efforts are made to monitor and control the data body. An example could be a google search history and cookies which lack a physical body but embodies in the form of a data body, in whom advertisers work upon to control to maximize their profits. Governmentality took another step in the digital society where techniques such as online login, passwords, access given, access denied, forced updates etc. were pushed for regulating common people. Moreover, algorithm are seen as filled with prejudices, motive driven and non-neutral. In a nutshell, we can say that the power in digital society is more remote, decentralized, minute and more insidious to track. Besides, studies have also taken up the issue of movements in digital society, whose operational structure seemed to be determined by the networking logic (Castells, 2015), where the crowd gathering and protesting mechanisms have become significantly transformed, however, many suspects digital activism as ‘slacktivism’, devoid of real political engagement and meaning. A rather more pragmatic area deals with governance and civic engagement in digital society, where digital has seen serving the policy interests such as m-government schemes and e-programs in various spheres spanning from education, health and numerous citizen services. Digital sociology opens the doors of critical evaluation of the delivery process and motives of these initiatives.

In the economic-consumptional field major questions raised by digital sociologists relate to the changing nature of capitalist enterprises, transformation of work, productivity, profitability, consumption, labour relations and exploitation, and development. Many works have drawn inspiration from Marxian theory and integrated them into digital Marxism. Ideas like ‘communicative capitalism’ (Dean, 2005) and ‘platform capitalism’ (Srnicek, 2017) were produced to explain the capitalistic modus-operandi in the digital age, where data acts as a raw material and the control over its ever-circulating flow constitutes the basis for productivity and power. Capitalistic digital platforms like Facebook, Google, Amazon, Alibaba etc. were seen as not just tech-companies but monopolistic business enterprises, who heavily rely on user data, whose information is sold to generate profits. It's all built upon a whole data-centric business model, which is meticulously designed. Additionally, many studies have articulated a great deal about changing labour dynamics in the digital society, where labour has seen more fragmented and discrete (such as gig workers, hourly workers, on-demand workers) due to their temporary positions in the organization of work, lacking union solidarity in traditional senses. The control is furthered by advanced surveillance mechanisms, and ratings are used to exert pressure and extend control upon labour. Other studies focus on the changes in existing jobs. For example, in journalism and media labour in general (Cohen, 2015a; 2015b), there is a growing trend of automated reporting, quick news production based on data mining and content collection, unpaid content provided by online audience, freelancing and citizen journalism. The news givers are judged based on the metric of containt viewing, clicks etc.

Another thread relates to the issue of economic development, where economists have generally taken a technocentric approach. Take for example, Jenson's (2007) study of Kerala's fisherfolk, where mobile was found improving sale co-ordination of sardines, allowing for remote price negotiation, which reduces transportation cost, price variability, and brings efficiency. Such positive correlations were also found in studies such as those of sub-saharan Africa (Aker & Mbiti, 2010) and in Morocco (Ilahiane & Sherry, 2009), others have taken a more rounded approach and evaluated its role in community development (Goggin & Clark, 2009). Though pro-development studies remain crucial in informing research and policies, they face vigorous challenges, particularly from anthropological, ethnograhic and causally complex studies anchored upon fieldwork traditions. For example, Horst and Miller's (2006) research among poor Jamaicans and Wallis' (2013) study of marginalized workers of China have shown that despite serving socio-communicative functions, digital devices like mobile does not necessarily lead to new businesses, better income or agency, and sometimes they increase the financial load from whom the mobile help has sought. Tenhunen's (2018) study of Janta village, West Bengal also critically interrogated flat development discourse and found intersectionalities of business benefits, where mobile benefits well-off groups. Mixed development discourse is a classical example of how differences in approaches brought differences in finding in digital research.

The consumptional debate on the digital draws on traditional sociological categories of production, consumption and transformed into prosumption and digital consumption.

In the methodological-procedural domain, it is observed that digitalization has produced a datalogical turn to social inquiries, where the traditional quantitative and qualitative methods are underpowered. Therefore, the debate has reconfigured as big data vs thick data, based on the demands of techno-data-social centric, and live methods. Initially, attention was given to big and broad social data flowing across cyberspace, on the internet and social media (such as tweets, Google search, keywords etc.). These data sets are sometimes deliberately put on by administrative agencies and business platforms. The hindsight is that the big data would elucidate structured patterns among unstructured, ever flowing huge data sets of social behaviours, thoughts and action patterns. It urges us to work along computational social sciences and use of techniques such as data mining, modelling, mapping large data sets, keywords etc. However, the big data analysis has been criticized for being shallow, ridden with machine bias, excluding the complexity and depth of socio-cultural context in which the data has emerged.

The rediscovery of anthropological sensibilities in digital resulted in increasing emphasis on thick data, digital ethnography and a rather more general association with digital anthropology (Miller & Horst, 2012: 3-35). It is based on certain time tested idea systems such as the recognition of the dialectic (such as virtual-real; presence-absence; commoditization-decommoditization; global-local; abstraction-differentiation; universal-particular etc.), the culture and false authenticity (fallible tendency of seing digital as mediated, in-authentic, un-natural and virtual, while real world as un-mediated, more authentic, natural and real), emphasizing holism (considering polymedia, and broader media ecology), considering voice and relativism, ambivalence of openness and closure and finally, normativity and principle of materiality. No wonder, there is clearly some affinity between these principles and the style of research and theorizing in anthropology which employ the notion of context, culture and interrelationships. These ideas help de-dogmatise prevailing uninformed, usually taken-for-granted notions of thinking and doing digital research.

Additionally, many studies have focused on the need to formulate new methods, approaches and perspectives, and have been successful upto certain extent in the process. A bunch of digital sociologists have emphasized the importance of digital tools in promulgating enquiries as well.

Figure-1 demonstrates four major realms of occupation of global digital sociology research on next page.

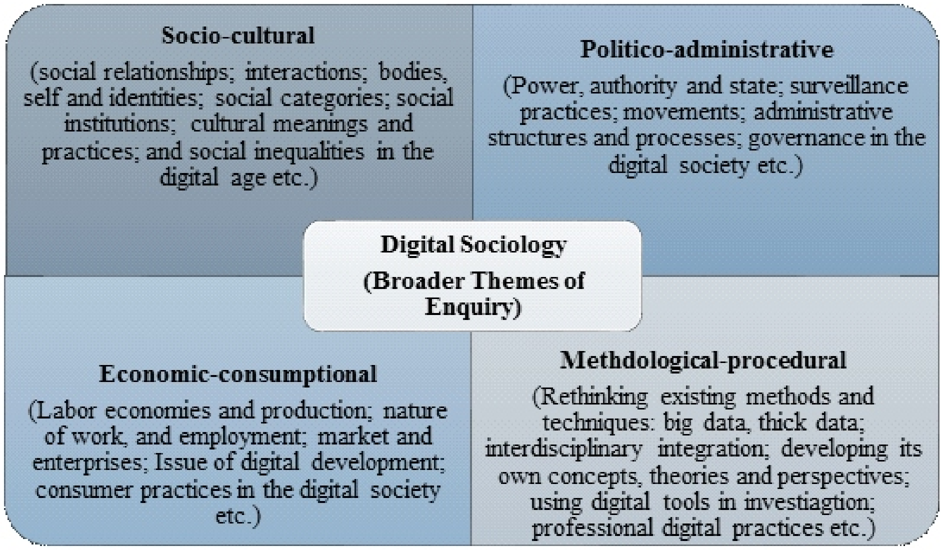

Figure-1: Four-fold Themes of Enquiry

Drawing upon scholarly works, six points of contention could be made:

1. Digital sociology advocates integrating new technological features and their usages into core areas of sociological concerns such as instantaneous communication and labour exploitation, internet and power relations and control etc. It views rather more technical concepts from computational sciences such as the network, data, algorithm, platforms through sociological lenses.
2. Like other sub-branches, digital sociology often revisits early time-tested sociological questions, themes and insights by re-using and re-framing them in the emerging digital environment. By doing so, it draws on a body of long intellectual heritage to explain the emerging structures and processes of contemporary digital society, reasserting sociological knowledge as a cumulative and connected process.
3. Despite inhering a rich body of insight into social structures and processes from pre-digital sociology, it does not undermine the sheer importance of cross-disciplinary learning. It gains from the works in computational sciences, anthropology, politics, design, philosophy, linguistics, geography and other realms of knowledge as well. It also aims to incorporate findings from various fields such as Internet Studies, New Media Studies, Mobile Communication Studies etc. No wonder, such practice leads to a more hybrid theorization based on an interdisciplinary input. This collaboration also intends to bring action element into digital sociology, which may chart out the map for solving real societal problems in the digital age. It reminds us of the

traditional association of sociology with both general and specific branches of knowledge.

4. Digital sociology seeks to explore the aftermath of the digital. Meaning instead of being overwhelmed by the digital, it critically navigates the gaps and grey areas of the digital such as fatigue, disillusionment, inequality, addiction etc.
5. Digital sociology moves beyond the binaries of virtual-real, absence-presence, offline-online but rearrange them in a continuum. In this way, it retains the philosophy of a world consisting of humans, machines and the digital as well.
6. Digital sociology is not merely about understanding the usages, impact, cultural appropriation and incorporation of the digital, but it also involves integrating digital into study, which unfolds a new way of inquiring, investigating and interacting with research participants. In this manner the digital is not only an object of investigation but a modality for doing sociology as well.

3. Professional and Institutional Recognition

Digital sociology, as a sub-field of sociology, is steadily gaining global recognition. Naturally, professional associations have shown increasing interest in it. The first was the British Sociological Association (BSA), which established a dedicated research group on digital sociology in 2012. Soon after, the Australian Sociological Association (TASA) followed suit by organizing its first digital sociology forum during its annual conference at Monash University, Clayton, in 2013. In the United States, the Eastern Sociological Society made a significant contribution by hosting a conference in New York centered on digital sociology, thereby formally acknowledging the field. Gradually, other sociological associations and societies began recognizing the growing relevance of digital sociology, establishing their own research branches. Among them, the most notable is the International Sociological Association (ISA), which acknowledged the digital's ubiquity by forming a thematic group in 2020. This group was later upgraded to Working Group 10 on Digital Sociology in 2024, and the first mid-term conference was held at the University of Warsaw, Poland-signifying that digital concerns could no longer be marginalized. Following this trend, the Indian Sociological Society (ISS) established its first research group, initially titled Adhoc Group-01 on Digital Sociology, which has now developed into a full-fledged research committee.

Alongside the formation of specialized branches by professional bodies, numerous academic programs have emerged worldwide. In 2013, Goldsmiths, University of London, launched the first-ever master's program in digital sociology. This was soon followed by programs at the University of Edinburgh, the University of Glasgow, and Virginia Commonwealth University in the United States. Later, courses were also introduced at the University of Warwick and the University of North Texas. The digital has not only attracted sociologists; other allied disciplines have also embraced the opportunity to explore it. Most notably, social anthropology has shown close engagement, prompting calls for a separate sub-discipline of digital anthropology. A cohort of practicing anthropologists—interested in ethnographies of mobile phones, the internet, and social media-came together to reconceptualize digital technologies not as mere technical tools but as cultural constructions, emphasizing human agency, meaning, and context. As a result, supported by a growing body of research, several academic programs have been introduced. The most well-known is the MSc in Digital Anthropology at University College London (UCL), which led to landmark ethnographic work such as How the World Changed social media (2016). In this project, Daniel Miller and colleagues produced pioneering comparative studies across countries like England, Chile, China, India, Brazil, Trinidad, and Italy. Another significant program was launched by the London School of Economics (LSE), offering a graduate course in digital anthropology. Today, digital themes occupy an important place in anthropological journals and conferences, both in India and internationally.

In South Asia, precursors to digital studies are typically located within science and technology studies (STS), the sociology of media, culture and communication, and mobile communication studies, where the socio-cultural implications of mobile phones, social media, and technologies are broadly explored. Courses explicitly titled with 'digital' are more recent interventions. In India, the International Institute of Information Technology, Bangalore (IIIT-B) has pioneered an interdisciplinary master's program called 'Digital Society'. Similarly, the Department of Society-Technology Interface, School of Social Sciences, Jaipur, has collaborated with IIIT-B to offer a two-year MSc course with the same title. IIT Jodhpur has also made significant strides by launching 'Digital Humanities' under its Interdisciplinary Research Division (IRD), offering MSc and PhD programs in key digital domains such as AI, new media, digital culture, digital heritage, multimodal data analytics, and digital ethnography. However, it seems that the sociology departments of Indian universities have largely left the responsibility of digital education to IITs and other specialized institutions. Despite increasing relevance—and the inclusion of some digital-related content in university curricula—there remains a lack of a distinct course specifically titled 'Digital Sociology'. Its overlapping themes are often subsumed under existing areas such as globalization and society, media, culture, and STS. It is no surprise, then, that if digital sociology is to truly develop in India, it must be institutionalized as a standalone syllabus in Indian universities—beyond the margins of STS or media studies—despite its shared concerns with them.

4. A Four-fold Approach for Indian Context

It is no surprise that digital sociology remains a relatively new entrant in India, despite the presence of overlapping domains such as science and technology studies (STS) and media studies. For digital sociology to develop meaningfully in the Indian context, a fourfold approach is necessary—encompassing teaching and research, methodological engagement, professional activities, and policy orientation. However, this path is also fraught with several challenges and complexities.

The first step involves incorporating digital sociology into teaching and research. In terms of research, numerous papers and several books of national and international repute have been published, covering themes such as the digital divide, development issues, implications for urban and rural India, e-governance, digital diffusion, and its political economy. Additionally, several unpublished dissertations available on Shodhganga reflect valuable contributions by research scholars across India. Paper presentations on digital themes are also increasingly common at academic seminars. However, many relevant topics remain underexplored in detail, including panoramic surveillance and power; disability in the digital age; organizational and labour issues in digital India; inequalities in access, skill, and usage of computers, internet, and smartphones across demographic groups; as well as concerns around agriculture, gender, caste, religion, political participation, and educational disparities in the digital era. Other underexamined areas include shifting dynamics of family, marriage, and kinship, and tribal culture, identity, and self-management in the digital age. In fact, there exists a significant research gap within the social sciences on mobile communication in India (Chauhan, 2020), which now forms a core area of digital inquiry. Moreover, the field calls for more connected and informed scholarship, which can only be achieved through a sustained engagement with global literature using comparative strategies that trace both similarities and differences in digital studies. The increasing tendency among newcomers to frame standalone studies-whether on AI, digital divides, or other exotic topics-may prove unproductive if not grounded in robust, systematic, and analytically sound international literature reviews. Merely generating paper titles with digital buzzwords based on journalistic impressions or common-sense notions—without employing foundational sociological tools such as classification and comparison—does little for those sincerely aiming to understand digital society through a sociological lens. In teaching, there is a need to introducing a separate syllabus in graduate and Ph.D. courses on digital sociology in Indian universities. And along with thematic areas mentioned earlier, scholastic works done by digital sociology scholars should also be included alongside a specific focus on Indian context by the inclusion of local socio-cultural categories, and policy issues related to digital development, literacy, inequality and detox. It also requires focusing on the integration of digital tools, and training of techno-data skills to faculty members for teaching and doing digital sociology.

Methodologically speaking, Indian digital scholarship must grapple with certain inherent problematics, which can be crystallized into four analytical threads. These often remain implicit until one engages in empirical investigation. First is the selection of an appropriate unit of analysis. Should one focus solely on the virtual? Or treat the real world as shaping the virtual? Or should a more balanced approach be adopted—and if so, how sustainable is that balance in practice? Second is the issue of determinism and causality. Researchers must confront how causal connections are established, raising the question of analytical priority in digital research: should technological variables be given primacy? Should social variables take precedence? Or is a balanced interplay necessary—and how might such balance be empirically achieved? The third challenge involves the unwanted intrusion of moral panics and prevailing binaries, which complicate efforts to move beyond normative judgments about the digital. This includes long-standing dilemmas around dichotomies in technological research such as digital optimism vs. pessimism, presence vs. absence, and virtual vs. real. Fourth is the issue of context. While the first three concerns are broadly cross-societal, the fourth is field-specific, requiring scholars to engage carefully with the particularities of their research sites-demanding the selection of appropriate categories and analytical methods rooted in contextual relevance.

The establishment of an Adhoc Group on Digital Sociology and its recent elevation to a full-fledged research committee (RC-30) is a welcome development. The Indian Sociological Society (ISS) has demonstrated its commitment to the field by initiating several professional digital practices—such as recording online webinars, sharing informative content on social media platforms, and creating hybrid (online/offline) forums for discussions on various aspects of digital society. However, further interventions are necessary. There is an urgent need for a dedicated All-India Sociological Conference (AISC) centered on the theme of the digital, given its increasing relevance across core subject areas of various research committees, including urban, rural, development, tribal, legal, and criminological studies. A more focused, detailed, and systematic engagement is required. Equally important are workshops and training sessions on digital skills such as visual sociology, data handling, mining, and modeling. These should involve cross-disciplinary collaboration with computational sciences and other related fields to foster the professional exchange of digital methods and practices. Regional sociological associations should also prioritize digital sociology, engaging seriously with questions of methodology, themes, techniques, and context in its development. At the same time, it is crucial to avoid the proliferation of superficial academic events—now common in seminars and workshops titled 'Impact of Social Media…', 'Digital Society', etc.—where raw empiricism and common sense often dominate. While such sessions may serve informative or even affective purposes, they tend to sideline the academic responsibility of fostering deep and long-term conceptual, methodological, and organized discussions. Philosophical engagement is essential if we aim to shift from being mere providers of digital raw material to becoming generators of original themes, perspectives, and concepts rooted in our specific social contexts. Ultimately, these and other necessary interventions will help not only in developing the field but also in moving digital sociology beyond the exclusive domains of IITs and other elite institutions, where it has thus far found serious academic attention.

In the policy domain, Indian digital sociology holds significant potential to serve a range of public functions. One of its promising directions lies in evolving as public digital sociology—an approach that applies sociological knowledge to real-world digital issues in order to benefit society. For instance, it can play a vital role in addressing the persistent digital divide in India, particularly in terms of access, skills, and usage across rural and urban populations. By offering empirically grounded insights and context-specific policy recommendations, digital sociology can help bridge these divides and support inclusive digital development in underserved regions.

Moreover, sociologists can contribute meaningfully to policy dialogues on digital literacy, digital wellbeing (including digital addiction and the need for digital detox), and the increasing educational inequalities exacerbated by the uneven penetration of digital technologies. These contributions would not only highlight structural barriers but also offer alternative frameworks rooted in ground-level realities. A critical sociological evaluation of flagship programs such as the Digital India initiative-examined through the lenses of class, caste, gender, region, and age-would enhance public accountability and foster more equitable policy design.

By engaging with such issues, digital sociology could expand its relevance beyond academic circles and assume an important role in shaping public discourse and state policy. In doing so, it would fulfill both the pragmatic and civic responsibilities of the discipline, transforming it into a more active, participatory, and socially responsive field within Indian sociology.

5. Conclusion

As a sub-branch of sociology, digital sociology is gradually gaining traction. Although still in its formative stages—not yet fully institutionalized across all contexts—it is moving through a phase of recognition and realization. Nonetheless, it has already contributed a growing body of scholarship, a rich array of themes for substantive enquiry, diverse methodological approaches, foundational principles, and a vibrant field of scholarly debate. While digital sociology is more firmly established in international academia, it has begun to leave its initial footprints within Indian sociology. However, its broader institutional- ization and rightful positioning within the discipline remain a work in progress. The first step toward developing this sub-field in India involves engaging deeply with existing global literature—exploring its themes, trends, and theoretical trajectories—with the goal of building a contextually rooted, informed, comparative and reflective scholarship. As India becomes increasingly digitized, there is a pressing need to accord serious academic attention to the digital—both in research and pedagogy. This attention must be guided by the longstanding intellectual legacy of Indian sociology and social anthropology. Digital sociology in India, therefore, lies at the intersection of emerging global discourses and the culturally grounded sensibilities of Indian social thought. Such an endeavor requires a conscious negotiation with local cultural categories, meanings, and sociological insights into Indian society's structures and processes. It also calls for the critical integration of global developments—across themes, methods, and discourses—to understand how digital transformations are shaping (and being shaped by) India's socio-cultural landscape. Undoubtedly, this task demands a new set of skills, conceptual tools, and a willingness to step beyond traditional comfort zones. Yet, the pursuit holds immense promise for contributing to an emerging and vital field of sociological knowledge.

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Ethnic Identity, Migration, and Diaspora: Exploring Ethnocentrism through Sociological Analysis

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Abstract

Human societies have carried diversity and differentiation since their inception, essential for their progress and survival. Every country reflects diversity in its social functioning, and India is especially known for its ethnic, cultural, geographical, linguistic, and religious pluralism. In the context of globalization, India is undergoing rapid transformation, influenced by migration and diaspora. Historically, individuals and communities have been interdependent, promoting the exchange of ideas and resources for survival and development. Migration is a universal sociological phenomenon: while natural forces shaped it in primitive and medieval periods, both natural and human-made factors are significant in modern times. However, migration has never been easy—some benefit while others suffer. Differences, dialogue, and conflicts have always accompanied migration and continue today under stricter nation-state regulations. Over time, cultural differentiation led to domination, integration, and persistent marginalization. The harshest forms of exploitation occurred through slavery, caste, and gender hierarchies. Although aristocracies and feudalism declined after the French Revolution and colonialism, new forms of domination emerged through capitalism and imperialism. In the modern era, nation-states regulate migration, making ethnicity, diaspora, and ethnocentrism increasingly contentious. This review paper examines the evolution of human societies and migration across stages of development, highlighting the growing importance of ethnic groups, diaspora, and ethnocentric concerns.

Keywords

Ethic identity, Migration and Diaspora, Ethnocentrism and Development Discourse.

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1. Introduction

Human societies have a long history of struggle and survival, but basic foundational needs of diversity and differentiation remain the same. We can easily discern that an individual can live alone, but survival is collective because dependency is basic to human life. Diversity consists of languages, cultures, religions, geographies, and ethnicities. There is no need to waste time arguing over whether dependency or independence is better, because neither is a completely separate concept. However, the history of human society suggests that humans are social animals, meaning they depend on society for development and survival. Each group or community has its own way of life, culture, values, morality, ethics, etc., within which individuals live and survive in a given natural setting. In fact, nature has a tremendous impact on humans and other living beings, and, to some extent, vice versa. Ethnic identity is the identity of a group or community in a given natural setting, where the group/community follows uniform cultural practices, values, and norms, speaks a distinct local language, and follows different gender practices. The United Nations Statistics Division, in its work on ethnocultural characteristics, has provided fundamental insights and perspectives on the concepts and definitions of ethnic and national groups. It states that, 'The specific ethnic and/or national groups of the population which are of interest in each country are dependent upon individual national circumstances. Some of the criteria by which ethnic groups are identified are ethnic nationality (i.e., country or area of origin, as distinct from citizenship or country of legal nationality), race, color, language, religion, customs of dress or eating, tribe, or various combinations of these characteristics. In addition, some of the terms used, such as "race", "origin", or "tribe", have multiple connotations. The definitions and criteria applied by each country investigating the ethnic characteristics of its population must therefore be carefully determined, with the involvement of or consultation with representatives of the groups it seeks to categorize. By the nature of this topic, these categories and their definitions will vary widely from country to country; therefore, no internationally accepted criteria are possible; thus, no internationally relevant criteria can be recommended (UN, 2017).

2. Objective of the Study

This paper aims to understand the fundamental tenets of ethnic identity formation and to examine the role of migration and diaspora within the broader context of social development.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design based on the analysis of secondary data. It relies on a systematic review of existing literature, including academic books, journal articles, and scholarly reports. A thematic and interpretative approach is employed to examine key concepts such as ethnic identity, migration, diaspora, and ethnocentrism across different socio-historical contexts. The study is primarily descriptive and analytical in nature, aiming to synthesize diverse theoretical perspectives and identify emerging patterns and relationships among the variables under consideration.

4. Ethnic Identity, Migration, and Diaspora: A Literature Review

4·1 Formation of Ethnic Identities Is a Process

There are arguments, observations, and studies on the impact of ethnic group functioning on society, culture, and the country's economy. A broad conceptualization suggests that there is no concrete, final definition of ethnic or group identity available in academic discourse; rather, it is described as an ongoing identity-making process. India is one of the countries in the world with significant cultural diversity, including languages, religions, geographical features, castes, tribes, races, and ethnic groups. It is also known as unity in diversity. There are scholars with insights and perspectives on ethnic group formations. Easterly and Levine (1997) and Alesina *et al.* (1997) examine whether ethnic diversity lowers a country's economic growth rate or its level of public good provision. Most empirical studies concern the implications of ethnic diversity. In their understanding, it makes the relevance. According to James D. Fearon (2003), "Primordialists" are said to believe that ethnic groups are either fixed, biologically given entities or, if they are social conventions, deeply rooted, clearly drawn, and historically rigid. He further argued that no plausible definition of "ethnic group" will by itself imply a unique list of groups for a country. He studied the relationship between the nature of ethnic identity and its functioning in a given society. Standard definitions of "ethnic group" in terms of shared beliefs about common ancestry and/or shared cultural features are problematic (Fearon and Laitin, 2000a). It is almost always possible to give examples of groups that fit the definition taken literally but are not intuitively "ethnic", or of groups that do not fit the definition but are often described as "ethnic". Alesina *et al.* (2002) attempt to distinguish between ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups in a sample of about 190 countries, and then use their lists to construct measures of ethnic, linguistic, and religious fractionalization. The prototypical ethnic group has the following features as Cited in the article of James D. Fearon (2003):

1. Membership in the group is reckoned primarily by descent by both members and non- members.
2. Members are conscious of group membership and view it as normatively and psychologically important to them.
3. Members share some distinguishing cultural features, such as common language, religion, and customs.
4. These cultural features are held to be valuable by a large majority of members of the group.
5. The group has a homeland, or at least "remembers" one.
6. The group has a shared and collectively represented history as a group. Further, this history is not wholly manufactured, but has some basis in fact.
7. The group is potentially "stand-alone" in a conceptual sense—that is, it is not a caste or caste-like group (e.g., European nobility or commoners).

4·2 Migration is a Dynamic Process of Transformation of Society

Migration is a global phenomenon that exists in all human societies. However, the nature of migration across societies/countries may differ in terms of its causes and consequences. As the central agency for collecting, classifying, and disseminating information on all types of international migration, the United Nations is of great importance and dynamism to the world community. There are agencies at the national and local levels that also collect, analyze, and disseminate the data on national and international migration. The United Nations Statistical Division collects and disseminates official national data on international migrant flows and stocks through its Demographic Yearbook, and it produces international standards and methods for international migration statistics. It also assists countries in enhancing their capacity for migration statistics. Coordinates statistical programs and activities through the United Nations Expert Group on Migration Statistics. There are other UN system entities working on migration statistics, such as the International Labour Organization, the International Organization for Migration, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. In human history, human conflicts have created forced migration and refugees. New concepts like refugee and asylum have emerged in the global context. The regimes like Nazism, which was a form of fascism and one of the dominant national chauvinisms of racial superiority in the history of Western Europe. However, after the Second World War, many countries adopted democracy as a form of government, and Today, every nation is viewed as independent and sovereign, and in a competitive environment, individuals and nations allow national chauvinism to emerge in politics. However, emerging chauvinism in developed countries in the initial stage was limited to political ideologies and the protection of native citizens' rights to education and employment, but in reality, it made little progress in this regard. Ronal Regan, the president of America, made his first statement in his political career that "Make America Great", which was echoed in Donald Trump's support to "Make America Great" again, has been spreading in other countries of the world. It has created a conducive environment for other societies to think for themselves and their interests. Concepts such as son of soil and nativism are outcomes of these developments in developed countries, gradually percolating into developing nations worldwide.

Migration is a social phenomenon that was historically regulated and controlled by natural forces, but today, national and international agencies control, regulate, and facilitate the migration process. As a consequence, the nature of migration is changing amid globalization and economic processes. Internal migration offers opportunities for mobility and development to sections of the population; in some cases, it is a survival strategy. So, nations have recognized the right to migrate as a fundamental right of their citizens within their states. In India, the nature of migration changed during colonial rule. Indentured labour has now become diaspora. After independence and during the freedom struggle, many people from rural areas migrated to urban industrial centers. This has created a middle class in India. A new diaspora is emerging after independence. At present, all four streams of migration are considered important and are making progress over time (rural-to-rural, rural-to-urban, urban-to-rural, and urban-to-urban). International migration is viewed as a process of economic integration and a part of the global development agenda. International migration opportunities for the Indian population have increased access to education, business, and knowledge. The Indian diaspora is among the largest, contributing to global culture, the economy, and social development (N. Jayaram 2004). India Migration Reports, 2011and 2012, brought out by the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs Research Unit on International migration at the Center for Development Studies, Kerala, provide a holistic understanding of migration and diaspora in India. Indian students' migration to other countries for education has been increasing day by day, but since COVID-19 and the Ukraine war, it has slowed. However, the government of India has introduced the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP-2020), aiming to provide quality education to its people by establishing institutes of national importance, expanding the number of Central and state universities, and opening the higher education sector to foreign universities to establish campuses in India. This may help us become the world's education hub in the near future and attract foreign learners.

4·3 Ethnocentrism and Globalization

Ethnic identity forms naturally over time in a given setting, and it develops a group culture that helps the group maintain its cultural distinctiveness. Since ethnic identity is a dynamic process, it changes over time. There are two perspectives on ethnic culture: cultural relativism and ethnocentrism. Cultural relativism recognizes that cultural processes are subjective and dynamic and an integral part of the social life of a group in a given context. Ethnocentrism is an ideology that develops over time, a feeling of distinctiveness and superiority within a group or community. In democratic societies, culture is considered an autonomous way of life for a particular group within a given society. However, legally, it is not recognized as dominant or superior over others. In today's modern nation-state economy, the economy is becoming a dominant factor, and groups that control and dominate a nation develop an ideology of ethnocentrism to foster a dominant culture. The world is divided on the basis of economic criteria, such as developed, developing, and underdeveloped, and in a broader sense, the global north and the global south. Every country or community claims superiority in one form or another, but in reality, those with economic and cultural power dominate this view. Ethnocentrism is an ideology in which a group, community, or state claims that its culture, values, and norms are superior or represent the global standard. In this view, new concepts like Make America Great Again (MAGA) are emerging and followed by others. There is nothing wrong with making a nation-state great, but in the first place, these nation-states or groups shall ensure liberty, equality, and justice for all internally.

There are views and perspectives on globalization and the global divide in light of the modernization of the world's population. The modern world, according to Max Weber, is defined by institutions that claim a monopoly on permissible coercion. In other words, as an institution that claims to be the only agency entitled to deploy coercive action in order to force the existing state of affairs to be different from what it has been and would continue to be if left alone. According to Zygmunt Bauman (2002), 'the right to draw the line between legitimate (permissible) coercion and illegitimate (impermissible) coercion is the prime stake of all power struggle'. 'The nation state was a grand vision of a nation blended into the polity; the communal interests dissolved in, and becoming indistinguishable from raison d'etat . Survival of the nation being identical with the unsapped and intractable might of the state, love of the law of the land, and faithful service to whatever had been presented and recognized as being in the state's interest. The state could claim the undivided loyalty of all its citizens and override all other interests, particularism, when viewed from the perspective of the sovereign totality of the state. Cultural particularities, religious disagreements, linguistic idiosyncrasies, or any other discrepancy in belief and preferences should not matter. Above all, they should not stand in the way of unswerving loyalty to the state, common to all. In case of conflict, priorities were unambiguous and the line of duty one for all.' He further stated that the Solidarity of fate is not a matter of choice. A global world is a place where, for once, the desideratum of moral responsibility and the interest of survival coincide and blend. 'Globalization is an ethical challenge'.

5. Findings

The study finds that the formation of ethnic identities rooted in linguistic and cultural distinctiveness is a natural and ongoing social process. However, when such identities are instrumentalized by nations, states, or groups for domination and subjugation, they give rise to ethnocentric ideologies. The analysis also shows that rapid scientific and technological advancements are accelerating social change, fostering development while simultaneously producing disparities, inequalities, and injustices, particularly in poorer and underdeveloped regions. Globalization presents a dual character: while it promotes integration and facilitates large-scale human development, it also raises serious concerns regarding human rights and equity. Furthermore, the study highlights a strong interrelationship between ethnic identity, migration, and ethnocentrism in shaping contemporary societies.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, social change is an inevitable and continuous process with humans at its core. The interplay of ethnic identity, migration, and globalization is reshaping societies through the emergence of new cultures, institutions, and forms of power and domination. While globalization holds the promise of integration and collective progress, it also risks reinforcing inequalities and ethnocentric tendencies if not managed inclusively. Therefore, a balanced approach that respects cultural diversity while promoting equity and human rights is essential for ensuring that these transformations contribute positively to humanity as a whole.

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The Emergence and Rise of the Communist Movement in Nepal, 1949–1996

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Abstract

This article examines the structural conditions, transnational influences, and organizational dynamics that gave rise to Nepal's communist movement from its founding in 1949 through the declaration of the People's War in 1996. Drawing on historical sociological frameworks of political opportunity structures (Tarrow, 1994), Gramscian hegemony theory, and comparative revolutionary studies (Skocpol, 1979; Goodwin, 2001), the article argues that the Maoist insurgency was not a sudden rupture but the cumulative product of four interlocking processes: the delegitimation of feudal-oligarchic governance under the Rana regime; the transnational circulation of anti-colonial and Marxist-Leninist ideologies through Indian exile networks; the persistent fragmentation and refounding of communist organizations through cycles of ideological dispute; and the failure of post-1990 parliamentary democracy to address deep structural inequalities. The article situates Nepal's experience within broader comparative debates on agrarian revolution, state-society relations, and the sociology of revolutionary movements.

Keywords

Nepal, Feudalism, Political Opportunity structures, Democratic transition, Revolutionary movement.

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1. Introduction

Understanding the origins of Nepal's Maoist insurgency requires attending not merely to ideological commitments but to the structural sociology of a society that had, by the mid-twentieth century, accumulated the conditions that theorists of revolution have identified as propitious for radical mobilization. Writing in a comparative framework, Theda Skocpol (1979) argued that successful social revolutions emerge not from voluntaristic acts of will but from the intersection of state crises, elite defection, and peasant grievances activated by structural transformation. Nepal on the eve of its communist formation displayed these features in concentrated form.

For one hundred and four years—from 1846 until 1951—Nepal was governed by the Rana oligarchy, an hereditary autocracy in which the prime ministership was monopolized by a single clan, the Shah kings were reduced to ceremonial figureheads, and the vast majority of the population was excluded from economic and political participation (Whelpton, 2005). The regime was, in Gramscian terms, a hegemony sustained primarily by coercion rather than consent: political parties were banned, civil liberties were nonexistent, and dissent was answered with imprisonment or exile (Hachhethu, 2002). Land ownership was heavily concentrated among Rana allies, and the countryside remained organized along feudal lines in which peasant households owed labour and produce to absentee landlords with close ties to the state. As Regmi (1978) documented in his seminal political-economic study, the Rana system of land tenure—characterized by birta grants, raikar state lands, and jagir assignments—institutionalized a form of agrarian surplus extraction that kept peasant producers in chronic poverty and political dependency.

