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Founder
S. S. Shashi

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Dharam Vir

Volume 35, Number 3 (July-September), 2026



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**(Autonomous, Regd. Recognized Charitable Organization of
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The Journal of National Development (JND) is an interdisciplinary bi-annual peer reviewed & refereed international journal committed to the ideals of a 'world community' and 'universal brotherhood'. The Journal is a joint effort of like-minded scholars in the field of social research. Its specific aims are to identify, to understand and to help the process of nation-building within the framework of a 'world community' and enhance research across the social sciences (Sociology, Anthropology, Political Science, Psychology, History, Geography, Education, Economics, Law, Communication, Linguistics) and related disciplines like all streams of Home Science, Management, Computer Science, Commerce as well as others like Food Technology, Agricultural Technology, Information Technology, Environmental Science, Dairy Science etc. having social focus/implications. It focuses on issues that are global and on local problems and policies that have international implications. By providing a forum for discussion on important issues with a global perspective, the *JND* is a part of unfolding world wide struggle for establishing a just and peaceful world order. Thus, the *JND* becomes a point of confluence for the rivulets from various disciplines to form a mighty mainstream gushing towards the formulation and propagation of a humanistic world-view.

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Public Investment, Rural Transformation and Sustainable Development: Insights from the Union Budget 2026-27

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Abstract

Public investment has long been recognized as a critical instrument for promoting rural development by strengthening agricultural productivity, expanding infrastructure, generating employment, and improving living standards. However, contemporary development thinking increasingly views rural transformation as a multidimensional process requiring coordinated investments that simultaneously enhance economic productivity, human capabilities, livelihood diversification, and environmental sustainability. Against this backdrop, the Union Budget 2026-27 provides an important opportunity to examine how fiscal priorities contribute to the evolving architecture of rural transformation in India. The Budget reflects an increasing emphasis on productive public investment that seeks to improve agricultural competitiveness, expand rural economic opportunities, enhance human capability development, and promote sustainable resource management. The article argues that the effectiveness of rural transformation depends not only on the magnitude of public investment but also on the coherence, complementarity, and long-term orientation of fiscal priorities. In this sense, the Union Budget 2026-27 illustrates how public investment can function as a strategic instrument for fostering inclusive, resilient, and sustainable rural transformation.

Keywords

Public investment, Rural development, Rural transformation, Fiscal priorities.

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Public Investment, Rural Transformation and Sustainable Development: Insights from the Union Budget 2026-27

1. Introduction

Public investment has long occupied a central place in development economics as an instrument for accelerating structural transformation, correcting market failures, and promoting inclusive economic growth. In predominantly agrarian economies, public expenditure on agriculture, rural infrastructure, irrigation, education, healthcare, and institutional development has been regarded as essential for enhancing productive capacity and improving rural welfare. Classical development economists argued that sustained public investment generates multiplier effects by increasing agricultural productivity, strengthening market linkages, stimulating non-farm economic activities, and facilitating the structural transformation of rural economies (Lewis, 1954; Johnston & Mellor, 1961). Consequently, the developmental significance of public investment extends beyond fiscal expenditure, as it shapes the long-term trajectory of economic and social transformation.

Subsequent scholarship has broadened this understanding by recognizing that rural development cannot be explained solely in terms of agricultural growth or poverty reduction. The capability approach advanced by Sen (1999) emphasized that development should be understood as the expansion of people's substantive freedoms and opportunities rather than merely increases in income. This perspective highlighted the importance of investments in education, healthcare, infrastructure, institutions, and social inclusion as essential components of development. Accordingly, public investment increasingly came to be viewed not simply as a mechanism for financing economic activities but as a strategic instrument for strengthening human capabilities, improving social welfare, and creating conditions for inclusive development.

More recently, contemporary development policy has further extended this perspective through the concept of rural transformation. Major international policy institutions, including the World Bank (2007), the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2006), and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2017), emphasize that sustainable rural transformation requires integrated public investment across agriculture, infrastructure, livelihoods, natural resource management, institutional capacity, and environmental sustainability. Within this

framework, rural transformation is understood as a multidimensional process in which economic productivity, social inclusion, and ecological resilience are mutually reinforcing rather than competing objectives. Public investment therefore assumes a strategic role in creating complementary conditions that enable rural households and communities to participate more effectively in long-term economic and social development.

These conceptual developments have significantly influenced the evolution of rural development policy in India. While earlier policy interventions primarily focused on agricultural production, poverty alleviation, and employment generation, contemporary policy increasingly recognizes the importance of infrastructure development, livelihood diversification, financial inclusion, technological modernization, climate resilience, and sustainable natural resource management. This broader policy orientation reflects the growing realization that contemporary rural challenges—including climate variability, declining farm profitability, rural youth unemployment, demographic transitions, and widening regional disparities—require coordinated public investment across multiple sectors rather than isolated programme-specific interventions.

The relationship between public investment and rural development has consequently attracted considerable scholarly attention. Empirical studies have consistently demonstrated that the developmental impact of public expenditure depends not only on its magnitude but also on its composition. Fan, Hazell, and Thorat (1999), for example, showed that investments in rural roads, irrigation, agricultural research, and education generated substantial gains in agricultural productivity and poverty reduction in India. Subsequent studies have similarly highlighted the contribution of investments in infrastructure, rural livelihoods, climate-resilient agriculture, and natural resource management to strengthening rural economies. Collectively, this body of scholarship suggests that integrated public investment produces more durable development outcomes than fragmented or sector-specific expenditure.

Against this backdrop, this article offers a broad reflection on the priorities emerging from the Union Budget and their implications for rural transformation. Rather than focusing on individual schemes or expenditure trends in isolation, it considers the composition of public investment across agriculture, rural infrastructure, livelihoods, and sustainability, and reflects on the extent to which these allocations complement one another in supporting the changing requirements of rural development. The analysis therefore seeks to situate the budgetary measures within the broader trajectory of rural transformation and to highlight the opportunities and challenges emerging from the priorities reflected in the recent Budget.

The Union Budget represents more than an annual fiscal exercise. It provides an important policy framework through which governments articulate development priorities and allocate public resources across competing sectors. Accordingly, the composition of budgetary allocations offers valuable insights into the strategic direction of public investment and its potential contribution to rural transformation. Interpreting the Union Budget 2026-27 through this analytical lens enables a broader understanding of how contemporary fiscal priorities seek to strengthen agricultural competitiveness, improve infrastructure, expand livelihood opportunities, and promote sustainable rural development as interconnected dimensions of structural transformation.

2. Public Investment as a Driver of Rural Transformation: Evidence from the Union Budget 2026-27

Public investment has emerged as a decisive instrument in shaping the trajectory of rural transformation in India. The Union Budget 2026-27 illustrates this shift by reconfiguring allocations across agriculture, infrastructure, livelihoods, and sustainability. Examining these budgetary choices provides evidence of how state priorities are being realigned to balance immediate welfare needs with long-term developmental outcomes. The budget of the Ministry of Rural Development increased from ₹87,765 crore in 2016-17 to ₹2,73,108 crore in 2026-27, representing an increase of approximately 211 per cent over the decade. In addition, the allocation of ₹1,62,671 crore for Agriculture and Allied Activities highlights the continued importance of agriculture as a foundational component of rural transformation. These aggregate allocations indicate that public investment continues to occupy a central position within the Government's broader development strategy.

2.1 Agricultural Productivity and Rural Diversification

Agriculture continues to constitute the foundation of India's rural economy and remains central to the process of rural transformation. However, contemporary public investment in agriculture extends beyond the traditional objective of increasing crop production. It increasingly seeks to enhance productivity, promote diversification, strengthen value chains, improve risk management, and create new opportunities for income generation across farm and allied sectors. Within this broader perspective, the Union Budget 2026-27 reflects an investment strategy that recognizes agriculture as a dynamic driver of rural economic transformation rather than merely a source of subsistence and employment.

Table-1 depicts data on the budgetary allocation for agriculture and allied activities from 2016-17 to 2026-27 on the next page.

**Table-1: Budgetary Allocation for Agriculture and Allied Activities,
2016-17 to 2026-27** (₹ Crore)

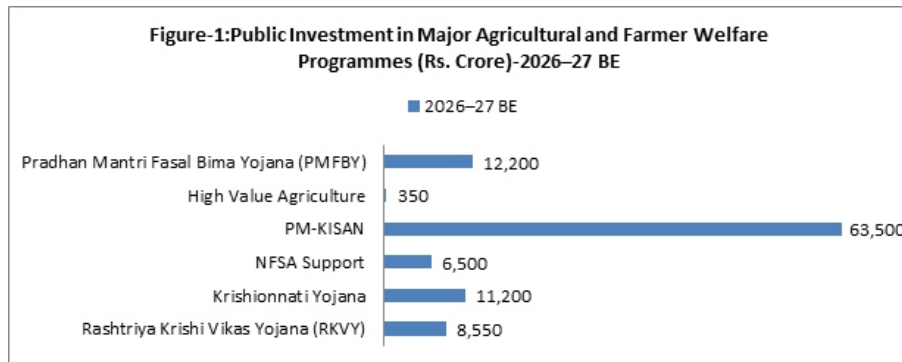
Sub-Head (Functional Classification)	2016-17 BE	2026-27 BE	Absolute Increase	Percentage Increase (%)
Crop Husbandry	9,430	32,500	23,070	244.6
Animal Husbandry & Dairying	2,450	14,200	11,750	479.6
Fisheries	450	6,800	6,350	1,411.1
Agricultural Research & Education	6,200	12,500	6,300	101.6
Forestry & Wildlife	1,800	5,600	3,800	211.1
Food Storage & Warehousing	3,100	9,400	6,300	203.2
Other Allied Services	24,482	81,671	57,189	233.6
Total Agriculture & Allied Activities	47,912	1,62,671	1,14,759	239.5

Source: Government of India, Union Budget 2026-27: Budget at a Glance; author's compilation.

The above table reveals a substantial expansion in public investment across agriculture and allied activities over the past decade. Total budgetary allocation increased from ₹47,912 crore in 2016-17 to ₹1,62,671 crore in 2026-27, representing an increase of 239.5 per cent. While crop husbandry continues to receive the largest share of investment, the pattern of expenditure indicates a broader strategic orientation towards diversification within the rural economy. Public investment in Animal Husbandry and Dairying increased by 479.6 percent while Fisheries recorded the highest proportional increase of 1,411.1 percent during the period. Significant increases are also evident in Agricultural Research and Education, Food Storage and Warehousing, and other allied services.

The scheme-wise allocation further reinforces this broader investment orientation. The continued allocation of ₹63,500 crore under *PM-KISAN* provides a stable income support mechanism that strengthens household liquidity and supports farm-level investment decisions. At the same time, increased allocations for the *Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana* and *Krishionnati Yojana*, which reaches ₹11,200 crore in 2026-27, indicate sustained emphasis on productivity enhancement, technological modernization, crop diversification, and institutional strengthening. The introduction of dedicated support for High Value Agriculture, although modest in scale, reflects growing policy recognition of diversification towards horticulture,

floriculture, and other high-value agricultural activities capable of generating higher farm incomes and greater market integration.



Source: Government of India, Ministry of Finance, Union Budget: Budget at a Glance, 2024-25 to 2026-27; Author's compilation.

The continued allocation of approximately ₹12,200 crore under the *Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana* (PMFBY) also highlights the importance accorded to agricultural risk management. In the context of increasing climate variability and production uncertainty, crop insurance constitutes an important component of public investment by reducing farmers' exposure to income shocks and strengthening the resilience of agricultural production systems. Similarly, continued support under the National Food Security framework contributes to maintaining food security while complementing broader investments in agricultural productivity.

From the perspective of rural transformation, these investment priorities illustrate an important evolution in agricultural policy. Public investment is no longer confined to increasing agricultural output alone; it increasingly seeks to improve competitiveness, encourage diversification, strengthen value chains, reduce production risks, and enhance farmers' participation in expanding markets. Such an approach recognizes that sustained rural transformation depends upon creating a more productive, diversified, and resilient agricultural economy capable of generating higher incomes and supporting broader structural change within rural areas.

2.2 Rural Infrastructure and Human Capability Development

Rural infrastructure constitutes one of the most important forms of productive public investment because it creates the enabling conditions for sustained economic and social development. Beyond improving physical assets, investments in housing, rural connectivity, drinking water, and sanitation strengthen human capabilities by improving health, education, labour productivity, mobility, and access to markets and public services. From a development economics perspective, infrastructure investment therefore generates benefits that extend well beyond immediate asset

creation, producing long-term multiplier effects across the rural economy. The Union Budget 2026-27 reflects this broader understanding by according considerable importance to infrastructure as an integral component of rural transformation.