The regime's insularity from international currents of modernization was not incidental but deliberate. British India's East India Company had established a residency in Kathmandu following the 1816 Sugauli Treaty, and the Ranas entered into a strategic accommodation with colonial power: in exchange for supplying Gurkha soldiers to the British Indian Army, the regime received diplomatic recognition and protection from external interference (Stiller, 1975; Whelpton, 2005). This relationship gave the Ranas a veneer of legitimacy while intensifying their internal authoritarianism. Paradoxically, it was the British-Indian connection that ultimately undermined them: the children of elite families exiled by intra-dynastic power struggles received education in colonial India, where they encountered both anti-colonial nationalism and socialist thought, creating the intellectual cadres who would return to challenge the regime.

Nepal thus presents a case of what Goodwin (2001) has called a 'neopatrimonial' state—one whose exclusionary and corrupt character rendered it structurally unable to incorporate rising social forces, generating the preconditions for armed opposition. The following sections after research objectives and research methodology trace how this structural condition was activated through transnational ideological networks, internal organizational dynamics, and the partial opening and rapid closure of democratic space between 1951 and 1996.

2. Research Objectives

The research aims to explore the historical condition that contributed to the emergence and rise of the Nepal's communist movement by providing a wider structural context for its emergence through feudal agrarian relations, colonialism and semi-colonialism as well as the transnational flow of Marxist-Leninist ideology in South Asia during the mid-20th century. The research analyze the experience of 104 years of rule by the Ranas, including the systematic exclusion of peasants from political life, concentration of land ownership with a small elite, and the violent repression of any form of organized dissent, to show that the conditions that made possible radical political mobilization; were not created by ideological extremists but instead arose from deep structural contradictions within Nepali society.

This research also aims to provide a detailed understanding of the rise of communism from 1949 to 1996, including the historical development of the communist party in and out of Nepal from its founding in Calcutta in September 1949 through multiple phases and cycles of internal contradictions, ideological dispute, splits, and reorganization and cyclical development until its transition towards the beginning of the armed Maoist revolution in 1996. We do not treat these organizational histories chronologically; rather, we analyze historical sociological lens so as to provide insight into how each of these processes were negotiated, contested, and ultimately agreed to within the communist movement through initiatives towards a protracted people's war. Thus, this research will contribute to a broader comparative understanding of how revolutionary movements develop, consolidate, and radicalize themselves in the context of structural inequalities and institutional closure.

3. Research Methodology

Based on the analysis of secondary sources such as political parties' manifestos and major decisions, and other scholarly literature, the article tries to analyze the emergence and rise of the communist movement in Nepal from 1949 to 1996. The study analyzes the historical political documents including the manifesto of the communist party and the list of 40 demands submitted by the then CPN (Maoist) to the Nepali congress led government. These documents help the study understand the ideological goal, mobilizing strategies, and organizational and ideological trajectory of the movement. The study also examine the organizational and ideological trajectory of the movement and the self-understanding and decisions of the leadership in different historical conjunctures between 1949 and 1996.

4. Geopolitical and Transnational Context

The mid-twentieth century presented a specific geopolitical conjuncture that proved decisive for South Asian radical politics. India's independence from British colonial rule in 1947 and the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 represented seismic shifts in the regional order, and their ideological reverberations were felt acutely among Nepali political exiles concentrated in cities such as Calcutta, Varanasi, and Patna. Sidney Tarrow's (1994) concept of 'cycles of contention'—periods in which protest diffuses across social sectors and borders—aptly describes the moment: anti-colonial mobilization across South Asia created a dense network of organizational contacts, ideological conversations, and practical solidarities through which Nepali activists absorbed both the Gandhian repertoire of nonviolent mass protest and the Marxist-Leninist frameworks propagated by the Communist Party of India.

The founders of the Nepali Congress in 1947—among them Bishweshwar Prasad Koirala, Subarna Shamsher Rana, and Ganeshman Singh—had participated directly in the Indian independence movement and maintained personal relationships with Congress leaders Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhas Chandra Bose (Rose & Fisher, 1970). Their political formation, shaped by the discourse of liberal nationalism and constitutional democracy, oriented the party toward a reformist rather than revolutionary path. The Communist Party of Nepal (CPN), founded on 15 September 1949 in Calcutta under the leadership of Pushpalal Shrestha, Nar Bahadur Karmacharya, and Manmohan Adhikari, represented a different but equally transnational intellectual genealogy. As Hoftun, Raeper, and Whelpton (1999) have noted, the founding cadres were decisively shaped by the Chinese revolution's peasant-centered strategy and by the Naxalbari agrarian uprising then fermenting in West Bengal.

The theoretical framework adopted by the early CPN drew on Mao Zedong's analysis of 'semi-feudal, semi-colonial' formations to characterize Nepal's social structure—a characterization that, while analytically contested, had significant mobilizing power in a society where feudal land relations remained dominant and British imperial influence operated through the Rana intermediary (Thapa & Sijapati, 2003). The CPN's founding program accordingly identified the abolition of autocracy, feudalism, and imperialism as the triple objectives of a 'new democratic revolution'—a formulation directly derived from Mao's 1940 essay 'On New Democracy'. This ideological inheritance would prove remarkably durable: the same formulation underpinned the Maoist insurgency launched nearly five decades later.

A sociologically significant feature of this early period is the class composition of the founding political elite. Both the Nepali Congress and the CPN were led by young men whose families had, paradoxically, been close to the Rana establishment before falling victim to the dynasty's internal power struggles. Exile had thus produced a specific kind of counter-elite: individuals with enough social capital to receive quality education in India yet with personal grievances against the very regime their families had served. This biographical pattern—of the disenchanted insider turned radical outsider—recurs throughout the sociology of revolutionary leadership (Pareto's 'circulation of elites'; Weber's analysis of charismatic authority) and is sociologically significant in understanding why Nepali revolutionary politics was led by educated elites rather than peasant communities who bore the greatest burden of structural exploitation.

5. The Praja Parishad and the Construction of Martyrdom

The founding of the Nepal Praja Parishad in 1939 in Kathmandu constituted an important precursor to the formally organized communist movement, and its fate illuminates the mechanisms through which political repression can paradoxically strengthen rather than extinguish oppositional consciousness. Formed by a small group of educated elites who had gained access to schooling at Darbar High School—itself established in 1892 by Chandra Shamsher, primarily for the children of the ruling class—the Parishad represented the first attempt at organized political resistance from within Nepal's own borders.

In 1941, the regime responded to this nascent opposition with exemplary violence: four core members of the organization—Dharma Bhakta Mathema, Shukraraj Shastri, Dasharath Chand, and Gangalal Shrestha—were sentenced to death and executed. Rather than eliminating political dissent, this act of repression constituted what sociologists of social movements call a 'moral shock' (Jasper & Poulsen, 1995)—an event so morally outrageous that it radicalizes previously uncommitted individuals and generates symbolic resources for future mobilization. The four executed activists became martyrs in the nationalist memory of Nepal, their deaths functioning as founding narrative of the democratic movement. This dynamic illustrates Della Porta's (1995) argument that state repression, when sufficiently brutal and directed at figures widely perceived as legitimate, tends to intensify rather than suppress radical mobilization.

The social sociology of Rana repression also merits attention. The regime's internal hierarchical ordering—which classified Rana family members into A, B, and C categories based on the caste status of their mothers, with corresponding differential access to power and resources—generated resentments not only among the dispossessed peasantry but within the ruling class itself. Those classified in the lower ranks of the Rana hierarchy found themselves politically marginalized within a system their own family had constructed. Subarna Shamsher Rana, one of the co-founders of the Nepali Congress, exemplified this pattern: a Rana by lineage but excluded from its highest privileges, he channeled elite frustration into democratic opposition (Nepali Times, 2020). This intra-elite fracturing was a structural precondition for the anti-Rana coalition's eventual success.

6. The 1951 Transition and Its Contradictions

The abolition of the Rana regime in 1951 was accomplished through a convergence of internal pressure and external geopolitical repositioning. India's new Congress government under Nehru withdrew its implicit support for the Rana oligarchy and facilitated the Delhi Agreement of 7 February 1951, which restored King Tribhuvan to substantive authority and nominally opened Nepal to multiparty politics (Rose & Fisher, 1970; Whelpton, 2005). For the CPN, this represented a partial opening of what Tarrow (1994) calls the 'political opportunity structure'—a shift in the institutional context that made certain forms of political action newly possible or more costly.

The post-1951 period was characterized by organizational expansion and popular consciousness-raising. Communist cadres dispersed across Nepal's districts, engaging in what Gramsci (1971) would have termed 'organic intellectual' work: articulating peasant grievances in the language of class analysis, connecting local experiences of landlord exploitation to structural dynamics of the feudal order, and building the organizational tissue of a revolutionary movement. In the western hills of Nepal, figures like Mohan Bikram Singh began systematic political education work in districts such as Pyuthan, translating Marxist concepts into the vernacular idioms of village life in ways that resonated with communities who had little or no formal education but intimate experience of economic marginalization and state indifference.

Yet the promise of 1951 was quickly circumscribed. The Delhi Agreement represented what analysts of democratic transition have called a 'negotiated transition' rather than a decisive rupture with the old order

(O'Donnell & Schmitter, 1986). The Rana elite retained substantial landed property and social influence; the king retained discretionary authority; and the structural conditions that had produced mass poverty—unequal land distribution, debt bondage, caste discrimination, ethnic marginalization—remained largely intact. For the CPN and its successors, this incomplete transformation confirmed the Marxist-Leninist thesis that formal political democracy was insufficient without the economic transformation of social relations, and it provided the empirical basis for future arguments that parliamentary means were inadequate vehicles for genuine social change.

7. Organizational Fission

One of the most sociologically striking features of Nepal's communist movement between 1951 and 1996 was its persistent tendency toward organizational fragmentation. The CPN underwent a series of splits that produced, by the mid-1990s, more than a dozen distinct communist formations with varying ideological orientations, organizational cultures, and strategic lines. Understanding this pattern requires moving beyond the simple narrative of individual leadership failures to identify the structural and ideological forces that made unity persistently difficult.

The first major rupture was precipitated by the royal coup of December 1960, in which King Mahendra dissolved parliament, banned political parties, and instituted the partyless Panchayat system. The coup exposed a fundamental strategic disagreement within the CPN leadership about the relationship between communism and nationalism. The then-General Secretary Kesharjung Rayamajhi took the position that the king's assertion of sovereignty against an 'elitist' parliamentary system represented a 'progressive' nationalist step, aligning with a strand of thought that perceived Indian influence over Nepali democracy as a form of neo-colonialism requiring resistance. This position—characterized subsequently as 'Rayamajhi Tendency' in the movement's internal discourse—reflected a real tension within anti-colonial and nationalist politics about the appropriate relationship between class struggle and national self-determination, a tension that had also roiled communist movements elsewhere in Asia and Africa.

Against Rayamajhi's royalist accommodation, Pushpalal Shrestha's faction argued for the restoration of parliamentary democracy and broad-based mass mobilization, while Mohan Bikram Singh's group advocated for a constituent assembly—a demand that would later become central to Maoist politics. The organizational consequences of this three—way split were to produce separate party formations that carried on parallel organizational work, each claiming authentic communist credentials while condemning rivals as deviationist.

From a sociological perspective informed by organizational theory, these splits can be analyzed through at least three lenses. First, they reflect the structural problem of maintaining organizational coherence in conditions of illegality and repression: the Panchayat-era ban on political parties forced communist organizations to operate underground or in exile in India, creating conditions in which face-to-face ideological contestation was difficult and personal networks became the primary basis of political loyalty (Scott, 1990). Second, the splits reflect genuine strategic uncertainty about the appropriate revolutionary path in a society where rapid social change was producing new social groups—an urban educated class, industrial workers in the Tarai plains, a growing diaspora labour force—whose political interests did not map neatly onto the peasant-centered strategy inherited from Maoist theory. Third, the pattern of splits and re-unifications reflects the logic of factional competition within a constrained organizational field, in which each sub-group had an interest in maintaining its distinct identity as a basis for claiming resources, prestige, and leadership positions (Bourdieu, 1991).

The formation of CPN (Fourth Convention) in 1974 under Mohan Bikram Singh, the subsequent split producing CPN (Mashal) under 'Kiran' (Mohan Baidya) and CPN (Masal) under Singh, and the eventual convergence of multiple factions into CPN (Unity Center) in the early 1990s, all followed this general pattern. Each organizational reconfiguration was justified in ideological terms-disputes over the evaluation of the 1990 democratic transition, the appropriate relationship to parliamentary elections, the timing and strategy of armed struggle—but was simultaneously shaped by the organizational interests and personal networks of competing leadership groups.

8. The Rise of a New Revolutionary Leadership

The formation of the CPN (Unity Center) in the early 1990s brought together three leaders who would collectively define the trajectory of the Maoist movement: Pushpakamal Dahal ('Prachanda'), Baburam Bhattarai, and Ram Bahadur Thapa ('Badal'). Their convergence in a single organizational structure represented a generational transition in the communist movement-from the founding intellectuals of the 1949 generation to a cohort shaped by the experience of the Panchayat period, the 1990 democratic opening, and the perceived inadequacies of parliamentary politics.

The sociological composition of this new leadership is analytically significant. Prachanda, born into a peasant family in Kaski district, had been active in Marxist study circles as a student at Rampur campus and rose within the party through organizational work rather than the intellectual credentials that had distinguished earlier leaders. Bhattarai, by contrast, had received a doctorate in Planning from Jawaharlal Nehru University in

New Delhi—one of India's premier institutions for left-wing intellectual life—and entered radical politics through journalistic and intellectual engagement with the urban educated public. Thapa came from a Magar ethnic community in western Nepal and a military family background, embodying the ethnic and regional dimensions of marginalization that the Maoist movement would later make central to its mobilizing appeal. Together, the three represented a combination of organizational capacity, intellectual legitimacy, and social breadth that gave the movement a degree of reach and credibility that earlier communist formations had lacked.

Prachanda's elevation to General Secretary of CPN (Mashal) in 1989 came through a process that illustrates the intersection of organizational logic and individual agency in political transformation. The 'Sector Action' of 1986—an attempt to disrupt Panchayat elections through coordinated attacks on police posts in Kathmandu—had proven strategically disastrous, resulting in the dismantling of the party's urban network and widespread arrests. The party undertook a formal 'self-criticism' exercise that resulted in the demotion of leaders associated with the decision, while Prachanda—who had not been involved in the failed action—emerged as the primary beneficiary of this organizational reckoning. This episode demonstrates how organizational failure, processed through the internal disciplinary mechanisms of a Leninist party, can paradoxically produce new leadership configurations and strategic reorientations.

9. The 1990 Democratic Transition, Structural Failure and Radicalization of the Left

The Jana Andolan of 1990—a mass movement that successfully ended the Panchayat system and restored multiparty democracy after thirty years of royal-authoritarian rule—presented Nepal's communist movement with both opportunities and dilemmas that would prove decisive for the subsequent turn to armed struggle. The restoration of democratic politics expanded the political opportunity structure, creating space for legal party activity, electoral competition, and open organizing. Yet the movement also ended through an elite bargain between King Birendra and the major political parties—Nepali Congress and the communists organized in the United Left Front—that left the monarchy intact, excluded the most radical elements of the left from the settlement, and produced a constitution that the future Maoists condemned as insufficiently transformative.

The United National People's Movement Committee (UNPMC), in which the precursor formations of the CPN (Unity Center) participated, had called for the complete abolition of the monarchy and the election of a constituent assembly—demands that were not incorporated into the 1990 Constitution. The leaders of what would become the Maoist party thus entered the post—1990 democratic period with a fundamental objection to its constitutional foundations, an objection that shaped their strategic calculations about the utility of electoral participation.

The formation of the United People's Front Nepal (UPFN) as the electoral wing of the CPN (Unity Center) for the 1991 general election represented a tactical rather than strategic commitment to parliamentary politics. The UPFN's electoral performance—nine seats and 4.39 percent of the popular vote, making it the third-largest parliamentary force—was treated by the Maoist leadership not as evidence of the viability of the parliamentary path but as confirmation of its limitations. The dominant parliamentary success of the CPN (Unified Marxist—Leninist)—formed by the mainstreaming of the former Jhapali movement and other communist factions—was viewed with particular alarm, as it demonstrated the capacity of the parliamentary framework to absorb and domesticate radical communist politics. The CPN (UML)'s 1993 adoption of 'People's Multiparty Democracy' as its ideological program, incorporating the full framework of liberal democracy, was characterized by the Maoists as ideological 'revisionism' and confirmed their conviction that the parliamentary road led not to socialism but to its permanent deferral.

State violence against UPFN activities during the electoral period provided further experiential evidence for this assessment. Cadres of the Nepali Congress and the Rastriya Prajatantra Party physically attacked UPFN campaign events, frequently with police protection or acquiescence. The government's violent suppression of a general strike on 6 April 1992—in which seven people were killed including a four-year-old child—became a constitutive moment for Maoist political identity, cited repeatedly in party literature as evidence of the 'fascist' character of parliamentary democracy. These experiences of state violence, analyzed through the framework of Piven and Cloward (1977) on poor people's movements, illuminate how repression can radicalize movements by demonstrating the limits of institutional channels and the willingness of the state to use lethal force against peaceful dissent.

The National Unity Convention held in Madi, Chitwan district, in November 1992 represents a critical juncture in the sociology of the Maoist movement—a moment at which accumulated organizational learning, ideological commitments, and strategic assessments crystallized into a definitive political line. The path of 'protracted people's war' proposed by Prachanda at the convention drew explicitly on Mao's military and political writings, particularly the thesis that in agrarian semi-feudal societies, revolution must begin in the countryside, gradually encircle the cities, and culminate in the seizure of state power through a combination of military and political means (Mao Zedong, 1938; Thapa & Sijapati, 2003).

The sociological assessment embedded in the Maoist strategic doctrine is worth examining carefully, as it reflects a coherent, if contested, analysis of Nepal's social structure and its political implications. The CPN (Maoist) characterized Nepal in the early 1990s as a 'semi-feudal, semi-colonial' formation in which a feudal landowning class allied with comprador and bureaucratic capitalist classes exercised power under conditions of Indian expansionist domination (Thapa & Sijapati, 2003; Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung, 2023). This structural analysis led to the conclusion that the conditions for revolution were objectively present: a large, impoverished, and politically excluded peasantry; a state apparatus that functioned primarily to reproduce elite interests; and an international context in which Indian hegemony foreclosed the possibility of genuine national sovereignty through parliamentary means.

The convention's decision was not unanimous: approximately half the delegates opposed the armed struggle resolution, arguing that Nepal's conditions were not ripe for protracted people's war and advocating instead for continued mass mobilization and urban-based political work. This internal disagreement produced a subsequent organizational split in 1994, when the opponents of the armed struggle line quit the Unity Center, leaving Prachanda's faction-which formally adopted the name CPN (Maoist) in 1996—to pursue the revolutionary path independently. The sociology of organizational schism here follows a pattern identified in the comparative study of revolutionary movements: once a definitive strategic line is adopted, moderates who cannot commit to its implications exit, leaving a more ideologically cohesive and militant core capable of sustaining high-risk collective action (McAdam, 1986; Della Porta, 1995).

10. Mobilization Resources: Ideology, Culture, and Military Preparation

The preparation for armed struggle between 1992 and 1996 involved the assembly of what McCarthy and Zald (1977) call 'mobilization resources'—the organizational, material, cultural, and human resources necessary for sustained collective action. The CPN (Maoist)'s approach to resource assembly was comprehensive, encompassing political education, cultural production, military training, and weapons procurement in an integrated strategy.

Political education formed the primary medium for consciousness-raising and organizational development. Regular party classes introduced cadres to the fundamentals of Marxist-Leninist-Maoist theory and linked abstract doctrinal content to concrete local experiences of exploitation and discrimination. This pedagogical practice drew on what Paulo Freire (1970) termed 'conscientization'—the process by which oppressed groups come to understand their social situation not as natural or inevitable but as the product of historically specific power relations that can be challenged and transformed. The emphasis on developing each cadre as simultaneously a political actor, military fighter, and cultural producer reflected the Maoist conception of total revolutionary commitment: revolution was not merely an organizational project but a transformation of individual consciousness and collective identity.

Cultural production occupied a central place in this mobilization strategy. The party developed songs, poems, plays, and visual art that gave affective expression to the revolutionary project and built collective identity among dispersed rural communities. This approach drew on the Maoist cultural theory derived from Mao's 1942 Yan'an Talks on Literature and Art, which argued that cultural production in class society was inevitably a terrain of political struggle and that revolutionary art must serve the masses by representing their experiences and aspirations. The cultural strategy also served practical organizational functions: cultural performances provided occasions for political education, collective solidarity, and the identification of potential recruits in villages where formal organizational structures were absent or vulnerable to state surveillance.

The third expanded meeting of the CPN (Maoist) in Gorkha in 1995 identified Nepal's specific structural features as conditions that would sustain protracted guerrilla warfare: the mountainous terrain that facilitated guerrilla mobility; the ethnic and caste marginalization of large sections of the population; the absence of direct external military intervention; and the existence of a large Nepali migrant labour force in India that could provide logistical support and a safe rear base. These assessments drew on both Maoist military doctrine and the specific lessons of the failed Jhapa uprising of 1971, which the party subjected to critical analysis to identify the organizational and strategic errors that had led to its defeat.

11. The Declaration of People's War

The formal declaration of the People's War on 13 February 1996, launched through coordinated attacks on police posts in Rukum, Rolpa, and Sindhuli districts, marked the culmination of the organizational and ideological trajectory traced in this article. The immediate political context included the government's violent suppression of Maoist political activities through 'Operation Romeo' in November 1995—which involved arbitrary arrests, extrajudicial killings, and documented human rights violations against members of left-wing parties in Rolpa district—and the government's failure to respond to a forty-point memorandum of demands presented by Maoist leaders to Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba on 4 February 1996 (Berghof Foundation; Thapa & Sijapati, 2003).

The forty-point demands themselves are a sociologically rich document: they articulate a comprehensive critique of Nepal's political order addressing national sovereignty (the abolition of the 1950 Nepal-India Treaty, rejection of the 1996 Mahakali Treaty); democratic representation (election of a constituent assembly, full subordination of security forces to civilian authority); and social equity (land reform, protection for Tarai landlords and indigenous communities). The demands reflect the multi-class coalition that the Maoists sought to assemble: nationalist appeals to those concerned about Indian dominance; democratic appeals to those excluded from elite politics; and redistributive appeals to the rural poor and marginalized ethnic and caste communities.

From the perspective of social movement theory, the declaration of People's War represents what Sidney Tarrow (1994) has called the transformation of 'repertoires of contention': the replacement of legal protest, electoral participation, and petitioning with armed insurgency as the primary modality of political action. This shift was not simply an ideological choice but a response to the perceived closure of institutional channels—the experience of state violence, electoral marginalization, and constitutional exclusion that had accumulated over the preceding decades. The Maoists' own analysis framed the shift in terms of the exhaustion of legitimate options: it was the state's refusal to engage with their demands, they argued, that made armed struggle not merely permissible but necessary.

12. Conclusion

This article has traced the emergence of Nepal's communist movement from its founding conditions in the late 1940s through the organizational, ideological, and strategic processes that culminated in the People's War of 1996. Several analytical conclusions emerge from this examination.

First and the foremost, the Maoist insurgency was not a product of ideological extremism or organizational voluntarism but of structural conditions-concentrated land ownership, state violence, ethnic and caste marginalization, and the systematic exclusion of large populations from political and economic participation—that had accumulated over more than a century of Rana oligarchy and its aftermath. These conditions constituted what Goodwin (2001) has identified as a 'revolutionary situation': a state perceived by significant sectors of the population as illegitimate, corrupt, and incapable of reform through institutional means.

Second, transnational ideological networks played a decisive role in providing the theoretical frameworks through which Nepali activists interpreted their structural situation and organized collective action. The Indian exile networks, the influence of Chinese Maoist thought, and the organizational ties to international communist movements all shaped the ideological repertoire available to Nepali communist leaders. Yet this ideological transfer was not mechanical imitation: Nepali communists adapted, contested, and reformulated imported frameworks in light of the specific conditions of their society.

Third, the persistent organizational fragmentation of the communist movement reflects both the structural difficulties of organizing under conditions of repression and illegality and the genuine ideological disagreements about revolutionary strategy that divided a politically sophisticated movement. The pattern of splits and reunifications was not merely an organizational pathology but a mechanism through which strategic and ideological questions were worked through in practice, ultimately producing a formation—the CPN (Maoist) under Prachanda—that combined organizational discipline, ideological clarity, and social breadth sufficient to sustain a decade-long insurgency.

Fourth, the failure of the 1990 democratic transition to address structural inequalities was a proximate cause of the insurgency. The partial opening of democratic politics simultaneously raised expectations and revealed the limits of parliamentary means as vehicles for substantive social transformation. The Maoists' strategic assessment—that the parliamentary framework served primarily to reproduce elite power while managing popular discontent through procedural democracy—proved compelling to a significant portion of Nepal's rural and marginalized population.

The People's War that began in 1996 would last a decade, claiming approximately 13,000 lives and transforming Nepal's political landscape in ways that neither its architects nor its opponents fully anticipated. Its sociology—rooted in the structural conditions and organizational dynamics examined here—illuminates not only Nepal's specific trajectory but also the broader conditions under which agrarian societies produce revolutionary movements that challenge the established order.

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The Developmental Production of Disaster Risk, Vulnerability, and Social Conflict: A Theoretical Review

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Abstract

Generally, development courses, disaster risk, and social conflict occupy separate analytical spaces in academic discourse. This paper aimed for a systematic theoretical review to examine how development disparities like access in public services, the unequal distribution of infrastructure and resources, and governance capacity produce and reproduce disaster risk vulnerability and social conflict through interdisciplinary literature. The paper argues that conventional definitions of vulnerability cannot capture the governance dimensions that may induce developmental inequality and intensify risk. It further argues that social constructivist and objectivist epistemologies must be reconciled rather than opposed in theorizing the disaster-development-conflict nexus. The analysis leads to the construction of the Developmental Production of Vulnerability and Conflict (DPVC) model, which captures the major developmental and vulnerability-related parameters. The paper concludes with directions for further study.

Keywords

Disaster-development-conflict nexus, Vulnerability, Developmental Production, Risk governance, Inequality, Nepal.

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1. Introduction

Contemporary disaster studies have undergone an epistemological reorientation over the past five decades. Earlier inquiries focused primarily on the physical dimensions of hazardous events and framed disasters as exogenous shocks that disrupt otherwise stable societies. However, a growing body of literature now conceptualizes disasters as endogenous outcomes of long-term economic, political, and social processes (Peters & Kelman, 2020). This shift from hazard-centered perspectives to vulnerability- and resilience-oriented approaches has transformed disaster studies into an interdisciplinary field encompassing political ecology, economics, geography, social anthropology, and governance studies (Chmutina *et al.*, 2021).

Despite this disciplinary expansion, an important analytical gap remains. While substantial scholarship has examined the development–disaster relationship and the development–conflict relationship separately, their integrated theoretical treatment within a single framework remains limited. In particular, developmental disparities—manifested through unequal access to public services, infrastructure, resources, and opportunities—have not been sufficiently theorized as structural drivers of both disaster vulnerability and social conflict. Existing approaches often focus on vulnerability as a social condition while giving inadequate attention to the role of governance and development processes in producing and reproducing risk and conflict. Addressing this gap requires a more comprehensive theoretical framework capable of explaining the interconnected dynamics among development, disaster vulnerability, and social conflict.

2. Objectives of the Study

The present study aims to:

1. Develop a theoretical framework for understanding the inter-relationships among development, disaster risk vulnerability, and social conflict.
2. Critically evaluate prevailing conceptualizations of vulnerability.

3. Analyze how unequal development processes intensify disaster losses and damages while simultaneously increasing the likelihood of social conflict.
4. Review and synthesize three major theoretical streams—vulnerability, rural–urban divergence, and reconciled epistemology—to advance understanding of the disaster–development–conflict nexus.

3. Methodology

This study has employed a systematic literature review approach to examine the theoretical and empirical linkages among development disparities, disaster risk vulnerability, and social conflict. Relevant literature was identified through academic online search engines and scholarly databases, drawing upon peer-reviewed journal articles, books, policy reports, and other academic publications. The primary search keywords included "vulnerability", "development disparity", "disaster risk reduction", "rural–urban linkage", "hazard", "development", "conflict", and "governance", along with related combinations of these terms.

The retrieved literature was screened based on its relevance to the objectives of the study and its contribution to understanding the disaster–development–conflict nexus. Particular attention was given to publications addressing vulnerability theory, governance and development inequalities, disaster risk reduction, and the relationship between development processes and social conflict. From the larger body of search results, approximately one hundred publications were selected for detailed review and analysis.

The selected literature was critically examined to identify recurring themes, theoretical perspectives, conceptual debates, and areas of convergence and divergence. Through this process, insights from diverse disciplinary traditions were synthesized to develop an integrated theoretical framework and to formulate the Developmental Production of Vulnerability and Conflict (DPVC) model proposed in this study. Particular attention was given to the ways in which development disparities, governance structures, and social vulnerabilities interact to produce differential disaster risks and conflict outcomes. The synthesis also facilitated the identification of key research gaps and emerging areas of inquiry, thereby providing a foundation for future theoretical and empirical investigations of the disaster–development–conflict nexus.

4. Theoretical Review

4·1 The Concept of Disaster: From Objectivism to Social Constructivism

The conceptual history of disaster clearly indicates an evolution from physical nature to societal concern. Early frameworks treated disasters as natural events whose destructive consequences were broadly proportional to the physical magnitude of the triggering hazard. This objectivist position, which provided the basis for engineering responses and early warning systems, proved inadequate for explaining why communities with similar hazard exposure experienced vastly different levels of loss and recovery capacity (Chipangura *et al*., 2016).

Scholar Gilbert (1998) offers a useful taxonomy of disaster paradigms, identifying three analytically distinct conceptualizations. First, a disaster is a duplication of war-like disruption. The second disaster is an expression of underlying social vulnerability, and finally, disaster is an entry into a state of radical uncertainty. According to him, each paradigm generates distinct conceptual tools and policy prescriptions.

This trajectory is captured in the progression of 'act of God' through 'act of nature' to 'act of human failure', and that determines the growing recognition of anthropogenic and institutional dimensions of disaster causality (Quarantelli, 2001; as cited in Furedi, 2007). Social constructivism holds that both the definition of what constitutes a disaster and the distribution of its impacts are products of social processes, cultural meanings, and power relations (Seddiky *et al*., 2021; Sun & Faas, 2018).

Nevertheless, this paper advances a different proposition from the more radical constructivist position. While the social production of vulnerability is analytically essential, the naturalness of hazards cannot be entirely reduced to social discourse without losing important insights for the research. The epidemiological technicalities of the novel coronavirus cannot be overlooked, though society's vulnerability is equally vital. (Benson, 2012).

4·2 Development: Concept, Trajectory, and Disparity

Development is one of the most debated areas in the social sciences. Its meaning has changed across historical periods and philosophical backgrounds. The multi-dimensional aspect of development encompasses economic growth, human capability expansion, political democratization, ecological sustainability, and spiritual flourishing in varying configurations (Panth, 2020). Similarly, development is understood as the systematic expansion of the capabilities and freedoms available to individuals and communities, consistent with Sen's (1999) foundational formulation. This definition highlights the process and distribution of development outcomes rather than their aggregate magnitude.

> "Development is thus about expanding the choices people must lead lives that they value... fundamental to enlarging these choices is building human capabilities-the range of things that people can do or be in life. The most basic capabilities for human development are to

lead long and healthy lives, to be knowledgeable, to have access to the resources needed for a decent standard of living, and to be able to participate in the life of the community (UNDP, 2003: 1, drawing on Sen, 1999).

The course of development thought from liberalism through import-substitution industrialization and structural adjustment programs to the current neoliberalism reflects persistent tensions between economic efficiency and social equity, and between growth maximization and environmental sustainability. These tensions are not merely academic; they are materially inscribed in the landscapes and institutional arrangements of developing countries and manifest as measurable inequalities in access to resources, services, and political voice (Collins, 2009).

Development disparities like unequal, unjust, and differentiated distribution of development benefits, including infrastructure, social services, natural resource access, and political participation, are structural features of most developing countries. Regional disparities and income inequality have been extensively documented in the Asian context and beyond (Dholakia, 2003; Neckerman & Torche, 2007; Bhattacharya, 2009). Contemporary studies further demonstrate that gender- and health-related disparities exert significant negative effects on income and overall human well-being (Ferrant, 2015; Perez-Arce *et al*., 2016).

The rural-urban dimension of development disparity is also an important dimension of this review. Shen (2009) identifies rural-urban disparities as a pervasive structural condition in developing countries, noting that they are not simply the product of market inefficiencies but of deliberate policy choices that systematically favor urban areas in the allocation of public investment. Yang (1999) identifies urban-biased policy frameworks as a principal driver of rising inequality in China. These findings are also applicable across rapidly urbanizing economies. According to Yang, the rural-urban disparity in land-use patterns and infrastructure networks constitutes a critical framework for studying disaster risk vulnerability.

4·3 Vulnerability Frameworks and Their Limitations

Vulnerability has emerged as the key concept in critical disaster studies. Birkmann (2006) traces the evolution of the concept from early formulations focused on biophysical susceptibility to more encompassing frameworks that incorporate economic, social, political, and institutional dimensions. The seminal contribution of Blaikie *et al*. (1994), elaborated in the Pressure and Release model, established the foundational argument that disasters result from the convergence of a natural hazard with unsafe social conditions produced by root causes rooted in political and economic structures.

Several theoretical frameworks have been developed to operationalize the concept. Wisner *et al*.'s (2004) political economy school situates vulnerability within the social relations of production and reproduction, arguing that patterns of land ownership, labour relations, and political marginalization systematically produce differential exposure to harm. Similarly, the BBC framework and subsequent approaches developed under UNISDR and UNDP underline the necessity to focus on social, environmental, and economic dimensions, integrating the concept of sustainable development. (Birkmann, 2006).

The dominant approaches to vulnerability assessment focus on the susceptibility and coping capacity of individuals and communities but are less attentive to the developmental and institutional processes that produce those conditions in the first place. Eakin and Luers (2006) argue for a more complex, socio-environmental framing that brings together the multiple dimensions and scales of vulnerability, while Oulahen *et al*. (2019) identify a notable gap in the existing literature: the absence of a refined conceptual framework that links multiple hazard exposures to the structural determinants of vulnerability.

Hilhorst and Greg (2004) make the essential political point that social processes generate unequal exposure to risk by rendering certain populations more prone to disaster than others, and that these inequalities are functions of power relations operative in every society. This perspective tends to locate vulnerability primarily in community-level social dynamics. The present review argues that the pattern, distribution, and quality of developmental investment across space and population produce governance-level vulnerability.

4·4 Governance, Institutional Failure, and Developmental Vulnerability

Governance emerges as a critical mediating variable between development conditions and disaster outcomes. Ahrens and Rudolph (2006) identify that participation, accountability, transparency, and predictability are the foundational characteristics of governance structures that, at the same time, foster development and support disaster risk reduction. They further argue that institutional failure generates conditions of underdevelopment and magnified disaster susceptibility.

Mosneaga (2022) situates the governance challenge within unsustainable development, arguing that contemporary development models, driven by short-term economic logic, weak regulatory frameworks, and inadequate attention to environmental constraints, are themselves generating the disaster risks that governance institutions are then called upon to manage. This produces the developmental paradox: growth-oriented development models simultaneously expand economic output and manufacture new categories of risk.

The relationship between public expenditure patterns and disaster risk reduction is particularly helpful in this regard. Evidence from multiple country contexts demonstrates that pre-disaster investment in preparedness, early warning infrastructure, flood embankments, and health services substantially reduces both immediate casualties and long-term economic losses (Vela & Miller, 2014; Qian *et al*., 2020; Seddighi & Seddighi, 2020). However, the distribution of such investment is rarely neutral. It tends to reflect existing political economies of resource allocation that privilege urban constituencies, economically productive zones, and politically organized populations at the expense of rural, peripheral, and marginalized communities. Karim and Noy (2020) find that subnational public spending for adaptive disaster risk reduction is driven by political considerations in Bangladesh.

5. The Nexus between Disaster, Development, and Conflict

5·1 Development and Disaster: Three Relational Dimensions

The relationship between development and disaster has been theorized along three analytically separable but empirically entangled dimensions, as identified in the regional framework (UNESCAP, 2017). *First*, disasters erode previously accumulated development gains: flood events, earthquakes, and other rapid-onset hazards can dismantle years of infrastructure investment, displace productive populations, and generate fiscal pressures that divert resources from longer-term development priorities. The post-disaster period, while theoretically an opportunity to build back better, is, in practice, frequently characterized by the reproduction of preexisting inequalities (Collins, 2018).

Second, development creates conditions of chronic vulnerability that magnify the impacts of hazards. The absence of adequate infrastructure, such as roads, bridges, drainage systems, and health facilities, leaves communities exposed to hazards that comparable populations in better-served areas would withstand with minimal consequences. This dimension of the relationship is central to the present argument and is examined in greater detail in subsequent sections.

Finally, development itself can generate new categories of disaster risk. Unregulated urban expansion into floodplains and the construction of infrastructure that disrupts natural drainage both compound existing risk profiles. Thomalla *et al*. (2018) identify this dimension as requiring particular policy attention, arguing that transformation is necessary to shift from risk-creating to risk-reducing development trajectories.

5·2 Development Disparity, Disaster Risk, and the Rural-Urban Continuum

The dimension of development disparity constitutes an underexplored analytical terrain in the disaster-development literature. The rural-urban continuum is not simply a descriptive geographic category but a structurally significant axis along which the benefits of development are unequally distributed. Jamshed *et al*. (2020) develop a conceptual framework that specifically addresses the dynamics of rural-urban linkages in relation to rural flood vulnerability, demonstrating that upstream land-use changes in rural catchments generate downstream flood risk for urban populations, while downstream flood-control infrastructure frequently protects urban centers at the expense of upstream rural communities.

This asymmetric distribution of flood risk management investment reflects a broader pattern in which rural areas bear disproportionate exposure to hazard impacts while receiving disproportionately low shares of development expenditure on protective infrastructure. Hidalgo-Bastidas and Boelens (2019) argue that the political construction of flood risk in coastal Ecuador, where the fixing of water overabundance as an urban problem systematically displaces risk onto rural communities whose interests are subordinated in planning and investment decisions. This political ecology of unequal development and differential vulnerability is consistent with Marks' (2018) broader argument regarding the political and economic production of disaster susceptibility.

This study defines development benefits in the context of flood risk management as encompassing: physical protective infrastructure such as bridges, drainage systems, embankments, early warning systems, access to quality education and health services, and institutional capacity for local disaster risk governance. The differential distribution of these benefits across the rural-urban continuum is posited as a primary mechanism by which developmental disparity translates into differential vulnerability.

5·3 Disaster Risk and Social Conflict

The relationship between disaster risk and social conflict is both theoretically complex and empirically contested. Galtung (1996) provides the foundational definition of conflict as the triangulation of attitudes, behaviors, and contradictions arising from a divergence of interests between individuals or groups. In this perspective, conflict is constitutive of social life. It becomes destructive when the contradictions of interest are compounded by grievances stemming from systemic inequality and perceived injustice.

Nel and Righarts (2008), in a widely cited quantitative study, find that natural disasters significantly increase the risk of violent civil conflict, particularly in low- and middle-income countries characterized by intermediate-to-high levels of inequality, mixed political regimes, and sluggish economic growth. This finding is consistent with the broader logic of the grievance amplification hypothesis: disasters that strike already unequal societies can intensify distributional conflicts over relief resources, reconstruction opportunities, and post-disaster land tenure.

Several causal pathways linking disaster to conflict have been identified in the literature. Harris, Keen, and Mitchell (2013) document the compounding effects that arise when disasters and conflicts overlap, noting that the institutional and infrastructural damage produced by conflict substantially magnifies the humanitarian consequences of subsequent disasters. The resource competition hypothesis, drawing on Homer-Dixon's environmental scarcity thesis, posits that disasters reduce the stock of available resources, such as arable land, potable water, and grazing areas, thereby intensifying competitive dynamics that may escalate into violence (Homer-Dixon,1994). The state delegitimization pathway identifies inadequate post-disaster government response as a source of popular grievance that can erode state authority and create political space for armed actors.

However, the empirical information is not uniformly supportive. Several studies, including those reviewed by Peters (2021), find no robust direct link between disaster occurrence and conflict onset in the absence of pre-existing structural conditions, including high inequality, weak governance, and entrenched political exclusion. This suggests that disaster functions not as an independent cause of conflict but as an amplifier of pre-existing structural tensions. This literature shows that developmental disparity is the foundational driver within the nexus.

5·4 Inequality as the Common Root

Across the three bilateral relationships, such as development-disaster, development-conflict, and disaster-conflict, inequality emerges as the structural condition that gives each its character and intensity. Development disparity is not simply one variable among many but the constitutive context within which both disaster risk vulnerability and social conflict are produced.

Ryder (2017) establishes, through an intersectional environmental justice framework, that the compounding of social vulnerabilities along lines of gender, race, class, and geography is a systematic feature of capitalist development, not an incidental deviation from its logic. Wisner *et al*. (2004) similarly locate the root causes of vulnerability in macro-level forces, including limited access to power, structures, and resources, which produce long historical processes of uneven development. From this perspective, policies that address disaster risk without addressing the developmental inequalities that produce it are structurally insufficient, however technically sophisticated.

6. Discussion: Toward an Integrated Theoretical Framework

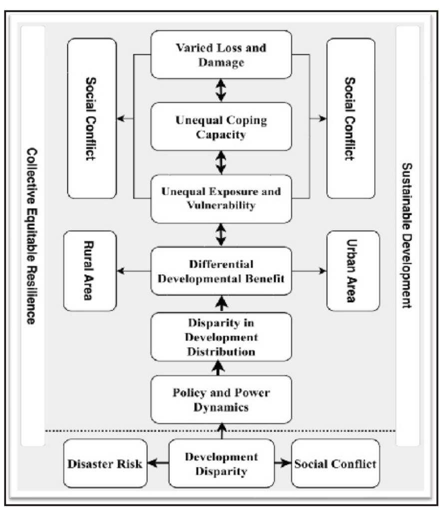
6·1 Reconceptualizing Vulnerability as a Developmental Construct

This reconceptualization draws on Cuny's (1994) foundational argument that vulnerability is fundamentally a development question: the conditions of susceptibility and limited coping capacity that define disaster-prone populations are produced by the same economic and institutional arrangements that produce underdevelopment. It extends this argument, however, by specifying the mechanisms more precisely. It is not simply the level of development but its distribution and institutional quality, as reflected in distributive equity, governance transparency, and hazard-specific preparedness investment, that determine how vulnerability is differentially produced across populations.

6·2 The Developmental Production of Vulnerability and Social Conflict: A Proposed Framework

This paper proposes the Developmental Production of Vulnerability (DPVC) model to examine the disaster-development-conflict nexus shown in theFigure-1 on next page.

Figure-1: A Theoretical Framework proposed for DPVC



Note: The framework proposed and constructed by the author based on the theoretical ground of (Blaikie *et al*.,1994; Wisner *et al*., 2004, and Thomalla, 2018).

This model has following four analytical layers.

The *first layer* comprises the structural conditions of developmental disparity, such as unequal infrastructure investment, differential access to social services, and biased public expenditure patterns, particularly as they manifest along the rural-urban continuum. These conditions constitute the root causes of compounded vulnerability, as identified by Blaikie *et al*. (1994), with explicit attention to the role of government allocation decisions rather than to market forces alone.

The *second layer* encompasses the arbitrating mechanisms that translate structural disparities into differential disaster risk, including the absence of protective infrastructure, limited institutional capacity for early warning and emergency response, restricted access to health services that would otherwise reduce post-disaster loss and damage, and the social exclusion of marginalized communities from risk governance processes.

The *third layer* addresses the conflict dimension. When the mediating mechanisms of the second layer are at work, and disasters actualize the structural vulnerability that they have produced, the distribution of post-disaster relief and reconstruction resources becomes a potential site of controversy. If this distribution reproduces or intensifies existing inequalities, the grievances that fuel social conflict are not only maintained but also intensified. As a result, social conflict further erodes institutional capacity and infrastructure, deepening the structural conditions that generate vulnerability.

The *fourth layer* comprises the model's normative and policy dimensions. Boyland *et al*. (2019), following Thomalla *et al*. (2018), identify three transformative opportunities to break the development-disaster risk cycle, namely exposing development-disaster trade-offs in policy and decision-making, prioritizing equity and social justice in resilience approaches, and enabling transformation through adaptive governance. The DPVC model endorses these opportunities and situates them within a conflict-sensitive analytical framework, arguing that interventions that fail to address distributional inequities will not only be insufficient for disaster risk reduction but may also actively contribute to social tension.

6·3 Epistemological Implications

The proposed framework has implications not only for substantive theory but also for the epistemological orientation of disaster studies. The debate between objectivist and social constructivist approaches has been productive in directing attention to the social production of vulnerability. However, it has sometimes been carried so far that the material reality of hazard processes is underemphasized. The DPVC model requires a methodology that can accommodate both the physical dynamics of hazardous events and the social, institutional, and developmental processes that determine their human consequences.

A constructivist approach with a hybrid methodology is advocated as methodologically consistent with the theoretical position advanced here (Chatora, 2012; Stallings, 2003). Larger N and cross-country analyses provide important evidence on the structural correlates of vulnerability and conflict risk (Nel & Righarts, 2008; Ferrant, 2015), but subnational, community-level, and small-N case-study research is also essential for tracing the precise mechanisms through which affected populations experience developmental disparity.

6·4 Research Gaps and Critical Reflections

Several significant gaps in the existing literature have been identified in this review. *First*, theoretical and empirical attention to the subnational and local dimensions of the development-disaster-conflict nexus remains limited. Most large quantitative studies operate at the country level and therefore cannot capture the intra-national distributional dynamics that this framework identifies as central.

Second, the role of gender and intersecting social identities in the developmental production of vulnerability is undertheorized. Although the literature acknowledges that women, disabled persons, ethnic minorities, and other marginalized groups face compounded vulnerability, the mechanisms by which gender-differentiated development outcomes translate into differential disaster risk remain inadequately specified. Matin *et al*. (2018) make a compelling case for equity as the core of resilience thinking, but operationalizing this commitment requires a more theoretically explicit treatment of intersecting vulnerabilities.

Third, the Western intellectual genealogy of much vulnerability and disaster theory raises concerns for scholars and practitioners working in non-Western contexts, including Nepal and other South Asian countries. The global frameworks for disaster risk reduction, such as the Sendai Framework and the Sustainable Development Goals, also reflect normative agendas shaped substantially by international institutional actors, whose development prescriptions are not always aligned with local understandings of risk, resilience, and well-being. The DPVC model is intended to apply to the Nepali context, where rural-urban disparities in flood-risk infrastructure, access to health services, and governance quality are pronounced, and where the institutional conditions for the developmental production of vulnerability are clearly present.

Taken together, these gaps highlight the need for a more context-sensitive, multi-scalar, and intersectional understanding of the development–disaster–conflict nexus. Future research should move beyond aggregate national analyses to examine how uneven development processes operate across localities and social groups, producing differentiated patterns of vulnerability and conflict. Greater attention is also needed to gendered and intersecting forms of disadvantage, as well as to locally grounded conceptions of risk, resilience, and well-being in non-Western settings. By integrating developmental disparities, governance structures, and social vulnerability within a single analytical framework, the DPVC model provides a foundation for addressing these gaps and offers a promising agenda for both theoretical advancement and empirical investigation.

7. Conclusion

This article has mapped the theoretical landscape of the disaster-development-conflict nexus and argued for reconceptualizing vulnerability, placing developmental disparity at its analytical center. Three principal conclusions emerge.

First, vulnerability is not simply a social condition produced by the abstract poverty and marginalization, but rather a developmental condition shaped by specific patterns of governance performance, public investment, and the allocation of development benefits. The uneven distribution of hazard-specific risk management infrastructure, health services, and institutional capacity along the rural-urban continuum is a primary mechanism through which governmental decisions translate structural inequality into differential disaster risk.

Second, the disaster-development relationship cannot be adequately theorized without simultaneous attention to the conflict dimension. When disasters strike highly unequal societies, the distribution of post-disaster resources becomes contested, reproducing existing inequalities; grievances are amplified, and institutional capacity is already weakened by prior developmental neglect, increasing the risk of social conflict escalation. The three phenomena of disaster risk, underdevelopment, and social conflict are not parallel processes to be studied in separate analytical silos; rather, they are components of a mutually reinforcing system.

Third, the epistemological debate between objectivist and constructivist approaches to disaster is most productively resolved not by choosing sides but by developing hybrid analytical frameworks that acknowledge both the material reality of hazard processes and the institutionally, socially, and developmentally constructed nature of their human consequences. The DPVC model proposed here contributes to such a framework.

Future research should empirically test the DPVC model at subnational scales, with particular attention to the Nepali context, where rural-urban development disparities and compounded disaster-conflict risks are clearly evident. Such investigations would help assess the explanatory power of the model across different socio-economic, geographic, and governance settings. Methodologically, hybrid approaches that combine quantitative analysis of development expenditure patterns with qualitative investigation of community-level experiences of vulnerability are recommended. Theoretically, greater attention to intersectionality and non-Western epistemologies of risk and resilience would substantially strengthen the analytical foundations of this emerging field. Addressing these priorities would not only refine the DPVC model but also contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how development processes shape disaster risk, vulnerability, and social conflict across diverse contexts. Furthermore, comparative and longitudinal studies are essential to capture the dynamic interactions between development trajectories, disaster impacts, and conflict processes over time. Such research can generate more nuanced policy insights and support the design of inclusive, risk-informed development strategies that strengthen resilience while reducing structural inequalities and conflict potential.

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Born into Hierarchy: Understanding Psychological Architecture of Caste Introducing Hierarchical Imprint Model of Caste Psychology (HIM-CP)

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Abstract

The Indian caste system is among the most psychologically complex social hierarchies in human history. Despite its scale and longevity, systematic psychological analysis of how caste is perceived, why it persists, and what it does to the mind remains underdeveloped. This paper addresses that gap in three stages: first, examining caste perception through social dominance and system justification frameworks, second, analyzing its structural and psychological causes, including socialization, cognitive essentialism, identity binding practices such as caste prescribed marriages, and institutional entrenchment, and surveying its consequences for stigmatized groups, dominant groups, and society at large. The paper's central theoretical contribution is the Hierarchical Imprint Model of Caste Psychology (HIM-CP), a five-level integrative framework that maps how caste leaves enduring psychological marks across macro ideological, institutional, intergroup, interpersonal, and intrapsychic dimensions. Implications for research, clinical practice, and social policy are discussed.

Keywords

Caste system, System justification, Hierarchical Imprint Model of Caste Psychology (HIM-CP), Social identity Theory, Indian psychology.

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1. Introduction

The caste system in India is not a relic of the past. It is a living psychological structure shaping the cognitive worlds, emotional lives, and life chances of countless individuals across the entire subcontinent. Caste determines who may eat with whom, who may marry whom, and who may aspire to which lifestyle, enforced not only through law and social sanction but, more durably, through its internalization into the self concept itself.

The psychological literature on caste,while growing, remains lean relative to the phenomenon's scale and depth. Indian social psychology has engaged with caste, but often by importing Western frameworks without adequate cultural adaptation (Misra & Gergen, 1993). This paper offers a systematic psychological analysis organized around three questions: How is caste perceived? What causes it to persist? And what are its psychological consequences?

Beyond systematizing existing literature, this paper introduces the Hierarchical Imprint Model of Caste Psychology (HIM-CP), a five-level framework integrating macro-ideological, institutional, intergroup, interpersonal, and intrapsychic dimensions of caste psychology. The name reflects the model's core insight which is that caste does not merely constrain from outside but imprints itself at every level of psychological life, leaving marks that persist even when structural conditions demand change. The model is designed as a heuristic for empirical research and a conceptual basis for clinical and policy intervention.

2. Perception of the Caste System

2·1 Dominant-Caste Perception

Two theoretical traditions anchor the psychology of how dominant groups perceive hierarchy. Social Dominance Theory (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999) identifies Social Dominance Orientation (SDO), the degree to which individuals endorse group-based hierarchy as a key predictor of prejudice. Research in India has found elevated SDO among upper-caste respondents, associated with active endorsement of legitimizing myths that frame the social order as meritocratic or divinely ordained (Mahalingam, 2003).

System Justification Theory (Jost & Banaji, 1994) similarly demonstrates that dominant groups tend to perceive existing hierarchies as natural and fair rather than arbitrary or unjust.

In the Indian context, the primary legitimizing myth is the dharmic framework encoded in texts such as Manu Smriti, which assigns ritual duty according to birth-caste and frames hierarchy as cosmic order (Dumont, 1970). Importantly, while explicit endorsement of caste has declined in urban populations, implicit bias persists. Deshpande (2011) documented that identical CVs were evaluated more favorably when assigned upper-caste names, paralleling findings on race-based discrimination in Western contexts (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004). Caste perception, in other words, operates partly through automatic cognitive processes that are resistant to conscious override.

2·2 Lower-Caste and Stigmatized Group Perception

System Justification Theory makes a counterintuitive prediction. Members of low-status groups often endorse the very system that disadvantages them, because doing so reduces the distress of perceiving oneself as a victim of injustice (Jost *et al.*, 2003). Mahalingam (2003) found that lower-caste individuals frequently endorsed the belief that caste differences are natural and unchangeable, more strongly than their social position might suggest. When inequality is seen as natural, it stops feeling like injustice, which is the psychological shift that reduces the pressure to resist it.

Yet powerful counterforces exist. The Dalit social movement, Ambedkar's intellectual legacy, and caste based political mobilization have created conditions for the development of critical consciousness which recognizes systemic inequality as structurally produced rather than naturally given (Watts *et al.*, 2011). This tension between system justification and critical consciousness is not resolved at once but continuously navigated, and its outcome shapes whether caste identity becomes a source of shame or collective pride (Omvedt, 2006).

2·3 Institutional and Cross Cultural Perception

Caste perception is also embedded in institutional frameworks. The Indian state's relationship to caste is structurally ambivalent: it prohibits caste discrimination while simultaneously requiring caste identification for the implementation of reservation policies. This ambivalence shapes perception at every level of institutional life. Comparatively, Wilkerson (2020) has drawn parallels between Indian caste and racial stratification in the United States, identifying both as instances of birth-assigned, immutable hierarchical ranking. Though the cultural specificity of each system must be preserved (Gupta, 2000), such comparisons open productive lines of cross-cultural inquiry into the shared psychological mechanisms through which birth-based hierarchy is maintained.

3. Causes of Caste Persistence

3·1 Historical and Structural Foundations

Caste is not a purely psychological phenomenon. It is the layered outcome of millennia of social, legal, religious, and economic organization. The varna system, described in the Rigveda as originating from the body of the primordial being Purusha, assigned the four varnas to cosmically ordered functions. Those who came to be known as Dalits were excluded from this fourfold framework altogether and consigned to occupations considered ritually impure, a positioning that encoded social exclusion as sacred law (Dumont, 1970). Colonial administration paradoxically deepened this structure as the British census making hardened previously more fluid caste boundaries into fixed administrative categories that outlasted colonial rule and continue to organize state resource distribution today (Dirks, 2001).

3·2 Psychological Pathways of Caste Transmission

3·2·1 Socialization and Early Identity Formation

Children acquire caste identity before they can critically examine it through surnames, dietary customs, ritual observances, and the hierarchies of domestic space. Developmental research suggests social categorization begins as early as ages three to five (Aboud, 1988), meaning caste is encoded as natural social knowledge in the pre-reflective period. Lower-caste parents engage in what Thorat and Newman (2010) call protective socialization, teaching children to navigate dominant caste spaces through deference and concealment. While this is a survival strategy, it quietly communicates to the child that their identity must be hidden to stay safe, a message that can chip away at self esteem and makes it harder to develop a secure, integrated sense of who they are.

3·2·2 Cognitive Anchoring and Essentialist Belief

Psychological essentialism, the tendency to perceive social categories as reflecting underlying natural essences (Medin & Ortony, 1989) functions as a cognitive anchor that makes caste hierarchy feel fixed and unalterable. Mahalingam (2003) demonstrated that essentialist caste beliefs make hierarchy appear inevitable. If caste differences are rooted in nature, no social policy or political effort can undo them. These beliefs are reinforced through ritual practice. The purity and pollution framework gives caste ideology a bodily reality where people physically experience certain bodies, spaces, and objects as contaminating. Haidt's (2012) research on disgust based moral cognition helps explain why beliefs rooted in bodily feeling are especially resistant to rational challenge.

3·2·3 Institutional Entrenchment

Caste is reproduced through the everyday practices of institutions like schools, workplaces, temples, families without requiring any conscious belief in caste ideology. Bourdieu's (1977) concept of habitus is useful here. Caste habitus describes the set of social habits, perceptions, and responses that people absorb simply by growing up and living within caste ordered environments, and which they then enact without reflection. When a child is treated differently at school based on caste, no one needs to teach that child a lesson about hierarchy because it is already written into the experience itself. This is how caste reproduces itself quietly, beneath the threshold of deliberate action.

3·3 Identity-Binding through Caste-Prescribed Marriage

B. R. Ambedkar (1936) argued that restricting marriage within one's caste is the key way caste boundaries are preserved across generations. By linking close relationships to caste, it turns caste into both a social and biological group, strengthening ingroup loyalty and dividing groups further (Moon, 2016). Psychologically, this increases caste identity and pressure against inter-caste relationships. Enforced through family control, social monitoring, and sometimes honor-based violence, it limits personal freedom and harms individual wellbeing (Guru, 2009; Rao, 2009).

4. Psychological Consequences of Caste

4·1 Consequences for Stigmatized Groups

4·1·1 Chronic Stress and Allostatic Load

Sustained caste based discrimination accumulates into measurable physical and psychological harm. McEwen and Stellar's (1993) concept of allostatic load, the cumulative biological cost of chronic stress provides a useful lens for understanding caste's somatic consequences, including elevated stress hormones, weakened immunity, and increased cardiovascular risk. While direct psychobiological research on caste based stress in India is still emerging, studies from analogous discrimination contexts document links between chronic discrimination experiences and physiological deterioration (Brondolo *et al.*, 2009). Within India, Thorat and Kumar (2008) documented that Dalit communities report dis-proportionately high rates of psychological distress, including anxiety and depressive symptoms, directly linked to experiences of discrimination and social exclusion. Additionally, the labour of concealing one's caste identity in professional and social settings constitutes its own invisible burden. Research demonstrates that actively hiding a stigmatized identity is cognitively draining and emotionally costly over time (Slepian *et al.*, 2017).

4·1·2 Stereotype Threat and Impaired Aspiration

Steele and Aronson's (1995) concept of stereotype threat, the performance impairment that arises when individuals fear confirming a negative stereotype about their group, which operates directly in the caste context. Hoff and Pandey (2006) provided experimental evidence specific to India that when caste was made salient, Dalit students performed significantly worse on cognitive tasks than in caste neutral conditions, while upper-caste students showed no effect. Appadurai (2004) described the capacity to aspire as a cultural resource, the ability to envision possible futures and move toward them and argued that chronic deprivation and exclusion systematically weaken this capacity among marginalized communities. Thorat and Newman (2010) further documented how caste based barriers in education and employment lead many lower-caste individuals to internalize restricted expectations for themselves, treating ceilings imposed from outside as limits that come from within.

4·1·3 Identity Threat and Collective Response

Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) identifies three responses to identity threat, which are: 1) individual mobility, which involves trying to leave or distance oneself from the stigmatized group, 2) social creativity, which means finding new ways to value one's identity and 3) social competition, which involves directly confronting the hierarchy. All three are visible in caste contexts. Dalit pride movements like the Dalit Panthers, Ambedkarite political organizations, and Dalit literature and art represent collective efforts to redefine what it means to be Dalit, turning a historically stigmatized identity into a source of dignity, solidarity, and resistance (Rawat & Satyanarayana, 2013).

4·2 Consequences for Dominant-Caste Groups

Hierarchy also shapes the psychology of those who benefit from it, though differently. Bandura's (1999) moral disengagement describes the cognitive strategies people use to detach themselves from the ethical weight of benefitting from unjust systems, strategies such as moral justification, displacing responsibility onto fate or karma, or gradually reducing the perceived humanity of those at the bottom of the hierarchy. All three are observable in dominant caste psychology. Furthermore, dominant caste individuals who hold formally egalitarian values while continuing to benefit from structural privilege are caught in a state of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957). Rather than resolving this tension by questioning their privilege, many instead manage it through denial which may help explain the intensity of resistance that often characterizes dominant caste responses to anti caste political movements.

4·3 Societal-Level Consequences

At the macro level, caste produces measurable costs to human development and democratic life. Thorat and Madheswaran (2018) documented the economic costs of birth-based occupational sorting, where talent and opportunity are systematically mismatched, constituting a drag on national productivity. At the level of social cohesion, the strong ingroup trust and deep out group suspicion that caste enforces undermine the conditions necessary for collective civic life. Banerjee and Somanathan (2007) found that caste fragmentation in Indian villages was associated with lower provision of public goods, linking the psychological architecture of caste identity to concrete deficits in democratic governance.

5. Theoretical Contribution: The Hierarchical Imprint Model of Caste Psychology (HIM-CP)

Existing frameworks like Social Identity Theory, minority stress models, system justification theory, each illuminate important dimensions of caste psychology. None, however, provides a unified framework integrating the multiple levels at which caste operates psychologically, from macro ideological formations down to the inner life of the individual. The HIM-CP fills this gap. The name captures the model's central premise: caste does not merely operate as an external constraint but imprints itself hierarchically across every layer of psychological experience, and these imprints are mutually reinforcing.

- **Level 1: Sacred-Ideological**

At the broadest level, caste is sustained by sacred ideology, a system of beliefs about divine and natural order that assigns every person a birth determined place in a hierarchy of ritual purity. This ideology is encoded in religious texts, ritual practices, and cultural narratives that have been reproduced over centuries. Caste is framed not as social convention but as cosmic necessity. Terror management theory (Greenberg *et al.*, 1986) offers an account of why this is so effective because beliefs that locate individuals within a meaningful, ordered cosmos buffer the anxiety that comes with awareness of one's own vulnerability and mortality. This explains why even those disadvantaged by caste ideology may resist its dismantling , the framework, however oppressive, provides existential security. Intervention at this level requires what Freire (1970) called conscientization, developing the critical awareness that ideology is historically made, not divinely given. Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism in 1956 represents the most historically significant example of this kind of ideological substitution in the Indian context, deliberately replacing a hierarchy-grounded worldview with one organized around equality and human dignity.

⏩ Level 2: Institutional-Normative

At the institutional level, caste is transmitted through the routine practices of schools, workplaces, legal systems, religious organizations, and families often without any explicit statement of caste ideology. Bourdieu's (1977) concept of institutional habitus captures this mechanism. Institutions enact caste not because their members consciously endorse it but because their practices have been shaped by it over time. When a child experiences caste differentiated treatment at school, no formal lesson is given but the lesson arrives through the experience itself, absorbed quietly into the child's understanding of how the world works and where they belong within it. Intervention at this level requires deliberate institutional redesign: enforcing anti discrimination norms, mandating diverse representation, and building institutional cultures that name and actively challenge caste differentiated treatment.

⏩ Level 3: Intergroup-Relational

At the intergroup level, caste operates through the in group and out group dynamics described by Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) where in group favoritism, out group derogation, and status based social comparison are all structured by the asymmetries of caste hierarchy. A feature not adequately captured by standard SIT is what the HIM-CP model terms as graded deference where lower ranking groups are expected not merely to avoid higher ranking groups but to actively perform submission and deference in everyday interactional contexts. The psychological cost of repeatedly enacting one's own subordination across a lifetime of encounters is a significant, undertheorized dimension of caste psychology that warrants dedicated empirical attention.

⏩ Level 4: Interpersonal-Behavioral

At the interpersonal level, caste is enacted through the behavioral routines of daily interaction like who initiates greetings, who yields physical space, who uses formal or informal address, who may share food and how. These everyday practices are the most embodied expressions of caste ideology, operating largely below the level of conscious intent. Goffman's (1963) stigma management framework is directly applicable where lower caste individuals engage in continuous, effortful management of their self presentation in caste marked interactions, a process that constitutes a chronic cognitive and emotional burden. This level is also the site of caste based microaggressions, subtle, often unintentional communications of devaluation that accumulate across encounters to produce distinct psychological harm (Sue *et al.*, 2007). Because microaggressive harm builds gradually rather than through discrete events, addressing it requires both individual level coping skill development and broader institutional cultural change that reduces the frequency of such encounters in the first place.

⏩ Level 5: Intrapsychic-Self Representational

At the deepest level, caste shapes the internal models of self through which individuals experience and navigate the world. This is the level of internalized casteism, the process by which caste ideology is absorbed into the self concept such that the dominant group's evaluations become one's own judgments about oneself. Caste stops feeling like something imposed from outside and begins to feel like a truth about who one is and expressed as shame, unworthiness, or inadequacy in lower caste individuals, and as entitlement or superiority in upper caste ones. Self-verification theory (Swann, 1987) explains why these self-representations are so durable. People are motivated to maintain self concepts that feel consistent and familiar, even negative ones. For lower-caste individuals who have internalized negative self images rooted in caste, affirmation and opportunity may feel threatening rather than liberating, because they contradict an identity that has become deeply familiar. This is why changing material conditions alone is not enough but inner representations of self must be deliberately transformed alongside external structures.

⏩ Inter-Level Dynamics and Research Implications

The five levels of the HIM-CP are mutually reinforcing. Sacred ideology (Level 1) shapes institutional practices (Level 2), which structure intergroup cognitions (Level 3), which pattern interpersonal behavior (Level 4), which are absorbed as self-representations (Level 5) and those self representations, in turn, provide the experiential ground from which sacred ideology feels true and necessary. This is the engine of caste's durability. No single level sustains the system alone, and no single level intervention can dismantle it, because the remaining levels continue generating the conditions for its renewal.

For empirical research, the HIM-CP implies that studies should specify which level they are examining and attend to how levels interact. Validated measurement tools are needed across all five: scales for sacred legitimizing beliefs (Level 1), measures of institutional normalization (Level 2), assessments of intergroup bias and deference norms (Level 3), instruments capturing microaggression frequency and impact (Level 4), and scales measuring internalized casteism (Level 5). For clinical work, treatment must be calibrated to the levels most salient in the client's experience like cognitive and narrative interventions for inner self-representations (Level 5), ideological counter narrative work for Level 1 imprints, and skill building for navigating microaggressive encounters at Level 4 while recognizing that the most durable outcomes will require coordinated change at multiple levels simultaneously.

6. Discussion

6·1 Towards an Indigenous Psychology of Caste

A persistent limitation of caste psychology research is its reliance on frameworks developed in Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic (WEIRD) contexts (Henrich *et al.*, 2010). Social Identity Theory, System Justification Theory, and the Minority Stress Model provide useful conceptual tools, but each requires significant adaptation to address the caste system's distinctive features like its cosmological legitimization of hierarchy, the ritually embodied character of pollution, the role of caste-prescribed marriage in boundary maintenance, and the specific phenomenology of untouchability. The development of a genuinely indigenous psychology of caste drawing on the intellectual tradition running from Phule to Ambedkar to Periyar requires not only culturally validated instruments but the inclusion of Dalit scholars as producers, not merely subjects, of psychological knowledge.

6·2 Policy Implications

Reservation policies in education and employment operate primarily at Levels 2 and 3 of the HIM-CP restructuring institutional opportunity and altering intergroup composition. These are necessary interventions, but insufficient on their own. Without attending to Level 5 self representations, structural inclusion may not translate into psychological empowerment. Without disrupting Level 1 ideological formations, social resistance to reservation policies will continue to be generated from within the belief system that makes hierarchy feel sacred and deserved. Educational curriculum reform that incorporates accurate histories of caste oppression and exposes students to the anti caste intellectual tradition represents an underutilized lever for Level 1 intervention. Workplace and institutional diversity programs should extend their scope beyond demographic representation to directly address Level 4 microaggression dynamics and Level 2 normalization processes.

7. Conclusion

Caste is one of the most psychologically consequential social structures ever devised. It does not merely sort people into groups but it reaches into the deepest layers of human experience, shaping how individuals see themselves, relate to others, aspire, suffer, and endure. On perception, the evidence is clear that caste is maintained not only through external enforcement but through the cognitive distortions of social dominance orientation, system justification, and essentialist belief, distortions that make hierarchy feel natural to those at the top and inevitable to those at the bottom. On persistence, the paper identified a convergence of historical structural forces, psychological mechanisms of socialization and cognitive anchoring, institutional entrenchment, and identity-binding through caste-prescribed marriage, each reinforcing the others in a system that is self-sustaining at multiple levels simultaneously. On consequences, the toll includes chronic physiological stress, impaired aspiration, stereotype threat, identity distortion, moral disengagement, and democratic deficits that reach far beyond the individual.

Against this backdrop, the Hierarchical Imprint Model of Caste Psychology (HIM-CP) offers a theoretical architecture, a system of mutually reinforcing imprints operating simultaneously across the sacred, the institutional, the intergroup, the interpersonal, and the intrapsychic. This means that interventions which address only one level, whether legal reform, affirmative action, or individual therapy will remain partial. The HIM-CP is offered not as a finished theory but as an invitation to researchers and policy makers to develop the measurement tools, researches and interventions that each level demands.

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Inter-District Analysis of Indebtedness among Non-Farm Households in Rural Punjab

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Abstract

The present paper examines the extent of indebtedness among non-farm workers in rural Punjab. The study reveals that 34.14 per cent of total sampled households are indebted. The incidence of indebtedness is the highest in district Bathinda and the lowest in district Gurdaspur. 33.51 per cent of total loans is raised for productive purposes while 66.49 per cent is raised for non-productive purposes. Among non-productive purposes, the highest amount is raised for domestic needs, followed by house construction, the addition of rooms and major repairs, marriages and social ceremonies and then by healthcare. The share of institutional sources in total loans is 55.64 per cent. Among the institutional sources, the share of the commercial banks is the highest in the total loans while under the non-institutional sources, the highest proportion is contributed by the relatives and friends. About 90 per cent of the total loan taken by the sampled households is raised at an interest rate below 14 per cent.