Table-2: Public Investment in Rural Housing and Connectivity
(₹ Crore)

Scheme	2016-17 BE	2024-25 RE	2025-26 BE	2025-26 RE	2026-27 BE	Absolute Increase	Percentage Increase (%)
PMAY-Gramin	15,000	32,327	54,832	32,500	54,917	39,917	266.1
PMGSY	12,581	17,871	19,000	11,000	19,000	6,419	54.0

Source: Government of India, Union Budget 2026-27: Budget at a Glance; Author's calculations.

The above table demonstrates sustained public investment in two of the principal components of rural infrastructure. Budgetary allocation under *Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Gramin* (PMAY-G) increased from ₹15,000 crore in 2016-17 to ₹54,917 crore in 2026-27, representing an increase of 266.1 per cent. Similarly, the allocation for the *Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana* (PMGSY) increased from ₹12,581 crore to ₹19,000 crore, reflecting the continued policy emphasis on strengthening rural connectivity.

The developmental significance of these investments extends beyond improvements in physical infrastructure. Access to adequate housing contributes to improved health outcomes, household security, and social well-being, while rural roads reduce transport costs, improve market integration, facilitate access to educational and healthcare institutions, and encourage the mobility of labour and goods. Infrastructure investment therefore enhances both productive efficiency and human capability formation by expanding the opportunities available to rural households. In this sense, investments in housing and connectivity serve as complementary drivers of rural transformation by strengthening the economic and social foundations of rural development.

Public investment in water and sanitation (Table-3) has also expanded substantially under the Union Budget 2026-27. The allocation for the *Jal Jeevan Mission* increased from ₹22,612 crore in 2024-25 to ₹67,670 crore in 2026-27, representing an increase of approximately 199.3 per cent, while allocations under the *Swachh Bharat Mission-Gramin* more than doubled over the same period. Most notably, the combined allocation for water, sanitation, and watershed-related programmes reached ₹2,16,654 crore, highlighting the strategic importance accorded to improving rural living conditions and strengthening natural resource management.

Table-3: Public Investment in Rural Water, Sanitation and Watershed Development (₹ Crore)

Scheme / Sector	Actual 2024-25	BE 2025-26	RE 2025-26	BE 2026-27	Absolute Change (2024-25 to BE 2026-27)	Percentage Change (%)
Jal Jeevan Mission	22,612	67,000	17,000	67,670	45,058	199.3
Swachh Bharat Mission-Gramin	3,211	7,192	6,000	7,192	3,981	124.0
Water, Sanitation and Watershed Schemes (Combined)	1,24,530	1,81,097	1,26,687	2,16,654	92,124	74.0

Source: Government of India, Union Budget 2026-27: Budget at a Glance; Author's calculations.

From the perspective of rural transformation, investments in drinking water, sanitation, and watershed development generate multidimensional developmental benefits. Improved access to safe drinking water reduces the incidence of water-borne diseases and the time burden associated with water collection, particularly for women and children, thereby contributing to better health, educational participation, and labour productivity. Similarly, sanitation infrastructure enhances public health and environmental quality, while watershed investments improve water conservation, groundwater recharge, and the sustainability of agricultural production. These complementary investments strengthen both human development and ecological resilience, reinforcing the long-term foundations of inclusive rural transformation.

The infrastructure priorities reflected in the Union Budget 2026-27 indicate that public investment is increasingly directed towards creating enabling conditions for sustained rural development rather than merely expanding physical assets. By improving connectivity, housing, water security, sanitation, and natural resource infrastructure, these investments enhance productive efficiency, expand human capabilities, and strengthen the resilience of rural communities. Consequently, infrastructure investment emerges not simply as an outcome of development policy but as one of the principal mechanisms through which rural transformation is advanced.

2.3 Productive Livelihoods and Rural Enterprise

The creation of sustainable livelihood opportunities constitutes a central objective of rural transformation. While public investment has traditionally supported rural employment through wage-based programmes,

contemporary rural development increasingly recognizes that long-term economic transformation requires investments that enhance skills, promote entrepreneurship, strengthen local institutions, and facilitate the expansion of the rural non-farm economy. Consequently, productive livelihoods are increasingly viewed as an important pathway through which public investment contributes to income generation, economic diversification, and

Table-4: Public Investment in Rural Employment and Livelihood Programmes (₹ Crore)

Budget Year	MGNREGA	VB-G RAM-G	DAY-NRLM
2024-25 RE	85,834	—	14,705
2025-26 BE	86,000	—	19,005
2025-26 RE	88,000	—	16,000
2026-27 BE	30,000	95,692	19,200

Source: Government of India, Union Budget 2026-27: Budget at a Glance, Ministry of Finance, Department of Economic Affairs, 2026; Author's compilation.

The expenditure pattern presented in Table 4 indicates an important reconfiguration of public investment within the rural livelihood sector. The most notable development is the introduction of the *Viksit Bharat- Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission (Gramin)* with an allocation of ₹95,692 crore, making it the largest dedicated programme supporting rural livelihoods in the Union Budget 2026-27. Simultaneously, the allocation for the *Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM)* increased to ₹19,200 crore, reflecting the continued emphasis on strengthening self-help groups, financial inclusion, women-led enterprises, and community-based institutions. These allocations indicate sustained public investment in programmes designed to expand livelihood opportunities beyond conventional agricultural employment.

The contraction in budgetary allocation for *MGNREGA* relative to the previous year's Revised Estimates signals a structural reorientation in the composition of livelihood-related public investment. This reduction is not an isolated fiscal adjustment but part of a broader policy shift wherein traditional employment guarantees are being deprioritized. The simultaneous introduction of *VB-GRAM-G*, with an allocation of ₹95,692 crore, underscores the state's preference for infrastructure-led interventions over direct wage-based rural employment. Such a reconfiguration foregrounds critical questions about distributive justice: while road asset management may enhance connectivity and long-term productivity, it does little to address the immediate crisis of rural underemployment. The juxtaposition of reduced support for *MGNREGA* with the expansion of capital-intensive schemes reveals an implicit hierarchy of welfare provisioning, privileging growth-

oriented infrastructure over rights-based entitlements. This trajectory reflects a deeper ideological move towards market-aligned development logics, raising concerns about the erosion of social protection in rural India.

From a development economics perspective, investments in productive livelihoods generate benefits that extend beyond immediate employment creation. Skill development, entrepreneurship promotion, access to institutional credit, producer organizations, and rural enterprises contribute to expanding the non-farm rural economy, strengthening local value chains, and improving household resilience against agricultural and climatic shocks. Programmes that encourage enterprise development also facilitate greater participation of women and rural youth in economic activities, thereby contributing to more diversified and inclusive patterns of rural growth. Consequently, public investment in livelihoods performs a dual developmental function by providing economic opportunities while simultaneously strengthening the productive capacity of rural communities.

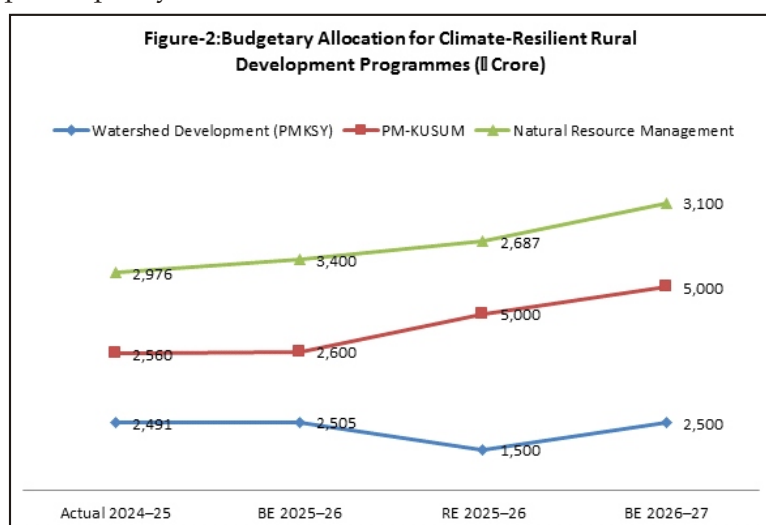
2.4 Climate-Resilient Rural Development

Climate change has fundamentally altered the political economy of rural development by expanding the developmental responsibilities of the state beyond agricultural production and poverty alleviation to include environmental sustainability and resilience. Increasing climate variability, groundwater depletion, land degradation, and the growing frequency of extreme weather events have heightened the vulnerability of rural livelihoods, particularly those dependent on rain-fed agriculture. Consequently, climate resilience has emerged as an integral component of rural development policy rather than a separate environmental objective. Public investment in natural resource management, watershed development, renewable energy, and climate-resilient agriculture has therefore assumed increasing importance within the broader framework of rural transformation.

The evolving expenditure pattern reflects this changing policy orientation. Budgetary allocations for watershed development under the *Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana* (PMKSY) have been maintained at ₹2,500 crore in 2026-27, while the allocation for the PM-KUSUM programme has increased from ₹2,560 crore in 2024-25 to ₹5,000 crore in 2026-27, representing an increase of approximately 95 per cent. Similarly, allocations for Natural Resource Management programmes remain substantial, amounting to ₹3,100 crore in 2026-27. Although these allocations constitute a relatively modest share of total rural expenditure, they indicate a growing recognition that investments in ecological restoration, water conservation, renewable energy, and sustainable resource management are indispensable for enhancing agricultural productivity and strengthening long-term livelihood resilience.

From a political economy perspective, these expenditure priorities illustrate an important evolution in the developmental role of the state.

Environmental sustainability is no longer treated merely as a conservation objective but is increasingly incorporated within the broader architecture of rural development. Investments in watershed development contribute to improving water availability, enhancing soil productivity, and reducing vulnerability to climatic shocks. Similarly, renewable energy initiatives such as *Pradhan Mantri Kisan Urja Suraksha evam Utthaan Mahabhiyan* (PM-KUSUM) strengthen agricultural resilience by promoting energy-efficient irrigation and reducing dependence on conventional energy sources. These interventions generate productive benefits while simultaneously supporting environmental sustainability, thereby blurring the conventional distinction between environmental policy and rural development policy.



Source: Government of India, Ministry of Finance, Union Budget: Budget at a Glance, 2024-25 to 2026-27; Author's compilation.

The increasing integration of climate resilience within public expenditure also reflects a broader redefinition of state priorities. Traditionally, rural development policy emphasized agricultural production, employment generation, and welfare provision. Contemporary fiscal priorities increasingly recognize that sustaining these objectives requires simultaneous investments in ecological systems that underpin rural production and livelihoods. In this sense, climate-resilient investments should be understood not as supplementary environmental programmes but as productive public investments that safeguard agricultural growth, strengthen livelihood security, and enhance the long-term sustainability of rural development. The growing prominence of such investments therefore signals an important shift in the political economy of rural development, in which environmental resilience has become an essential pillar of the state's developmental strategy rather than an ancillary policy concern.

3. Public Investment and Rural Transformation: Policy Reflections

The analysis of the Union Budget 2026-27 suggests a discernible shift in the orientation of public investment towards a more integrated conception of rural transformation. Rather than treating agriculture, infrastructure, livelihoods, and environmental sustainability as separate policy domains, the Budget increasingly positions them as interconnected components of rural development. This approach reflects a broader understanding of structural transformation, in which productivity enhancement, livelihood diversification, improved connectivity, human capability formation, and ecological resilience are mutually reinforcing objectives. The significance of this emerging orientation lies not simply in the expansion of public investment, but in the extent to which its composition reflects a broader rethinking of the economic, social, and ecological foundations of rural development.

The transformative potential of public investment, however, depends not only on the scale of budgetary allocations but also on the institutional and regional context in which such investments are implemented. India's rural economy is marked by substantial differences in resource endowments, economic structures, infrastructure, and institutional capacity across states and regions; consequently, similar investments may generate uneven outcomes. Effective implementation therefore requires stronger coordination across sectors and levels of government, alongside greater attention to local developmental priorities and institutional capabilities. The developmental returns from public investment will ultimately depend on the extent to which fiscal commitments are translated into timely, accessible, and locally responsive interventions rather than remaining confined to budgetary allocations.

The quality and composition of public investment are equally important to its transformative potential. Sustained investment in agriculture, infrastructure, and livelihood promotion needs to be complemented by investments that strengthen the productive ecosystem of rural areas, including technological diffusion, market integration, value-chain development, digital connectivity, human capabilities, and local institutions. Such complementarities can enhance the productivity of physical assets while expanding the capacity of rural households and enterprises to participate in emerging economic opportunities. The effectiveness of public investment, therefore, depends not simply on increasing expenditure across sectors, but on creating meaningful linkages among different forms of investment so that their combined effects strengthen rural productivity, livelihoods, and economic resilience.