Keywords

Non-farm households, Debt, Purpose, Sources, Rate of interest.

JEL Codes: C81, D14, E43, G21, G23

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Inter-District Analysis of Indebtedness among Non-Farm Households in Rural Punjab

1. Introduction

The rural non-farm sector plays an important role in the development of rural areas in Asia and Pacific region. But rural non-farm activities are not a substitute for employment in agriculture but a supplementary measure (Mukhopadhyay *et al*., 2008). A diversified portfolio income-generating activities is a sure way to minimize income variability and to ensure a minimum level of income (Osarfo *et al*. 2016). The non-farm activities in India got a major boost in the post reforms period both in terms of employment generation and overall growth of the sector (Das *et al*. 2020). The development of non-farm activities is an important adaptive strategy in rural areas to increase family income, spread risk, stable salaries, reduce income inequalities to cope the income differentials and give them security of control over productive resources (Subramanian, 2017). The development of rural non-farm activities is generally viewed as an alternative less costly policy option for providing gainful employment to rural labour (Sidhu and Singh, 2015).

The labour absorption capacity of the farming sector is declining and the problem of unemployment is rising in rural areas of Punjab (Anonymous, 2013). In order to remove the problems of rural unemployment and poverty, the growth of the non-farm sector is the need of the time. The policymakers also focus on is the sector to remove poverty and inequality through the growth of rural income. But all the non-farm activities do not lead to similar economic outcomes. A good number of them are related to low-paid and irregular jobs while on the other hand, non-farm employment in services is inaccessible low-skilled, less-educated rural masses. This sector occupies a special position for generating alternative employment opportunities outside the farm sector. Whereas its contribution to employment is non-debatable but its performance in terms of income generation is considered to be far from impressive (Bhalla, 2006). The rising non-agricultural incomes can also increase inequality as a consequence of differential access between the less and better-endowed (Coppard, 2001).

The labour force is shifting from agriculture to the non-farm sector in search of new and better work opportunities in rural Punjab (Kaur, 2013). The diversification to the non-farm sector leads to higher income, but the resultant increase is very small. Thus, the transition of rural households from farm to non-farm-sector activities is a very weak strategy in agriculturally developed state of Punjab (Kapoor and Kapoor, 2021). The living conditions of non-farm households are very vulnerable in rural Punjab. The presence of indebtedness in rural areas is a general phenomenon. It is generally due to irregular or low level of income which is equally true for the farm as well as non-farm workers. The agrarian crisis that rampaged through rural India for the past few years has clearly been related to the rising burden of indebtedness among rural households (Sandhu and Toor, 2020). Since most of the rural non-farm workers belong to the informal sector, therefore their access to formal credit system is also inadequate to meet their needs. Low bargaining strength and hence low income of majority of the rural non-farm workers further aggravates their condition. So, this paper is an attempt to examine the extent, sources and purposes of debt among non-farm workers in rural Punjab.

2. Methodology

For the purpose this study, the whole state has been divided into three agro-climatic regions on the basis of climate, type of soil, cropping pattern, culture of land tenure and farming communities etc. These regions are South-West Region, Central Plains Region and Shivalik Foothills Region. The South-West Region comprises of Bathinda, Mansa, Ferozepur, Fazilka, Faridkot, Muktsar and Moga districts. The Central Plains Region constitutes Patiala, Fatehgarh Sahib, Sangrur, Amritsar, Kapurthala, Jalandhar, Nawanshahr, Tarn Taran and Ludhiana districts. The Shivalik Foothills Region comprises of Hoshiarpur, Pathankot, Gurdaspur, Mohali and Ropar districts. At the first stage, one district from each region has been chosen randomly. Bathinda district from the South-West Region; Jalandhar district from the Central Plains Region; and Gurdaspur district from the Shivalik Foothills Region have been selected for the purpose of present study. One village has been chosen randomly from each development block of the selected district. There are thirty development blocks in the selected three districts. Thus, in all, thirty villages have been selected from the three districts. Eight villages from the Bathinda district, eleven villages from the Jalandhar district and eleven villages from the Gurdaspur district have been selected. Taking into consideration the number of variables, the number of households with positive responses and degrees of freedom in the form of time and resources, 659 households were selected from the three districts for the purpose of survey. Out of the total selected 659 households, 238 households have been selected from Bathinda district, 238 households from the Jalandhar district and 183 households from the Gurdaspur district.

3. Results and Discussion

3·1 Incidence of Indebtedness

An overview of the incidence of indebtedness among the sampled rural non-farm workers along with their average amount of debt is presented in Table-1. The table shows that out of total sampled households, 34.14 per cent are indebted. The incidence of indebtedness is the highest in district Bathinda and the lowest in district Gurdaspur as we can see from the table that 43.28 per cent of the sampled rural non-farm households in district Bathinda are indebted while this ratio is only 19.67 per cent in district Gurdaspur and 36.13 per cent in district Jalandhar. The another study by Sahu (2018) also found that 52 per cent of households in the country were indebted in rural areas.

Table-1: Incidence of Indebtedness and the Average Amount of Debt among Rural Non-Farm Households

District	No. of Households		Indebted Households as Percentage of Sampled Households	Average Amount of Debt (in ₹) (Per Indebted Household)
	Sampled	Indebted		
Gurdaspur	183	36	19.67	179722
Jalandhar	238	86	36.13	118880
Bathinda	238	103	43.28	160453
All Sampled Households	659	225	34.14	147646

Source: Field Survey, 2016-17.

Further, it can be observed that the average amount of debt among the sampled non-farm households is ₹1,47,646 per indebted household. Though district Gurdaspur has the lowest incidence of indebtedness but it has the highest amount of debt per indebted household. An indebted non-farm household in this district has an average debt burden of ₹ 1,79,722 as compared to ₹1,60,453 in district Bathinda and ₹1,18,880 in district Jalandhar.

3·2 Indebtedness according to the Purpose of Loans

Looking at the indebtedness by the purpose of the loan gives a fair idea about how the loan is being used and whether the borrower would be able to pay it back. A higher ratio of productive loans to that of non-productive loan indicates that the nature of the debt may not be very critical while a lower ratio shows a miserable position of the borrowers (Deshpande *et al.*, 2001). In the case of current survey, it can be observed from Table-2 that for the sampled non-farm households, the amount of productive loans is just half of the non-productive loans. An average household in the rural non-farm sector of Punjab has been found to have taken a loan of ₹49,486. for productive purposes and ₹98,160 for the non-productive purposes. Out of the productive purposes the major amount is taken for non-farm business which has been found to be ₹41,728 while ₹7,334 are taken for agriculture and only ₹424 for purchase of livestock. On the other hand, in the category of non-productive purposes, the major amount has been raised for meeting the domestic needs, followed by house construction and major repairs, marriages and other social ceremonies and health care. Another ₹7,938 and ₹6,364 has been borrowed for purchase of durables and education, respectively.

Table-2: Per Household Debt according to Purpose

(Mean Values, In ₹)

Sl. No.	Purpose	Gurdaspur	Jalandhar	Bathinda	All Sampled Households
1.	Agriculture	41667 (23.18)	–	1456 (0.91)	7334 (4.97)
2.	For non-farm business	17125 (9.53)	27852 (23.42)	61913 (38.59)	41728 (28.26)
3.	To purchase of livestock	–	–	927 (0.58)	424 (0.29)
Total Productive Purposes (1-3)		**58792 (32.71)**	**27852 (23.42)**	**64296 (40.07)**	**49486 (33.51)**
4.	Marriages and other socio-religious ceremonies	15278 (8.50)	6628 (5.58)	18087 (11.27)	13258 (8.98)
5.	House construction, addition of rooms and major repairs	21667 (12.06)	25907 (21.79)	16223 (10.11)	20796 (14.08)
6.	Domestic needs	50097 (27.87)	26481 (22.28)	32934 (20.53)	33214 (22.50)
7.	Healthcare	25000 (13.91)	5302 (4.46)	14107 (8.79)	12484 (8.46)
8.	To purchase durables	6111 (3.40)	3221 (2.71)	12515 (7.80)	7938 (5.38)
9.	Education	2777 (1.55)	15488 (13.03)	–	6364 (4.31)
10.	To purchase land	–	5233 (4.40)	–	2000 (1.35)
11.	Repayment of loan	–	1512 (1.27)	2291 (1.43)	1626 (1.10)

12.	For sending Children Abroad	–	1256 (1.06)	–	480 (0.33)
Total Non-productive Purposes (4-12)		**120930 (67.29)**	**91028 (76.58)**	**96157 (59.93)**	**98160 (66.49)**
Total		**179722**	**118880**	**160453**	**147646**
Ratio of Productive to non-productive loan		**0.49**	**0.31**	**0.67**	**0.50**

Source: Field Survey, 2016-17

Note: Figures in brackets are column-wise percentages.

In the district-wise analysis the highest amount of debt per indebted household has been recorded in district Gurdaspur, followed by district Bathinda while the sampled households in district Jalandhar have registered the lowest amount of debt per indebted household. In each of the district, the amount of loan for productive purposes is lower than that of the non-productive purposes. The table shows that ₹58,729, ₹27,852 and ₹64,296 were taken for productive purposes and ₹1,20,930, ₹91,028 and ₹96,158 were taken for non-productive purposes in district Gurdaspur, Jalandhar and Bathinda, respectively. As a result, the ratio of productive to non-productive loans in these districts has been found to be 0.49, 0.31 and 0.67. Although the amount of productive as well as non-productive loan is the lowest in district Jalandhar but this district also has the lowest ratio of productive to non-productive loan. Actually, the sampled households in this district have taken loan for non-farm business only. On the other hand, in district Gurdaspur, a greater amount of loan has been taken for agriculture than for the non-farm business. In Bathinda district, the debt for non-farm business is the highest among all the sampled districts. It amounts to ₹61,913 as compared to ₹27,852 in district Jalandhar and ₹17,125 in district Gurdaspur.

Under the category of non-productive loans, it has been found that the highest amount of debt for domestic needs and healthcare is taken by the sampled households in district Gurdaspur while that of house construction, major repairs etc. is the highest in district Jalandhar and that of marriages and socio-religious ceremonies and purchase of durables is the highest in district Bathinda.

The table further shows that out of total loans taken by the sampled rural non-farm households, 33.51 per cent is raised for productive purposes while 66.49 per cent is raised for non-productive purposes. The findings are different from the study conducted by Kaur (2016) which found that the usage of loan for income generating activities is as high as 81.96 per cent. Out of total loans, it has been found that under the category of productive purposes, 28.26 per cent are taken for non-farm business and 4.97 per cent for agriculture while only 0.29 per cent is taken for purchase of livestock.

On the other hand, under the category of non-productive loans, it has been found that 22.50 per cent, 14.08 per cent, 8.98 per cent and 8.46 per cent of total loans are taken for domestic needs, house construction/major repairs, marriages and social ceremonies and health care, respectively.

District-wise analysis shows that the proportion of loans taken for productive purposes is the highest in district Bathinda and the lowest in district Jalandhar while the sampled households in district Gurdaspur take 32.71 per cent of the total loans for productive purposes. On the other hand, 67.29, 76.58 and 59.93 per cent of total loans are taken for non-productive purposes in district Gurdaspur, Jalandhar and Bathinda, respectively. We can further notice that the highest proportion of loan for agriculture is taken by the households in district Gurdaspur which is 23.18 per cent while only 9.53 per cent of total debt by these households is taken for non-farm business. As compared to it, 23.43 per cent and 38.59 per cent of total debt in district Jalandhar and Bathinda, respectively is taken for non-farm business. Under the category of non-productive purposes, we can find that the highest proportion of debt on domestic needs is taken by the non-farm households in district Gurdaspur which turns out to be 27.87 per cent as compared to 22.28 per cent in district Jalandhar and 20.53 per cent in district Bathinda. Similarly, 12.06 per cent, 21.79 per cent and 10.11 per cent of total debt in districts Gurdaspur, Jalandhar and Bathinda, respectively is incurred on house construction, additions of rooms and major repairs, Reddy *et al*., (2020) found that 32 percent of total loans were used for domestic needs and 21 per cent for house construction.

While in case of marriages and other socio-religious ceremonies, these proportions are 8.50 per cent, 5.58 per cent and 11.27 per cent, respectively. The highest proportion of debt for healthcare has been recorded in case of district Gurdaspur, followed by district Bathinda and district Jalandhar.

3·3 Indebtedness according to Sources of Loans

The purpose of debt largely determines the source of debt as most of the formal agencies traditionally give loan mainly for productive purposes. But the liberalization wave has led many commercial banks to diversify their loan portfolio by providing loans for non-productive purposes as well e.g. for purchase of automobiles, house construction, education etc. As a result, the average amount as well as proportion of loan from the institutional sources can be higher than the productive loans. Similar trends can be observed in our survey. For this purpose, we can observe table-3 which shows the source-wise average amount of debt taken by the sampled rural non-farm households. Table-3 shows that the sampled non-farm households take a greater amount of loan from the institutional agencies than from the non-institutional ones. The average amount of debt from institutional agencies is ₹82,152.89 per indebted household as compared to ₹65,493.33 from the non-institutional agencies. Thus for the sampled households, the ratio of institutional to non-institutional debt is 1.25. Out of the institutional loans, the largest amount is sourced from commercial banks. Another ₹5,608.89, ₹5,478.44 and ₹1,644.44 are raised from Primary agricultural co-operative societies/co-operative banks, Micro-finance companies and community development banks, respectively. In case of the non-institutional debt, the biggest contributors are relatives and friends, followed by money lenders) and large farmers.

Table-3: Per Household Debt from Different Credit Agencies

(Mean Values, in ₹)

Sl. No.	Source of Debt	Gurdaspur	Jalandhar	Bathinda	All Sampled Households
A. Institutional					
1.	Primary agricultural cooperative societies co- operative banks	1389 (0.77)	8860 (7.45)	4369 (2.72)	5609 (3.80)
2.	Commercial banks	115972 (64.53)	42387 (35.66)	75723 (47.19)	69421 (47.02)
3.	Community development banks	–	4012 (3.37)	243 (0.15)	1645 (1.11)
4.	Micro Finance Companies	–	9377 (7.89)	4138 (2.58)	5478 (3.71)
Sub-total		117361 (65.30)	64636 (54.37)	84473 (52.65)	82153 (55.64)
B. Non-institutional Sources					
5.	Money-lenders	11000 (6.12)	7977 (6.71)	20514 (12.79)	14200 (9.62)
6.	Traders/shopkeepers	2972 (1.65)	–	971 (0.61)	920 (0.62)
7.	Large farmers	20556 (11.44)	3023 (2.54)	20456 (12.75)	13809 (9.35)
8.	Relatives and friends	27833 (15.49)	43244 (36.38)	34039 (21.21)	36564 (24.76)
Sub-total		**62361 (34.70)**	**54244 (45.63)**	**75980 (47.35)**	**65493 (44.36)**
Total		**179722 (100.00)**	**118880 (100.00)**	**160453 (100.00)**	**147646 (100.00)**
Ratio of Institutional Loans to Non-Institutional Loans		**1.88**	**1.19**	**1.11**	**1.25**

Source: Field survey, 2016-17

Note: Figures in brackets are column-wise percentages.

The district-wise scenario shows that among all the districts, the sampled households in district Gurdaspur have raised the largest amount from the institutional sources, mainly from the commercial banks. The average amount of debt raised from institutional sources by the sampled households is ₹1,17,361, ₹64,636 and ₹84,473, respectively in district Gurdaspur, Jalandhar and Bathinda. Out of this ₹1,15,972, ₹42,387 and ₹ 75,723 are raised from commercial banks while the contribution of primary agricultural co-operative societies/co-operative banks is ₹1389, ₹8860 and ₹4369, respectively. The district-wise analysis of source of non-institutional debt shows that the highest amount under this category is taken by the sampled households in district Bathinda followed by district Gurdaspur and the least amount is taken by the sampled households in district Jalandhar. The distribution of total debt from non-institutional sources in different districts paints a distinct picture for each district.

The sampled households in district Gurdaspur has a greater reliance upon the large farmer than the money lenders while in district Jalandhar, it is the other way round as more of the debt has been raised from the money lenders than the large farmers. However, in Bathinda, the sampled non-farm households rely equally upon both of the sources. In all the districts, maximum amount of non-institutional debt has been taken from relatives and friends. ₹27,833, ₹43,244 and ₹34,039 has been taken from this source in district Gurdaspur, Jalandhar and Bathinda, respectively e. Thus, we have seen that for the sampled rural non-farm households the amount of debt from institutional sources is higher than that of the non-institutional sources. This has given a ratio of institutional to non-institutional debt at greater than one. This ratio is the highest in district Gurdaspur but the lowest in district Bathinda.

The table further shows that out of the total debt reported by the sampled non-farm households, 55.64 per cent is taken from the institutional sources. These figures are somewhat different from the findings of Sandhu and Toor (2020) in which 25 per cent of total debt of non-farm households have been taken from institutional sources. The share of the institutional sources is the highest in district Gurdaspur where 65.30 per cent of total debt of the rural non-farm households is taken from the institutional sources while this proportion is 54.37 per cent and 52.65 per cent in district Jalandhar and district Bathinda. Thus, the major proportion of loans taken from the non-institutional sources has been recorded in case of Bathinda district followed by district Jalandhar and then by district Gurdaspur. Further, we can see that 47.02 per cent of the debt is raised from the commercial banks and this proportion is different in different districts. It has been found that out of the total debt of the sampled non-farm households 64.53, 35.66 and 47.19 per cent has been taken from the commercial banks in districts Gurdaspur, Jalandhar and Bathinda, respectively. These figures are in line with the findings of another study by Kaur (2020) which shows that commercial banks provided 46.53 per cent of the outstanding debt of rural Punjab. The primary agricultural societies/ co-operative societies/co-operative banks and micro-finance companies have a greater presence in district Jalandhar than other two districts as we can see from the table that 7.45 per cent and 7.89 per cent, respectively of total debt of the sampled households in Jalandhar district is taken from these two sources. But these proportions are only 2.72 per cent and 2.58 per cent in district Bathinda while in district Gurdaspur, none of the sampled household has taken any loan from the micro-finance companies and only 0.77 per cent of their total debt has been taken from primary agricultural/ co-operative societies/co-operative banks.

The sampled non-farm households had taken 44.36 per cent of the total loans from the non-institutional sources Under the broader category of non-institutional sources, we can see that 24.76 per cent of the total debt of the sampled non-farm households has been taken from the relatives and friends and just 9.62 per cent and 9.35 per cent has been taken from the money lenders and the large farmers, respectively. The results of present study are in line with the findings of another study by Sahu (2018) which reveals that nearly 40 per cent of all loans came from informal sources with 26 per cent advanced by moneylenders. But these proportions of debt from different sources vary according to the district. In district Gurdaspur 15.49 per cent, 11.44 per cent, 6.12 per cent and 1.65 per cent of total debt of the sampled households has been taken from relatives and friends, large farmers, money lenders and the traders/shopkeepers, respectively. In district Jalandhar, 36.38 per cent of total debt has been taken from the relatives and friends, 6.71 per cent from the money lenders and 2.54 per cent from the large farmers while none of the sampled household was found to have borrowed from the traders/shopkeepers. On the other hand, in district Bathinda apart from the relatives and friends, the money lenders and the large farmers also have a noticeable share in total household debt. The table shows that in this district 21.21 per cent, 12.79 per cent and 12.75 per cent of total debt has been taken from the relatives and friends, money lenders and large farmers, respectively.

3·4 Indebtedness and Rate of Interest

The source and purpose of debt together determine the distribution of debt according to rate of interest. If the loan is raised for non-productive purposes and from the non-institutional source, there will be a greater probability of its having a higher rate of interest than the ones taken for productive purposes and from the institutional agencies. As we have observed in earlier tables on source of the loan availed by the sampled non-farm households is higher from the institutional agencies than from the non-institutional one, therefore, we can easily expect that higher amount of debt would have been raised at the stipulated rates charged by the banks, co-operative societies and other institutional agencies. Table-4 justifies the pattern observed in earlier tables on source and purpose of debt taken by the sampled households. The table shows that an average household takes the highest amount of loan at a rate of interest between 1-7 per cent and this amount has been found to be ₹70,169. The next important interest rate category is 8-14 per cent, ₹43,931 have been taken by the sampled non-farm households at this rate of interest. Since, the sampled households also take a considerable amount of loan from the friends and relatives, therefore, here too we can see that per household debt at 0 per cent rate of interest is ₹ 20,090. Besides, ₹7,448, ₹5,653 and ₹355 were taken at the interest rates 15-21 per cent, 22-28 per cent and above 28 per cent, respectively. Thus, we have seen that after crossing the priority sector lending rates (1-7 per cent), as the rate of interest increases, the average amount of loan per household falls and this is true for every district with an exception of district Gurdaspur. Earlier we noticed that the households in district Gurdaspur have the highest amount of debt among all the sampled districts. But here, we can notice that actually the per household amount of loan is the highest for the sampled households in Bathinda district in all the interest rate categories above 1 per cent (with an exception of the rate of interest above 28 per cent). In the interest category 0 per cent, the sampled households in this district have recorded the lowest amount of debt. Under this category, the highest amount of loan has been registered by the sampled households in district Jalandhar, followed by district Gurdaspur. The table shows that per household debt for district Bathinda is ₹94,087, ₹26,225, ₹13,891, ₹10,000 and ₹291 on the rate of interest 1-7 per cent, 8-14 per cent, 15-21 per cent, 22-28 per cent and above 28 per cent, respectively. Interestingly, in district Gurdaspur, a greater amount of loan has been taken at a rate of interest ranging between 8-14 per cent.

Table-4: Per Household Debt according to Rate of Interest

(Mean Values, in ₹)

Sl. No	Rate of Interest (in %)	Gurdaspur	Jalandhar	Bathinda	All Sampled Households
1.	0	16444 (9.15)	26563 (22.34)	15959 (9.95)	20090 (13.61)
2.	1 - 7	51750 (28.79)	49233 (41.41)	94087 (58.64)	70169 (47.52)

3.	8 - 14	108750 (60.51)	38003 (31.97)	26225 (16.34)	43931 (29.75)
4.	15 - 21	1389 (0.77)	2267 (1.91)	13891 (8.66)	7448 (5.04)
5.	22 - 28	–	2814 (2.37)	10000 (6.23)	5653 (3.83)
6.	Above 28	1389 (0.77)	–	291 (0.18)	355 (0.24)
Total		**179722 (100.00)**	**118880 (100.00)**	**160453 (100.00)**	**147646 (100.00)**

Source: Field Survey, 2016-17

Note: Figures in brackets are column-wise percentages.

Further, we can see the percentage share of each interest category in total household loans in table-4. The table shows that the highest proportion of total household debt is taken at the interest rates ranging between 1-7 per cent, 47.52 per cent of total household debt is raised on this range. The next important categories are 8-14 per cent and 0 per cent; 29.75 per cent and 13.61 per cent of total household debt has been found to be raised on these two interest categories, respectively. Thus, we have seen that leaving the zero-interest rate category aside, the proportion of loan under each category falls as the rate of interest increases and this trend can be noticed in two of the districts sampled districts i.e. district Jalandhar and Bathinda. In district Gurdaspur, the highest proportion of loan has been taken at a rate between 8 and 14 per cent, followed by the interest category 1-7 per cent. We can notice from the table that in this district 60.51 per cent and 28.79 per cent of total household debt lies under these two categories, respectively. On the other hand, the highest proportion of loan taken at rate of interest ranging between 1-7 per cent has been registered in case of the sampled households belonging to district Bathinda, 58.64 per cent of total household loan in this district has been taken at this interest rate while these proportions are 28.79 per cent and 41.41 per cent in district Gurdaspur and Jalandhar, respectively. Thus, we have seen that about 90 per cent of the total loan taken by the sampled households is raised at an interest rate below 14 per cent. This is mainly due to the reason that these household take a greater proportion of their loans from the institutional sources. These findings are somewhat different from the findings of another study by Sandhu and Toor (2020) which found that about 69 per cent of the total loans of non-farm households obtained at the rate of interest above 20 per cent.

4. Conclusions and Policy Implications

An analysis of the indebtedness among the sampled non-farm households shows that 34.14 per cent of the sampled households are indebted. In each of the sampled district, the amount of loan for productive purposes is lower than that of the unproductive purposes but the share of the institutional agencies is higher than that of the non-institutional agencies. The average amount of debt across all the districts for productive purposes and from the institutional agencies shows that the institutional agencies has been meeting more loans for the productive purposes. Among the institutional sources, the share of the commercial banks is the highest in the total debt while under the non-institutional sources, the highest proportion is contributed by the relatives and friends, followed by the money lenders and the large farmers. Further, it has been found that a major share of debt is raised at an interest rate lower than 14 per cent.

Therefore, they need a special attention in any policy aimed at improving the well-being of the rural masses. Their credit needs should be adequately addressed through institutional finance. Since most of the rural non-farm enterprises are unregistered, therefore they do not have adequate access to institutional finance. As majority of the non-farm workers are also landless, hence due to lack of collateral, their reliance on non-institutional sources increases which charges heavy rate of interest from them. This points towards the need of greater penetration of institutional financial agencies in the rural areas with a wider coverage of rural enterprises which should be providing credit to the non-farm enterprises at lower rate of interest. But the matter of fact is that currently the formal financial system is not well suited to meeting the credit needs of the informal sector. It is therefore essential to ensure that the credit needs of the informal sector are adequately addressed through public sector banks, rural branches of the commercial banks or other Non-bank finance companies (NBFCs). Micro-finance through self-help groups is generally considered to be another potentially useful channel but its recent experience in the state is highlighting its exploitative character which leads the asset poor rural masses in to an endless chain of loans. Hence, the working of these institutions and the rates charged by them must be controlled properly.

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The Narrative Convention of Nonfiction and Female Writings of "Non-gender-oriented": An Analysis of Chinese Female Nonfiction Writings in the New Era

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Abstract

The feminist writing in nonfictional literature has become a bursting tendency in China since the 21st century. The works of a large number of female writers, such as Liang Hong, Lin Bai, Sun Huifen, Qiao Ye, Wang Xiaoni, Li Juan, Ding Yan, Huang Deng, Lin Nabei, Chen Danyan, and Zheng Xiaoqiong, have made non-fiction writing as one of the few (or perhaps the only) collective phenomena in feminist writing after the decline of private writing trend in 1990s. However, the current studies of feminist writing in nonfictional literature are relatively insufficient, with few explorations examining the "interactive" relationship between nonfiction narrative and gender expression within the complex relationship between literary genre and gender. This paper aims to undertake such an attempt.

Keywords

Narrative convention, Nonfiction writings, feminist writing, Nonfictional literature, Literary genre, Gender.

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The Narrative Convention of Nonfiction and Female Writings of “Non-gender-oriented”: An Analysis of Chinese Female Nonfiction Writings in the New Era

1. Under the Influence of Narrative Convention of Nonfictional Literature

Nonfiction literature is a cross-genre form of writing that takes action (research, interviews) as its premise, facts (reality, history) as its foundation, transcription(oral or written) as its means, and narrative (description, commentary, imagery) as its rhetorical device. The narrative convention of nonfiction mainly refers to the regulations or strategies relating to the life-like construction in the nonfiction to satisfying its sober aesthetic needs. Consequently, the nonfiction rarely covers the themes of women and even does not draw much attention to the gender marks which are considered the most important in feminist studies. Even within these minority ones does talk about women, it is the social identities (rank, position, occupation etc.) that takes the main part instead of the gender identity. For example, here is a nonfictional poem *On Female Workers* by Zheng Xiaoqiong:

> After being labeled as a farmer, you’re tagged with a suffix
>
> As a hybrid migrant worker.
>
> It has nothing with farming or not farming, turning on machines or turning off
>
> It is unrelated to gender
>
> Beyond these labels, you’re a laborer, a component worker on an assembly line
>
> With a junior high school education or an 18-year-old age
>
> A post-90s youth……

The gender element, which is the most valued in women’s writing, is excluded from the traditional female writing, which is a new phenomenon in Chinese women’s literature. As this situation has been majorly explained in previous studies as with the horizon widened and social subjectivity strengthened due to the progress in female writer’s social consciousness in modern China, I suggest that it not only connects with the writer’s subjective interests but internally relate to the narrative restriction of nonfiction writing:

Firstly, the nonfiction works emphasize the "hybridity" in gender expression to display the original model of life in text. It is obvious that in reality the initial existence of gender discourse appears to be "mixing" with other social discourses, where the gender issues are never isolated. "Overemphasizing the distinction between 'male' and 'female' is absurd... 'Femininity' is not an essential entity; it is interconnected and mutually influential with other aspects."[1] Gender, the relatively more obscure and weaker part compared with other sides in social power structure, is influenced by ranks, occupations, or ethics etc and distort itself within. Unlike fictional writing that employs metaphors, symbols, magic, or parody to convey "life-derived yet transcendent" narratives, non-fiction must maintain the baseline of "authenticity" in its vivid and concrete storytelling. It generally cannot resort to literary refinement or sublimation to emphasize themes, but must obtain the intricate and multifaceted facades of gender issues intertwined with other social problems as in reality. Therefore, the phenomenon of gender discourse overlapping with class, regional and ethical discourse in nonfiction is more obvious than in fiction. Take the example of the body writing for female workers by Ding Yan, "in these factories in the Pearl River Delta, women are more popular than men.The production machine is particularly interested in the bodies of young women, as they are better suited to the requirements of lean production, more cost-effective, and easier to manage and control."[2] From the perspective of production efficiency and management, the gender differences in female body which ordinarily embodied in physiology and psychology have been replaced by the body politics in economical realm, as they have been transforming into cost and output. This differs from the body writing in another type of female works as "private writing" in which the personal desire is particularly emphasized as some metapharical images such as flow, wave and wings appears again and again. In the comparison of these two types it is obvious that the nonfictional female writing obtains far less gender makes but social attributions, which is particularly evident in its concerning with the poor or lower class, for that "only certain group of women are fortunate enough to distinguish themselves by the gender category, simply because their social class (which is evidently dominant) or racial position has never been highlighted."[3] Thus, the phenomenon that the lower class women cannot be defined by the single gender category of male/female is more obvious than that of the middle class who have no worries about food and clothing. Therefore, the nonfiction writing focuses on the writing of "the body in society" (rather than the body in emotional desire) in depiction of lower class is more in line with the original life. But to take this step risks at the possibility of losing gender criticism itself in class criticism, the gender issues maybe falsely transformed into a part of the class concern. In *China in Liangzhuang* by Liang Hong, various aspects of Liangzhuang are addressed, including land, environment, education, healthcare, and elderly care, with only three sections touching on gender. The society-related concerns remains so strong that almost alienate gender concern into an unimportant position, which confronted with the gender's role in actual social power structure that the work is trying to represent. In a word, all of these relates to the "restoration" for gender discourse in nonfiction to go back to its representation in a pluralistic reality.

Secondly, the nonfiction narrative restriction which abides by the logic of life itself and "sacrifices the generality in purchasing of universality", prompting difficulties in constructing a more typical gender expression. Universality is seen as a characteristic principle in nonfiction narrative convention, which means the combination of commonality and individuality in works. Unlike the fictional works can achieve the universality in reference of "deriving from all, synthesizing in one" like Lu Xun's Ah Q which adopts artistic techniques such as cutting, refining and sublimating in the construction of the figure, the nonfiction "is an object-controlled narrative, in which the structure, characters and plot are all arranged by the object itself ."[4] It has to obey certain principles as featuring in plainness and originality but lack of universality and purposeful design to represent the individual. The female nonfiction is full of the transcription of the interviewee's words and deeds, which undoubtedly restricted to certain personal experience, capacity and cultural background, embedding relatively superficial or not integrated feminist consciousness. For example, In Liang Hong's *Departure from Liangzhuang*, Lanzi (a migrant worker in the city) said,"I firmly believe one thing in my life and values which I keep repeating: a girl must be self-reliant. She shouldn't rely on men or anyone else-self-reliance is the best choice."[5] This undoubted feminist statement, which gives readers big expectations for her story, is whatever disappointed by the later pages of her interview transcription that all about her sentimental and narcissistic love story with a boy from Beijing. The story is neither elegant nor well-explained for the gender topic of women independence, too vulgar and not profound to be enough. Another case is in Huang Deng's *Families on the Land*, the most vivid evidence of rigid gender ideology in rural region, the sudden suicide of a young girl named Sister Three by ingesting pesticide, actually fails to carry on the necessary depth of its topic. The incident is narrated through the Sister Four's account, in which the reason of the tragedy is only briefly mentioned as related to a strained relationship between Sister Three and her mother and the discovery of her death is also plainly depicted that she returned early from weeding and was found dead after consuming pesticide. Neither the incident itself nor the

Sister Four's colloquial narration attains eventful or detailed, as they adhered to the principles of non-fictional storytelling. Together with the facts that the author's comments is left for only few lines and afterwards the discussion adrifts to other topics, the whole narration gives readers a pretty shallow impression. The gender implication of this event is clearly not excavated enough, and its relation with the non-fiction narrative convention has to be blamed in this case.

Thirdly, collective, sketch-like, and simplified character portrayals have also dispersed the gender expression. The nonfictional narratives emphasize on the interviewee subjectivity, restoration of reality, direct recordings following interviews, as well as the character portrayal represented in groups to convey social issues effectively. For example, the appendix of Departure from *Liangzhuang* lists 42 key interviewees, *Ten-Day Talks on Life and Death* lists 30, and in *Families on the Land* the number is up to 108. Apparently there are too many characters in total that the depiction for each one becomes less cautious, except for the narrator and witness "I" in some texts which can represent repeatedly. The writer Yi Weixing said, "Reportage literature differs fundamentally from fiction in character portrayal. It brings characters into the narrative when needed, discarding them when needless", "It can be the study of human beings, but it can also not be."[6] Besides, limited by the interview method, the language used in nonfiction is mainly spoken language. All of these contribute to problems in the conveyance of gender connotation. On the one hand, the gender stance of a group may not consistent. On the other hand, the life-like language and sometimes overly succinct narration cannot form a relatively consistent narrative voice. The way of the characters' presentation in the text through the narrator's "intermediary" cannot directly reveal their own personal feelings, which is biased because of the narrator's personal position. The difficulties exemplified in characters portrayal suggest it is a part hugely influenced by the non-fiction narrative conventions.