The growing emphasis on sustainability adds further dimension to the evolving framework of rural transformation. Investments in watershed development, renewable energy, climate adaptation, and natural resource management should be understood not as peripheral environmental interventions but as productive investments that protect agricultural systems, improve resource efficiency, and strengthen the resilience of rural livelihoods. With climate-related risks increasingly affecting agricultural productivity and rural incomes, integrating environmental considerations into public investment is essential for sustaining development gains over the long term. Sustainability, therefore, is not an additional objective to be pursued alongside rural development, but an increasingly integral component of the productive and livelihood foundations on which durable rural transformation depends.

4. Conclusion

The Union Budget 2026-27 suggests an evolving rather than wholly transformed approach to rural development in India. Its significance lies in the changing orientation of public investment towards a more interconnected framework linking productive activity, livelihoods, human development, and environmental sustainability. The Budget does not mark a complete departure from established rural development priorities; rather, it indicates a gradual reorientation in the way these priorities are brought together within the broader development strategy. In this sense, the Budget provides important insights into the changing architecture of rural development, where the boundaries between economic, social, and ecological objectives are becoming increasingly interconnected. Whether this emerging orientation ultimately constitutes a substantive transformation will depend on the developmental outcomes that unfold over time.

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**A Study on Household Consumption
Expenditure of Dalit Women Labourers
in Rural Haryana**

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Abstract

The present study reveals that Dalit women labour households, on an average, have a consumption expenditure of ₹93003.86 annually in rural Haryana. This consumption expenditure is highest, i.e., ₹101837, in Sirsa district and lowest, i.e., ₹84214.81, in Mahendragarh district. It is ₹93812.85, ₹91474.15 in Sonipat and Yamunanagar districts, respectively. The annual per-capita consumption expenditure of these households comes to ₹19293.14 in rural Haryana. It is ₹20309.33, ₹20294.44, ₹19388.98, and ₹17108.20 in Sirsa, Yamunanagar, Sonipat, and Mahendragarh districts, respectively. Dalit women labourers have very low consumption expenditure because their income is usually irregular and insufficient. The average propensity to consume for these households is 1.05. Since the value is more than one, it means that, on average, these households spend more than their total income. As a result, a typical household in the sample faces a yearly deficit.

Keywords

Dalit women, Consumption expenditure, Rural Haryana, Durable, Non-durable, Services, Socio-religious ceremonies, Average propensity to consume.

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A Study on Household Consumption Expenditure of Dalit Women Labourers in Rural Haryana

1. Introduction

In rural India, Dalit women labourers occupy one of the most disadvantaged positions within the socio-economic structure due to the intersection of caste, gender, and class inequalities. Dalits officially recognized as Scheduled Caste (SC) have historically faced social exclusion, limited access to productive resources, and discrimination in labour markets. When gender is added to caste disadvantage, Dalit women experience a double or even triple marginalization, which significantly influences their income levels, employment opportunities, and ultimately their household consumption expenditure patterns. Consumption expenditure is widely used in development economics as a key indicator of living standards, poverty, and economic well-being. For rural Dalit women labour households, consumption expenditure does not merely reflect spending behaviour but also indicates survival strategies under constrained income conditions. A large share of their income is generally allocated to essential needs such as food, fuel, healthcare, and basic clothing, leaving very little scope for saving, education, or asset creation. In many cases, the average propensity to consume of these households tends to be high, sometimes even exceeding income, forcing families to rely on informal credit sources and debt cycles (Kumari, 2017).

Rural labour markets often confine Dalit women to low-paid, irregular, and informal employment, such as agricultural wage work, domestic labour, brick-kiln work, and seasonal migration. Wage discrimination, delayed payments, and the absence of social security further reduce their disposable income. These structural barriers directly shape consumption patterns, where expenditure is largely need-based rather than choice-based (Singh, 2005).

2. Review of Literature

Regional studies, like those in Punjab, reveal that landlessness, lack of skill development, and limited bargaining power in labour markets are central factors influencing consumption expenditure patterns. Households headed or supported by Dalit women labourers usually display low asset ownership and high consumption vulnerability, making them more sensitive to inflation and price fluctuations of essential commodities. Consumption expenditure among rural Dalit women labourers provides deeper insight

into poverty dynamics, gendered economic inequality, and social justice issues (Singh *et. al.*, 2019).

Haryana is considered one of the more prosperous agricultural states in India, but the benefits of development are not evenly distributed across social groups. Rural Dalit women labourers are landless or possess very small landholdings, which limits their economic independence. Their dependence on daily wage labour makes household income highly unstable. So, consumption expenditure is largely subsistence-oriented rather than growth-oriented. Employment conditions further influence expenditure patterns. Rural Dalit women in Haryana frequently face wage discrimination, seasonal unemployment, and a lack of social security benefits, which restrict their purchasing power. Government initiatives such as MGNREGA, old age pensions, widow pensions, and subsidized food programs provide partial relief but are often insufficient to ensure long-term economic stability (Narayan & Laxmi, 2016).

Several studies (Thresia, 2004; Balakrishanan, 2005; Reddy, 2008; Kareriya, 2011; Goswami, 2013; Mondal, 2013; Dar, 2014; Dinesha, 2016; Gundemeda, 2020; Kumar, 2020; Pramod, 2020; Raja, 2022) indicate that almost woman labourers are Dalit, illiterate, unskilled, and economically very weak. Because of the economic compulsion, they are employed in the unorganized sector, where Dalit women labourers are working as labourers in agriculture, construction work, factory work, and other marginal work for daily wages. Women from poor families accept the inferior working conditions due to their economic compulsion. Rural Dalit women labourers usually have low consumption expenditure because their income is limited and irregular. They mostly work in daily wage jobs where payment is small and not guaranteed every day. Due to this, they spend less on food, health, education, and other basic needs. Social discrimination and a lack of job opportunities also reduce their earning capacity. As a result, their overall standard of living remains low compared to other groups in rural areas. In many cases, they also have a large family responsibility, so their earnings are used only for basic survival. Savings are very rare, and unexpected expenses like illness or emergencies create more financial stress. Therefore, their consumption pattern remains very low and reflects their economic vulnerability in rural society.

3. Objectives of the study

Objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To estimate per household and per capita consumption expenditure of the Dalit women labourers;
2. To analyze the patterns of consumption expenditure on various items; and

3. To examine the average propensity to consume (APC) among Dalit women labourers.

4. Research Methodology

The present study describes the consumption expenditures of rural Dalit women labourers in Haryana. It is a cross-sectional analysis related to the year 2020-21 that includes the data related to the consumption spending of Dalit women labourers. The sampling design is selected by the three-stage stratified sampling; selection of districts, selection of villages and selection of households. Haryana state can be divided into four parts based on geographical factors and natural regions. Based on random sampling, Sonapat district has been selected from Eastern Haryana, Sirsa district from Western Haryana, Yamunanagar district from Ambala Plain or Sub-montane Belt, and Mahendragarh district from Southern Haryana.

Based on random sampling, one village from each development block of the selected district has been chosen. Thus, in all, thirty villages have been selected for the survey, eight from Sonapat district, seven from Sirsa district, seven from Yamunanagar district, and eight from Mahendragarh district. Out of the total 30 selected villages, 535 Dalit woman labour households have been randomly selected and investigated by taking 10 per cent of the households from the total number of Dalit woman labour households. The primary data were collected from the selected households through well-structured questionnaires. The majority of the respondents were illiterate, so the questionnaire was filled out by the interview method.

5. Levels of Household Consumption Expenditure

Table-1 explains the average spending pattern of Dalit women labour households in rural Haryana. It shows how much money a normal rural Dalit woman labourer's family spends in one year on different needs. On average, a rural Dalit woman labourer household spends about ₹93003.86 per year. A large share of this money is used on non-durable goods, which is around ₹55808.75. After this, families spend on services, durable goods, and social-religious ceremonies, which cost ₹21344.20, ₹8880.50, and ₹6970.41, respectively.

Among non-durable items, the biggest expenses are food grains and milk & milk products, where families spend around ₹11345.64 and ₹9584.95 each year. For durable goods, the highest spending is on house construction, addition of rooms, & major repairs, which is about ₹4838.21 annually. When it comes to services, the highest cost is health care, with an average spending of ₹13282.80 per year. In addition, families also spend money on marriages and other social ceremonies, which comes to around ₹6320.84 annually. Overall, food, housing repairs, health care, and social ceremonies are the main areas where rural Dalit women labour households spend most of their money.

Table-1: Levels of Consumption Expenditure of Rural Dalit Woman Labour Households

(Mean Values in ₹, Per Annum)

S. No.	Items of Consumption	Sonapat District	Sirsa District	Yamunanagar District	Mahendragarh District	Haryana
A.	Non-durables					
1	Food grains					
1.1	Cereals					
I	Wheat	7778.90	7178.93	7502.09	6403.10	7219.80
II	Rice	1248.38	1152.50	1271.10	1341.01	1251.40
III	Maize	871.00	455.36	1117.94	2537.21	1226.77
1.2	Pulses	978.77	1221.93	1193.31	1456.82	1212.21
1.3	Food grains are received as wages in kind.	447.00	371.21	426.03	503.49	435.46
2	Milk & milk products					
2.1	Home-produced & purchased	10099.02	7008.50	9556.29	6782.94	8352.74
2.2	Received as wages in kind	1098.85	1653.57	1157.94	987.60	1232.21
3	Condiments & spices	3580.38	3562.14	3528.68	3503.88	3544.02
4	Fruits	722.85	688.36	541.10	486.51	610.64
5	Vegetables	2981.54	3139.64	2995.00	3044.88	3041.61
6	Edible oils	1925.00	2386.07	1863.97	1744.19	1986.54
7	Sugarcane products	4066.46	5562.14	3902.06	4158.91	4438.36
8	Meat, fish & eggs	1156.54	1787.86	1162.13	802.25	1237.74
9	Tea leaves	3465.31	4731.43	3397.06	3117.83	3695.50
10	Biscuits, bread & sweets	999.61	1102.86	1055.66	899.61	1016.77
11	Pickles	457.31	389.29	424.34	430.15	424.58
12	Intoxicants & drugs	1680.77	4239.29	2314.93	2348.06	2672.39
13	Fuel, LPG & Electricity	6152.31	5885.72	6122.06	5613.95	5945.05

14	Clothes & footwear	4554.61	5365.00	4004.78	3636.43	4405.51
15	Soaps & detergents	1577.31	2073.93	1571.40	1569.15	1703.79
16	Water filter	190.15	217.71	206.47	—	155.66
Sub-total (A)		56032.07	60173.44	55314.34	51367.97	55808.75
B.	Durables					
1	House construction, addition of rooms & major repairs	4768.46	5250.71	4996.62	4293.80	4838.21
2	Television	302.54	235.14	237.94	89.77	217.18
3	Computer/ laptop	—	—	—	—	—
4	Electric fans/cooler	185.77	293.36	212.13	183.88	220.17
5	Utensils	242.23	354.50	260.59	224.65	272.04
6	Cots	288.92	325.50	289.04	244.96	287.93
7	Furniture	248.08	342.50	213.16	214.50	255.81
8	Refrigerator	23.08	57.07	7.35	1.55	22.79
9	Bicycle/rickshaw / autorickshaw	27.46	70.71	72.43	91.01	65.53
10	Sewing machine	7.85	24.36	16.29	5.58	13.77
11	Motorcycle/ scooter/ moped	1294.38	1120.71	941.62	276.74	913.89
12	Mobile phones	1490.00	1765.71	1370.07	1255.04	1475.01
13	Ornaments	282.31	497.86	194.27	206.98	298.17
Sub-total (B)		9161.08	10338.13	8811.51	7088.46	8880.50
C.	Services					
1	Education	4069.23	3428.57	3511.03	3670.54	3663.55
2	Health care	13123.08	14335.72	12486.03	13141.09	13282.80
3	Conveyance	2377.54	3021.43	2530.59	1886.05	2466.43
4	Communication	1283.85	1942.86	1272.94	1194.57	1432.00
5	Entertainment	455.38	443.21	413.01	277.91	398.64
6	Newspaper & books	131.08	36.43	128.60	110.78	100.78
Sub-total (C)		21440.16	23208.22	20342.20	20280.94	21344.20

D.	Socio-religious ceremonies					
1	Marriage & other social ceremonies	6552.31	7530.00	6340.81	4754.26	6320.84
2	Religious ceremonies	627.23	587.21	665.29	723.18	649.57
Sub-total (D)		7179.54	8117.21	7006.10	5477.44	6970.41
Total (A+B+C+D)		93812.85	101837.00	91474.15	84214.81	93003.86

Source: Field Survey, 2020-21.