Fourthly, the hybrid aesthetic style also plays a role in the reduction of feminist discourse. Nonfiction writing is accustomed to transplant a lot of literature, history, news, pictures etc. together in the text, which profoundly contribute to the restoration of the "original appearance" of reality or historical facts, while forming into a hybrid aesthetic style in certain degrees. Because the official and objective expression of historical data or news in nonfiction, is not consistent with the the sometimes sentimental voice of the narrator. The characters' direct quotation which is oralized and dialectalized, with their own tone and style, also quite distinct from the narrator's and claim a "mixed" color of the clamor. The aesthetic style is thus not very uniform, with the scene "fragmented", and the character image "silhouette", together leading to the dispersion of feminist discourse. For example, in Chen Danyan's "Bund Trilogy" a fresh language style full of delicate feelings is used in its reality recordings, but the historical materials and pictures mixed in and consequently weakened the original feminine style by the incoherent news announcement. And in Wang Xiaoni's *Teaching Diaries*, the narrator's diary style is not consistent with the straightforward words in the students' homework or in the conversation. All those derivate the narrative from the feminist voices.

2. The Subtle and Indirect Narratives and "Non-gender-oriented" Writing

The female writing is committed to the social problems under the influence of nonfiction narrative conventions. It does not rigidly adhere to gender identity, compared to a gender-centred approach that prioritizes gender, female interests, and expands female individualism. Instead, with the robust, sharp and hard temperament it is not inferior to any male writing it is characterized as "non-gender-oriented". it integrates gender concerns with broader social considerations such as class, region, and profession, without particularly foregrounding gender issues. Liang Hong, the author of *China in Liangzhuang* and *Departure from Liangzhuang* said, "Unlike other social issues, gender does not manifest itself in overt, episodic, or sudden forms. It permeates our lives in the most routine manner. Unless one possesses sufficient sensitivity, it is difficult to discern its presence."[7] While on the other hand, "non-gender-oriented" doesn't mean that it deviates from the category of female writing. Its actively participation in gender discourse remains, in which the expressions often emerge indirectly, subtly, and implicitly, manifesting as the author' s unconsciousness of female.

Firstly, there's a defined female identity engaging in the first narrator "I", which can provide gender issues in convenience as "I" play different roles of narrator, interviewer and witness in texts. The female nonfiction works in contemporary China mentioned in the paper mostly take "I" as the narrator, providing not only an immersive "meta-narrative", but also an opportunity for the gender consciousness to flow in the discourse gap of social concern. In Liang Hong's *Departure from Liangzhuang*, the feminist consciousness reveals itself smoothly through the narrator "I", which describe women's situation to be more difficult and toilsome within the sovereign of the idea "men are the most important" in the poor rural society. while Wang Xiaoni's *Teaching Diaries* focuses on the problems that both male and female college students will encounter, such as the education of college, the origin of students, the interest and specialty, etc. in which the gender issue makes it more difficult. For example, the narrator "I" is quite concerned with a girl student Huang Ju, who previously dropped out school and then comes back, "Surprisingly, I found the characters traditionally associated with Chinese women, the subtlety, evasiveness, shyness, gentleness, resilience, and stubbornness are all embodied in Huang Ju, a young woman born in the 1990s in Shaanxi, which seemingly unchanged through the passage of time."[8] Through narrative approaches in first-person perspective such as commentary, reflections, and monologue, female voices have somehow collected the power to speak of the world, formulating a unique emotional structure that combines "broader social concern" with "subtle female consideration."

Secondly, there's also an "intuitive" attention to female characters under the influence of gender unconsciousness. Jonathan Culler once said, to be a subject, one must have a gender. But the innate nature of gender identity leads some female writers to express their thoughts relating to gender issues under a kind of unconsciousness or subconsciousness-often unclear even to the writers themselves-and sometimes with a certain ambiguity. For example, Sun Huifen had such words about her *Ten-Day Talks on Life and Death , "I didn't deliberately focus on women; I chose these stories from among many others guided by intuition in writing. Yet, the resilience and inner strength of women have always been my genuine understanding-perhaps this indelible perception has shaped my writing."*[9] Going through the book's preface and table of contents we can see the listed deaths in suicides are male mainly, but as the interviews about them are mainly conducted those who knew them, it is the rural women who plays a crucial part in recovering the stories, with most vividly portrayal and deepest impression. Thus, while documenting the phenomenon of rural suicide, these works factually place their greatest focus on rural women, the female sensibilities expresses in which become a highlighted "marginal female voice" featuring in women's nonfiction literature.

Thirdly, there's feminine voice echoes in narrative forms-that is, the indirect, nuanced, and fragmented expression feature distinctly of female discursive qualities, speaks out-loud through certain language structures, aesthetic preferences, and formal designs. Feminist Robyn R. Warhol said, "Ultimately, The difference between texts written by men and women lies not so much in so-called content, but rather in their modes of narration and discursive characteristics-be they sentimental, ironic, scientific, or otherwise."[10] For instance, Zhang Xinxin's *Beijing People* is generally regarded as a turning point of her writings' transition from female writing to oral-history-style non-fiction. Yet it is by no means a work "without women" or "without subjectivity", its poetic titles drawn from women's oral accounts, the subtle, symbolic, and metaphorical language used in narration, the "feminine" mode of storytelling, and the employment of various modal particles in specific linguistic expressions all reflect, to some extent, a feminine voice embedded in. Moreover, the approaches of speaking in different interviewees featuring in some common characters which can be concluded as a form of "Collective Narrative" as in words of Susan S. Lanser, through which the socially marginalized women begin to form their collective identities. Through collective expressions such as "more people, greater strength" and "unity is strength", individuals-who may otherwise be in humble positions with limited voice-"strive to achieve a collective power that would be difficult to attain alone."[11]

3. Narration & Gender: Female Nonfiction in Case Studies

We have known that the gender elements do not entirely recede in "non-gender-oriented" female writing but persists as an indirect, implicit, and nuanced presence, manifesting through unconscious, or subconscious latent discourse in the text. Surrounding other specific social issues, it forms a diffuse and often indistinctly defined structure at the margins. Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that the text of this type remains as a "female writing" rather than a neutralized or masculine mode of expression. The gender discourse have never been restricted as "explicit" or "implicit," "prominent" or "subtle", "present" or "absent", when receding to a secondary or marginal position it still collide, drift, intersect, overlap, increase or decrease, deprive or derive against other social discourses, furthering the aesthetic modes of female nonfiction writing. And it also drives the evolution of nonfiction and contribute to its "victory" in ita competition between some traditional forms such as reportage literature.

The controversy of whether there is an inherent connection between narrative and gender remains a long-standing problem in literary studies. One side holds that there's no solid connection between the two, that narrative styles written by male authors can also be employed by female authors, and vice versa. Scholars such as Warhol, Ren Yiming, and Wang Fei remind us that to correlate specific narrative practices with their author' s biological sex risks falling into gender essentialism. The other side acknowledges a certain relationship does exist, which can be more concretely explained into two thesis: (1) To explain the distinctiveness of female narrative from the perspective of the "gendered" author, as seen in the arguments of Zhang Kangkang and Huang Mei, who have developed a unique style in their writing due to their physiological and psychological experiences of great suffering by gender issues. (2) To promote specific genres or narrative modes as a means of empowering women, such as viewing autobiographical writing as a feminist form or collective narratives as a stylistic strategy for female self-empowerment. To draw a conclusion, these discussions have enriched the study of female literature, but most of which have only focused on "whether" gender analysis can be conducted at the level of genre or form, the research on "how" to carry out remaining notably scarce.

Through the careful examine of the views above, this paper acknowledge the narrative form is neutral in theory, but the fact that a specific gender in authors is in relation with the remarkable success that has appeared in certain writing types also remains notably. The relationship between narrative and gender should be grounded in a substantial body of works by multiple authors, rather than isolated formal experiments by particular individuals; it should be based on concrete, historically situated textual practices, not on predetermined theoretical deductions. The analysis of the complicated relationship between narration and gender depends on actual cases, and the key lies in identifying specific literary phenomena where the two mutually influence, permeate, propel, and constrain each other. This paper can be taken as a case study that serves to investigate the interplay between literary form and gender, focusing on women' s nonfiction writing,

Compared to the traditionally male-dominated field of reportage literature, the emergence of a substantial number of women writers in the lineage of nonfiction literature reflects an prosperous situation of contemporary Chinese female literature. The gender discourse blurred but never disappear, engaging in social issues through a mode of gendered implicit presence as constructed in the nonfiction landscape. Besides, the female genuine attention to details and intuition shines its charms, along with the first-person narration representing a unique literary style. Since the new century, this practice has offered both inspiration and caution in genre development for its significant social influence. It can be said that In the exploration of the power in narrative form and gender discourse incorporation, Chines female nonfiction writing has made a notable contribution.

Note

This paper is an abbreviated passage of "Narrative Rules of Non-fiction and 'Non-gender-departmentalist' Female Writings--On Female Non-fiction literature of China in the New Age" by Sun Guirong, ***Journal of Renmin University of China***, 36(216), June 2022, 162-170.

Footnotes

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Indians and Britishers: Rivalry from the Battle of Delhi (1803) to the Battle for Delhi (1857): With special reference to Chaudhary Ganga Bishan of NCR Delhi

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Abstract

The East India Company, after taking Bengal, Bihar and Odisha in its full control, executed further its expansion into upper Ganga Valley. Delhi was on its target. Governor-General Lord Wellesley made 2 plans for taking Delhi and Bundelkhand. He executed these sending General Gerard Lake to bring Emperor Shah Alam II into Company's control on the basis of military power. The Marathas under Daulat Rao Sindhia of Gwalior were responsible to safeguard both the emperor and the city of Delhi. The fall of Aligarh Fort was a set back to them but their leader Madho Rao Maratha at Malagarh Fort was amongst those who had tried their best to resist Company's army. A fierce battle was fought on September 11, 1803 at the very site now known as the 'Golf Course' of Noida. At this site was the main camp of General Lake. The Marathas were supported by a number of prominent zamindars and chaudharies of NCR Delhi. Amongst them were Chaudhary Ganga Bishan's family members and kinsmen of Khindaura and nearby villages. Tikam Singh and Pitam Singh of the Asaura Riyasat's family and their other close relatives and supporters also fought on Indian side but finally many of them remained slain on the battle field fighting against General Lake. Historically, this battle is known as the 'Battle of Delhi'. After a long period of exact 53 years and 8 month from the Battle of Delhi, Chaudhary Ganga Bishan Tyagi's nephew Dilsukh Chaudhary killed 5 European Army Officers on May 11, 1857 on account of the old rivalry.

Keywords

Battle of Delhi, Battle for Delhi, Ganga-Yamuna Doab, Aligarh Fort, Malagarh Fort, Bilaspur Fort, Khindaura, Ghayaspur, East India Company.

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Indians and Britishers: Rivalry from the Battle of Delhi (1803) to the Battle for Delhi (1857): With special reference to Chaudhary Ganga Bishan of NCR Delhi

This paper is in the series of an attempt to unearth the families and leaders of Indians fought in the Battle of Delhi to support the Maratha contingents against the East India Company's forces under General Gerard Lake[1] on September 11, 1803. The rivalry existed till long that is witnessed on killing of 5 Europeans in the village of Khindaura situated in NCR Delhi in the present *tehsil* of Modinagar in Ghaziabad District of Uttar Pradesh on May 11, 1857 during the 'Indian War of Independence of 1857'.

The upper Ganga-Yamuna Doab region has been a platform to control the northern India politically on the basis of purely military strength. For estimating its geo-historic value in this respect, Prof. Percival Spear rightly remarks:[2]

> "Two hundred years ago Delhi had been a great and imperial city for a century, with anything between one and two million inhabitants. It was the largest and most renowned city, not only of India, but of all the East from Constantinople to Canton. Its Court was brilliant, its mosques and colleges numerous, and its literary and artistic fame as high as its political renown. Within fifty years its provinces vanished, its wealth was plundered, its Emperor was blinded, and the city shrank to be a provincial capital of less than two hundred thousand people. The greatness of the change is not appreciated because the magnitude of Mughal Delhi is not realized. The main steps in the decline, the sacks of Nadir Shah and Ahmad Shah Abdali, the civil wars of the 'omrahs' or nobles, the atrocities of Ghulam Qadir Khan, are well known. But the drama which accompanied these events, the ebb and flow of changing fortune, the alternating hopes and deepening gloom, are too often disregarded in the facile terms 'decadence', 'effete glory' and 'inevitable decline'. Because Delhi is great now, with its new-planned capital city, it is forgotten that it was ever great before; because the disorders which now occur are within the city itself the days are forgotten when every village was a walled fortress, when no one could travel without an escort, and when robbers picked off unwary travellers from behind the walls of decaying monuments. The Mutiny is commonly the only dramatic event connected with the history of Delhi; to the Delhi-wallah it is an isolated catastrophe not comparable to the disasters of the previous century."

Discussing Nadir Shah's invasion and Ghulam Qadir's atrocities, he further writes:[3]

> "It is the purpose of this study to trace the history of Delhi from the time that it ceased to be the capital of Mughal India until it became a completely British city after the Mutiny in 1858. The first date may be conveniently fixed in 1761 when the tides of Afghans and Marathas had swept over the Empire to meet, in a titanic shock, on the fatal field of Panipat, and thereafter in receding to leave that troubled turmoil of rival chiefs and shadowy sovereignties which is known as the Great Anarchy. From 1738, the year of the first Maratha excursion to the environs of Delhi, the tale of the Empire's dying throes has been told with masterly clarity by Sir Jadunath Sarkar up to 1772. But thereafter comes a gap. Interest has been concentrated more upon the fortunes of picturesque personalities than the fate of the people and the imperial district. The fortunes of the adventurer George Thomas, of the brigand Ghulam Qadir, of the Frenchman de Boigne, of the Christian Princess Samru, have been more attractive subjects than the citizens of Delhi, tossed about by every wind of fortune, or the peasants of the districts, sheltering behind the mud walls of their villages, or fleeing to the stony hills. But though society seemed decadent, politics rotten, and rival chieftains fierce and unscrupulous, there was method in the political madness of the day. In order to follow the ever-changing situation, something should first be said of the underlying political factors which governed the Delhi situation."

What glory of the city of Delhi enjoyed has been categorically pointed out by the historian when he explains:[4]

> "No city east of Constantinople has so attracted the possessors of or the aspirants to power. This is because Delhi, in relation to the rest of India, occupies a position of fundamental strategic importance. Situated on the Doab, the alluvial plain of the Ganges and the Jumna, it stands in the centre of a corridor which connects the Punjab and the north-west with the rest of India. To the north, the corridor narrows and runs north-west, bounded on the one side by the mighty Himalayas, and on the other by the Rajputana desert. There is no natural obstacle before the Indus is reached; the mountains beyond are of little value for defence because the Afghan passes descend steeply on the Indian side but only gently on the Afghan. The neighbours of India are for ever looking down on the plains of India; India is for ever looking up to the forbidding mountain ranges. The only way to make these passes safe is to control both sides, as the Mughuls did from the time of Akbar to that of Muhammad Shah, and as the British Government did on a restricted scale. But this involves the occupation of the Afghan plateau, the

> rigours of whose climate Indian troops from the plains have never been willing to endure for long."

Delhi, in real sense of the term was "Dehali", the gateway as well as the 'potential master of Hindustan' having 'its master' as the 'potential master of whole peninsula:[5]

> "The invader from the north-west must always follow the Punjab corridor until he reaches the Jumna and the neighbourhood of Delhi. Arrived at Delhi the whole of India lies open before him. To the south-east the thousand miles of the flat Gangetic plain invites him through rich cornlands to the richer rice-fields of Bengal. The master of Delhi is the potential master of Hindustan and, since the wealth of India is to be found in Hindustan, its master is the potential master of the whole peninsula. To the south runs the route to the rich lands of Malwa and central India and on to the Deccan. To the south-west the route skirts Rajputana to the indigo and rice-fields of Gujarat. Ajmer, which is the key of Rajputana, is within easy reach of Delhi, and there is no natural obstacle on the main routes until the river Narbada and the Vindhya mountains are reached. Therefore every ambitious power from the north, seeking the control of the country, and every Indian power aspiring to empire, has sought to possess Delhi as the key of Hindustan. These strategical facts are recognized in Hindu tradition, which has an underlying faith in the fundamental political as well as the cultural unity of India. The unity of the country, however frequently broken, is as natural an Indian conception as the balance of power, however often threatened, is a constant European conception of politics."

The Mughal masters of Delhi in 18th century had gradually lost their control in a time-bracket when the mighty Marathas were ready to take it in their control. Peshwa Balaji Vishwanath[6] and after his death in 1719[7], his eldest son and successor Peshwa Bajirao not only had their plans but the power and strategical ability also to capture Delhi.[8]

On the other hand Nadir Shah's episodes[9] and his death opened the Afghans, under his ex-commander Ahmad Durrani's leadership, the way to come into the field as Maratha's competitor. The historian, further throws light on the scene highlighting these points systematically as follows:[10]

> "In the eighteenth century, the power which had for two centuries controlled Delhi and India rapidly decayed, and immediately the winds of war began blowing to fill in the political depression thus created. There were two candidates for empire, the Afghans in the north, who had become independent of Persia at the death of Nadir Shah, and the Marathas in the south. The Afghans under Ahmad Shah Abdali had warlike vigour and the financial sinews of war, but lacked political

> cohesion. Their once promising Indian empire degenerated into a series of blindings and betrayals. The Marathas possessed military skill and political finesse, but, based on the comparatively infertile Deccan, which had been further impoverished by years of Mughul warfare, they lacked the necessary resources for a continued effort. The result was that when these two powers met in apparently decisive combat at Panipat, the one thing which can with certainty be said of that famous carnage was that it was not decisive. Within a few years the Marathas, who were beaten, had returned to Hindustan, and the Afghans, who were victorious, had disappeared permanently from India. It did not even decide negatively that the Marathas should not enjoy the Empire of India, for twenty years later the Empire was again within their grasp with no one in the north to stop them. Later developments made it clear that even had the Marathas won Panipat, they would not long have held the Empire, and this for two reasons. First, they lacked the necessary resources in men and money, and secondly their own internal jealousies and dissensions were too great. What Panipat really did was to reveal, as in a lightning flash, the political bankruptcy of the Afghan chiefs and the material poverty of the Marathas. The fact that it took the Marathas ten years to recover from the blow is evidence not so much of the severity of the defeat, as of their lack of reserves."

In a time so tough for the Mughals at Delhi, the Marathas under Mahadji Sindhia and Tukoji Holkar; the Sikhs; the Jats and the Afghans from Rohilkhand were the concerns:[11]

> "Who then was to fill the void created by the retirement of the contending armies? To the north, in the Punjab, the Sikhs ventured down from the hills into which they had been driven by Bahadur Shah and Farrukhsiyar fifty years before; in petty conflicts with village zamindars, local Muslim chiefs, and each other, they gradually spread over the country and sorted themselves out into twelve misls or loose confederacies. To the west, the Rajput chiefs, faint from interminable Maratha depredations, enjoyed a brief respite which their political incapacity prevented them from using effectively. To the south, central India and Malwa as far as the river Chambal gradually fell into the hands of the Maratha chiefs Madho Rao Sindia and Tukaji Holkar. In theory merely officers of the Peshwa, their families were both destined to become independent, but their progress was hindered by their mutual jealousies. To the south-east lay the province of Oudh, whose hereditary governor was the able and ambitious Shuja-ud-daula. He was shortly to become Vazir of the Empire-the ejection from which office of his father, Safdar Jang, in 1754 was one of the immediate causes of the collapse of the Empire. Due east of Delhi, sandwiched

between the Ganges and the hills of Kumaun, lay the district of Rohilkhand, once part of Oudh. It had been occupied about 1740 by the Rohilla tribe of Afghans, who had been driven by Nadir Shah before him into India. As turbulent and enterprising as any of their race, they also proved to be a disintegrating factor throughout this period."

It was the year of 1788, when the drama was played by the infamous Ghulam Qadir,[12] son of former Mir Bakshi Zabita Khan, He was also the eldest grandson of the former Mir Bakshi Najibuddaula, father of Zabita Khan. He committed every kind of atrocity with far inhuman brutality dealing with Emperor Shah Alam II. He, even made the Emperor blind int he Red Fort but no news of his crimes was out[13]. When the news reached the ears of Mahadji Sindhia, he immediately sent a strong force to release the Emperor from he captivity. The Maratha force besieged the Red Fort and Ghulam Qadir had to flee in a dark night. Finally, he was caught from Bamanauli[14] from a house of a Brahmin. Ali Bahadur[15], grandson of Peshwa Bajirao from Mastani took the captive Ghulam Qadir to the Mathura Camp of Mahadji where he was tortured and finally beheaded.

In the meantime, Emperor Shah Alam II restored Mahadji to the office of the Mir Bakshi[16] i.e. Commander-in-Chief and bestowed upon him the country from Etawah to the foot-hills of Shivalik in presently district of Haridwar as well.[17] This area of Upper-Ganga-Yamuna Doab consisted of the various territories falling in the *Subas* of Agra and Delhi. The sirkars of Agra, Koil, Delhi and Saharanpur covered this area particularly somewhere partly or fully.

Since the year of 1788 to his death in 1794; 17 Agra Fort remained under the control of Mahadji Sindhia who had established at Gwalior. After his death in 1794, his nephew and adopted son by Daulat Rao Sindhia succeeded him.[18]

During those last years of the eighteenth century, Lord Wellesley was the Governor-General of the East India Company.[19] He was responsible to execute his two plans relating to the geographical area discussed above and that of the Bundelkhand.[20] He was a colonial expansionist. Delhi was on his point, with deadly targeted one. He ordered to General Gerard Lake[21] to invade the country and reach Delhi to bring Emperor Shah Alam II under Company's protection.[22] The main hurdle was Daulat Rao Sindhia's forces trained in European style of warfare under the able command of General M. Perron. Writing the then situation, Percival Spear remarks:[23]

"......and in 1803 the Maratha troops opposing the British at Delhi numbered in all about 19,000."

General Gerard Lake's expedition might be made futile, if Maratha General Monsier. Perron would have resisted him, but, he was the person already in terms with Governor-General. He was in secret correspondence who had written to seek permission to travel to Europe in Company's ship.[24] Those days the ships of East India Company were considered the safest means to travel in the seas. His would be voyage was a thing of merely a permission from G.G. Lord Wellesley.

Lord Wellesley took the full advantage of it but he never showed a slight sign of his dealing with General Perron to General Lake. Lake was kept totally unaware to that secret correspondence.

Unaware of the secret terms of Governor-General with General Monsier Perron, General Lake marched with his full preparation of having been already done in July 1803.[25] He crossed the Ganga near Farrukhabad and entered the territory ruled by Sindhia. He reached Mathura and attacked the Aligarh Fort where a very fierce battle was fought.[26] The inmates fought fiercely but, on 3 September, 1803; the fort fell into Lake's hands.[27]

Next to Aligarh Fort was the fort of Malagarh[28] under one Madho Rao Maratha.[29] He sent messages to his allies as well as to James Skinner,[30] his subordinate Anglo-European warrior who had been given charge of Bilaspur Fort[31] from the Marathas. Amongst the former, a number of prominent *zemindars* came and assembled under the umbrella of the Marathas[32] but Skinner had shown the sign of defection.[33] On it, Madho Rao being confirmed on his treachery, sent hard message and approached his fort to besiege him. But James Skinner very sharp in war tactics did not give Madho Rao Maratha a chance and came out of his fort[34] and some miles away gave resistance to Madho Rao.[35] A fierce battle was fought in which Madho Rao's cavalry could not defeat James Skinner[36] and had to come in terms.[37] Madho Rao, preferred to come into terms so that he might advance to guard Delhi and Emperor Shah Alam II.

This was a juncture at which the role of Chaudhary Ganga Bishan of Khindaura is seen.[38] He was a cavalrymen who alongwith his tribesman joined the Battle of Delhi fought on September 11, 1803.[39] That battle has its historical importance. Actually, it is that Battle of Delhi, which actually was not fought at Delhi. It is also called as the "Battle of Patparganj".

Neither the 'Battle of Delhi' or the 'Battle of Patparganj' was fought at Delhi nor at Patparganj. In fact, it was fought at the very place presently known as the Golf Course of Noida. The battle ground covered the area of some nearby tiny villages. But the centre of the British force under General Gerard Lake was at this very place.

In this battle General Lake remained victorious. The Indian side under the leadership of Madho Rao and other Marathas was defeated. The Maratha lieutenants posted at Kothigate Hapur and those at Ajarara *thana* including the prominent local *zamindars* and Chaudharies were slain on the battlefield.[40] Amongst them some have been discovered by the author during the last 4 decades. Some prominent local figures discovered are as follows:[41]

1. Family members of Chaudhary Ganga Bishan Tyagi of Khindaura and their supporting clansmen as well as other ones.
2. Family members of Chaudhary Pitam Singh and Tikam Singh of *Riyasat* family of Asaura with their clansmen and other supporters.

It could not be found out whether other ones were in which exact number? But the author encounters the evidence that one Ghasi Ram,[42] a Jat of Narwal gotra resisted the forces of the East India Company under Col. Burn when he had reached Shamli.[43] Ghasi Ram, a protege of the Marathas, resisted him.[44] His son Mohar Singh participated in 1857 against the Britishers who was caught and had been hanged till death from a Neem tree in the Shamli tehsil campus.[45] The author has identified the exact point where that *Neem* tree stood. Later on, in the second half of the twentieth century, the prominent citizens of Shamli took a lead to establish Vaishya Degree College, Shamli in that very historic campus of Shamli tehsil.

The 'War of Indian Independence of 1857' started from Meerut on Sunday, May 10, 1857[46] proved a war for getting rid of the foreign rule. On the next morning i.e. on 11th May, it broke out at Delhi. On the same historic day of 11th May, Chaudhary Ganga Bishan[47] and his brave nephew w Dilsukh Chaudhary[48], imprisoned 6 Europeans[49] amongst them 4 were lieutenants. On his order, the villagers of Khindawra, Kumhera, Bhaneda, Suhana and Ghayaspur killed the captives.[50] Only one named Captain Osburne could escape from the scene to tell the story to the Magistrate at Meerut.[51]

The names of the killed are as follows:[52]

1. Lieutenant Willough by of Delhi Magzine.
2. Lieutenant Butler of 54th Native Infantry.
3. Lieutenant Ensuign Angelo of 54th Native Infantry.
4. Lieutenant Hyslope of 74th native Infantry.
5. Mr. Stewart of Delhi College.

Thus from the 'Battle of Delhi' fought on September 11, 1803 to the 'Battle for Delhi' fought from 10th May to 20th September 1857 and after; till the death of Tatya Tope in 1859, Chaudhary Ganga Bishan[53], a Tyagi Brahmin was actively alive to take revenge. His desire strong in nature can be felt in his words (when asking for water reaching home after the killings of 5 Europeans) as follows:[54]

> *"Aaj kaleje me thandak padi hei,*
>
> *Chavvaun saal baad jakar.*
>
> *Bahu pani laade,*
>
> *Dilsukh ne 4 ka badlaa 6 se liya hei."*

Means:

"Today, after 54 years, my soul is at peace.

Daughter-in-law, bring [me] water,

Dilsukh has taken revenge for 4 [of our family]

by killing 6 [of East India Company]."

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Some Aspects of Gender Inequality in India

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Abstract

Gender inequality is deeply entrenched in all spheres of life in Indian society. It is a socio-cultural phenomenon rooted primarily in the patriarchal social structure that has historically shaped social institutions, norms, and practices. Gender inequality denies women equal rights and opportunities in terms of social status, education, healthcare, property ownership, employment, decision-making, and access to resources. Due to persistent gender stereotypes, discriminatory customs, and the absence of equal economic and social freedoms, women are subjected to multiple forms of discrimination and violence throughout their life cycle, from birth to old age. These include practices such as sex-selective abortion, child marriage, domestic violence, workplace discrimination, and unequal participation in political and public life. Gender inequality not only undermines the dignity, well-being, and empowerment of women but also adversely affects economic growth, social justice, and sustainable development. The persistence of gender disparities hampers the effective utilization of human resources and weakens the overall progress of society. This paper examines the major dimensions, causes, consequences, and challenges of gender inequality in India and highlights the need for collective efforts to achieve gender equality and inclusive development.

Keywords

Gender inequality, Culture, Patriarchy, Economy, Education, Health.

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Some Aspects of Gender Inequality in India

1. Introduction

Gender inequality is prevalent in Indian society irrespective of region, social class, religion, etc. It is a social process which relegates women to inferior positions in society. This age-old problem has its roots in socio-cultural norms and is essentially a feature of patriarchal social structure. Gender equality is a fundamental human right and crucial for peace, prosperity and development of society. Gender inequality manifests itself in various forms such as disparities in education, employment, health and violence against women. Addressing this issue is important as it impacts not only the well-being of women but also has bearings on the social and economic development of the society at large. This research paper discusses the current scenario of gender inequality and analyses some keys issues that are important for tackling gender inequality.

Gender inequality is a global concern and addressing this issue is imperative for peace, prosperity, and sustainable growth across the world. In September 2015, the UN adopted the '2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development', with 17 SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) at its core, wherein the SDG 5 promotes gender equality and women's empowerment. The United Nations report on gender equality observes: "Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable world. There has been progress over the last decades, but the world is not on track to achieve gender equality by 2030."

2. Dimensions of Gender Inequality in India

Gender inequality is an issue of immense concern for Indian society. This persistent problem has roots in systemic as well as social factors. While disparities in the status of education, economic participation and poverty are characteristics of systemic indicators, regressive gender norms and violence against women are the attributes of social factors. Several research studies as well as reports by multilateral organizations; have demonstrated many dimensions of gender inequality in India. The Global Gender Gap Report prepared by the World Economic Forum is an annual index designed to measure gender equality. It measures gender-based gaps in four areas, namely, economic participation and opportunity; educational attainment; health and survival; and political empowerment. The Global Gender Gap Report 2024, ranks India at 129 out of 146 countries. In South

Asia, India is ranked fifth after Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Bhutan, while Pakistan's rank is 145. This report shows a considerable gender gap in India.

Table-1: India's Rank in Global Gender Gap Report, 2024

Performance by Subindex	Rank
Economic participation and Opportunity	142
Educational Attainment	112
Health and Survival	142
Political Empowerment	65
Overall	129

India ranks 131 out of 148 countries globally in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2025. With a parity score of just 64.1%, India is among the lowest-ranked countries in South Asia. India ranked at 108 out of 193 countries on the Gender Inequality Index (GII) with a score of 0.437, as per the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Report (HDI) 2023-24. The Gender Inequality Index (GII) measures gender-based disadvantage in three dimensions- reproductive health, empowerment and the labour market. It reflects the gap in human development potential due to inequality between female and male achievements in these areas. A low GII value indicates low inequality between women and men, and vice-versa.

Table-2: Gender Inequality Profile of India

Subindex of Gender Inequality Profile	India 2022
HDI Rank	134
Gender Inequality Index	108
Maternal Mortality Ratio (per 1,00,000 live births)	103
Adolescent Birth Rate (births per 1,000 women ages 15-19)	16.3
Seat in National Parliament (in %)	15.1
Population with at least secondary Education (Female) (in %)	26.6
Population with at least secondary Education (Male) (in %)	52.7
Female Labour Force Participation Rate (in %)	28.3
Male Labour Force Participation Rate (in %)	76.1
HDI Value	0.644

India demonstrated progress in reducing gender inequality. The country's GII value of 0.437 is better than the global and South Asian averages, according to the report. The country's GII value of 0.437 is better than the global average of 0.462 and the South Asian average of 0.478, "the report said. India's adolescent birth rate in 2022 was 16.3 (births per 1,000 women ages 15-19), an improvement from 17.1 in 2021", it said.

3. Main Dimensions of Gender Inequality in India

3·1 Gender Inequality in Education

Education is the basic right to anyone. Education creates various avenues for girls to make them aware of the vast professional opportunities to build better futures for themselves and their family, join the workforce, take care of the families financially.

There has been improvement and changes happened in the literacy rate of women since independence but still there is gender gap in education. There are several reasons behind it. Such as Poor financial conditions of families, Social and cultural norms that prefer boys' education than boys, there is lack of infrastructure in Government schools which do not have adequate classrooms, furniture and basic amenities like toilet and drinking water. Lack of safe and reliable transport facilities etc

Over the past decade, notable progress has been achieved through targeted government initiatives such as *Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao, Samagra Shiksha*, and digital learning schemes, which have significantly improved girls' access to education. Girls' Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in secondary education has risen from 77.1% to 81.4%, accompanied by a reduction in dropout rates from 17.8% to 12.3%. Female literacy levels and the proportion of women attaining 10 or more years of schooling have also shown consistent growth, reflecting narrowing gender gaps in educational attainment.

Table-3: Gender Inequality Gap in Education

Year	TLRI	FLR	MLR	Literacy gap
2001	64.83%	53.67%	75.26%	21.59%
2011	74.04%	65.46%	82.14%	16.3%
2017-18	77.7%	70.3%	84.7%	14.4%
2023-24	80.9%	74.6%	87.2%	12.6%

3·2 Gender Inequality in the Economic Field

Gender inequality persists in various aspects of society, including education, employment, leadership, and economic disparities. Gender inequality in the economic field refers to disparities between men and women in labour force participation, pay gap, accumulation of wealth, property right and rights in decision making process. Despite several kinds of advancements, legislations and constitutional interferences, still gender disparity exists in the occupational arena. It is clearly evident from female labour force participation rate as shown in the following table:

Table-3: Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) in 2025

Indicator	Male	Female
Labour Force Participation Rate (15+ years)	79.1%	40.0%
Worker Population Ratio (15+ years)	76.6%	38.8%

This means that the labour force participation rate of women remains significantly lower than that of men. Only about 4 out of every 10 women aged 15 years and above are either working or seeking work, compared to nearly 8 out of 10 men. We must remember that the women's labour force participation has improved considerably—from about 23.3% in 2017–18 to 41.7% in 2023–24, still the gender gap remains substantial. Much of the increase has occurred in self-employment, informal work, and unpaid family labour rather than secure salaried jobs.

3·3 Gender Stereotypes and Career Choices

Gender stereotypes and biases often influence career choices and opportunities for individuals. Women are often steered towards traditionally female-dominated fields such as caregiving and hospitality, while men are encouraged to pursue careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields. This perpetuates the gender wage gap and limits the potential for individuals to pursue their desired career paths.

3·4 Inequality in the Workplace

Gender inequality in the workplace is manifested in various forms, like unequal pay, limited career advancement opportunities, and workplace discrimination. Studies indicate that a significant portion of women are generally paid less than men for the same work resulting in significant wage gap. This wage gap not only impacts individuals' financial security but also perpetuates economic disparities between genders. Also, women get fewer representation in leadership positions and decision-making roles within organizations, which further perpetuates the cycle of inequality. One recent analysis found that discrimination in the workplace accounts for about 94% of the observed gender wage gap in India. Another recent survey in Telangana, conducted by Telangana labour department, has found that nearly 90% of companies had failed to fully comply with legal requirements for internal committees addressing workplace sexual harassment (*The Times of India*, May 13, 2026). Moreover, research continues to find significant earnings gaps between socially advantaged and disadvantaged caste groups in the labour market. Interpreting the caste-based earning gaps in the Indian labour market, studies suggest that differences in education, occupation, and historical disadvantages contribute to persistent workplace inequalities.