The above table highlights that there are considerable variations in the consumption expenditure levels of rural Dalit women labour households across all the districts. The table shows that the annual household consumption expenditure, on an average, is the highest in Sirsa district, i.e., ₹101837 and the lowest in the Mahendragarh district, i.e., ₹84214.81. It is ₹93812.85 in Sonipat and ₹91474.15 in Yamunanagar districts.

An average annual household consumption expenditure on non-durables is highest in Sirsa district, i.e., ₹60173.44, followed by Sonipat, Yamunanagar, and Mahendragarh districts with ₹56032.07, ₹55314.34, and ₹51367.97, respectively. In the case of services, the highest consumption expenditure for an average rural Dalit woman labour household is ₹23208.22 in Sirsa district, followed by Sonipat (₹21440.16), Yamunanagar (₹20342.20), and Mahendragarh (₹20280.94) districts.

The consumption expenditure on durables is the highest in Sirsa district, i.e., ₹10338.13, while this amount is ₹9161.08 in Sonipat, ₹8811.51 in Yamunanagar, and ₹7088.46 in Mahendragarh districts. In the case of socio-religious ceremonies, the highest consumption expenditure for an average rural Dalit woman labour household is ₹8117.21 in Sirsa district, followed by ₹7179.54, ₹7006.10, and ₹5477.44 in Sonipat, Yamunanagar, and Mahendragarh districts, respectively.

6. Patterns of Household Consumption Expenditure

Consumption spending can be better understood by looking at how much money families spend on different daily items. Table-2 shows the spending pattern of Dalit women labour households in rural Haryana. The table explains that the highest part of their total spending is on non-durable goods, which is about 60 per cent. After that, they spend on services (22.95 per cent), durable goods (9.54 per cent), and socio-religious functions (7.50 per cent). This means that most rural Dalit women labouring families spend their money mainly on basic survival needs for their households. Among non-durable items, food grains are the most important. On average, a Dalit woman labourer household in rural Haryana spends 12.20 per cent of their total budget on food grains. Milk & milk products are the second most important item, with about 10.31 per cent of the total spending. The field

survey also found that most families keep one or two milch animals to meet their daily milk needs. Spending on fuel, LPG, & electricity is the next important expense, making up about 6.39 per cent of the total household spending. After this comes spending on sugarcane products, which is about 4.77 per cent of the total expenses of rural Dalit woman labour households. On average, these households spend only a small part of their income (4.74 per cent) on clothes & footwear. Their earnings are very low, so they are often unable to buy enough clothing for all family members. The field survey also showed that many of them usually wear used or old clothes given by wealthier families. Tea leaves, condiments & spices come next in spending, making up about 3.97 per cent and 3.81 per cent of the total household consumption expenses, respectively. After this, money is spent on vegetables, intoxicants & drugs, edible oils, soaps & detergents, meat, fish, & eggs, and biscuits, bread & sweets. Their shares in total spending are around 3.27 per cent, 2.87 per cent, 2.14 per cent, 1.83 per cent, 1.33 per cent, and 1.09 per cent, respectively. Other items like fruits, pickles and water filter take only a very small portion of the total consumption budget of an average rural Dalit woman labour household. When it comes to durable goods, the largest expense is on house construction, addition of rooms & major repairs. This alone forms about 5.20 per cent of the total consumption expenditure of an average rural Dalit woman labour household in Haryana.

Table-2: Patterns of Consumption Expenditure of Rural Dalit Woman Labour Households
(Percentage of Total Consumption Expenditure)

S. No.	Items of Consumption	Sonapat District	Sirsa District	Yamunanagar District	Mahendragarh District	Haryana
A.	Non-durables					
1	Food grains					
1.1	Cereals					
I	Wheat	8.29	7.05	8.20	7.60	7.76
II	Rice	1.33	1.13	1.39	1.59	1.35
III	Maize	0.93	0.45	1.22	3.01	1.32
1.2	Pulses	1.04	1.20	1.30	1.73	1.30
1.3	Food grains are received as wages in kind.	0.48	0.36	0.47	0.60	0.47
2	Milk & milk products					
2.1	Home-produced & purchased	10.77	6.88	10.45	8.05	8.98

2.2	Received as wages in kind	1.17	1.62	1.27	1.17	1.33
3	Condiments & spices	3.82	3.50	3.86	4.16	3.81
4	Fruits	0.77	0.67	0.59	0.58	0.66
5	Vegetables	3.18	3.08	3.27	3.61	3.27
6	Edible oils	2.05	2.34	2.04	2.07	2.14
7	Sugarcane products	4.33	5.46	4.27	4.94	4.77
8	Meat, fish & eggs	1.23	1.76	1.27	0.95	1.33
9	Tea leaves	3.69	4.65	3.71	3.70	3.97
10	Biscuits, bread & sweets	1.07	1.08	1.15	1.07	1.09
11	Pickles	0.49	0.38	0.46	0.51	0.46
12	Intoxicants & drugs	1.79	4.16	2.53	2.79	2.87
13	Fuel, LPG & Electricity	6.56	5.78	6.69	6.67	6.39
14	Clothes & footwear	4.86	5.27	4.38	4.32	4.74
15	Soaps & detergents	1.68	2.04	1.72	1.86	1.83
16	Water filter	0.20	0.21	0.23	0	0.17
Sub-total (A)		59.73	59.07	60.47	60.98	60.01
B.	Durables					
1	House construction, addition of rooms & major repairs	5.08	5.15	5.46	5.10	5.20
2	Television	0.32	0.23	0.26	0.11	0.23
3	Computer/laptop	—	—	—	—	—
4	Electric fans/cooler	0.20	0.29	0.23	0.22	0.24
5	Utensils	0.26	0.35	0.29	0.27	0.29
6	Cots	0.31	0.32	0.32	0.29	0.31
7	Furniture	0.26	0.34	0.23	0.25	0.28
8	Refrigerator	0.02	0.06	0.01	0.002	0.02
9	Bicycle/rickshaw autorickshaw	0.03	0.07	0.08	0.11	0.07
10	Sewing machine	0.01	0.02	0.02	0.01	0.01
11	Motorcycle/scooter/moped	1.38	1.10	1.03	0.33	0.98
12	Mobile phones	1.59	1.73	1.50	1.49	1.59
13	Ornaments	0.30	0.49	0.21	0.25	0.32
Sub-total (B)		9.76	10.15	9.64	8.43	9.54
C.	Services					
1	Education	4.34	3.37	3.84	4.36	3.94
2	Health care	13.99	14.08	13.65	15.60	14.28

3	Conveyance	2.53	2.97	2.76	2.24	2.65
4	Communication	1.37	1.91	1.39	1.42	1.54
5	Entertainment	0.49	0.44	0.45	0.33	0.43
6	Newspaper & books	0.14	0.04	0.14	0.13	0.11
Sub-total (C)		22.86	22.81	22.23	24.08	22.95
D.	Socio-religious ceremonies					
1	Marriage & other social ceremonies	6.98	7.39	6.93	5.65	6.80
2	Religious ceremonies	0.67	0.58	0.73	0.86	0.70
Sub-total (D)		7.65	7.97	7.66	6.51	7.50
Total (A+B+C+D)		100	100	100	100	100

Source: Computed from Table-1.

The next important items are mobile phones, which account for about 1.59 per cent. Spending on other durable items such as motorcycles/scooters/moped, ornaments, cots, utensils, furniture, electric fan & coolers, television, bicycles/rickshaw/autorickshaw, refrigerator, and sewing machine is very low. Each of these items usually makes up less than 1 per cent of the total household spending. Among service expenses, health care takes the biggest share, about 14.28 per cent of the total expenditure for an average rural Dalit woman labour household in Haryana. Education comes next with 3.94 per cent, followed by transport or conveyance at 2.65 per cent, communication at 1.54 per cent, entertainment at 0.43 per cent, and newspapers & books at only 0.11 per cent. Some families face serious illnesses, which force them to spend more on medical services. Most rural Dalit women who labour in households suffer from different health problems. This is mainly due to poor housing conditions, an unbalanced diet and unsafe drinking water. The field survey showed that people usually depend on local village medical practitioners for treatment. It was also observed that even with government efforts, many problems remain. Because of financial pressure, many school-going children also work to support their families, which leads to frequent absences from school. In terms of socio-religious ceremonies, rural Dalit women labour households spend about 6.80 per cent of their total income on marriages & other social ceremonies. After this, they spend around 0.70 per cent of their income on religious activities.

The district-wise patterns reveal that the consumption expenditure is highest on non-durables, followed by services, durables, and social-religious ceremonies in all the districts. The proportion of consumption expenditure on non-durables is highest, i.e., 60.98 per cent in Mahendragarh district, followed by 60.47 per cent in Yamunanagar, 59.73 per cent in Sonipat, and 59.07 per cent in Sirsa districts. Services rank second in consumption

expenditure of rural Dalit woman labour households; this proportion is 24.08 per cent in Mahendragarh district, followed by 22.86 per cent, 22.81 per cent, and 22.23 per cent in Sonipat, Sirsa, and Yamunanagar districts, respectively. In the case of durable items, an average rural Dalit woman labour household spends the highest, i.e., 10.15 per cent in Sirsa district; however, this proportion is 9.76 per cent in Sonipat, 9.64 per cent in Yamunanagar, and 8.43 per cent in Mahendragarh districts. On socio-religious ceremonies, an average rural Dalit woman labourer household spends the highest proportion in Sirsa district (7.97 per cent), followed by Yamunanagar (7.66 per cent), Sonipat (7.65 per cent), and Mahendragarh (6.51 per cent) districts.

Out of the total expenditure on non-durables, food grain accounted for the largest spending component, i.e., 14.53 per cent in Mahendragarh district, 12.58 per cent in Yamunanagar, 12.07 per cent in Sonipat and 10.19 per cent in Sirsa districts. The second rank of milk & milk products, accounting for the maximum share, i.e., 11.94 per cent, 11.72 per cent, 9.22 per cent and 8.50 per cent in Sonipat, Yamunanagar, Mahendragarh, and Sirsa districts, respectively. Next, for fuel, LPG & electricity, on an average, Dalit women labour households spend 6.69 per cent in Yamunanagar district, followed by 6.67 per cent in Mahendragarh, 6.56 per cent in Sonipat, and 5.78 per cent in Sirsa districts.

The next non-durable item, according to their use and importance in Mahendragarh district, is sugarcane products, followed by clothes & footwear, condiments & spices, tea leaves, vegetables, intoxicants & drugs, edible oils, soaps & detergents, biscuits, bread & sweets, meat, fish & eggs, fruits, and pickles. In Yamunanagar district, the next non-durable item according to their use is clothes & footwear, followed by sugarcane products, condiments & spices, tea leaves, vegetables, intoxicants & drugs, edible oils, soaps & detergents, meat, fish & eggs, biscuits, bread & sweets, fruits, pickles, and water filters. In Sonipat district, the next important items are clothes & footwear, sugarcane products, condiments & spices, tea leaves, vegetables, edible oils, intoxicants & drugs, soaps & detergents, meat, fish & eggs, biscuits, bread & sweets, fruits, pickles, and water filter. The order of these items in Sirsa district is sugarcane products, clothes & footwear, tea leaves, intoxicants & drugs, condiments & spices, vegetables, edible oils, soaps & detergents, meat, fish & eggs, biscuits, bread & sweets, fruits, pickles, and water filter.

Among the durables, the most important component of consumption expenditure is house construction, addition of rooms & major repairs in all the districts. The Dalit women labour households, on an average, spend 5.46 per cent of the total consumption expenditure on this item in Yamunanagar district, while this proportion is 5.15 per cent, 5.10 per cent, and 5.08 per cent in Sirsa, Mahendragarh, and Sonipat districts, respectively. The field survey

revealed that the housing conditions of rural Dalit women labour households are deplorable, and their houses are not repaired on time. Expenditure on mobile phones ranks second in all the districts. The share of this item in the total consumption expenditure is 1.73 per cent, 1.59 per cent, 1.50 per cent, and 1.49 per cent in Sirsa, Sonipat, Yamunanagar, and Mahendragarh districts, respectively. The share of motorcycle/scooter/moped is 1.38 per cent in Sonipat, 1.10 per cent in Sirsa, 1.03 per cent in Yamunanagar, and 0.33 per cent in Mahendragarh districts. The share of other items such as television, electric fans/cooler, cots, furniture, refrigerator, bicycle/rickshaw/autorickshaw, sewing machine, and ornaments is quite meagre. It is less than 1 per cent for each item for an average rural Dalit woman labour household in all the districts.

The table also clearly shows that the consumption expenditure pattern for services is the same in all the districts. Health care is the most important item, followed by expenditure on education, conveyance, communication, entertainment, and newspapers & books in all the districts.

Among the socio-religious ceremonies, Dalit women labour households spend the highest proportion of their income on marriages & other social ceremonies, which is 7.39 per cent in Sirsa district, followed by 6.98 per cent, 6.93 per cent and 5.65 per cent in Sonipat, Yamunanagar, and Mahendragarh districts, respectively. The expenditure on religious ceremonies is 0.86 per cent in Mahendragarh, 0.73 per cent in Yamunanagar, 0.67 per cent in Sonipat, and 0.58 per cent in Sirsa districts.

7. Per Capita Consumption Expenditure

After examining the levels and patterns of household spending among Dalit women labour families in rural Haryana, it becomes important to study their per-person consumption expenditure, as family-size differs from one household to another. The average family-size of the respondents is 4.82 members. Table-3 indicates that the average yearly per capita consumption expenditure of these households is ₹19293.14 in rural Haryana. However, spending differs greatly across various items. The highest per capita expenditure is on non-durable goods, which is ₹11577.22. Expenditure on services, durable goods, and social-religious ceremonies is ₹4427.74, ₹1842.20, and ₹1445.98, respectively.

Among daily household items, the highest spending per person was on food grains (₹2353.60). After that, they spent money on milk & milk products (₹1988.34), fuel, LPG, & electricity (₹1233.27), and sugar products (₹920.71). Other expenses were on clothes & footwear (₹913.90), tea leaves (₹766.61), condiments & spices (₹735.19), and vegetables (₹630.97). Smaller amounts were spent on intoxicants & drugs (₹554.37), edible oils (₹412.10), soaps & detergents (₹353.44), meat, fish, & eggs (₹256.76), biscuits, bread, & sweets (₹210.92), fruits (₹126.67), pickles (₹88.08), and water filters (₹32.29).

For durables goods, the biggest yearly expense per person was on house construction, addition of rooms, & major repairs, which was about ₹1003.66 for an average Dalit woman labour household in rural Haryana. After this, spending was mainly on mobile phones (₹305.98) and motor- cycles/ scooter/ mopeds (₹189.58). In the case of services, health care had the highest annual expense at ₹2755.45. This was followed by education (₹759.98), transport/conveyance (₹511.65), communication (₹297.06), entertainment (₹82.69), and finally newspapers and books (₹20.91). For an average rural Dalit woman labour household, per capita expenditure on marriages & other social ceremonies accounted for ₹1311.23, and religious ceremonies for ₹134.75.

Table-3: Per Capita Consumption Expenditure of Rural Dalit Woman Labour Households

(Mean Value in ₹., Per Annum)

S. No.	Items of Consumption	Sonapat District	Sirsa District	Yamunanagar District	Mahendragarh District	Haryana
A.	Non-durables					
1	Food grains					
1.1	Cereals					
I	Wheat	1607.72	1431.70	1664.41	1300.79	1497.71
II	Rice	258.01	229.84	282.01	272.43	259.60
III	Maize	180.02	90.81	248.03	515.43	254.49
1.2	Pulses	202.29	243.69	264.75	295.95	251.47
1.3	Food grains are received as wages in kind.	92.38	74.03	94.52	102.28	90.33
2	Milk & milk products					
2.1	Home-produced & purchased	2087.24	1397.71	2120.16	1377.95	1732.73
2.2	Received as wages in kind	227.11	329.77	256.90	200.63	255.61
3	Condiments & spices	739.98	710.40	782.87	711.81	735.19
4	Fruits	149.40	137.28	120.05	98.83	126.67
5	Vegetables	616.22	626.14	664.47	618.57	630.97
6	Edible oils	397.85	475.85	413.54	354.33	412.10
7	Sugarcane products	840.45	1109.26	865.71	844.88	920.71
8	Meat, fish & eggs	239.03	356.55	257.83	162.98	256.76
9	Tea leaves	716.20	943.59	753.67	633.39	766.61

10	Biscuits, bread & sweets	206.60	219.94	234.21	182.76	210.92
11	Pickles	94.52	77.64	94.14	87.39	88.08
12	Intoxicants & drugs	347.38	845.44	513.59	477.01	554.37
13	Fuel, LPG & Electricity	1271.54	1173.79	1358.24	1140.47	1233.27
14	Clothes & footwear	941.34	1069.94	888.50	738.74	913.90
15	Soaps & detergents	325.99	413.60	348.63	318.77	353.44
16	Water filter	39.30	43.42	45.81	—	32.29
Sub-total (A)		11580.57	12000.39	12272.04	10435.39	11577.22
B.	Durables					
1	House construction, addition of rooms & major repairs	985.53	1047.15	1108.55	872.28	1003.66
2	Television	62.53	46.89	52.79	18.24	45.05
3	Computer/laptop	—	—	—	—	—
4	Electric fans/cooler	38.39	58.50	47.06	37.35	45.67
5	Utensils	50.06	70.70	57.81	45.64	56.43
6	Cots	59.71	64.91	64.13	49.76	59.73
7	Furniture	51.27	68.30	47.29	43.57	53.07
8	Refrigerator	4.77	11.38	1.63	0.31	4.73
9	Bicycle/rickshaw/autorickshaw	5.68	14.10	16.07	18.49	13.59
10	Sewing machine	1.62	4.86	3.61	1.13	2.86
11	Motorcycle/scooter/moped	267.52	223.50	208.91	56.22	189.58
12	Mobile phones	307.95	352.14	303.96	254.96	305.98
13	Ornaments	58.35	99.29	43.10	42.05	61.85
Sub-total (B)		1893.38	2061.72	1954.91	1440.00	1842.20
C.	Services					
1	Education	841.02	683.76	778.96	745.67	759.98
2	Health care	2712.24	2858.97	2770.15	2669.61	2755.45
3	Conveyance	491.38	602.56	561.44	383.15	511.65
4	Communication	265.34	387.46	282.41	242.68	297.06
5	Entertainment	94.12	88.39	91.63	56.46	82.69
6	Newspaper & books	27.09	7.26	28.53	22.50	20.91
Sub-total (C)		4431.19	4628.40	4513.12	4120.07	4427.74

D.	Socio-religious ceremonies					
1	Marriage & other social ceremonies	1354.21	1501.71	1406.77	965.83	1311.23
2	Religious ceremonies	129.63	117.11	147.60	146.91	134.75
Sub-total (D)		1483.84	1618.82	1554.37	1112.74	1445.98
Total (A+B+C+D)		19388.98	20309.33	20294.44	17108.20	19293.14

Source: Field Survey, 2020-21.

The family-size varies from one district to another. It is the highest, i.e., 5.01 in Sirsa district and the lowest, i.e., 4.51 in Yamunanagar district. It is 4.92 in Mahendragarh and 4.84 in Sonipat districts. Table 3 also displays the mean values of per capita consumption expenditure for rural Dalit women labour households in all the districts. There are considerable variations in per capita consumption expenditures across all the districts. The per capita consumption expenditure is the highest in Sirsa district, i.e., ₹20309.33 and the lowest in Mahendragarh district, i.e., ₹17108.20. It is ₹20294.44 in Yamunanagar and ₹19388.98 in Sonipat districts. The per capita consumption expenditures depend on household income, family-size, and the number of earning members of the family.

The per capita consumption expenditure on non-durables is the highest in Yamunanagar district, which amounts to ₹12272.04, followed by the Sirsa, Sonipat, and Mahendragarh districts with ₹12000.39, ₹11580.57, and ₹10435.39, respectively.

In the case of services, the average per capita consumption expenditure for rural Dalit woman labour households is ₹4628.40 in Sirsa district, followed by Yamunanagar (₹4513.12), Sonipat (₹4431.19), and Mahendragarh (₹4120.07) districts.

The per capita consumption expenditure on durables is the highest, i.e., ₹2061.72 in Sirsa district. While this amount is ₹1954.91 in Yamunanagar, ₹1893.38 in Sonipat, and ₹1440 in Mahendragarh districts.

The per capita consumption expenditure on socio-religious ceremonies is the highest, i.e., ₹1618.82 in Sirsa district and the lowest, i.e., ₹1112.74 in Mahendragarh district. It is ₹1554.37 and ₹1483.84 in Yamunanagar and Sonipat districts, respectively.

8. Average Propensity to Consume

Average propensity to consume (APC) means the share of income that is spent on consumption. In this study, APC is calculated for rural Dalit women labour households in Haryana. A detailed description is given in Table 4. The table shows that the average propensity to consume for these households is 1.05. Since the value is more than one, it means that, on average, these

households spend more than their total income. As a result, a typical household in the sample faces a yearly deficit of about ₹4357.85.

Table-4 Average Propensity to Consume of Rural Dalit Woman Labour Households

District	Average Income (₹)	Average Consumption Expenditure (₹)	Average Propensity to Consume C/Y	Annual Deficit (₹)
Sonipat District	87151.92	93812.85	1.08	6660.93
Sirsa District	98718.23	101837.00	1.03	3118.77
Yamunanagar District	85057.71	91474.15	1.08	6416.44
Mahendragarh District	83003.63	84214.81	1.01	1211.18
Haryana	88646.01	93003.86	1.05	4357.85

Source: Field Survey, 2020-21.

The above table shows that the average propensity to consume is more than one in all the selected districts. The highest value is found in Sonipat and Yamunanagar districts, which is 1.08, while the lowest value is recorded in Mahendragarh district, which is 1.01. Sirsa district has a value of 1.03. When the average propensity to consume is greater than one, it means that a rural Dalit woman labour household spends more money than it earns in a year, leading to a financial deficit in every district studied. The largest annual deficit is seen in Sonipat district at ₹6660.93, followed by Sirsa with ₹6416.44, Yamunanagar with ₹3118.77, and Mahendragarh districts with ₹1211.18.

9. Conclusions and Policy Implications

The expenditure pattern of rural Dalit women labour households shows that their average annual consumption is quite low, which reflects their weak economic condition. Most of their income is spent on basic non-durable necessities such as food grains, milk & milk products, while only a small share goes toward clothes & footwear and similar goods. Spending on services, socio-religious ceremonies, and durable items remains limited, indicating that survival needs are prioritized over comfort or long-term assets. Field observations also highlight poor living standards, as many families wear old or low-quality clothes, sometimes received from others, which points toward financial hardship. Overall, the per capita consumption level is modest, with the highest share directed towards essential non-durables, followed by services, durables, and socio-religious ceremonies. This pattern clearly suggests that these households struggle to move beyond subsistence and have very limited capacity for saving or investment, underlining the need for stronger economic support and welfare measures. The study indicates that

the average propensity to consume of rural Dalit women labour households is slightly above unity, which means their expenditure generally exceeds their income and many families run a deficit. To maintain even a minimum standard of living, these households often depend on borrowing from various sources. This situation keeps them caught in a continuous cycle of poverty where meeting daily needs themselves becomes a challenge, and there is little scope for saving or future security. The pattern of spending further reflects their vulnerable condition, as insufficient resources prevent them from allocating adequate funds toward better consumption items or improving living standards. Variations in family-size and income levels contribute significantly to this imbalance. Overall, the findings highlight economic instability and the urgent need for supportive policies to uplift the living conditions of these households. Rural Dalit women labour households have very low income and often spend more than they earn. The government should strengthen wage employment schemes, rural job programs, and women-focused livelihood missions. Proper implementation of minimum wages is also essential to ensure stable earnings. A major share of expenditure goes to food and other basic non-durable goods. Strengthening the Public Distribution System, nutrition programs, and subsidies on essential burdens will improve food security.

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Afghanistan in the Contemporary Era: Issues and Challenges

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Abstract

At different periods of its historical past, Afghanistan was the center of central Asia and has been subject to ceaseless invasion and conquest. The history of Afghanistan is a history of fighting and conflict even up to the present time, with political life marked by instability, and ongoing struggles over the peace and state-building. It continues to be affected by ethnic fault lines, military interventions and efforts towards reform. This paper tries to throw lights on the historical and contemporary political problems of Afghanistan. It is based on an introduction to the political history of Afghanistan including changes in governance and state organization. The discussion then moves on to the social, political and economic context of the Afghan population, focusing on the challenges that they face in their daily lives. The growth of the Taliban and their impact on society, governance and Afghanistan's international relations are taken particular note of.

Keywords

Taliban, Conflict, Insecurity, Economic collapse, Gender equality.