3·5 Gender Wage Gap and its Consequences

Gender wage gap refers to the disparity in earnings between men and women, with women earning less than men for the same work. This wage gap is influenced by various factors, including gender discrimination, occupational segregation, and caregiving responsibilities. Majority of the women continue to earn less than men across occupations. Women earn approximately ₹76 for every ₹100 earned by men on average. In higher-skilled jobs, men earn about ₹150 per hour, while women earn around ₹112 per hour. Even women spend far more time on unpaid household and caregiving activities than men. It has been shown that the women spend about 305 minutes per day on unpaid domestic work as compared to men, who spend about 86 minutes per day on the same activities. Despite its massive economic contribution, domestic work remains invisible in labour statistics, undervaluing women's time and restricting their participation in paid employment. This unequal distribution of household responsibilities limits women's participation in paid employment. The Economic Survey 2022-23 estimated the value of women's unpaid care work at Rs 22.7 lakh crore, roughly 7.5% of India's GDP.

The gender wage gap deeply affects women. It adversely impacts financial security, economic stability, and overall well-being of women. Women face several disadvantages in accessing economic resources and opportunities, which negatively impacts their financial security and ability to invest in their future.

There are many economic benefits of gender equality. Researches show that gender equality is positively correlated with economic performance, innovation, and overall well-being within societies. When women are given equal access to education, employment opportunities, and leadership positions, societies benefit from a more diverse talent pool and a broader range of perspectives that drive innovation and success.

- **Economic Participation:** Female labour force participation increased from 23.3% (2017-18) to 41.7% (2023-24). Schemes like Stand-Up India and Mahila e-Haat, promote women entrepreneurship.
- **Shifting Social Norms:** Changing societal attitudes and gender-neutral portrayals in media have enabled greater acceptance of women in leadership and non-traditional roles.

There have been attempts to reduce socio-economic inequality through policy interventions since the first plan, still there are evidences of social and economic discrimination.

3·6 Gender Inequality in Leadership and Decision-making Positions

Gender inequality is particularly pronounced in leadership and decision-making positions within organizations and society at large. Women are significantly underrepresented in leadership roles, including corporate boards, government positions, and other decision-making bodies. Studies have shown that Women constitute only 33% of entry-level employees in the formal sector. Their representation drops to 24% at the managerial level, illustrating the "leadership pipeline" problem. Among top executives (Key Managerial Personnel), women account for only 12.4%, and nearly two-thirds of companies have no female executive in such positions.This lack of representation has significant consequences for policy-making, resource allocation, and organizational culture.

When women are not given an equal voice in shaping policies and practices, the needs and perspectives of half the population are not adequately represented. This perpetuates the cycle of inequality and limits the potential for creating inclusive and equitable societies. Furthermore, the lack of gender diversity in leadership positions has consequences for organizational performance and innovation.

The participation of women in decision-making is crucial for a country's development and standardization. When women are more involved in decision-making, it leads to positive transformations in societies, including changes in laws, policies, services, institutions, and social norms. Ensuring that women have a voice in decisions that affect their lives, their families, and the broader community is essential for improving their quality of life across all layers of society. These decisions impact women as much as they do men, highlighting the importance of women's inclusion in decision-making processes, with equal power and representation alongside men. Society bears the responsibility of ensuring that women have equal opportunities to participate in decision-making at all levels, and that decision-making bodies represent a diverse range of people and communities

3·7 Gender Health Inequality Gap

The gender health gap refers to long-term differences in how healthcare is provided to and experienced by women compared to men. It's caused by a historical underrepresentation of women in medical research and bias in healthcare. As a result, women face poorer health outcomes, less access to appropriate care, and lower-quality medical treatment.

Though India's Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) declined from 254 deaths per 100,000 live births (2004–06) to 88 deaths per 100,000 live births (2021–23), still it has been stressed that health risks associated with pregnancy and childbirth continued unabated in India. The World Bank estimates about 80 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births in 2023. Around 57% of women aged 15–49 years are anaemic, compared with a much lower prevalence among men. Anaemia affects women's productivity, pregnancy outcomes, and overall health (The Times of India, August 25, 2025).

"Disparities are seen in a number of health conditions such as pain management, heart disease and mental health", says Dr. Rageshri Dhairyawan, the author of UNHEARD: The Medical Practice of Silencing. "There is also a lack of knowledge and services for conditions that affect mostly women such as endometriosis and menopause." Gender health gap affects women's health and quality of life

According to Dr Rageshri Dhairyawan the women's health gap has a severe impact on physical and mental health and overall quality of life. "These gaps may also affect economic status if found unable to work due to illness", she says. "Your close relationships - especially with family - may too be impacted." Dhairyawan adds that while women may live longer than men, they spend a greater portion of their lives in poor health.

4. Conclusion

This paper discusses various aspects and forms of gender inequalities prevalent in our society. Our constitution gives equal rights to men and women. But legal and administrative measures alone cannot guarantee gender equality in any society. Various factors like social, cultural, economic and political pose great hindrance towards our goal of achieving gender equality in India. We should work towards eliminating gender inequality starting from our homes. India can develop only when women are able to contribute to their full potential in every sphere of social and economic life of our country.

To reduce gender inequality in India, policymakers should adopt a multi-dimensional approach that promotes equal access to quality education, healthcare, employment opportunities, and political participation for women. Effective implementation of gender-sensitive laws, strict enforcement of equal pay provisions, expansion of skill development programmes, provision of affordable childcare facilities, and awareness campaigns to challenge patriarchal norms are essential. Furthermore, increasing women's representation in decision-making institutions and strengthening social protection measures can help create an inclusive environment where women can fully realize their potential and contribute to sustainable national development.

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Ethnicity, Adequacy of Consumption and Inequality in Nepal

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Abstract

This paper examines the adequacy of overall consumption at household level in Nepal with a focus on ethnic and spatial disparities, using nationally representative data from the Nepal Living Standards Survey (NLSS-IV, 2022/23) data which includes 46,870 individuals and 9,600 households. Results show significant differences in adequacy of household consumption across locations and ethnic groups. Households in Kathmandu reflect the lowest levels of consumption inadequacy, while those in other urban areas experience much higher inadequacy, often approaching rural levels. Rural Nepal has the highest prevalence of inadequacy in overall consumption, with 57.7% of households reporting less than adequate consumption. Ethnic disparities are equally striking: Hill Dalits (62.9%) and Madhesh/Tarai Dalits (76.5%) remain the most disadvantaged having less than adequate consumption, while Hill Caste and Madhesh/Tarai Caste households seem comparatively better. The chi-square tests confirm highly significant associations ($p < 0.001$) between ethnicity, place of residence, and adequacy in consumption. These findings highlight the dual influence of social stratification and spatial location on household welfare, underscoring the need for policies that address both rural-urban disparities and entrenched ethnic inequalities to promote inclusive and equitable development in the context of adequacy of overall consumption among households in Nepal.

Keywords

Ethnicity, Overall consumption, Inequality, Rural-urban, Nepal.

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1. Introduction

Ethnicity is widely understood as a form of social grouping shaped by shared experiences and consciousness. Gray (2012, as mentioned by Gautam, 2013) conceptualizes ethnicity by emphasizing its subjective dimension, suggesting that individuals' perceptions and experiences of belonging form the basis of the 'essentialist' or 'primordial' understanding of ethnicity. However, Gray also recognizes the fluidity of ethnic identity, arguing that ethnicity is not fixed but rather temporary, emerging from social interactions and collective consciousness over time. Similarly, Giddens (2006, as cited by Gautam, 2013) frames ethnicity as a socially constructed phenomenon, rooted in cultural practices and shared outlooks that distinguish one community from another. He underscores that ethnicity is not innate but is continually produced and reproduced through social processes, highlighting its dynamic and relational character.

The formation and persistence of ethnic identities are closely linked to broader social, political, and economic contexts. As Kanbur *et al.* (2011, cited by Gautam, 2013) note, ethnicity is an outcome of larger societal processes that shape group dynamics, reflecting the interplay of structural forces and individual experiences. This perspective shifts the understanding of ethnicity from a fixed attribute to a socially mediated and historically contingent phenomenon, emphasizing that ethnic distinctions are both constructed and maintained through collective social practices and institutional frameworks.

In the study of social inequality, concepts such as stratification and differentiation are central, as both refer to forms of social heterogeneity. Differentiation typically concerns the division of labour or occupation, but it also encompasses broader forms of pluralism within society. Horizontal differentiation, or inequality, refers to variations among groups without implying hierarchical ranking, while vertical differentiation, or stratification, represents graded hierarchies of status or power. Abe (2010, as cited by Gautam, 2013) distinguishes heterogeneity as horizontal differentiation based on nominal characteristics, whereas inequality signifies vertical differentiation along a graduated scale.

Social stratification, therefore, represents not merely differentiation but the systematic ordering of social differences along one or more axes.

Gupta (2003, as cited in Gautam, 2013) clarifies that stratification involves the organization of social differences according to specific criteria, often a single dominant parameter, which integrates diverse social strata into a coherent system. This approach highlights how both differentiation and stratification reflect the structured yet dynamic nature of social inequalities, providing a framework for understanding how social hierarchies are constructed, maintained, and reproduced over time.

Research on financial well-being highlights the importance of both individual-level behaviors and broader structural forces. Ali, Rahman, and Bakar (2015) demonstrate that financial satisfaction is more attainable than complete debt elimination, as the former depends largely on financial planning and literacy across the life course. Their findings show that financial planning directly enhances satisfaction and mediates the effects of financial literacy and attitudes toward money, underscoring the need for proactive strategies to manage increasingly complex financial commitments.

Complementing this perspective, Baek and De Vaney (2010) investigate how U.S. families manage economic hardship, using risk management theory and the permanent income hypothesis as guiding frameworks. Their study reveals that families typically rely on credit or savings to bridge income gaps, though responses differ depending on household circumstances. The broader context of the U.S. economic crisis-marked by high unemployment and widespread financial insecurity (Moseley, 2009; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009)-exposed the vulnerability of many households, particularly given the lack of adequate emergency funds documented in prior research (Chang, Hanna, & Fan, 1997; Ding & DeVaney, 2000). Risk management theory explains these behaviors as forms of risk financing, while the permanent income hypothesis sheds light on the timing of saving and borrowing decisions during periods of income disruption. Together, these perspectives reveal how financial resilience depends not only on individual financial literacy but also on systemic economic stability and preparedness for shocks.

Expanding the discussion to global contexts, Cabezas (2004) situates financial behaviors within the political economy of tourism in the Caribbean. Her analysis demonstrates how historical exploitation and neoliberal reforms have shaped labour markets, particularly in the domain of sex tourism. By emphasizing the entanglement of sex, travel, and globalization, Cabezas argues for broader frameworks that situate labour and sexual citizenship at the center of analysis. This perspective highlights that financial strategies-whether through formal planning, coping with crisis, or engaging in globalized labour markets-are embedded within wider socio-political and historical structures.

Taken together, these studies underscore that financial well-being and resilience cannot be understood solely at the individual level. While financial literacy, planning, and savings behavior are crucial determinants of financial satisfaction and security, structural conditions such as economic crises, labour market dynamics, and historical inequalities play equally significant roles. Thus, a comprehensive understanding of financial resilience requires integrating micro-level behavioral factors with macro-level socio-economic and political forces.

Wisman and Capehart (2010) investigate a socially generated factor contributing to obesity that is not addressed by Keith *et al.*-namely, that the obesity epidemic may be largely driven by heightened insecurity and stress in a context where high-fat and high-sugar foods are readily available. Research increasingly supports a strong link between stress, insecurity, and weight gain. Physiologically, stress prompts individuals to crave fatty and sweet foods and often leads to higher calorie consumption, promoting weight gain, particularly dangerous abdominal fat. Over the past three decades, insecurity and stress have risen alongside capitalism's intensifying creative destruction: job and income security has declined, social status is threatened by growing inequality, healthcare costs have surged, retirement income adequacy is uncertain, social capital and neighborhood cohesion have weakened, and people worldwide are more time-pressured and anxious about the future. Evidence for a connection between insecurity, stress, and obesity is reflected in the "social gradient of obesity", where obesity rates are highest among the least privileged and most economically insecure groups-those with minimal control over their lives and key sources of self-worth-such as African-American and Mexican-American women (Hedley *et al.*, 2004; Flegal *et al.*, 2002, as cited in Wisman and Capehart, 2010). This kind of scenario can be observed in other countries of the world including Nepal.

The Nepal Living Standards Survey (NLSS-IV, 2022/23) indicates persistent concerns regarding the adequacy of household consumption across multiple dimensions. According to the National Statistics Office (NSO, 2024), 18.5 percent of households reported less than adequate consumption in areas such as housing, clothing, health care, and children's schooling, while inadequacy was most pronounced in income, where 50.5 percent of respondents expressed insufficiency. Moreover, at least one-fifth of households reported inadequate consumption in all categories except schooling. Patterns of adequacy also varied along socioeconomic lines: households in lower consumption quintiles and poorer groups were more likely to report "less than adequate", whereas wealthier households were more likely to report consumption as "fair". These disparities suggest significant inequality in consumption adequacy across regions, provinces, and social groups. The research problem, therefore, lies in examining the determinants of consumption adequacy in Nepal, with particular attention to poverty status, regional variations, and socio-demographic factors such as urban-rural residence and ethnicity.

2. Objectives

The primary objective of this paper is to examine the adequacy of household consumption in Nepal with particular attention to ethnic and spatial disparities. Specifically, the study seeks to (i) analyze how adequacy of consumption varies across major ethnic groups such as Hill Caste, Madhesh/Tarai Caste, Janajatis, and Dalits; (ii) compare disparities between Kathmandu, other urban areas, and rural Nepal to describe the urban-rural divide; and (iii) assess whether ethnicity and place of residence are significantly associated with variations in consumption adequacy. By doing so, the study aims to highlight structural inequalities and identify the most vulnerable groups, thereby informing policies that promote inclusive development and poverty reduction in Nepal.

3. Methods

The sources of data and analysis done in this paper is based on secondary data from the Nepal Living Standards Survey (NLSS-IV, 2022/23), which provides nationally representative household-level information. A weighted sample of 46,870 individuals and 9,600 households was used to ensure population-level generalizability. Adequacy of consumption was measured as the proportion of households with less than adequate consumption across ethnic categories and residential locations (Kathmandu, other urban, rural). Descriptive statistics were employed to present the distribution of inadequacy levels, while cross-tabulations highlighted ethnic and spatial variations. To test the statistical significance of these variations, chi-square tests were conducted, with results showing highly significant associations (<0.001) between ethnicity, location, and consumption adequacy. The combination of descriptive and inferential methods allowed for both the identification of patterns and the establishment of robust statistical relationships across social and spatial categories.

4. Social Construction of Economy and Inequality

Daly (2017) examines the multifaceted meanings and repertoires of action associated with money in contexts of poverty and low income. Drawing on interviews with 51 participants, the study demonstrates how individuals actively engage with money to navigate and position themselves within complex social and personal realities. The analysis approaches money on two levels: first, as a matter of praxis and orientation in spending, and second, as an element of self-identity. In terms of spending, two primary repertoires emerge: a functional repertoire, where money is treated as a resource for meeting material needs, and a relational repertoire, where money is understood in relation to interpersonal connections and the maintenance of personal and familial values. These repertoires are closely tied to broader processes of self-construction and worldview formation. For those experiencing poverty or low income, money may operate as a disabling force, undermining valued identities and limiting future prospects. However, an alternative orientation reframes financial scarcity more positively, by emphasizing skill development, character formation, and the affirmation of core values and relationships. Overall, the research highlights the complex and ambivalent role of money in low-income settings, underscoring the agency, creativity, and diverse meanings that individuals attribute to it (Daly, 2017).

Gittleman and Wolff (2004) further point out that the explanatory power of mean-coefficient analysis is unsatisfactory, since a deeper understanding of the racial wealth gap-and of the effectiveness of policies aimed at reducing it-depends on identifying why wealth accumulation differs so sharply by race. Key questions remain: Do white families accumulate more wealth than African American families of similar ages because of larger inheritances and intergenerational transfers, higher savings rates, or superior returns on assets? Unfortunately, because wealth data are typically available only at a single point in time, it is difficult to determine which of these factors plays the most significant role in racial wealth inequality (Gittleman & Wolff, 2004).

Gittleman and Wolff (2004) argue that while examining earnings and income is useful for understanding labour market discrimination and the extent to which African Americans are closing the gap with whites in terms of marketable skills and social connections, such studies give only a partial picture. Two families with the same income but very different wealth levels do not occupy the same economic position. Families with greater wealth are better equipped to invest in their children's education and health, live in safer and more resourceful neighborhoods, weather financial difficulties, and exert greater political influence (Gittleman & Wolff, 2004). In fact, the level and type of earning affect different social aspects of individual and household life in different social contexts.

5. Sociological Understanding of Economy & Consumption

Daly (2017) notes that recent sociological research has expanded insights into the nature of money, shaping an emerging-though not fully unified-alternative paradigm. One line of inquiry highlights money's symbolic role in signaling status, authority, and social worth (Carruthers & Ariovich, 2010), while also examining its connection to trust (e.g., Giddens, 1990). Scholarship on monetary practices emphasizes the mutual influence between money, culture, and social relationships (Carruthers & Ariovich, 2010: 69). Zelizer's work (1989, 1994) is particularly influential in showing how money gains specific meanings within cultural practices and social structures that extend beyond formal economic systems. She underscores how individuals actively transform money in personal contexts, demonstrating that money is socially shaped and that different forms of money are distinguished through social norms governing their acquisition and use.

Daly (2017) highlights two main strands within the literature on money. The first views money in primarily functional and cultural terms within a market-oriented framework, while the second regards money as socially constructed and embedded in relationships and systems of value. These perspectives generally operate in isolation from one another, a divide that is also reflected in research on poverty and low income. Although numerous studies examine the experiences of individuals and families in such contexts, they often concentrate narrowly on practices of money management and expenditure, treating these as ends in themselves and focusing largely on the limited range of options available (Hooper *et al.*, 2007; Kempson, 1996, as cited in Daly, 2017). This is not to diminish the contribution of research that has illuminated the complex strategies, resources, and practices of "coping" with financial hardship (Daly & Leonard, 2002; Flint, 2010; Patrick, 2014, as cited in Daly, 2017). Nonetheless, taken collectively, three broad conclusions can be drawn from this body of work. First, studies of low-income households tend to emphasize money-handling practices and assume a largely rational, functional orientation. Second, they portray financial scarcity and the "discipline of poverty" as the primary forces structuring personal and family life. Third, the deeper role of money in shaping identity and social being remains insufficiently explored (Daly, 2017).

Gray and Kish-Gephart (2013), adopting a microsociological perspective, propose a theoretical framework to explain how social class distinctions are reproduced within organizations. They introduce the notion of "class work" to describe the cognitions and practices individuals from different social classes employ during cross-class interactions. The authors highlight how such class work not only reinforces inequality but also shapes organizational dynamics, particularly affecting those in lower hierarchical positions. By tracing how micro-level interactions become embedded as institutionalized rules and practices, their work contributes to both institutional theory and the sociology of class differences. They also call for further research on social class in organizational contexts while acknowledging the methodological and conceptual challenges this entails (Gray & Kish-Gephart, 2013). It is therefore important to carry out detail study on social construction of economy and inequality in different contexts.

Hersch and Viscusi (2010) investigate why Mexican workers tend to experience poorer outcomes regarding fatality risk compensation. They consider two potential explanations: the worker's proficiency in English and whether the immigrant, currently legal, had previously been undocumented in the United States. Their analysis also presents regression analyses including each of these variables individually, as well as their interactions with the fatality rate and with the fatality rate specific to Mexican workers.

Leininger and Kalil (2014) examine the connections between economic conditions, family stress, and children's adjustment. They note that a key principle of the family stress model is that economic strain affects children indirectly, primarily through its impact on parents' emotional and behavioral functioning (Conger *et al.*, 2010). However, other research suggests that increases in parental depression or family conflict are not always necessary for children to be negatively affected by economic strain. Children can be directly influenced by witnessing the economic difficulties experienced by their parents-or even by those of friends and neighbors (Ananat *et al.*, 2011; Barling *et al.*, 1998, 1999; Hamilton *et al.*, 2009; Mistry *et al.*, 2009, as cited in Leininger and Kalil, 2014). Additionally, their (Leininger & Kalil, 2014) findings support earlier reports showing that substantial portions of the population across all income levels faced significant economic strain during the Great Recession. The results provide strong evidence that, particularly for White families, examining ongoing economic strain may be more informative than focusing on individual economic events when studying the impact of macroeconomic turbulence on child and adolescent behavioral problems.

Under the theme of "Capitalist realism", Paulson and O'Guinn (2012) note that in his 1984 book, sociologist Michael Schudson compares advertising in capitalist societies to Soviet realist art. In the Soviet Union, art was required to serve specific objectives: it had to educate the working class in the spirit of socialism and depict life not as it was, but as it should be-an idealized version worth emulating (First Soviet Writers Congress 1934, quoted in Schudson, 1984: 215). Artists who did not conform were prohibited from exhibiting their work. Schudson (1984) argues that American advertising functions similarly, being ideological and prescriptive, though differing in its conventions and enforcement mechanisms. If one replaces "art" with "advertising", the principle becomes that advertising should portray reality as progressive and represent social struggles in a positive light. When societal disruptions occur, advertising presents ideologically appropriate solutions. Like Soviet realism, ads simplify and typify people, presenting them as representatives of broader social categories: "advertising must simplify and typify images and ideas, depict people only as incarnations of larger social categories" (Schudson, 1984: 215). This process of flattening and stereotyping facilitates the promotion of a particular ideology or preferred social reality (Paulson and O'Guinn, 2012). It is therefore important to look at various aspects of economy in different socio-cultural contexts.

6. Ethnicity, Consumption & Rural-Urban Disparity in Nepal

Scanlan (2003) explores how comparative sociological perspectives can illuminate issues of food security. Given that food security involves complex economic, political, and social factors, sociology is well positioned to study it, drawing on multiple theoretical approaches and rigorous methods to identify the most immediate explanations for hunger dynamics. The article outlines key measures and constructs for assessing food security and its determinants, presents relevant theories, highlights the value of cross-national research, and demonstrates sociology's contribution to understanding the socio-political roots of hunger. Scanlan emphasizes the potential for future comparative sociological research to expand on recent work, which has established sociology's role in a field historically dominated by studies focused primarily on production and supply rather than on conflict, stratification, and inequality-factors central to understanding hunger (Scanlan, 2003). This kind of disparity can be observed in overall consumption of households across ethnicities and rural-urban locations in the context of Nepal from the following Table:

Table-1: Ethnicity and Overall Consumption and Rural-Urban Disparities in Nepal **(N=46870)**

Ethnicity	Percentage of Households with Less than Adequate			
	Kathmandu	Urban Nepal	Rural Nepal	Total
Hill Caste	31.1	42.3	52.2	43.1
Madhesh/Tarai Caste	27.4	55.6	54.7	54.4
Mountain/Hill Janajati	34.9	43.8	60.0	47.3
Tarai Janajati	29.1	53.3	55.4	53.3
Hill Dalit	54.1	63.4	62.9	62.7
Madhesh/Tarai Dalit	25.6	64.3	76.5	67.9

Religions/Linguistic group	42.1	61.1	60.6	60.2
Others & Not stated	–	10.8	26.7	18.6
Total	**33.8**	**50.1**	**57.7**	**50.5**
Chi-Square value	12247.43	118785.25	36522.50	165862.49
Degree of freedom	12	14	14	14
-value	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000

Source: Computed from NLSS-IV (2022/23) Data Set (Results are weighted)

Adequacy of consumption in Kathmandu, other urban areas, and rural Nepal shows marked differences across ethnic groups. Kathmandu exhibits the lowest share of households with inadequate consumption across almost all categories, reflecting higher access to resources, services, and economic opportunities in the capital. For example, less than a third of Hill Caste (31.1%) and Madhesh/Tarai Caste (27.4%) households in Kathmandu report inadequate consumption, compared to over half of their rural counterparts. Even traditionally disadvantaged groups, such as Hill Dalits (54.1%) and Madhesh/Tarai Dalits (25.6%), fare relatively better in Kathmandu than in rural areas. This suggests that the urban economy and infrastructure in Kathmandu mitigate consumption inadequacy across diverse ethnicities.

In other urban areas outside Kathmandu, inadequacy levels are higher and closer to rural Nepal, showing that the benefits of urbanization are unevenly distributed. For example, 55.6% of Madhesh/Tarai Caste and 64.3% of Madhesh/Tarai Dalit households in other urban areas experience inadequate consumption, which is much higher than their levels in Kathmandu. Similarly, Hill Dalits in other urban areas (63.4%) are almost as deprived as those in rural areas (62.9%). These figures suggest that secondary towns and urban settlements lack the appropriate economic opportunities, service infrastructure, and income-generating capacity available in Kathmandu. Thus, while urbanization is often associated with better living standards, the data reveal that not all urban residents benefit equally, reinforcing the capital city's dominance in resource concentration.

In rural Nepal, inadequacy of consumption is the most widespread, with 57.7% of households overall reporting less than adequate levels. The disparities are particularly sharp among disadvantaged groups such as Madhesh/Tarai Dalits (76.5%), Hill Dalits (62.9%), and Mountain/Hill Janajatis (60.0%). Even relatively advantaged groups like Hill Castes (52.2%) and Madhesh/Tarai Castes (54.7%) face over half of households reporting inadequate consumption. These patterns highlight entrenched structural inequalities and the persistence of poverty and deprivation in rural regions. The overall chi-square results, all significant at <0.001, confirm strong associations between ethnicity, settlement location, and adequacy of consumption. Rural-urban disparities, combined with ethnic stratification, reveal that consumption adequacy is not only spatially unequal but also socially stratified in Nepal.

The chi-square test results further reinforce the robustness of these findings. Extremely high chi-square values across Kathmandu (12,247.43), other urban areas (118,785.25), rural Nepal (36,522.50), and the national total (165,862.49), all with -values of 0.000, indicate that the observed differences in adequacy of consumption across ethnic groups and settlement types are highly statistically significant. This means that the disparities are not due to random chance but are strongly associated with ethnicity and place of residence. In other words, both social identity and geographic location systematically shape household consumption adequacy in Nepal.

7. Discussion

Daly (2017) emphasizes that sociological research on money is moving beyond a purely economic paradigm, recognizing its symbolic, cultural, and relational dimensions. Money is not simply a neutral medium of exchange but a socially embedded institution that signals status, authority, and trust (Carruthers & Ariovich, 2010; Giddens, 1990). Zelizer's (1989, 1994) influential work underscores how money acquires meanings through cultural and social practices, showing that financial resources are actively transformed by individuals and families within specific contexts. These insights are particularly relevant to Nepal, where social identity, ethnicity, and settlement location strongly shape access to resources and adequacy of consumption.

The findings from Nepal demonstrate that consumption inadequacy is not merely a matter of financial scarcity but is structured by broader systems of inequality. In Kathmandu, households across almost all ethnic groups report significantly lower inadequacy compared to their rural and secondary-urban counterparts. This supports Daly's (2017) critique of poverty research that overemphasizes rational money management while overlooking the ways in which money is entangled with identity and social being. For disadvantaged groups such as Dalits and Janajatis, inadequate consumption reflects more than limited income-it reveals entrenched social hierarchies and exclusionary practices that limit access to opportunities and services.

Gray and Kish-Gephart's (2013) concept of "class work" helps explain how inequality persists through everyday practices and organizational rules, suggesting that in Nepal's socio-economic system, ethnic and caste distinctions play a similar role to class boundaries in organizational contexts. The persistence of high consumption inadequacy among rural Dalits and Janajatis illustrates how social stratification is reproduced not only through formal institutions but also through embedded cultural and relational practices that define who has access to economic opportunities.

Similarly, research by Leininger and Kalil (2014) on family stress models shows how economic strain reverberates beyond income, shaping family dynamics and child well-being. In Nepal's rural areas, where more than half of households experience inadequate consumption, economic hardship likely generates stress that affects intergenerational well-being. These findings suggest that inequality in consumption is not only an economic issue but also a social and psychological one, reinforcing Daly's (2017) call to study the deeper role of money in shaping social being.

At a broader cultural level, Paulson and O'Guinn's (2012) discussion of "capitalist realism" sheds light on how dominant narratives of progress can obscure structural inequalities. Just as advertising simplifies social realities into idealized categories (Schudson, 1984), narratives of urbanization in Nepal often portray cities as engines of opportunity. Yet the empirical evidence shows that only Kathmandu provides significantly better conditions, while other urban areas more closely resemble rural deprivation. This indicates that the benefits of urbanization are unevenly distributed and ideologically overstated, with the capital city monopolizing resources and opportunities.

The disparities confirmed by highly significant chi-square results further demonstrate that ethnicity and geography jointly determine household well-being in Nepal. Hill and Madhesh/Tarai castes in Kathmandu, for instance, report relatively low inadequacy, while Dalits and Janajatis in rural areas face systematic disadvantage. This pattern highlights the social construction of economic inequality: access to adequate consumption is not distributed randomly but follows historically embedded lines of power, identity, and location.

Taken together, the findings suggest three main implications. *First*, in line with Daly's (2017) framework, analyses of poverty in Nepal must move beyond a functionalist focus on money-handling practices to incorporate the cultural, relational, and symbolic roles of money. *Second*, inequality in consumption cannot be understood without considering how ethnicity and settlement shape access to resources, mirroring Gray and Kish-Gephart's (2013) insights on the reproduction of class distinctions. *Third*, macroeconomic processes such as urbanization should be critically examined for their uneven impacts, as ideologies of progress may mask structural exclusions.

Ultimately, the study of consumption adequacy in Nepal contributes to the sociological literature on money and inequality by showing how financial scarcity is mediated by cultural norms, social hierarchies, and spatial divisions. Money in this context is not simply a resource but a social instrument through which identities and inequalities are produced and sustained.

8. Conclusions

The findings drawn in this paper highlight that adequacy of consumption in Nepal is deeply structured by both ethnic identity and settlement location, reflecting entrenched socio-economic inequalities. While Kathmandu demonstrates lower levels of inadequacy across groups, the persistence of deprivation in rural areas and secondary towns underscores that the benefits of urbanization are concentrated and unevenly distributed. These patterns confirm Daly's (2017) argument that money must be understood not only in functional terms but also as a socially embedded construct that reflects power, trust, and identity.

The findings further suggest that financial scarcity alone does not explain inequality. Rather, social hierarchies-manifested in caste, ethnicity, and geography-play a decisive role in shaping who has access to adequate consumption. As Gray and Kish-Gephart (2013) argue in organizational contexts, inequality is reproduced through everyday practices and structural arrangements; in Nepal, this occurs at the intersection of social stratification and spatial disadvantage. The symbolic and cultural meanings of money (Zelizer, 1989, 1994) therefore become crucial in understanding how deprivation is both experienced and perpetuated.

From a policy perspective, addressing inadequacy of consumption requires multi-dimensional strategies. Expanding infrastructure and economic opportunities beyond the capital is essential to mitigate urban-rural disparities. At the same time, targeted interventions must address the specific disadvantages faced by Dalits, Janajatis, and Madhesh/Tarai groups, ensuring that development policies confront entrenched patterns of exclusion. Social protection programs, inclusive financial systems, and equitable access to education and healthcare can help reduce the structural barriers that restrict upward mobility.

For future research, a stronger focus on the social construction of economic life is needed. Beyond measuring income and expenditure, studies should explore how money, trust, and cultural practices shape household strategies, social identities, and intergenerational outcomes. Comparative research across urban, semi-urban, and rural contexts would further illuminate how inequality is reproduced and contested in different settings. Moreover, integrating the insights of family stress models (Leininger & Kalil, 2014) could help clarify the psychosocial dimensions of economic hardship, particularly its impact on children and community resilience.

In essence, the evidence from Nepal demonstrates that economic inequality cannot be understood apart from its social and cultural foundations. Money is not merely a tool of exchange but a medium through which social distinctions, identities, and exclusions are enacted. Recognizing this complexity is vital for designing policies that foster not only material adequacy but also social justice and inclusive prosperity.

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Democratic Decentralization in Himachal Pradesh: An Analysis of Electoral Participation, Representation and Emerging Trends in the 2026 Panchayat Elections

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Abstract

Democratic decentralization is a core principle of participatory governance that emphasizes the transfer of authority and decision-making power from higher levels of government to local institutions. It aims to strengthen grassroots democracy by promoting citizen participation, improving accountability, and ensuring responsive governance. In India, local governance institutions act as the main framework for implementing this democratic vision and for enhancing political inclusion at the grassroots level. Within this context, Himachal Pradesh provides a significant case for examining decentralized governance due to its rural character, geographical diversity, and strong reliance on local institutions. The present study is based on the Panchayati Raj Elections conducted in Himachal Pradesh in 2026 and is designed to analyze multiple dimensions of electoral democracy at the local level. The study specifically examines voter participation and electoral trends, with a focus on youth involvement in the electoral process. It also evaluates women's representation in Panchayati Raj Institutions, along with the educational and socio-economic profile of elected representatives. Further, the study analyzes how the outcomes of these elections reflect and influence the broader process of democratic decentralization in the state. The analysis is based on secondary data obtained from official electoral records, reports and government sources. It highlights patterns of increasing participation, improved representation of women, and a gradual shift towards more educated and socially diverse leadership in local governance. These findings collectively provide insights into the functioning of grassroots democracy in Himachal Pradesh.

Keywords

Panchayati Raj, Democratic Decentralization, Electoral participation, Himachal Pradesh.

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1. Introduction

Democratic decentralization is widely regarded as one of the most important pillar of participatory governance in India. It aims to transfer decision-making powers and developmental responsibilities from central and state governments to local self-government institutions higher levels of government to local institutions. It also improves administrative efficiency as local bodies can better understand and address local needs and problems. The idea of democratic decentralization in India is closely linked with the evolution of the Panchayati Raj system. The Panchayati Raj system in India has a long historical background rooted in traditional village governance, where villages functioned as self-governing units through local councils. After independence, the need to institutionalize grassroots democracy was strongly emphasized, leading to the recommendations of the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee in 1957, which proposed a three-tier system of Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti, and Zila Parishad. This system was first introduced in Rajasthan in 1959 and later adopted by several states. However, over time, it faced several challenges such as irregular elections, inadequate funds, and limited functional autonomy. To address these issues, the Ashok Mehta Committee in 1977 suggested major reforms, but meaningful constitutional recognition was achieved only with the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992. This amendment gave constitutional status to Panchayati Raj Institutions, made regular elections mandatory, ensured reservation for SCs, STs, and women, and established State Finance Commissions to strengthen financial resources.

The constitutional recognition of Panchayati Raj Institutions in 1992 further strengthened their development and led to uniform implementation across states, including Himachal Pradesh. The Panchayati Raj system in Himachal Pradesh was initially introduced under the Himachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act, 1952, which was implemented in 1954. After the formation and reorganization of the state, the system gradually evolved to meet local governance needs in the hilly terrain. Following the 73^{rd} Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992, it was restructured under the Himachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 to align with constitutional provisions. At present, it operates through a three-tier structure consisting of Gram Panchayat at the village level, Panchayat Samiti at the block level, and Zila Parishad at the district level. In Himachal Pradesh, Panchayati Raj Institutions play a crucial role in rural development, especially in remote and mountainous areas, and are characterized by strong public participation, high voter turnout, and increasing representation of women and educated representatives.

The Panchayati Raj Elections of 2026 are particularly significant as the elections recorded extensive voter participation, active involvement of first-time voters and unprecedented representation of women in local governance. The elections provide valuable insights into emerging trends in grassroots democracy and offer an opportunity to assess the effectiveness of democratic decentralization in Himachal Pradesh. However, limited research is available regarding the electoral dynamics, voter participation, and representation patterns in the Panchayati Raj Elections of Himachal Pradesh in 2026. The present study seeks to fill this gap.

2. Objectives of the Study

The present study aims to examine the Panchayati Raj Elections conducted in Himachal Pradesh in 2026 and to analyze their significance in the context of democratic decentralization and local self-governance. The study seeks to assess voter participation and examine the participation of youth in the electoral process. The study further evaluates women's representation in Panchayati Raj Institutions with a view to assessing the effectiveness of constitutional provisions aimed at promoting gender inclusiveness in local political institutions. The study also analyzes the educational and socio-economic profile of elected representatives to understand emerging patterns of rural leadership and political participation

3. Research Methodology

The present study is descriptive and analytical in nature. The study is based entirely on secondary data collected from reports of the State Election Commission, Himachal Pradesh, official election notifications, government publications, newspaper reports and other relevant documents. Percentage analysis, descriptive statistical techniques and comparative interpretation have been employed to analyze electoral participation, representation patterns and emerging trends in local governance. The collected data have been classified and presented in tabular form for systematic analysis and interpretation.

4. Presentation and Interpretation of Data

4·1 Panchayati Raj Elections in Himachal Pradesh, 2026

The Panchayati Raj Elections constituted an important democratic exercise and provided an opportunity to assess the functioning of grassroots democratic institutions in the state. The elections were significant not only for renewing local self-government bodies but also for evaluating patterns of political participation, representation, and democratic decentralization. The State Election Commission announced the schedule for the Panchayati Raj Elections on 28 April 2026. The elections were conducted in three phases on 26, 28, and 30 May 2026. The electoral exercise covered all 3,754 Gram Panchayats of Himachal Pradesh and involved the election of representatives at various levels of Panchayati Raj Institutions, including Pradhans, Up-Pradhans, Ward Members, Panchayat Samiti Members, and Zila Parishad Members.

Table-1: Election for Different Posts in PRIs 2026

Sr No	Post	Total
1.	Pradhan	3754
2.	Up-Pradhan	3754
3.	Ward Members	21654
4.	Panchayat Samiti Members	1769
5.	Zila Parishad Members	251
6.	**Total**	**31182**

Source: State Election Commission HP Election Data-2026.

One of the most notable features of the Panchayati Raj Elections in Himachal Pradesh in 2026 was the high number of unanimous and uncontested victories. Although the State Election Commission conducted the elections in three phases, a significant number of local bodies witnessed consensus-based electoral outcomes. Prior to polling, 128 Gram Panchayats were elected unanimously, while 10,854 candidates were declared elected unopposed to various positions. This trend reflects the spirit of social harmony, mutual understanding, and community consensus that characterizes many rural areas of the state. Rather than engaging in electoral competition, local communities in several Panchayats preferred to select their representatives through collective agreement. These outcomes may be interpreted as indicators of strong social cohesion and political consensus at the grassroots level. They also demonstrate the growing institutional acceptance and consolidation of Panchayati Raj Institutions, while highlighting the enduring tradition of participatory decision-making and local self-governance in rural Himachal Pradesh.

4·2 Voter Participation and Electoral Engagement

The Panchayati Raj Elections of 2026 witnessed extensive participation from voters across the state. Data in the table-2 on next page reflect that a total of 50,79,048 voters were registered for the elections, including

25,67,770 male voters, 25,11,249 female voters and 29 voters belonging to the third gender category.

Table-2: Voters in HP Panchayat Election-2026

Sr No	District	Male	Female	Others	Total
1.	Bilaspur	158282	157056	02	315340
2.	Chamba	205142	199506	09	404657
3.	Hamirpur	180434	184724	02	365160
4.	Kangra	600947	589380	03	1190330
5.	Kinnaur	29995	29974	00	59969
6.	Kullu	157258	152736	01	309995
7.	Lahaul-Spiti	12906	12976	00	25882
8.	Mandi	398843	396784	07	795634
9.	Shimla	258460	250375	00	508835
10.	Sirmour	195459	178589	02	374050
11.	Solan	179217	172055	00	351272
12.	Una	190827	187094	03	377924
Total		**2567770**	**2511249**	**29**	**5079048**

Source: State Election Commission HP Election Data-2026, ***Dainik Jagaran*** Newspaper, dated 29/04/2026.

It is also clear from the above table that among the districts, Kangra recorded the highest number of registered voters, followed by Mandi and Shimla. In contrast, Lahaul and Spiti and Kinnaur recorded comparatively smaller voter populations due to their geographical and demographic characteristics. The data indicate a relatively balanced gender composition among the electorate, reflecting inclusive democratic participation.

4·3 Voter Turnout in PRIs Election-2026

The level of voter turnout is an important indicator of the strength and effectiveness of democratic institutions. The Panchayati Raj Elections, 2026, in Himachal Pradesh were conducted in three phases and witnessed remarkably high voter participation across the state. Table-3 depicts that the first phase recorded a voter turnout of 78.83 percent, while participation increased to 79.79 percent in the second phase and 80.81 percent in the third phase. The steady increase in voter turnout across all phases reflects strong public confidence in Panchayati Raj Institutions and indicates growing awareness of the importance of local governance.

Table-3: District-wise Voter Turnout in PRIs Elections

District	1st Phase Vote %	2nd Phase Vote %	3rd Phase Vote %
Kullu	84.41	85.52	84.66
Sirmour	83.41	85.16	86.25
Solan	81.06	83.62	83.84
Mandi	79.80	80.96	82.11
Shimla	80.45	80.68	82.96
Una	79.80	79.73	79.84
Bilaspur	77.39	78.95	78.67
Chamba	80.88	79.99	81.87
Kangra	75.81	76.29	77.54
Kinnaur	73.59	76.29	79.67
Hamirpur	73.12	74.94	76.52
Lahual-Spiti	69.40	69.38	71.08
Total	**78.83**	**79.79**	**80.81**

Source: https://sechimachal.hp.gov.in/dpmis/PollingDayDashBoardPublicRural.aspx

District-wise analysis, as presented in Table-3, reveals significant variations in participation levels. Kullu and Sirmaur recorded some of the highest turnout percentages, while Lahaul and Spiti reported comparatively lower participation due to geographical constraints. Nevertheless, voter turnout remained substantial across all districts, demonstrating the deep roots of democratic participation within rural Himachal Pradesh. The high voter turnout also suggests that citizens increasingly perceive Panchayati Raj Institutions as effective mechanisms for addressing local issues and promoting development. Compared with many parliamentary and legislative elections, participation levels in Panchayati Raj elections remain remarkably high, emphasizing the relevance of local governance in people's everyday lives. A district-wise analysis of voter turnout significant variations in participation levels across Himachal Pradesh

4·4 Youth Participation in the Electoral Process

Youth constitute an important segment of the population and play a crucial role in strengthening democratic governance. Their participation in the electoral process is a key indicator of political awareness, civic consciousness, and engagement with public affairs. As agents of social and political change, young people contribute to the vitality and sustainability of democratic institutions by bringing new perspectives, aspirations, and ideas into the political process. Youth participation emerged as an important feature of the Panchayati Raj Elections of 2026. A total of 52,349 first-time voters participated in the electoral process, including 28,581 male voters and 23,768 female voters. The involvement of such a large number of new voters reflects growing political awareness among younger generations and indicates increasing interest in democratic governance.

Table-4: Age-wise Elected Members in PRIs Election 2026

Age	Elected Members	%age
21-30	4078	13.15
31-40	10847	34.98
41-50	9753	31.45
51-60	4795	15.46
61-70	1537	4.96

Source: State Election Commission HP Election Data-2026.

The age profile of elected representatives further highlights the emergence of younger leadership. The largest proportion of elected representatives belonged to the 31-40 years age group, followed by those in the 41-50 years category. A substantial number of representatives also belonged to the 21-30 years age group, demonstrating the gradual entry of young leaders into local governance institutions. The growing participation of youth is likely to influence governance priorities and administrative practices. Younger representatives often bring new perspectives regarding employment generation, technological innovation, digital governance and sustainable development. Their involvement strengthens the democratic process by ensuring generational diversity in political leadership.

4·5 Women's Representation in Panchayati Raj Institutions

Women's representation in Panchayati Raj Institutions is a significant indicator of inclusive and participatory democracy at the grassroots level. Women's representation emerged as the most remarkable outcome of the Panchayati Raj Elections of 2026. Women secured 16,691 elected positions, accounting for 53.82 percent of the total elected representatives. This figure exceeds the statutory reservation requirement and demonstrates the growing political empowerment of women in rural Himachal Pradesh. The increasing presence of women in local governance has important implications for democratic participation and inclusive development. Their involvement contributes to greater attention to issues such as education, health, sanitation, social welfare and community development. Consequently, women's representation strengthens both democratic legitimacy and governance effectiveness.

4·6 Social Inclusion and Representation

The Panchayati Raj Elections of 2026 further strengthened the principle of inclusive governance by ensuring representation of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes. Reservation provisions enabled these communities to participate actively in local governance and decision-making processes.

Table-5: Category-wise Elected Members

Category	Elected Members	%age
Un-Reserved	12189	39.31
SC Women	4539	14.64
SC	2448	7.89
ST Women	1175	3.79
ST	701	2.26
OBC Women	226	0.73
OBC	177	0.57
Women (Others)	9555	30.81

Source: State Election Commission HP Election Data-2026.

The category-wise distribution of elected representatives shows that Panchayati Raj Institutions have become more inclusive and representative. The most notable feature of the 2026 elections was the remarkable success of women candidates, who secured 53.82 percent of the total elected positions, exceeding the 50 percent reservation provided for them. This indicates that women were not elected only because of reserved seats but also gained the confidence and support of voters across different categories. The significant representation of women from Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, OBCs, and other sections reflects the growing role of women in local governance. These results highlight a positive change in rural society, where women are increasingly participating as leaders and contributing actively to decision-making and development at the grassroots level.

4·7 Educational Profile of Elected Representatives

Education plays a crucial role in enhancing the effectiveness of local governance, as it equips elected representatives with the knowledge and skills necessary for informed decision-making and public administration. The educational profile of elected representatives, as presented in Table-6, provides valuable insights into the changing nature of rural leadership in Himachal Pradesh. The largest proportion of elected representatives (44.46 percent) were matriculates, followed by those with secondary-level education (23.14 percent) and under-matric qualifications (18.54 percent). The elections also witnessed the successful participation of graduates (8.40

percent) and postgraduates (4.03 percent), indicating a growing presence of educated individuals in local governance.

Table-6: Education Level of Elected Members

Education	Total Number	%age
Illiterate	443	1.43
Secondary	7175	23.14
Matric	13787	44.46
Under Matric	5748	18.54
Graduate	2606	8.4
Post Graduate	1251	4.03

Source: State Election Commission HP Election Data-2026.

It is also clear from the above table that the proportion of illiterate representatives remained very low (1.43 percent), highlighting the increasing importance of education in grassroots leadership. Overall, the educational composition suggests the emergence of a more informed and capable leadership while maintaining the inclusive character of Panchayati Raj Institutions.

4·8 Socio-economic Profile of Elected Representatives

The socio-economic profile of elected representatives demonstrates the representative character of Panchayati Raj Institutions. The data presented in Table-7 indicate that an overwhelming majority of elected representatives, constituting 88.94 percent of the total, belonged to Above Poverty Line (APL) households, while a significant number also came from Below Poverty Line families. The presence of taxpayers and non-taxpayers among elected representatives further illustrates the socio-economic diversity of local leadership.

Table-7: Economic Status of Members

Economic Status	Total Number	%age
APL	2780	88.94
Tax Payer	201	0.65
Non Tax Payer	1131	3.65
BPL	2096	6.76

Source: State Election Commission HP Election Data-2026.

This diversity is important for ensuring that Panchayati Raj Institutions remain responsive to the needs of different sections of society. Representation from varied economic backgrounds enables local institutions to address issues affecting both economically stronger and weaker groups. Consequently, Panchayati Raj Institutions continue to function as inclusive platforms for democratic participation and community development.

5. Major Findings

The findings of the study demonstrate that the Panchayati Raj Elections, 2026, marked a significant milestone in the consolidation of democratic decentralization and grassroots governance in Himachal Pradesh. The elections witnessed exceptionally high voter participation, with turnout consistently remaining at a remarkable level and exceeding 80 percent in the final phase of polling, reflecting the deep-rooted faith of citizens in local democratic institutions. The participation of more than 52,000 first-time voters signifies the growing political awareness, civic consciousness, and democratic engagement of rural youth. Equally noteworthy was the substantial representation of women, who secured 53.82 percent of the elected positions, highlighting their expanding role in local leadership and decision-making processes. The electoral outcomes also revealed the increasing presence of educated representatives and ensured the inclusion of socially disadvantaged groups through constitutional reservation provisions. Collectively, these developments underscore the growing institutional maturity, inclusiveness, and democratic legitimacy of Panchayati Raj Institutions, reaffirming their pivotal role in promoting participatory governance and strengthening grassroots democracy in Himachal Pradesh.

6. Conclusion

The Panchayati Raj Elections of Himachal Pradesh, 2026, represent a significant achievement in the process of democratic decentralization and grassroots governance. The elections were characterized by high voter participation, active youth engagement, and substantial representation of women and inclusive participation of marginalized communities. The successful conduct of elections across the state demonstrates the strength and effectiveness of Panchayati Raj Institutions as instruments of local democracy. The findings reveal that citizens continue to place considerable trust in local self-government institutions. Women have emerged as influential political actors, while increasing participation of younger generations indicates the emergence of a new leadership profile in rural governance. The educational and socio-economic diversity of elected representatives further reflects the inclusive character of Panchayati Raj Institutions. Overall, the Panchayati Raj Elections of 2026 reaffirm the importance of grassroots democratic institutions in promoting political participation, social inclusion and rural development. The Himachal Pradesh experience demonstrates that democratic decentralization continues to play a vital role in strengthening democracy and enhancing governance at the local level.

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The Ecology-Commerce Nexus of Biodiversity Loss: Implications for Human Health and Economic Productivity in the Aravalli Range, India

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Abstract

Biodiversity loss has emerged as a critical challenge with far-reaching ecological, public health, and economic consequences. This study investigates the relationship between biodiversity degradation, human health outcomes, and economic productivity in the Aravalli Range, India-one of the country's most environmentally stressed ecological regions. Drawing upon secondary data from government reports, international databases, and peer-reviewed literature, the study employs a descriptive and trend-based analytical framework to examine changes in forest cover, water availability, health-related vulnerabilities, public health expenditure, and selected indicators of human development. The findings suggest that biodiversity degradation in the Aravalli region contributes to ecosystem instability and water stress, which in turn increase health risks and economic burdens through higher healthcare expenditure, reduced labour productivity, and constraints on sustainable development. The study further demonstrates that the economic costs associated with ecosystem degradation remain largely underrepresented in conventional measures of economic performance and development planning. By integrating ecological, health, and economic dimensions within a commerce-oriented natural capital framework, the paper highlights biodiversity as a productive economic asset essential for long-term human well-being and economic resilience. The findings underscore the need for biodiversity-sensitive governance, ecosystem valuation, and the integration of natural capital considerations into economic policy and development strategies.

Keywords

Biodiversity loss, Economic productivity, Ecosystem degradation, Human Development Index, Human health, Water Scarcity.

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The Ecology-Commerce Nexus of Biodiversity Loss: Implications for Human Health and Economic Productivity in the Aravalli Range, India

1. Introduction

Biodiversity constitutes a fundamental component of natural capital and underpins the ecosystem services that sustain human well-being, economic activity, and environmental stability. Healthy ecosystems provide essential services such as water purification, climate regulation, pollination, disease regulation, and nutrient cycling, all of which contribute directly and indirectly to human health and economic productivity (WHO, 2015; Costanza *et al.*, 2014; Dasgupta, 2021). As recognized within the natural capital framework, biodiversity is not merely an environmental asset but a productive resource that supports livelihoods, public health, and long-term economic development. Consequently, biodiversity conser= vation has emerged as an important consideration within sustainable development and economic governance discourse.

Despite its importance, biodiversity loss has become one of the most significant global challenges of the twenty-first century. Recent assessments indicate that the accelerating decline of species, habitats, and ecosystem functions is undermining ecosystem resilience and reducing the capacity of natural systems to support human societies (IPBES, 2019; Díaz *et al.*, 2019). The degradation of ecosystem services contributes to increasing water scarcity, environmental stress, and heightened exposure to health risks, thereby generating substantial social and economic costs. These impacts often manifest through reduced labour productivity, increased healthcare expenditure, and weakened developmental outcomes, particularly in regions where communities remain highly dependent on ecosystem resources (World Bank, 2021; Dasgupta, 2021). From an economic perspective, such consequences represent negative externalities and the depreciation of natural capital that remain inadequately reflected in conventional measures of economic performance and development planning.

The growing recognition of the interdependence between ecological systems and economic outcomes has strengthened interest in understanding biodiversity through an integrated ecological-economic perspective. Within this framework, biodiversity conservation generates economic value through the maintenance of ecosystem services, while biodiversity degradation creates hidden costs that affect households, businesses, and governments alike (Costanza *et al.*, 1997; TEEB, 2010). Ecosystem degradation can reduce water availability, increase public health burdens, disrupt livelihood opportunities, and impose additional expenditure on environmental restoration and healthcare systems. As a result, biodiversity loss is increasingly viewed not only as an environmental concern but also as a development and economic challenge with implications for long-term sustainability.

India occupies a particularly important position within this discourse. As one of the world's mega-diverse countries, India hosts a rich variety of ecosystems, species, and genetic resources while simultaneously supporting a large population that depends directly and indirectly on ecosystem services for water security, health, agriculture, and livelihood generation (Convention on Biological Diversity, 2022). However, rapid urbanization, industrialization, land-use change, and resource extraction have intensified pressures on biodiversity and ecosystem integrity. The degradation of natural capital therefore has implications extending beyond ecological sustainability to encompass economic productivity, public health, and human development (UNDP, 2020).

Within the Indian context, the Aravalli Range represents an ecologically and economically significant landscape. Stretching across north-western India, the Aravalli ecosystem serves as a critical ecological corridor and supports diverse flora and fauna while providing essential ecosystem services such as groundwater recharge, soil stabilization, biodiversity conservation, carbon sequestration, and micro-climatic regulation. These services contribute substantially to regional water security, environmental quality, agricultural productivity, and economic activity. However, increasing pressures from mining, deforestation, land-use transformation, and urban expansion have accelerated ecological degradation across the region. Such changes have been associated with declining groundwater levels, habitat fragmentation, environmental stress, and growing public health concerns, thereby creating challenges for sustainable regional development.

Although a substantial body of literature has examined biodiversity conservation, ecosystem services, environmental sustainability, and public health outcomes, these themes have largely been studied in isolation. Limited research has adopted an integrated natural capital perspective that simultaneously evaluates the ecological, health, and economic consequences of biodiversity loss within a specific regional context. In particular, empirical studies linking biodiversity degradation to water stress, health-related expenditure, labour productivity, and broader development outcomes remain scarce for the Aravalli Range. This fragmentation restricts a comprehensive understanding of the economic implications of ecosystem decline and limits the incorporation of biodiversity considerations into development planning and governance frameworks.

Against this backdrop, the present study examines the relationship between biodiversity loss, human health, and economic productivity in the Aravalli Range, India. Using a descriptive and trend-based analytical approach, the study integrates ecological, water, health, and development indicators to evaluate the broader consequences of ecosystem degradation. The paper seeks to demonstrate that biodiversity conservation and ecosystem restoration are not merely environmental imperatives but strategic economic investments that contribute to human well-being, productivity, and sustainable development. In doing so, the study contributes to the growing literature on biodiversity, natural capital, and sustainable development while highlighting the importance of incorporating ecosystem values into economic planning, governance, and policy formulation.

2. Conceptual Framework: The Ecology-Commerce Nexus of Biodiversity, Health and Economic Productivity

The conceptual framework of this study is based on the Ecology-Commerce Nexus, an integrated analytical perspective that views biodiversity as a productive component of natural capital supporting both human well-being and economic development. Within this framework, ecological systems are recognized not merely as environmental assets but as economic resources that generate valuable ecosystem services essential for sustaining livelihoods, public health, and long-term productivity. Biodiversity supports a wide range of ecological functions, including water regulation, climate moderation, soil conservation, pollination, nutrient cycling, and disease control. These ecosystem services contribute directly to environmental sustainability and indirectly to economic performance by maintaining the ecological conditions necessary for human and economic activity (Costanza *et al.*, 2014; Dasgupta, 2021; World Bank, 2021).

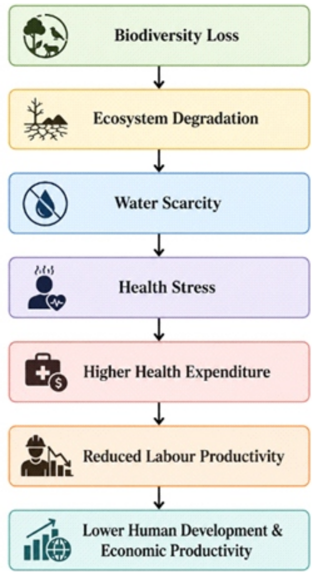
The framework assumes that biodiversity loss initiates a chain of interconnected ecological, social, and economic consequences. As biodiversity declines, ecosystems become less resilient and less capable of providing critical regulatory and provisioning services. This process represents the depreciation of natural capital, reducing the capacity of ecological systems to support human societies and economic activities. The resulting environmental stress often manifests through ecosystem degradation, declining resource availability, and increased vulnerability to ecological disturbances. Since many of these costs are not reflected in market prices or national accounting systems, the economic consequences of biodiversity loss frequently remain hidden despite their substantial long-term implications.

A central pathway within the framework links biodiversity loss to human health outcomes. Ecosystem degradation can adversely affect environmental quality, disrupt natural disease regulation mechanisms, increase climate-related stress, and reduce access to ecosystem-derived resources that contribute to public health. Such changes heighten health vulnerabilities and place additional pressure on healthcare systems (IPBES, 2019; Díaz *et al.*, 2019). Deteriorating health conditions weaken human capital by reducing labour efficiency, increasing absenteeism, and raising public and private healthcare expenditure. Consequently, adverse health outcomes represent an important channel through which biodiversity loss influences economic productivity and development.

Water scarcity is conceptualized as a critical mediating variable connecting ecological degradation with health and economic outcomes. Biodiverse ecosystems contribute significantly to groundwater recharge, watershed protection, and hydrological stability. The degradation of these ecosystems reduces their capacity to regulate water resources, leading to declining groundwater availability and increasing water stress. Reduced water security negatively affects agricultural production, industrial activity, and household welfare while simultaneously increasing the risk of water-related health problems. Water scarcity therefore functions as a key transmission mechanism through which biodiversity loss affects both human well-being and economic performance.

The framework further incorporates the economic concepts of natural capital depreciation, negative externalities, and market failure. When the environmental costs associated with biodiversity loss are excluded from production and consumption decisions, economic agents are incentivized to overexploit ecological resources. This results in socially inefficient outcomes where short-term economic gains are achieved at the expense of long-term ecological sustainability and economic resilience. The failure to internalize environmental costs contributes to the systematic undervaluation of ecosystem services and may create an inaccurate perception of economic progress (TEEB, 2010; Dasgupta, 2021).

Based on these relationships, the study conceptualizes biodiversity loss as an indirect driver of economic stress operating through ecosystem degradation, water insecurity, and adverse health outcomes. The proposed framework suggests that biodiversity conservation and ecosystem restoration generate economic benefits by strengthening ecosystem services, improving public health conditions, enhancing resource security, and reducing productivity losses. In ecologically sensitive regions such as the Aravalli Range, where communities remain closely dependent on ecosystem resources, these interconnections become particularly significant. Accordingly, biodiversity conservation is viewed not merely as an environmental objective but as a strategic investment in natural capital, human capital, economic productivity, and sustainable development.



3. Review of Literature

3·1 Global Perspectives on Biodiversity, Human Health and Economic Development

The relationship between biodiversity, human health, and economic development has attracted increasing attention within environmental and ecological economics literature. Early work by Costanza *et al.* (1997) demonstrated the substantial economic value of ecosystem services, arguing that ecological systems generate critical benefits that are often excluded from conventional market valuation. Subsequent studies expanded this perspective by emphasizing biodiversity as a key component of natural capital that supports economic productivity and human well-being (Costanza *et al.*, 2014).

The World Health Organization has consistently highlighted the importance of biodiversity and ecosystem services for public health, particularly through their role in water purification, air quality regulation, food security, and disease control (WHO, 2015; WHO, 2020). Similarly, the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services reported that approximately one million species face extinction risks due to human activities, with significant implications for ecosystem resilience, food systems, and public health outcomes (IPBES, 2019). Díaz *et al.* (2019) further argued that biodiversity decline reduces nature's capacity to provide essential services necessary for sustaining human societies.

From an economic perspective, the Dasgupta Review (2021) conceptualizes biodiversity as a productive asset and argues that economic systems have historically treated natural capital as a free and inexhaustible resource. The review contends that the failure to account for biodiversity loss results in market failures, inefficient resource allocation, and long-term economic vulnerabilities. Collectively, these studies establish a strong theoretical and empirical foundation linking biodiversity conservation with health security, economic resilience, and sustainable development.

3·2 Biodiversity Governance: SDGs, CBD and the Global Biodiversity Framework

International governance frameworks increasingly recognize biodiversity as a prerequisite for sustainable development. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals integrate biodiversity considerations across multiple goals, including health and well-being (SDG 3), clean water and sanitation (SDG 6), climate action (SDG 13), and life on land (SDG 15), highlighting the interconnected nature of ecological and socio-economic development (United Nations, 2015).

The Convention on Biological Diversity has played a central role in promoting biodiversity conservation through international cooperation and policy coordination. The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework emphasizes ecosystem restoration, sustainable resource management, and the integration of biodiversity values into national accounting and development planning processes (CBD, 2022). These initiatives reflect a growing recognition that biodiversity conservation is not solely an environmental objective but also an economic and developmental necessity.

Despite significant progress in global biodiversity governance, implementation challenges remain substantial. Several assessments indicate persistent gaps between conservation commitments and on-ground outcomes, particularly in developing economies facing competing development priorities. Consequently, researchers increasingly advocate the incorporation of ecosystem valuation and natural capital accounting into policy frameworks to better align economic decision-making with ecological sustainability.

3·3 Biodiversity, Ecosystem Degradation and Development in India

India represents one of the world's megadiverse countries and supports a large population dependent on ecosystem services for livelihoods, agriculture, water security, and public health. National assessments conducted by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change and the Forest Survey of India indicate that while forest conservation efforts have achieved some success, several ecosystems continue to face pressures from urbanization, infrastructure expansion, mining activities, and land-use change (MoEFCC; FSI).

Water security has emerged as a critical concern within the Indian environmental context. Reports of the Central Ground Water Board highlight increasing groundwater depletion across several regions of the country, particularly in semi-arid and ecologically fragile landscapes (CGWB). Environmental degradation and declining ecosystem quality have also been linked to public health vulnerabilities. Studies conducted by the Indian Council of Medical Research emphasize the growing influence of environmental stressors on disease burden and population health outcomes, particularly among vulnerable communities (ICMR).

These findings suggest that biodiversity conservation in India is closely linked with broader development objectives, including water security, public health, and sustainable economic growth. However, much of the existing literature continues to examine these dimensions independently rather than through an integrated ecological-economic framework.

3·4 Studies on the Aravalli Range

The Aravalli Range constitutes one of India's oldest mountain systems and performs critical ecological functions, including groundwater recharge, soil conservation, biodiversity conservation, and micro-climatic regulation. Existing studies identify mining, deforestation, urban expansion, and land-use transformation as major drivers of ecological degradation within the region.

Research undertaken by environmental organizations and academic institutions documents declining vegetation cover, habitat fragmentation, groundwater stress, and increasing environmental vulnerability across the Aravalli landscape. Several studies emphasize the importance of the Aravallis in maintaining regional hydrological balance and mitigating desertification processes in north-western India. Other investigations have highlighted the depletion of medicinal plants, biodiversity decline, and the weakening of ecosystem services resulting from anthropogenic pressures.

Although these studies provide valuable insights into ecological degradation within the Aravalli ecosystem, they remain predominantly environmental in orientation. Limited attention has been devoted to examining how biodiversity loss influences public health outcomes, healthcare expenditure, labour productivity, and broader economic development indicators. As a result, the economic implications of ecosystem degradation remain insufficiently explored within the regional literature.

3·5 Synthesis and Research Gap

The literature reviewed demonstrates a growing global consensus that biodiversity constitutes a critical form of natural capital supporting ecosystem stability, human health, and economic productivity. Existing studies establish important linkages between biodiversity conservation, ecosystem services, public health, and sustainable development. International governance frameworks further reinforce the need to integrate biodiversity considerations into policy and economic planning.

However, three important gaps remain evident. First, much of the existing literature examines biodiversity, health, and economic development separately rather than through an integrated analytical framework. Second, limited research explicitly investigates the economic consequences of biodiversity degradation through pathways such as healthcare expenditure, labour productivity, and human development outcomes. Third, the mediating role of water scarcity linking biodiversity loss to health and economic performance remains underexplored in region-specific studies, particularly within ecologically sensitive landscapes such as the Aravalli Range.

The present study seeks to address these gaps by examining biodiversity loss, water scarcity, human health, and economic productivity within a unified natural capital framework. By focusing on the Aravalli Range, the study contributes to the emerging literature that links ecological sustainability with economic development and human well-being.

4. Study Area: The Aravalli Range

The Aravalli Range is one of the oldest fold mountain systems in the world and constitutes a major ecological landscape in north-western India. Extending approximately 700 kilometres from Gujarat through Rajasthan and Haryana to Delhi, the Aravallis serve as a critical ecological barrier that influences regional climate, supports biodiversity, and contributes significantly to groundwater recharge in an otherwise semi-arid environment. The mountain range plays an important role in maintaining ecological balance and providing ecosystem services essential for human well-being and economic activities across the region.

Ecologically, the Aravalli ecosystem supports diverse flora and fauna adapted to arid and semi-arid conditions. The range functions as an important habitat corridor and contributes to soil conservation, carbon sequestration, watershed protection, and micro-climatic regulation. These ecosystem services support agricultural productivity, water security, and environmental sustainability in surrounding regions. However, increasing anthropogenic pressures, including mining, deforestation, urban expansion, infrastructure development, and land-use transformation, have significantly altered the structure and functioning of the ecosystem. Various environmental assessments have reported habitat fragmentation, vegetation degradation, and declining ecological integrity across several sections of the Aravalli belt (MoEFCC; Forest Survey of India).

Among the ecosystem services provided by the Aravallis, water regulation is of particular economic significance. The range facilitates groundwater recharge and supports regional hydrological stability through its forest cover and watershed functions. Reports of the Central Ground Water Board indicate increasing groundwater stress in many districts influenced by the Aravalli system, with ecological degradation contributing to declining recharge capacity and reduced water availability. Water scarcity has important implications for agriculture, industry, and household welfare while simultaneously increasing health risks associated with inadequate access to safe water resources.

The ecological degradation of the Aravalli Range has broader implications for economic productivity and human development. The weakening of ecosystem services can increase healthcare expenditure, reduce labour productivity, heighten vulnerability to climate-related risks, and impose additional costs on governments and communities. These impacts illustrate how biodiversity loss generates economic consequences that are often overlooked in conventional development assessments. Consequently, the Aravalli Range provides a highly relevant case for examining the interrelationships between biodiversity loss, water security, human health, and economic productivity.

Given its ecological significance, growing environmental pressures, and direct relevance to regional development challenges, the Aravalli ecosystem serves as an appropriate study area for analysing the broader implications of biodiversity degradation. The region offers a valuable context for understanding how the loss of natural capital affects human well-being and economic resilience, thereby contributing to the emerging discourse on biodiversity, sustainable development, and ecological economics.

5. Research Gap and Objectives

5·1 Research Gap

Existing global studies have firmly established the linkages between biodiversity loss, ecosystem degradation, environmental stress, and human well-being (IPBES, 2019; WHO, 2020). Research has increasingly recognized biodiversity as a critical component of natural capital that supports ecosystem services essential for health, livelihoods, and economic development. Within the Indian context, numerous studies and government assessments document region-specific challenges, including declining forest quality, groundwater depletion, land degradation, and increasing environmental health vulnerabilities (MoEFCC; Forest Survey of India; Central Ground Water Board; Indian Council of Medical Research).

Despite this growing body of literature, several important gaps remain. First, much of the existing research adopts ecological or public health perspectives, with limited attention to commerce-oriented outcomes such as labour productivity, public health expenditure, and broader development indicators. Second, the role of water scarcity as a key transmission mechanism linking biodiversity degradation to health and economic outcomes remains insufficiently explored within integrated ecological-economic frameworks. Third, region-specific studies of ecologically sensitive landscapes, particularly the Aravalli Range, rarely examine biodiversity loss, human health, and economic productivity within a unified analytical structure.

As a result, biodiversity degradation continues to be under-recognized as an economic concern despite generating significant negative externalities, imposing hidden costs on society, and creating long-term risks for sustainable development. Addressing these gaps requires an integrated approach that considers the ecological, health, and economic dimensions of biodiversity loss simultaneously.

5·2 Objectives of the Study

In response to the identified research gaps, the present study seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1 To analyze recent trends in biodiversity degradation in the Aravalli Range using ecosystem-based proxy indicators.
2. To examine the linkages between biodiversity loss and human health outcomes, with particular reference to environmental and water-related stress.
3. To assess the role of water scarcity as a potential mediating pathway connecting biodiversity degradation and health-related vulnerabilities.
4. To evaluate the economic implications of biodiversity loss with reference to public health expenditure and labour productivity.
5. To examine the influence of biodiversity degradation on broader human development outcomes, with particular reference to the Human Development Index (HDI).
6. To interpret biodiversity loss within a commerce-oriented natural capital framework and highlight its implications for sustainable development and economic resilience.

6. Research Methodology

6·1 Research Design

The study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design to examine the interrelationships between biodiversity loss, human health, and economic productivity in the Aravalli Range. A descriptive approach is employed to identify trends and patterns in ecological, health, and economic indicators, while analytical interpretation is used to examine the potential linkages among these variables within a natural capital framework. This design is appropriate because the study seeks to understand broad ecological-economic relationships rather than establish direct causal effects.

The analysis is guided by a commerce-oriented perspective that interprets biodiversity loss as a form of natural capital depreciation and a source of negative economic externalities. Accordingly, the study evaluates how ecosystem degradation may influence human well-being and economic outcomes through pathways such as water scarcity, health stress, and productivity constraints.

6·2 Data Sources and Period of Study

The study is based exclusively on secondary data obtained from authoritative national and international sources to ensure reliability, transparency, and comparability. Secondary data are particularly suitable for the present study because biodiversity, health, and economic indicators are generated by specialized institutions through standardized data collection procedures and are widely used in environmental and development research.