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Afghanistan in the Contemporary Era: Issues and Challenges

1. Introduction

Afghanistan has been experiencing non-democratic and tribal political institutions since it was established. There is an open and hidden conflict in this country on ethnic grounds because of ethnic politics, ethnic dominance, discrimination, oppression and occupation of land of ethnic groups. Throughout history various empires and dynasties have risen and fallen in Afghanistan which is a crossroads of civilizations. Afghanistan has been affected by various cultural influences since ancient times until contemporary eras, such as Persian, Greek, Arab, Mongol and British cultures.¹ Afghanistan has a long history which goes back to the 1500 B.C. time of other religion that had never been so close to Afghanistan. Different dynasties set up their empires eventually to be overthrown. Geographically, historically, politically, culturally and strategically, Afghanistan is a part of Central Asia. Various factors such as foreign occupation, monopoly, ethnic, religious and cultural heterogeneity have made Afghanistan less peaceful in nature.² In its political development the history of Afghanistan reveals that these nations have had issues dealing with forming an efficient and legitimate government throughout history as a result of tribalism and civil war. Like many other states, Afghanistan had a turbulent past in which many invaders had tried to make it a part of their own country but failed. Persian, Turks, Mongols and Greeks have tried to colonies it in order to exercise their control over the Silk Road, which proved an important string to the bow for control of India prior to the 18th century.³ On August 19, 1919, Afghanistan became independent from the British. This rule of monarchy was followed by the constitutions of 1923 and 1931, but then by that of 1964 which called the new government a constitutional monarchy with an elected parliament.⁴ Today, Afghanistan is confronted with a considerable number and diversity of complex and interwoven challenges. They can be generally categorized under sectors of humanitarian action, economic development, security and peace. But Afghanistan is not a 'post conflict' country, it is a country currently in the grip of violence that has over gripped country for more than 40 years. The reasons behind the violence can be traced back to the disintegration of the state, following the communist coup in 1978 and Soviet invasion in 1979, and the subsequent war of resistance (*Jihad*) (1979-1992) and civil war (1992-2001) performed by the victorious mujahedeen groups. These conflicts together resulted in the destruction of national infrastructures, such as health and

education, killing more than 1.7 million people, permanent disability of another 2 million people and have displaced more than 5 million from their homes.⁵

After the Soviet Union's withdrawal in 1989, Afghanistan has entered into a civil war. Until the Taliban rise, there are many groups which are trying for government seats. Taliban became the strongest force in Afghanistan until a decisive setback at Operation Anaconda in 2002, the United States and its allies.⁶ By returning Taliban to power in 2021, This country faces with continuing political challenges. Lack of comprehensive and representative government has severely diminished political engagement and illegitimacy both nationally and internationally. Political opposition or dissent is at a minimum in Taliban controlled areas, under the command of power focused Taliban leader. In addition, inadequate institutional frameworks, limitation of civil rights and the absence of rule of law have exacerbated governance uncertainty. This has contributed to political instability in Afghanistan, along with other anthropological issues such as lack of international recognition and Afghanistan's humanitarian needs which endure.

2. Objectives of the study

Objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To analyze the historical evolution of Afghanistan's political system from independence to 2021, with its governance structures.
2. To examine the main political challenges that Afghanistan has faced in the post-2001 era.
3. To evaluate how the 2021 political collapse has affected stability, economy, women, people and international relations.

3. Methodology

In the present study, qualitative and analytical approach based on secondary sources has been used. The data is gathered from academic books, conference papers, peer-reviewed journals, institutional reports and trustworthy online sources. Thematic content analysis techniques have been employed to find main patterns and major issues concerning governance, conflict and international engagements raised from the gathered data.

4. Afghanistan: Political Background (1919-1973)

Prince Amanullah Khan emerged as the new champion and defender of Islamic freedom and independence. It marked the first aerial invasion in Afghanistan's history; there was even a truce known as the Treaty of Rawalpindi, the details of which were not even completed because of negotiations for nearly two years. The treaty granted the Afghans independence, and defined the boundary of the British kingdom as not

extending beyond Khyber Pass. The Third Anglo-Afghan War 1919 was a short but intense war starting with Amanullah Khan's proclamation of independence. Despite the better numbers of British troops, Afghan armies attacked the border of the territory of British India, which prompted British to hold talks with them. The war was brought an end to by the Treaty of Rawalpindi 1919 which formally recognized Afghanistan as fully independent. From 1919 to 1929, King Amanullah Khan was one of the most prominent reformers in Afghan history and he tried to translate Afghan society from a traditional to a modern one. King Amanullah Khan began to introduce the changes in Afghanistan a profound way, which influenced the country's political, educational and social systems. Politically, in that Treaty of Rawalpindi that asserted Afghanistan's sovereignty on the international stage, he proclaimed total independence for Britain well back in 1919. Instead he laid the stone of legal government when he first introduced the constitution into the country. In addition, he established a constitutional monarchy in the country. He formed an advisory panel in order to curb power concentration. Amanullah Khan started modern educational institutions in which education system was made compulsory for children. This policy of sending both the boys and all the girls out of the country, to obtain higher education, is really the best indication of his progressive views. Amanullah Khan supported the public's participation and also women's rights within social situations. Progress towards gender equality was made through legislative change.⁷

After the Amanullah Khan, Short time rule of Habibullah Kalakani started and his ruling lasted only for 10 months, from January to October 1929, under a rebellious leader and Tajik bandit. He was the sole King of Tajik that brought Tajik to the Country's political power after 7 hundreds years. Habibullah Kalakani had no experience and knowledge to control and manage all Afghanistan's political situations and make strong government. He could not leave any special and large work in Afghanistan in that time. Yet after some months of recruiting tribesmen, Nadir Shah and Amanullah's former war minister, the Musahiban brothers were able to breach the Durand Line and enter Afghanistan. As such, on October 10th, 1929, the large force defeated the ruler of the Tajik and captured Kabul. Habiballah Kalakani managed to flee, but was later caught and executed, early in November. Soon after, Nadir Shah was declared as the King of Afghanistan.⁸ Mohammad Nader Shah rose to power in 1929 and was supported with military and political forces of his own family, after crumbling of reform program of Amanullah Khan, and Mohammad Nader Shah became the overseer of the political turmoil that followed during Habibullah Kalakani's reign. King Nadir Shah made a further effort at the modernization of Afghanistan using roads and communications. Additionally, he instituted measures to promote

regeneration under his relations with foreign powers, his creation of economic reform facilities in the form of commercial banks, and his establishment of a disciplined army of almost 40,000 soldiers. However, in spite of the positive reforms, Nadir Shah limited the rights to free speech, and as such thousands of Afghan intellectuals were imprisoned or killed. Lastly, in November 1933, King Nadir Shah was shot dead by an Afghan teenager, Abdul Khaliq Hazara.⁹ Together Mohammad Zahir Shah ascended to the throne, and was the youngest and the longest-reigning and the last King of Afghanistan in a triple way. Zahir Shah was crowned king at the age of 19 and spent most of his kingship with a number of more seasoned advisors in the royal family. In Zahir's final 10 years, his rule will be governed by his personal decision, without having to adhere to any rules of king's advice and review. The time of peace and internal stability in Afghanistan was the longest from 1929-1978.¹⁰

Finally, Daoud Khan, a prominent political figure in mid- 20th century Afghanistan, rose to power through a carefully orchestrated bloodless coup on July 17, 1973. However, at the time king Zahir Shah was abroad and sought medical treatment at Italy, a vacuum was left, which Daoud Khan filled quickly. With the help of some in power in the army and then under the predatory influence of the officers he ended the Monarchy and proclaimed the existence of the republic of Afghanistan. Daoud Khan cast himself as the first president of this country. On the 28th of April, 1978 Sardar Mohammad Daoud Khan, the first President of Afghanistan was finally killed.¹¹

5. Communist Regimes PDPA (1978 -1992)

The role of Afghanistan in international relations until late 1970s was negligible. This was viewed as the 'safari side of the country', far distant from the 'oilfields of the Persian Gulf' or other strategic areas of the Middle East or South Asia which was emphasized in the declassified official records of the time.¹² A significant turning point in Afghan history was the Saur Revolution (April 1978) which marked the communist takeover of the country. The coup was organized by Marxist-Leninist leftists, led by officers of the armed forces under the direction of the PDPA, which had split into two wings leftist section, called Khalq (Masses) and right-wing section known as Parcham (Banner). The assassination of a prominent Parchami ideologue Mir Akbar Khyber was the immediate spark of the Revolution. His funeral became a huge demonstration with alarming implications to the government of President Mohammed Daoud Khan, a response which led to the arrest of prominent leaders of PDPA, including Nur Mohammad Taraki and Babrak Karmal. However, Hafizullah Amin another important PDPA official was only imprisoned under house arrest which permitted him to continue coordinating the coup in secret. In December 1979, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan came as a reaction to a mounting of domestic trouble in the country. Besides, it was part of a political drama, and a military affair at the

same time, which ultimately led to the downfall of the Afghan state. The decision to intervene was heavily influenced on Cold War politics and intention to maintain Soviet influence over the region. But support for Najibullah waned and his government began to unravel after collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. In April 1992, when Mujahideen forces came in to Kabul, Najibullah took sanctuary at a UN building. The days of communist government were ended with it and a new era of the restlessness dawned.¹³

6. First Taliban Emirate Era (1996-2001)

During the late 1990s, the Taliban government entered into an agreement with the Al-Qa'idah, which have undertaken significant attacks, such as the 9/11 attacks. In response, the U.S. and its allies overthrew the Taliban regime in 2001 and established a new government in Afghanistan. In the first time, from 1996 to 2001, the Taliban ruled over the Kabul province of Afghanistan. They took control of Kabul in September 1996 and proclaimed the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. They never did control the entire country, however, since the anti-Taliban forces were in control of the north-east areas in due course of the U.S. invasion and the international military operation, the Taliban turned to conducting anti-Taliban operations. The government of Taliban, which lasted from 1996 to 2001 and during this time the women were prohibited from going to school. They couldn't work, get an education, or get involved in politics. All types of music were forbidden and severe censorship was instituted.¹⁴

7. Islamic Republic Afghanistan (2001 - 2021)

Following the collapse of the Taliban regime in 2001, a wide-range of Afghans and international partners struck a consensus on policies in December 2001 which provided the basis for future government of the Afghan states. The steps are collectively called the "Bonn Agreement" which resulted in a transitional authority that was led Chairman Hamid Karzai to provide interim management of Afghanistan until the establishment of emergency (Loya Jirga) that would set up a transitional authority for Afghanistan. The transitional Government would convene another (Loya Jirga) after two years in office to draft a new Constitution to be followed by free and fair elections.¹⁵ October 9, 2004 was the date of the first Presidential Election. There were about 80% of people present. In December 2004 Hamid Karzai who won the first round of elections (55.4 percent of the vote) was sworn in as President of Afghanistan. He governed by decree in 2005, because National Assembly hadn't been formed yet. During presidential elections, the Independent Election Commission, whose commissioners was personally loyal to Karzai and handpicked by him, was charged with lacking legitimacy. The election date had been set by the IEC to be August 20th, 2009, which is slightly later than April 21st, 2009, as per the Constitution, Article 61.¹⁶ The other election took place on 28 September 2019; its result's delayed due to protests and

inequalities for roughly 5 months. Following its election declaration in February 2020, the election outcome was determined with Ashraf Ghani taking 50.64% of the votes compared to Dr Abdullah who won 39.5%. Abdullah and other candidates rejected the results, and refused to acknowledge Ghani's victory. Zalmay Khalilzad attempted to conduct mediation but was met with failure and both Medias' Abdullah and Ghani have declared themselves both President and simultaneously renewed their inaugurations. This political deadlock affected the unity of the Afghan government and raised some difficulties in the negotiation with the Taliban since there was no one in Afghanistan whose authority was accepted by everybody.¹⁷

8. Return of the Taliban (2021)

These conversations, which have been conducted in many secret meetings with the Taliban representative, and under pressure from the days both on the inside and outside the Afghan government, led to the signing of an outline agreement by the US and representatives of Taliban in Doha on February 29, 2020. The Trump administration, UK, as well as the NATO officials had themselves the day happened as an important one and a crucial step to complete their long going war in Afghanistan.¹⁸ When the Taliban went into the negotiations in Doha with the US with high sense of their political need for withdrawal and political distaste of the US presence in Afghanistan and dwindling legitimacy of President Ashraf Ghani, it was with a clear understanding of the US goals and political time pressure. Senior Western diplomatic officials got on planes for Doha where they met with the Taliban and some even invited them to come to Europe to provide their interpretation of the changes that had occurred in the new Taliban from the old ones of the 90s and that it was their desire to not witness a repeat of the brutal Islamic Emirate they had known. But, just a side note, Taliban got what it wanted. Negotiations to settle the conflicts between the warring sides were started as a part of the Doha process with peace goals. The Doha Agreement also known as a pullout agreement that signed on February 29, 2020, between the United States and the Taliban marked the completion of the entire process, which began in October 2018 and finished in August 2021. By the middle of August 2021, the Taliban assumed control of the Afghan capital of Kabul and President Ghani went into exile, and on 16 August 2021, the Taliban declared the establishment of an Islamic Emirate in Afghanistan.¹⁹