The period of analysis spans 2019-2024, covering pre-pandemic, pandemic, and post-pandemic phases. This period enables the examination of recent trends while capturing structural changes affecting environmental conditions, public health, and economic performance.

Major sources of data include the following:

- Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) - India State of Forest Reports (ISFR).
- Forest Survey of India (FSI) - Forest cover and vegetation assessments.
- Central Ground Water Board (CGWB) - Groundwater assessment reports.
- Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) - Disease burden and environmental health studies.
- National Health Accounts (NHA) - Public health expenditure statistics.
- Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) - Economic and productivity indicators.
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) - Human Development Index (HDI).
- Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and World Bank - International environmental and development datasets.

The analysis focuses on the Aravalli Range and associated regions where ecological conditions, water availability, and human development indicators are directly influenced by the functioning of the Aravalli ecosystem.

6·3 Variables and Proxy Indicators

Direct measurement of biodiversity, ecosystem services, and health outcomes at the regional level is often constrained by data limitations. Therefore, the study employs following proxy indicators, a widely accepted approach in environmental economics and sustainability research:

- Biodiversity Indicators.
- Forest cover trends.
- Land degradation status.
- Vegetation stress and ecosystem condition.
- Water and Health Indicators.
- Groundwater stress levels.
- Water availability trends.
- Disease burden and environmental health vulnerabilities.
- Public health expenditure.
- Economic and Development Indicators.
- Labour productivity trends.
- Health-related economic burden.
- Human Development Index (HDI).

Water scarcity is treated as a mediating variable that potentially connects biodiversity degradation with health and economic outcomes. The conceptual framework assumes that ecosystem degradation may reduce water security, thereby influencing both public health conditions and economic productivity.

6·4 Analytical Approach

The study employs a trend-based and comparative analytical approach. Data are organized into thematic tables and examined across the study period to identify observable patterns and associations among biodiversity, water, health, and economic indicators. Descriptive statistics, percentage changes, and comparative trend analysis are used wherever appropriate.

The interpretation of findings is guided by the concepts of natural capital depreciation, market failure, and negative externalities. Biodiversity loss is viewed as an environmental cost that may generate indirect economic consequences through reduced ecosystem services, increased health burdens, and productivity constraints. Given the descriptive nature of the study and the reliance on secondary data, the analysis focuses on identifying plausible associations rather than establishing causal relationships.

6·5 Limitations of the Study

The study is subject to certain limitations. First, the analysis relies exclusively on secondary data, which may vary in coverage, methodology, and reporting standards across institutions. Second, biodiversity and ecosystem services are represented through proxy indicators rather than direct ecological measurements. Third, the study adopts a descriptive analytical approach and therefore does not employ econometric techniques to establish causal relationships among variables. Consequently, the findings should be interpreted as indicative of broader ecological-economic patterns rather than definitive causal effects.

Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable insights into the interconnected nature of biodiversity, human health, and economic productivity and contributes to the growing literature on natural capital and sustainable development.

7. Results and Interpretation

7·1 Forest Cover Status of Selected Aravalli Districts in Gujarat

Table-1A: Forest Cover Status of Selected Aravalli Districts in Gujarat (2023)

District	Total Forest Cover (km^2)	% of Geographical Area	Change from 2021 (km^2)
Aravalli	279.54	8.87	+17.13
Banaskantha	812.51	7.54	-4.67
Sabarkantha	559.67	13.16	+18.41
Mahisagar	293.83	11.70	-10.13
Chhota Udepur	453.81	13.14	-13.02

Source: Compiled by the author from Forest Survey of India (FSI), India State of Forest Report (ISFR) 2023.

The above table presents forest cover patterns in selected districts forming part of the Gujarat segment of the Aravalli landscape based on the India State of Forest Report (2023). The findings reveal mixed trends in forest cover between 2021 and 2023, indicating that ecological conditions vary across districts. Aravalli and Sabarkantha districts recorded positive changes of 17.13 km^2 and 18.41 km^2 respectively, suggesting localized improvements in forest cover. In contrast, Banaskantha, Mahisagar, and Chhota Udepur experienced declines ranging from 4.67 km^2 to 13.02 km^2, reflecting continuing ecological pressures.

Despite some gains, the overall pattern does not indicate uniform ecosystem recovery across the region. Forest cover as a proportion of geographical area remains relatively modest in several districts, while the observed declines in others point to ongoing challenges associated with land-use change, habitat fragmentation, resource extraction, and environmental stress. These findings suggest that biodiversity conservation outcomes within the Aravalli landscape remain uneven and that localized improvements have not fully offset broader ecological vulnerabilities.

From the perspective of the study's conceptual framework, the mixed forest cover trends indicate continued pressure on the natural capital base that supports critical ecosystem services such as groundwater recharge, climate regulation, soil conservation, and biodiversity maintenance. The persistence of ecological stress may therefore have implications for water security, human well-being, and long-term economic sustainability within the Aravalli region.

7·2 Forest Cover Status of Selected Aravalli Districts in Haryana

Table-1B: Forest Cover Status of Selected Aravalli Districts in Haryana (2023)

District	Total Forest Cover (km^2)	% of Geographical Area	Change from 2021 (km^2)
Faridabad	78.43	10.58	-1.08
Gurugram	113.11	8.99	+0.15
Mahendragarh	111.31	5.86	-1.72
Mewat (Nuh)	108.96	7.23	-4.05
Rewari	61.45	3.86	-0.52

Source: Compiled by the author from Forest Survey of India (FSI), India State of Forest Report (ISFR) 2023.

The above table presents forest cover patterns in selected Haryana districts that form part of the Aravalli landscape. The findings indicate that forest cover remains relatively limited across most districts, reflecting the ecological fragility of the region. Gurugram recorded a marginal increase of 0.15 km^2 in forest cover between 2021 and 2023, whereas Faridabad, Mahendragarh, Mewat (Nuh), and Rewari experienced declines ranging from 0.52 km^2 to 4.05 km^2. Among the districts considered, Faridabad exhibits the highest proportion of forest cover relative to geographical area (10.58%), followed by Gurugram (8.99%) and Mewat (7.23%).

The predominance of negative forest-cover changes suggests that ecological pressures continue to affect significant portions of the Haryana segment of the Aravalli Range. Urban expansion, infrastructure development, land-use transformation, and resource extraction are likely contributors to these trends. The decline is particularly notable in Mewat (Nuh), which recorded the largest reduction in forest cover during the assessment period.

From the perspective of the study's conceptual framework, the observed forest-cover losses indicate continuing pressure on the natural capital base that supports groundwater recharge, climate regulation, soil conservation, and biodiversity maintenance. These ecosystem services are critical for regional water security and human well-being. Consequently, the findings suggest that ecological degradation remains an important concern within the Haryana portion of the Aravalli landscape and may have broader implications for environmental sustainability and long-term economic resilience.

7·3 Forest Cover in the Delhi Segment of the Aravalli Landscape

Table-1C: Forest Cover Status of Selected Aravalli Districts in Rajasthan (2023)

District	Total Forest Cover (km^2)	% of Geographical Area	Change from 2021 (km^2)
Alwar	455.01	5.61	-13.72
Jaipur	428.80	3.76	-11.65
Sikar	119.19	1.54	-8.65
Jhunjhunu	59.44	1.00	-6.44
Udaipur	774.54	6.47	-5.73

Source: Compiled by the author from Forest Survey of India (FSI), India State of Forest Report (ISFR) 2023.

The above Table presents forest cover patterns in selected districts forming part of the Rajasthan segment of the Aravalli Range. The findings reveal a consistent decline in forest cover across all selected districts between 2021 and 2023, indicating continuing ecological pressures within the region. Alwar recorded the largest decline (-13.72 km^2), followed by Jaipur (-11.65 km^2), Sikar (-8.65 km^2), Jhunjhunu (-6.44 km^2), and Udaipur (-5.73 km^2).

Although Udaipur possesses the highest forest cover among the selected districts (774.54 km^2), followed by Alwar (455.01 km^2) and Jaipur (428.80 km^2), the negative changes observed across all districts suggest that biodiversity conservation gains remain fragile. Forest cover as a proportion of geographical area remains relatively low in several districts, particularly Sikar (1.54%) and Jhunjhunu (1.00%), reflecting the ecological vulnerability of the semi-arid Aravalli landscape.

The uniform decline in forest cover across these districts points towards persistent environmental pressures arising from land-use change, urban expansion, mining activities, infrastructure development, and increasing resource demands. Such trends are significant because the Aravalli ecosystem performs critical functions including groundwater recharge, soil conservation, biodiversity maintenance, and climate regulation.

From the perspective of the study's conceptual framework, the observed decline in forest cover represents a gradual depreciation of natural capital within the Aravalli region. The weakening of ecosystem services may adversely affect water security, environmental quality, and long-term economic resilience. These findings therefore support the broader argument that biodiversity degradation in the Aravalli Range generates ecological costs with potential implications for human well-being, productivity, and sustainable development.

7·4 Cover Status of Selected Aravalli-Influenced Districts and Forest Fire Trends in the Delhi Segment of the Aravalli Landscape (2023)

Table-1D: Forest Cover Status of Selected Aravalli-Influenced Districts in Delhi (2023)

District	Total Forest Cover (km²)	% of Geographical Area	Change from 2021 (km²)
South Delhi	70.89	44.58	+0.90
New Delhi	48.64	31.18	-0.91
South-East Delhi	19.54	19.35	-0.44
South-West Delhi	12.65	4.47	+0.50

Source: Compiled by the author from Forest Survey of India (FSI), India State of Forest Report (ISFR) 2023.

Table-1E: Forest Fire Incidents in Selected Aravalli-Influenced Districts of Delhi

District	Forest Fires (2022-23)	Forest Fires (2023-24)
South Delhi	–	9
New Delhi	1	3
South-East Delhi	–	1
South-West Delhi	1	1

Source: Compiled by the author from Forest Survey of India (FSI), India State of Forest Report (ISFR) 2023.

The Delhi Ridge, often regarded as the northernmost extension of the Aravalli Range, represents an ecologically significant urban forest system that contributes to biodiversity conservation, air quality regulation, groundwater recharge, and climate moderation within the National Capital Territory. The forest cover data reveal considerable variation across Aravalli-influenced districts. South Delhi possesses the largest forest cover (70.89 km²), accounting for 44.58% of its geographical area, followed by New Delhi (48.64 km²). South-East Delhi and South-West Delhi contain comparatively smaller forested areas but remain important components of the Ridge ecosystem.

Changes between 2021 and 2023 indicate mixed trends. South Delhi and South-West Delhi recorded marginal increases in forest cover, whereas New Delhi and South-East Delhi experienced slight declines. Although these changes are relatively small, they suggest that ecological conditions within the Delhi Ridge remain dynamic and sensitive to urban development pressures.

The forest fire data provide additional evidence of environmental stress. Total fire detections in Delhi increased from 7 incidents during 2022-23 to 16 incidents during 2023-24. South Delhi accounted for the largest increase, recording nine fire incidents in 2023-24. The rising incidence of forest fires may reflect increasing climatic stress, prolonged dry conditions, anthropogenic disturbances, and growing pressure on urban forest ecosystems.

From the perspective of the study's conceptual framework, the Delhi segment of the Aravalli landscape continues to provide valuable ecosystem services despite its highly urbanized setting. However, the combination of fluctuating forest cover and increasing forest-fire occurrences indicates emerging ecological vulnerabilities. These trends highlight the importance of conserving the Delhi Ridge as a component of the wider Aravalli ecosystem and as a form of natural capital that contributes to environmental quality, public health, and long-term urban sustainability.

8. Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that biodiversity degradation in the Aravalli Range has implications extending beyond environmental sustainability to encompass human health and economic productivity. Evidence from Gujarat, Haryana, Rajasthan, and Delhi reveals uneven but generally fragile forest-cover trends, accompanied by groundwater stress and increasing ecological pressures. These patterns suggest a gradual weakening of the natural capital base that supports critical ecosystem services, particularly water regulation and environmental stability.

The results are consistent with the study's conceptual framework, which proposes that biodiversity loss affects economic outcomes through ecological and health-related pathways. As ecosystem quality declines, the capacity of the Aravallis to support groundwater recharge and watershed functions is reduced, contributing to chronic water stress. This, in turn, heightens health vulnerabilities and increases public expenditure requirements, reinforcing the link between ecological degradation and human well-being.

From a commerce perspective, the findings reflect the consequences of negative environmental externalities. While economic activities such as urban expansion, mining, and land-use change may generate short-term gains, the associated ecological costs are largely borne by society. Rising health expenditure, water insecurity, and pressures on productivity represent hidden costs that are not adequately captured in conventional economic accounting systems.

Water scarcity emerges as a key transmission mechanism connecting biodiversity degradation with broader economic outcomes. The weakening of ecosystem services can increase resource-management costs, reduce productive efficiency, and place additional fiscal burdens on governments. Consequently, biodiversity loss should be viewed not only as an environmental concern but also as a development challenge with implications for long-term economic resilience.

Overall, the study supports the argument that biodiversity conservation and ecosystem restoration constitute investments in natural capital. Strengthening the ecological resilience of the Aravalli Range can contribute to improved water security, better health outcomes, enhanced productivity, and more sustainable economic development. The findings therefore reinforce the importance of integrating biodiversity considerations into economic planning and governance frameworks.

9. Conclusion

This study examined the interrelationships between biodiversity loss, human health, and economic productivity in the Aravalli Range through the lens of the Ecology-Commerce Nexus. Drawing upon secondary evidence relating to forest cover trends, groundwater stress, public health indicators, labour productivity, and human development outcomes, the study demonstrates that biodiversity degradation extends far beyond ecological concerns and generates important economic and social consequences.

The findings indicate that the Aravalli ecosystem continues to experience significant environmental stress, reflected in declining forest cover across several districts, persistent groundwater pressure, and growing ecological vulnerability. These changes weaken ecosystem services that support water security, environmental regulation, and public well-being. The evidence further suggests that ecological degradation contributes indirectly to rising health-related costs, increased fiscal burdens, and constraints on productivity and development outcomes. Although the study does not establish direct causal relationships, the observed patterns consistently support the proposition that biodiversity loss generates economic costs through interconnected ecological and human pathways.

These findings support the study's central argument that biodiversity conservation and ecosystem restoration should be viewed as strategic economic investments rather than solely environmental objectives. Strengthening the ecological resilience of the Aravalli landscape is likely to generate benefits in the form of improved water security, better public health outcomes, enhanced productivity, and greater long-term economic sustainability.

From a commerce perspective, the study highlights biodiversity as a productive form of natural capital rather than merely an environmental resource. The degradation of biodiversity represents a form of capital depreciation that reduces the economy's capacity to generate sustainable returns over time. As ecosystem services deteriorate, hidden costs emerge in the form of water scarcity, increased healthcare expenditure, reduced labour efficiency, and slower improvements in human development. These costs are rarely reflected in conventional measures of economic performance, resulting in a systematic undervaluation of ecological assets and an overestimation of economic progress.

A key contribution of this study is the demonstration that biodiversity loss functions as a negative economic externality with implications for development planning, public finance, and long-term economic resilience. By integrating ecological, health, and economic dimensions within a unified analytical framework, the study extends the discourse on biodiversity beyond conservation and positions it within the broader domains of commerce, economic governance, and sustainable development. The findings suggest that investments in biodiversity conservation and ecosystem restoration should be viewed not as environmental expenditures but as investments in natural capital capable of generating social, economic, and developmental returns.

The Aravalli Range provides a particularly important case study because it illustrates how ecological degradation in a resource-dependent landscape can translate into wider economic vulnerabilities. As pressures from urbanisation, land-use change, resource extraction, and climate variability continue to intensify, the costs of biodiversity loss are likely to become increasingly visible within health systems, labour markets, and public finances. Consequently, safeguarding ecological assets is essential not only for environmental sustainability but also for maintaining economic productivity and human well-being.

In conclusion, the study argues that biodiversity conservation is fundamentally an economic imperative. The Ecology-Commerce Nexus demonstrated in the Aravalli Range reveals that the protection and restoration of natural capital are integral to sustaining productivity, strengthening human development, improving fiscal efficiency, and supporting long-term sustainable growth. Future economic policy, business strategy, and development planning must therefore move beyond viewing biodiversity as a peripheral environmental concern and recognise it as a foundational asset underpinning economic prosperity and societal welfare.

10. Policy Implications

The findings of this study have important implications for economic policy, environmental governance, and sustainable development planning.

The evidence suggests that biodiversity loss within the Aravalli Range generates substantial ecological, health, and economic costs that are insufficiently reflected in conventional development frameworks. Accordingly, biodiversity conservation should be recognised not merely as an environmental expenditure but as an investment in natural capital that supports long-term economic productivity and human well-being.

First, biodiversity considerations should be systematically integrated into economic and development planning. Policymakers should recognise ecosystem services such as groundwater recharge, climate regulation, soil conservation, and biodiversity maintenance as productive assets that contribute directly to economic activity. Development projects within ecologically sensitive landscapes such as the Aravalli Range should therefore incorporate biodiversity valuation and environmental cost assessments as part of decision-making processes.

Second, ecosystem restoration should be prioritised alongside conservation efforts. The district-level evidence of declining forest cover and continuing ecological stress indicates that protection measures alone may be insufficient. Large-scale restoration initiatives, including the Aravalli Green Wall programme and landscape-based ecological restoration projects, should be strengthened to improve ecosystem resilience, enhance groundwater recharge, and restore biodiversity. Such investments are likely to generate long-term economic returns through improved water security, reduced environmental risk, and enhanced productivity.

Third, environmental policy and public health policy should be more closely integrated. The findings indicate that ecological degradation contributes indirectly to health vulnerabilities through water scarcity and environmental stress. Preventive investment in ecosystem protection may therefore reduce future healthcare expenditure and improve public health outcomes. Integrating biodiversity considerations into health planning can improve policy efficiency by addressing environmental determinants of health rather than focusing exclusively on treatment-based approaches.

Fourth, stronger mechanisms are required to internalise biodiversity-related externalities. Economic and regulatory instruments such as natural capital accounting, ecosystem service valuation, ecological compensation mechanisms, and stricter enforcement of land-use regulations can help ensure that environmental costs are incorporated into economic decision-making. Such measures would reduce market distortions and encourage more sustainable patterns of production and resource use.

Fifth, improved monitoring and governance of the Aravalli ecosystem are essential. The forest-cover declines observed across several Aravalli districts and the increase in forest-fire incidents within the Delhi Ridge highlight the need for stronger institutional coordination across states. Since the Aravalli Range spans Gujarat, Rajasthan, Haryana, and Delhi, a coordinated landscape-level management approach is necessary to ensure effective conservation and restoration outcomes.

Finally, the findings support India's commitments under the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, and the Sustainable Development Goals. Protecting and restoring the Aravalli ecosystem can contribute simultaneously to biodiversity conservation, water security, climate resilience, public health improvement, and sustainable economic growth. From a commerce perspective, safeguarding the Aravallis represents an investment in natural capital that yields long-term economic, social, and environmental returns for present and future generations.

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An Introductory Note on the Tihanpuri Syed Brothers (Up To Governorship of Allahabad and Patna)

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Abstract

The Barha Syeds, historically renowned as one of the most influential military aristocratic lineages of the Mughal Empire, comprised four principal branches: Tihanpuri, Chhatrauri, Kundliwal, and Jajneri. Among these, the Tihanpuri branch played a decisive role in the political and military affairs of the late Mughal period. This article examines the early history and rise of the Tihanpuri Syed brothers up to their appointments as the Governors of Allahabad and Patna. It traces the origins of the family, highlighting the pivotal role of Syed Mahmud, whose defection from Sikandar Sur during the siege of Mankot, facilitated through the efforts of Bairam Khan, marked the beginning of the family's close association with the Mughal court. Thereafter, the Barha Syeds earned a distinguished reputation for military service under Emperors Akbar, Jahangir, Shah Jahan, and Aurangzeb, frequently leading the imperial vanguard in major campaigns. The study argues that this long-standing tradition of military loyalty and administrative competence laid the foundation for the remarkable political ascendancy of Syed Abdullah Khan and Syed Husain Ali Khan. Their appointments as the Governors of Allahabad and Patna, respectively, not only reflected imperial confidence in their abilities but also positioned them as key actors in the Mughal war of succession initiated by Prince Farrukhsiyar. By situating the Tihanpuri Syed brothers within the broader framework of Mughal political and military history, the article provides a contextual understanding of the origins of their subsequent prominence in imperial politics.

Keywords

Barha Syeds, Siege of Mankot, Tihanpur, Chhat Banur, Kundli, Jajner.

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An Introductory Note on the Tihanpuri Syed Brothers (Up To Governorship of Allahabad and Patna)

The clan of the Barha Syeds enjoyed a highly prominent position during the Mughal period.[1] This prominence is attributed to one Syed Mahmud, popularly known as Dade Mahmud[2] among his descendants as well as among all four branches of the Barha Syeds.[3] According to the family tradition, he changed the side at a crucial moment during the 'Siege of Mankot'.[4] Bairam Khan, the guardian and regent of the young Akbar convinced him to do so in a private secret meeting to desert from the cause of besieged Sikandar Sur.

It is claimed that this defection occurred at Bairam Khan's repeated request and thus Syed Mahmud was influenced by the fact that both men adhered to the Shia faith. Syed Mahmud not only abandoned the cause of his master Sikandar Sur, but also joined Bairam Khan's forces during the conflict.[5] As a result, Sikandar Sur was made to terms[6] and Bairam Khan greatly appreciated the assistance rendered by Syed Mahmud.

According to this tradition, from that time onward the Barha Syeds were granted the privilege of leading the *Harawal Dasta* (Advance Guard) of the Mughal army.[7] This distinction contributed significantly to the prestige, influence, and military importance that the Barha Syeds subsequently enjoyed within the Mughal Empire.

In fact, references to the Barha Syeds can be traced back to the period of the Sayyid dynasty that ruled the Delhi Sultanate.[8] During the reign of that dynasty, the Barha Syeds were granted a *jagir* consisting of twelve villages in the Upper Ganga-Yamuna Doab, located in what is now Muzaffarnagar District and some areas of the adjoining districts of present-day Uttar Pradesh.

Before their settlement in the *Doab* region, they are believed to have resided in four villages in Punjab and were historically known as the Punjabi Syeds. The community traditionally claims descent from Sayyid Abu'l-Farah Wasti of the town of Wasit near Baghdad.[9] However, from a historical perspective, this genealogical claim remains open to question and cannot be accepted without reservation.

Some scholars have suggested that the Barha Syeds may have originated from Sindhi Brahmin family that converted to Islam, although this theory is likewise not free from doubt. Other clues have been interpreted as pointing toward a Punjabi Brahmin origin, but this hypothesis is equally uncertain. Thus, the precise ancestry of the Barha Syeds remains a matter of debate, and none of the competing theories can be regarded as conclusively established.

Whatever the case may be, it appears that during the reign of Emperor Akbar the Barha Syeds were regarded by some contemporaries as descendants of Hindu converts. A tradition supporting this view has been still preserved among the Barha Syeds themselves that and has been passed down through generations.

According to this tradition, the following account is narrated:[10]

> "Emperor Akbar was once accompanied by several high-ranking officials when the question of the lineage and purity of Syed Mahmud's clan was raised. When challenged to prove the authenticity of his Sayed ancestry, Syed Mahmud is said to have proposed an ordeal by fire. He declared that he was willing to enter a blazing fire and that, if he emerged unharmed, his claim to pure Sayed descent should be accepted."

The tradition further relates that Akbar neither allowed Syed Mahmud to undergo the ordeal nor explicitly endorsed or rejected his claim of being pure Syed. Instead, the emperor merely smiled and remained silent. This response has been interpreted in different ways. The descendants of Syed Mahmud have traditionally regarded Akbar's silence and smile as tacit approval of their claim to Sayed ancestry. Others, however, have viewed the emperor's reaction as deliberately ambiguous, neither confirming nor denying the claim.

As a result, both interpretations continued to coexist. While many contemporaries reportedly accepted the prevailing public opinion regarding the clan's origins, Syed Mahmud and his descendants considered their own understanding of the matter to be authoritative.

Based on extensive fieldwork, the authors argue that the available evidence points more strongly toward an Indian origin for the Barha Syeds rather than an Arabic one. Nevertheless, the question of their ancestry remains a subject of historical debate and of differing interpretations as well.

According to the traditional genealogy of the Barha Syeds, their ancestor, Sayyid Abu'l-Farah Wasti is said to be migrated from Baghdad to India along with his twelve sons during the reign of Sultan Nasiruddin Mahmud,[11] the son of Shamsuddin Iltutmish, who ruled the Delhi Sultanate from 1246 to 1266 CE.

A further difficulty with the traditional genealogy of the Barha Syeds lies in its chronology. If the dates given in the tradition are accepted literally, Sayed Abu'l-Farah Wasti would have had to live for more than 200 years, a lifespan that is clearly implausible. On this basis, the authors argue that the claim cannot be accepted as historically reliable.

The tradition further states:[12]

> "Abu'l-Farah is said to have remained in India until the reign of Sultan Sikandar Lodi (1489-1517 CE). Upon hearing of the death of Hulagu, he is said to have returned to Persia, leaving behind, by the Sultan's command, four of his sons, who eventually became the founders of the four principal branches of the Sayed family in this region."

The chronology of this account is problematic, and the dates alone reveal significant inconsistencies. According to the tradition, the four branches first settled in Punjab, in villages now fall within the territory of Patiala.

The account further identifies the four brothers and the origins of their respective lineages:

- Syed Daud, the eldest brother, settled in Tiharpur (Tehanpur), and his descendants came to be known as the Tehanpuri Syeds.
- Syed Abu'l-Fazl settled in Chhat Banur, and his descendants became known as the Chhatraudi Syeds.
- Syed Abu'l-Fazail settled in Kundli, from which his branch acquired the name Kundliwal Syeds.
- Syed Nazmuddin Husain settled in Jajner, and his descendants became known as the Jajneri or Jajheri Syeds.

These four branches subsequently formed the principal divisions of the Barha Syed community.

From a historiographical perspective, the narrative of Abu'l-Farah and his twelve sons does not withstand close scrutiny. The tradition contains numerous chronological inconsistencies, suggesting that events and figures from different periods may have been merged into a single genealogical account. As a result, the story appears to incorporate both historical memories and later legendary additions.

One of the objections noted in the District Gazetteer is particularly significant:[13]

> "Family tradition represents the Sayyids as having continued in the service of Shahab-ud-Din Ghori, but this is chronologically impossible. The earliest inscription connected with the family is that found on the tomb of Ibn Salar Chatrorhi, known as Salar-i-Auliya, at Sambhalhera. The inscription bears the date 777 A.H. (1375 CE) and records him as the eighth descendant of Abu'l-Farah. The parent villages of these families are now entirely insignificant places, with the exception of Chhatbanur, which developed into a large settlement containing several thousand Sayyid inhabitants."

This observation highlights the chronological difficulties associated with the traditional genealogy. If the earliest verifiable inscription dates from 1375 CE and refers to an eighth-generation descendant of Abu'l-Farah, then the family's claimed association with Shahab-ud-Din Ghori becomes historically problematic. Such discrepancies suggest that the genealogy, while important as a community tradition, cannot be accepted uncritically as a precise historical record.

With regard to the origins of the Barha Syeds, the authors argue that even during the reign of the Mughal Emperor Jahangir, they were not universally recognized as Syeds of Arab descent. In the *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri*, Jahangir is reported to have remarked that the personal courage of the Barha Syeds was the strongest evidence in support of their claim to Syed status. According to the authors, this observation implies that there was little other evidence available to substantiate their alleged Arab ancestry.

The authors further contend that, up to Jahangir's reign, the Barha Syeds were commonly regarded by many as descendants of Hindu converts rather than immigrants of Arab origin. In support of this view, they cite the observations of H. R. Nevill, who noted in the District Gazetteer:[14]

> "...but as early as the reign of Akbar, their claim to be true Sayids was not generally admitted."

The *Gazetteer* also refers to them by their earlier designation, the "Punjabi Sayyids". The authors interpret this title as one of the strongest evidences of a Punjabi origin, arguing that the community was historically associated with Punjab before its later settlement in the Ganga-Yamuna Doab. In their view, the continued use of the term "Punjabi Sayyids" suggests that the group was originally rooted in the Punjab region rather than being recent migrants from the Arab world.

However, the question of the ancestry of the Barha Syeds remains a matter of historical debate. While some traditions emphasize Arab lineage through descent from the Prophet's family, other interpretations stress local or regional origins within the Indian subcontinent.

Regarding the early division of the Syed families after their settlement in Punjab, the District Gazetteer records the following:[15]

> "Shortly after their settlement in the Punjab, the family divided into two branches. One of these settled at Bilgram in the present Hardoi District, from where a colony later migrated to Marhera in Etah District. The other branch established itself in the Doab region. Both families claimed a connection with the Sayyid of Khairabad and Fatehpur-Huswa, but as early as the reign of Akbar, their claim to be genuine Sayyids was not generally admitted."

This account suggests that the family underwent an early geographical and genealogical division following its settlement in Punjab. One branch moved eastward into the regions of Bilgram and Marhera, while the other established itself in the upper Ganga-Yamuna Doab. The Gazetteer further indicates that, despite their claims of Sayed ancestry and connections with other prominent Syed families, the authenticity of these claims was questioned by some contemporaries even during the reign of Emperor Akbar.

The passage is frequently cited by scholars who argue that the origins and genealogy of the Barha Syeds were subjects of debate long before the Mughal empire reached its height.

In due course of time, the Tehanpuri branch of the Barha Syeds rose to extraordinary prominence, particularly during the reign of the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb and after. Among its notable members was Syed Abdullah Khan Barha, who was appointed *Subedar* (Governor) and *Faujdar* of Ajmer.[16] According to the authors, this appointment reflected both his administrative abilities and the prestige attached to his Syed lineage.

Ajmer occupied a position of immense religious significance owing to the shrine of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti, one of the most revered Sufi saints in South Asia. The city was therefore considered one of the most important religious centres of the Mughal empire. Recognizing Abdullah Khan's piety, competence, and sense of justice, Aurangzeb entrusted him with the administration of that strategically and spiritually important province.[17]

Syed Abdullah Khan Barha hailed from Jansath, which is at present a tehsil headquarters of Muzaffarnagar District in Uttar Pradesh. He had several grand sons, among whom the most prominent were:[18]

- Hasan Ali Khan Barha
- Husain Ali Khan Barha
- Kamruddin Ali Khan
- Nuruddin Ali Khan,
- Imaduddin Ali Khan
- Sirajuddin Ali Barha
- Najmuddin Ali Khan Barha
- Saifuddin Ali Khan Barha.

Following the death of their grandfather, the brothers sought employment and advancement within the Mughal administration. Despite their efforts, they were unable to secure positions commensurate with their ambitions during Aurangzeb's lifetime.

The situation changed after the death of Aurangzeb on 3 March, 1707 at Burhanpur[19] in the Deccan. His death triggered a fierce struggle for succession among his surviving sons. At the time, his eldest surviving son, Muazzam (Bahadur Shah I) was stationed in Kabul, while Muhammad Azam Shah and Kam Bakhsh were closer to the imperial court.

Sensing that his death was approaching, Aurangzeb ordered Azam Shah and Kam Bakhsh to proceed to their respective provinces-Bengal and the Deccan. Nevertheless, his death soon led to a series of succession struggles that would profoundly reshape Mughal politics and create new opportunities for ambitious nobles, including the Barha Syeds.

The two elder brothers, Syed Hasan Ali Khan Barha and his younger brother Syed Husain Ali Khan Barha, sought employment in the service of Prince Muazzam,[20] who was advancing from Lahore toward Agra following the death of Aurangzeb. Their efforts proved successful, and they were admitted into the prince's service.[21]

Subsequently, both brothers participated in the War of Succession fought between Prince Muazzam and his brother, Prince Azam Shah. This conflict formed part of the larger struggle for the Mughal throne that followed Aurangzeb's death in 1707.

As is well known fact that Prince Muazzam emerged victorious in the decisive battle and ascended the Mughal throne. Upon becoming emperor, he assumed the title Bahadur Shah I. Although his personal name was Muazzam, he had earlier been granted the honorific title "Bahadur Shah" by Aurangzeb, and it was under this regnal name that he ruled the Mughal empire. The victory of Bahadur Shah I marked an important turning point in the careers of the Tihanpuri Barha Syed brothers, whose loyalty and military service during the succession struggle helped to establish their reputation within the Mughal nobility and laid the foundation for their future rise to prominence.

On January 10, 1711, Prime Azimushshan appointed Abdulla Khan his naib in the *suba* of Allahabad and Husain Ali Khan to the same post in the province of Azimabad Patna.

The rise of the Barha Syed brothers in Mughal politics was closely connected with the succession struggles that followed the death of Bahadur Shah I. Through the influence of Bahadur Shah's son- Prince Azimushshan, ultimately, the two brothers secured important appointments in the imperial administration and were entrusted with the governorships of Allahabad and Patna, respectively.

According to the narrative, the brothers had earlier enjoyed the patronage of Prince Azimusshshan. Following that Prince's death, his son Farrukhsiyar, became a claimant to the Mughal throne. Encouraged by his mother, who is described in the account as a Hindu convert, Farrukhsiyar was advised to seek the support of the Barha brothers in order to challenge his paternal uncle, Emperor Jahandar Shah, and recover what he regarded as his rightful inheritance.

With considerable financial resources at his disposal, Farrukhsiyar set out from Bengal toward Delhi. Upon reaching Patna, he attempted to establish contact with the brothers, particularly Syed Husain Ali Khan Barha, who had previously been associated with his father's faction. At that time, however, Husain Ali Khan was absent from Patna, being engaged in a campaign against rebellious zamindars in the surrounding region.

During his absence, Farrukhsiyar's mother succeeded in gaining access to the household of Husain Ali Khan and, more importantly, to his mother, a woman for whom the Sayed noble had the highest respect and affection. Through persistent appeals, she sought to persuade the Sayed family to support her son's claim to the throne.

According to the tradition, Husain Ali Khan's mother strongly believed that favours received in the past should be repaid with loyalty and assistance when circumstances demanded it. On this principle, she urged her son to support Farrukhsiyar in his struggle for the Mughal throne.

Husain Ali Khan, despite his deep respect for his mother, initially opposed the proposal. He pointed out the practical difficulties facing Farrukhsiyar's cause. The young prince, he argued, possessed neither a substantial army nor sufficient military resources. He lacked cavalry, artillery, and experienced commanders, and had only a few hundred followers in his camp. In Husain Ali Khan's view, it was unrealistic to imagine that such limited resources could successfully challenge Emperor Jahandar. Shah, the rightful reigning emperor of Hindustan.

Furthermore, both Barha Syed brothers were already serving under Jahandar Shah, The emperor had retained them in their offices and had not removed them from imperial service, despite having every opportunity to do so. That, in Husain Ali Khan's opinion, imposed a moral and political obligation upon them.

Nevertheless, the Syed matriarch remained steadfast in her position. Refusing to abandon her argument, she delivered a forceful response to her son, one that, according to the tradition, proved decisive in shaping the course of events that followed.

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I, Dr. Dharam Vir, hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

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