9. Political Challenges in Afghanistan

Afghanistan also struggles today, as the Taliban have returned to take control of the country since 2021, with deep-seated challenges such as low productivity, underdeveloped infrastructure, climate change, forced migration, governance weaknesses and internal displacement. Many are the result of problems created not only by the Taliban but actually predating the

Taliban and are beyond any one regime's ability to fix on their own, further adding to Afghanistan's policy, security and international relations issues. Concurrently, a regional sentiment is emerging and even a beginning normalization process led by international acceptance indicates that dialogue with the Taliban is the only option to overcome the ongoing humanitarian crisis and to avoid state collapse and renewed large scale conflict.²⁰

9.1 Human Rights

Administrative corruption at the time of the republic government prior to 2021 and a few types of corruption exist under the Taliban too. These encompass bribery when recruiting staffs, maladministration of money, irregularities in national projects. These worries have been exacerbated by the weakening or dismantling of previous governance, accountability and oversight mechanisms including aid management institutions and independent monitoring systems. Attempts to curb human rights abuses in the health field have fallen and the judicial system of the Emirate is not independent but is committed to the main ideology of the Taliban. Independent oversight has been removed and there are serious restrictions on the media, which does not report independently. Due to the women's rights limitations as workers for local and international, humanitarian groups and United Nations, the situation is worsened. In December 2022, the Taliban have prohibited females from working for any NGOs with few exceptions for Health and Education sectors.²¹ Human rights abuses continued to affect the Afghan people during the reign of the de facto Taliban government. Gender persecution constituted the crime against humanity faced by women and girls and their right to freedom of expression was under threat. Women's rights to freedom of movement were also curtailed. Healthcare continued to be poor and women and girls continued to be denied access to education.²² Women's rights are Freedoms for half a Humanity. These play an essential role in achieving a life free from violence, discrimination and oppression. Since the Taliban rule, women in Afghanistan have experienced problems in enjoying their rights in various areas such as the right to work, to get proper education, to participate in politics and to get healthcare. The girls and women are not permitted to attend secondary school or university in Afghanistan, the only Islamic country to prohibit it. However, during this time the women and girls are allowed to attend Madrasa to learn books of religion.²³ Unfortunately Women get significantly less access to the job market in the government of Afghanistan; where the Taliban are in control. They are denied employment opportunities in much of the government work, NGOs and most private industries. Only certain areas like primary education, media as reporter and small business are partially or completely available for women.²⁴

9.2 Civil Society, Economic, Social Work

Pre-Taliban, Afghans civil society had a significant role in advocating human rights, transparency and legal and policy reform initiatives. But, in

recent times as the Taliban regime, these organizations encounter immense difficulties in the political, legal and financial fronts and in operations. Taliban have severely curtailed freedom of association, assembly and expression which has virtually banned the majority of civil society activity. In addition, NGOs have been deprived of funding sources and the support of international donors have forced their employees to halt human rights activities and to exclude women from their functioning. The Taliban have been intervening in the work of NGO by setting up too many regulations, requirements for over-reporting and restrictions on their work and also dissolving many NGOs.²⁵

Poverty worsened due to unfavorable weather conditions and the continued internal displacement and economic crisis, after the Taliban regained control in 2021 in one of the issues that was discussed in the relevant section. According to UNDP about 85% of Afghans lived on less than one dollar a day. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 23.7 million people, more half the country's population needed humanitarian assistance therefore 12 million people were food insecure while 2.9 million experienced emergency levels of hunger. In 2024, UNICEF estimated 2.9 million children to be acutely malnourished, of which 850,000 were suffering life-threatening malnutrition. In the meantime, hundreds of thousands of Afghan refugees were forcibly repatriated to various countries in the region, including Iran, Pakistan and Turkey. In other European countries as well, the Afghan refugees were sent back.²⁶

9.3 Foreign Relations

Regional states have tried to have good relations with the Taliban. Many of the states that have not officially recognized Islamic Emirate have still been engaged with Afghanistan as a result of their traditional economic ties, such as trade agreements and exports, among which are Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Iran, China, and India. Meanwhile, they have been trying to establish more solid and better political ties with future Taliban. Taliban seem to be making concerted efforts to engage in relations with Afghanistan neighbors.

Pakistan is still one of the most influential and complicated elements of Afghanistan's post-2021 scenario. Pakistan's foreign affairs have been a longstanding issue in Afghanistan including its backing of the Taliban during the 1990s. Everyone had believed that Taliban's return in the government of Afghanistan was welcome for Pakistan's policy in the region but it has created challenges in Pakistan too with the regular contacts with the Taliban government. It has boosted the morale of individual militias and even their capacity within the country, especially the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and hence boosted the attacks against the security forces within Pakistan, which the Taliban always refuted. By the way, the relations

between Pakistan and Afghanistan are worst; Pakistan started attacking Afghanistan for getting rid of terrorists, including the leaders of TTP, but the Taliban reject that there is not any living terrorist in Afghanistan.²⁷ Border relations have become fractious and in 2026, it has become one of the most significant conflicts. These fighting have been described as “open war” resulting in many casualties, the closure of borders, and major disruptions to trade. Further, the mass deportation of Afghan migrants by the Pakistani government has worsened relations and the growing diplomatic ties between the Taliban and the Indian government.²⁸

The Torkham border crossing between these two countries was re-opened on 19 March after its closure due to clashes between Pakistani and Taliban security forces for almost a month. The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that the Afghan people came back from Pakistan in April by about 144 thousand of which 30 thousand were deported.²⁹

Iran is another vital neighboring country where engagement has a political, economic and social component. Though, Iran was against the Taliban government in 1996, it has maintained its relations with the Taliban. Iran stresses its need to be involved in the government in Afghanistan, saying it has close ties both with ethnic and religious minorities in the country, especially Tajiks who speak Persian and Hazara who are mostly Shia Muslims. With the return of the Taliban in 2021 and the worsening economic situation, around 3 million Afghans migrated to Iran. but, about 1.9 million of them were later returned to Afghanistan due to the increase in undocumented migration. Today, there is conflict between Iran and U.S., but there have been continuous relations between Iran and Taliban. Trade continues to exist between them, albeit limited to trade in imports and exports.³⁰

China is increasingly becoming a dominant regional power in Afghanistan with strategic and economic interests. The Chinese ambitions will have played out the two goals with and on a global scale and the regional scale as well, since the emergence of the Taliban to power. Since 2021, China has hosted more visits by Taliban and other regional or global powers than any other. Also, China has initiated diplomatic relation with them. The President of China had welcomed the Ambassador of the Taliban to discuss various matters on 1 December 2023 and accepted his credentials. In the decision, this is the first time China has officially accepted the Taliban-appointed Ambassador as the representative of Afghanistan in Beijing.³¹ China is being a lot supportive of the Taliban government giving financial aid, investments, and equipment. Over the years the Taliban have participated several times in regional conferences. China is also meeting the other needs paramount for the Taliban economic, security and diplomatic efforts. China’s foreign policy is to have Afghanistan on its side against the

eastern front, which involves the US presence in South and in East China Sea, and a game in the region with India and others that are allied with the US.³²

Russia also has been active in Central Asia by engaging the Taliban to consolidate its influence in the region, much like it has done. In July 2025, Russia was the first to officially recognize the Taliban regime in Afghanistan since their return to power in 2021. It has always tried to interact with the Taliban and have dealt with them very well. President Vladimir Putin received Afghanistan's credentials of its official ambassador, thus adding to the international legitimacy for the Taliban. This also was a decisive position for Russia as an important and key player in Central Asia.³³

India's approach had been more measured and humanity-centered in its approach towards Afghanistan. India was significantly present in Afghanistan after 2001 and was doing that in the name of soft power and development assistance. Total investment in infrastructure, humanitarian support and capacity building for India was more than \$3 billion. Indian s consciously refrained from sending military personnel and presented itself as a 'benevolent partner' such as the Salma Dam, the Zaranj-Delaram Highway, the construction of the Afghan Parliament building and medical missions, etc. The interactions between Afghanistan and India over the years have been guarded and, largely, restricted to issues of humanitarian and development cooperation since 2021. Not to mention, India had not recognized the Taliban government which reopened its Embassy in Kabul in 2022 to supervise aid and India's interests. India has been medically assisting, supplying food and the infrastructure without acknowledging the state India has given medical aid, food and built facilities without formal recognition of the state. Meanwhile, India is working with the Afghan people through scholarships, schooling and development initiatives on a balanced basis and not legitimizing the rule of the Taliban.³⁴ From October 9-16, 2025, the Acting Foreign Minister of the Taliban, Mullah Amir Khan Muttaqi, attended India. This was the first-ever dignitary-to dignitary meeting between India and the Taliban since their seizure of power in 2021. India has sent Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief materials to Afghanistan which is situation is struggling due to recent earthquakes and floods, on April 06, 2026. The aid components are kitchen sets, hygienic care kits, plastic sheets, tarpaulins, sleeping bags and others", the External Affairs Ministry said in a social media post.³⁵

Lastly, the policies of the Central Asian States further illustrate the diverse but cautious regional approach toward Afghanistan. The relations among Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan have been defined by a fleeting sense of security and some wariness about economic engagement since 2021. Tajikistan's consistent rejection of the Taliban and skepticism at the rise of extremism in its neighboring regions. Tajikistan's consistent rejection of the Taliban and doubts about their spread of extremism along the borders.

Uzbekistan, however, has taken a pragmatic approach of that nature by allowing dialogue, encouraging trade and transit initiatives, but without formal recognition. Turkmenistan has also been neutral; this country desires to have a good relationship with the Taliban and it is mainly based on energy & economic cooperation, without any participation of the political domain.³⁶

10. Suggestions

The Taliban came to Afghanistan in 2021, bringing a host of issues along with them, amongst them political, economic and social. Furthermore, Afghanistan was once again politically isolated, without recognition by the international community, with institutional check on human rights in general and civil society, women rights in particular. For this reason, Afghanistan is facing humanitarian crisis, economic issues and growing concerns and worries about the stability of government having undergone these political changes. In order to overcome the challenge, the present administration must consider these suggestions not just a recognition but a realization as well, as they will help in the development and progress and will ensure peace and stability in the country.

1. Promote Inclusive Governance through Traditional Mechanisms:

The government should call a Loya Jirga (Grand National Assembly) to enable political participation. The traditional Loya Jirga (National Assembly) can be used for conducting dialogue between various ethnic, social and tribal groups and enhance legitimacy of the governance system.

2. Create an Inclusive Government: Afghanistan is a country of various ethnic groups and for the country to function, all ethnic groups must have their representatives in the government. It should include ethnic minorities, youth and women and representatives of civil society in this government formation. A political monopoly must be avoided, so ultimately, such a government is needed to build a more unified nation and mitigate the resurgence risk.

3. Protect Women's Rights and Opportunities: Men and women are equally unto duty in learning. Thus, the limitations on the education of women and their access to the workforce have to be lifted, and avenues for their development ought to be available. It is not just a basic human right, it's the precondition for sustainable development and a country's progress.

4. Strengthen Civil Society and Accountability: It is important to journalists, civil society organizations, and activists should be protected and supported. Their function to hold people to account, to illuminate fatuous acts and reveal the hidden make-up of governments is vital for the resilience of democracies and having things right.

5. **Enhance the Delivery of Humanitarian Assistance:** The delivery of humanitarian aid should have been done through a neutral channel of communication, through the United Nations, so that the helpless groups receive the aid without political influences and wasted.
6. **Consolidate Regional Cooperation:** Afghanistan should cooperate with regional countries in establishing regional stability and ensuring security on the borders. Afghanistan should do more to enhance cooperation with regional countries, particularly Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, and central Asian nations, in a bid to improve security on borders and regional stability. Investment in the area of cooperation for trade, transportation and water resources governance may also be a confidence building exercise in the region.
7. **Encourage Diplomatic Engagement:** Now it's time for Afghanistan to act positively toward the international community and create a policy for which there is no international isolation. Continued dialogue and conditional recognition is to be encouraged to foster in the Government a moderate attitude and respect international standards.
8. **Support Regional Economic Projects:** The involvement in regional economic creativities like trade corridors, energy projects, and water sharing arrangements can be a source of economic growth and job creation and connect Afghanistan with wider economic systems.
9. **Empower the Afghan Migration:** Afghan refugees' means of living overseas should be linked to support Afghanistan, transfer knowledge and skills, invest and draw the international community's attention to Afghanistan's problems. They can play an important role in being instrumental in filling the gap between Afghanistan's demand and support from the international community.

11. Conclusion

Today, Afghanistan is in a difficult political, economic, and social situation with feelings of isolation, little economic opportunity and limitations on basic rights. These have caused much instability and difficulty in development. Afghanistan, an extremely poor country, continues to be in the middle of a brutal and seemingly never-ending war. Invaders, empires, and power struggles have all had an impact on Afghanistan's history. Several cultures have affected Afghanistan, such as Persian, Greek, Arab, Mongol, and British. The history of political development of Afghanistan was very complicated; this changed dramatically, since the proclamation of independence in 1919 till the tumultuous changes of the 21st century. For constitutional change (modernization) or increasing centralization of state power see monarchs linked to 'change-traditional' reforms, notably Amanullah, Nader Shah and Zahir Shah and their various demands of the

Afghan state. Monarchy became turmoil's of republics, communism then Islam rule (influenced by the development from within and the exercise of world forces on it). In spite of the repeated attempts of creating stable institutions, the political path of Afghanistan was characterized by the conflict, foreign intervention and change of ideologies. Twenty years after the establishment of international military regime in Afghanistan, it came to the end in 2021 when Taliban took over to Kabul. It was a major event in political and modern history of Afghanistan when Taliban took control of Kabul after the Doha Agreement in 2021. This nation since then has been plagued by serious economic, political and humanitarian difficulties, along with widespread human-rights abuses, particularly for civil society and women. Losing formal recognition, and experiencing internal disasters, continues to shape Afghanistan's fragile and uncertain future even with the cautious participation of regional and global players especially in areas of economic, export and import affairs to stop further instability. In the end, although Afghanistan is facing many difficulties, there is still hope for a better future. The country can achieve peace and progress if the government takes action to place all groups in decision making; if it ensures civil society space is protected; if women's rights are restored; and if a government strengthens relations with neighbouring countries. Afghanistan has an opportunity to transform today's challenges into opportunities for stable and sustainable development thanks to the support of the international community and the support of the Afghan people.

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Exploring Digital Landscape, Awareness and Vulnerabilities: A Case Study of Students of Central University of Rajasthan, India

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Abstract

The objective of this research paper is to analyze the awareness of digital literacy and online security among the students at Central University of Rajasthan (CURAJ) in relation to the wide gulf in their extensive digital usage versus their insecurity online. A qualitative methodology including two instruments structured questionnaires (n=27) and semi- structured interviews (n=15) were used to analyze student usage and their attitudes toward privacy and security. According to the findings, the students are extremely digitally literate, and their usage hours is around over six hours a day while a very high level of ignorance about online security awareness is noticeable. All 42 participants stated they were unaware of the digital literacy resources being used in the university, demonstrating a clear gap in the institution's outreach, thus, magnifying their insecurity over the internet. Based on the findings, a key recommendation would be the need for implementing mandatory digital literacy and internet security modules across the curriculum along with effective communication on available resources.

Keywords

Digital literacy, Cybersecurity awareness, Online safety, Digital vulnerability, Higher education.

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1. Introduction

Digital technologies have impacted our life very deeply in the twenty-first century, influencing our relationships, learning, and communication. A variety of opportunities for development and education have been created by the spread of internet platforms. However, this digital environment also presents a number of difficulties, particularly in terms of potential vulnerabilities that people, particularly students, may experience. Navigating this digital landscape for students, who are frequently early users of technology, is both liberating and dangerous. This case study tries to understand the complicated web of digital awareness among the students of CURAJ (Central University of Rajasthan), acknowledging the crucial relevance of digital literacy and online safety. In-depth interviews were conducted with 15 students. The interviews allow for a more nuanced exploration of the students' digital experiences, addressing specific themes such as online privacy concerns, encounters with digital scams, and awareness of cybersecurity best practices. The interviews are semi-structured, allowing for flexibility while ensuring key topics are covered. The study identifies usage of online platforms, potential weaknesses and risks faced by the students in the digital landscape, encompassing areas such as online privacy, cybersecurity threats, and digital scams.

The research attempts to assess the level of digital literacy among these students through a thorough assessment. It aims to ascertain their knowledge of digital technology, their expertise with exploring online resources, and most importantly their understanding of key safety precautions in the digital domain. The survey aims to identify the weaknesses faced by CURAJ students, including any areas where their knowledge may be insufficient or where misunderstandings may still exist. This study, which explores the digital world in which CURAJ students live, aims to shed light on their current levels of awareness and provide valuable insights into areas where targeted educational interventions can be implemented. These observations play a critical role in creating prospective educational programmes and tactics, ensuring that students have the information and abilities required to operate safely and responsibly in the digital age. "Digital awareness" includes a deep grasp of online ethics, privacy, and security in addition to being skilled with digital technologies. In addition, the idea of

“vulnerabilities” emphasizes the possible dangers and flaws people may encounter on the huge, linked internet. The need for digital education is urgent because of these risks, which can range from inadvertent data disclosure to falling for sophisticated online frauds.

2. Review of Literature

First and foremost, it is vital to define what exactly is meant by cybercrime in order to determine the actual dimension of these digital threats. Vadza (2013) states that cybercrime is defined as any criminal offense that is committed using the computer, as the tool or the target (like for example hacking or DOS attacks), or both. Despite being often related to normal traditional criminal behaviour (like theft, fraud, forgery, defamation under the Indian penal code), this criminal act is particularly deadly in the digital medium and in fact many believe that this form of crime is often more terrifying and fatal than traditional crime, due to its sheer magnitude.

Because of this severity, gaining knowledge about the methods used by cybercriminals is extremely important. Gunjan, Kumar, and Avdhanam (2013) explore how cybercrimes have evolved over the years, noting a dangerous shift in techniques, targets, and the growing sophistication of online criminal activities. They emphasize that understanding these patterns is vital, as cybercrimes can cause long-term and sometimes irreversible harm to individuals, organizations, and governments. Echoing this, Veresha (2018) points out that these activities pose direct risks to data, financial resources, and the personal safety of individuals. Furthermore, Nayak and Das (2013) highlight the broader consequences of these digital threats, noting their profound impacts on social, economic, and political structures.

The rapid shift in global communication has acted as a major catalyst for these vulnerabilities. As Soomro and Hussain (2019) observe, the internet has completely transformed human interaction, replacing traditional letters and face-to-face meetings with emails, video calls, and global social media platforms. However, they warn that the sheer volume, velocity, and variety of social media networking have generated severe new privacy and security concerns. Beyond technological shifts, cybercrime is also heavily influenced by socio-economic environments. Kshetri (2016) developed a framework demonstrating how formal and informal institutions (such as laws, government policies, and social norms), alongside wealth disparities and international relations, deeply impact cybercrime. His findings reveal that a nation’s level of development and institutional performance significantly dictate its cybersecurity landscape, particularly in underdeveloped nations.

Due to the sophisticated nature of cybercrimes, tracking, laws and prevention tactics are necessary. A data-based system is imperative, whereby, statistical tools are used to analyze cybercriminals as pointed out

by Kshetri (2013). Such data, should then, inform preventive tactics (Veresha, 2018) which was illustrated when statistical data were used to study the impact of cyber laws and the Malaysian Government's responses on cybercrime (Jayabalan, Ibrahim, and Manaf, 2014). Finally, mitigation is achieved when efforts are jointly coordinated. The laws would be initiated by the Government; however, tech firms carry the responsibility of not just detecting and prevention of crimes actively (Nayak and Das, 2013) but through an ever-improving system of prevention techniques (Soomro & Hussain, 2019).

3. Methodology

This research is based on a mixed-methods case study design to gain in-depth insights into CURAJ students' digital awareness and susceptibility to online threats. Quantitative data was collected from a structured online questionnaire (n=27), examining the digital usage, familiarity with various platforms, and basic knowledge about cybersecurity. Semi structured in-depth interviews (n=15) followed, and qualitative data was elicited to supplement survey data by looking into aspects like online privacy and experience with scams. Furthermore, a systematic review of literature was conducted on online threats to build a theoretical background for the collected data.

4. Cyber Threats

There are several risks that might disrupt digital environments and jeopardize people's security in the field of cybersecurity. Malware, which includes viruses, worms, trojan horses, ransomware, and spyware, poses a serious danger by corrupting systems, interfering with business processes, and allowing unauthorized access to confidential data. Phishing assaults are cunning tactics where fraudsters pretend as reliable institutions to trick people into disclosing sensitive information, such as passwords and credit card numbers. Using deceptive methods like impersonation and luring schemes, social engineering techniques force people into unintentionally disclosing private information. Attacks known as Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) bombard online systems with excessive traffic, which makes them sluggish or even crash. Data manipulation may result from Man-in-the-Middle (MitM) attacks, which include intercepting and changing communication between parties without their knowledge. When unauthorized access is achieved, personal information, financial information, or intellectual property are exposed. Identity theft is a serious issue that includes hackers taking personal data from victims to impersonate them. This leads to monetary loss, poor credit, and legal issues. Online scams, which range from fraudulent tech help programmes to lottery hoaxes, deceive people into handing over money or private information. Ransomware encrypts data and

demands bitcoin in exchange for their release; however, paying the ransom may not always result in the recovery of the encrypted contents. An emerging digital threat known as cyberbullying causes emotional harm to victims through harassment and humiliation. Devices are susceptible on insecure Wi-Fi networks, enabling for data interception and unauthorized access. If IoT devices don't have enough security, Internet of Things vulnerabilities might jeopardize home networks and user privacy. Zero-Day exploits provide hackers an edge while a fix is being created by taking advantage of software flaws that suppliers are unaware of. Credential stuffing is another concerning practise where attackers take advantage of users' propensity for reuse by leveraging username and password combinations from one site's database to obtain unauthorized access to other accounts. These attacks highlight the urgent need for strong cybersecurity measures and digital literacy in order to protect people.

5. Presentation of Cases

Participants during non-working days offered insightful responses to the question about daily screen time on digital devices, including computers, smartphones, and tablets. No respondents reported using digital devices for between one and two hours, showing a considerable departure from this time range. Instead, a sizeable portion 4 participants acknowledged using digital gadgets for two to four hours every day. A noteworthy finding was that 13 respondents said they had spent between 4 and 6 hours, which represents a sizable share of the participants. What was even more startling was the finding that a large majority 25 people used their digital gadgets for at least 6 hours per day. This significant reaction reveals a common pattern across participants, pointing to a high degree of digital participation in their everyday lives and the potential for it to affect a number of elements of their routines and activities.

No respondents mentioned using digital devices for between one and two hours each day on working days, showing a noteworthy absence during this period. A small but significant proportion of respondents to the poll, totaling 8, confessed devoting 2 to 4 hours per day. The bulk of the participants, who consisted of 21 responders, admitted to sleeping between 4 and 6 hours each day. 13 people also admitted to using their gadgets for 6 hours or longer, underscoring the fact that a sizeable portion of the population was heavily engrossed in their digital screens. These comments highlight the participants' common screen-time habits and highlight how ingrained role digital devices play in participants' everyday lives.

42 people responded to the question "Which of the following online platforms do you use frequently?" and shared insightful information about their online habits. Social media emerged as the most popular platform

among these respondents, with all 42 participants confirming their participation in a variety of social media networks. Particularly, 10 respondents mentioned using Facebook frequently, underscoring the platform's continued popularity with the sampled population. Instagram also showed up as a favourite platform, with a significant 25 respondents admitting to using it frequently. Instagram is a visual-focused social networking site. Even while fewer respondents picked Twitter, it nevertheless had importance because seven of them confirmed regular usage. These answers highlight the various social media preferences among the sampled population and highlight the crucial role that these platforms play in their online interactions and social networking activities.

Regarding messaging platform preferences, all 42 participants reported utilizing digital communication tools in their daily lives. WhatsApp overwhelmingly dominated as the primary medium, frequently used by 38 respondents. The remaining participants were evenly split, utilizing either Facebook Messenger (n=2) or other alternative texting services (n=2). These findings underscore the ubiquitous nature of instant messaging applications in contemporary student communication, explicitly highlighting WhatsApp as the central hub for their digital interactions. From the 42 respondents (n=35), they chose YouTube as a primary platform for online learning, much larger than other structured e-learning platforms, Coursera (n=4), BYJU's (n=2), and UpGrad (n=1). The results revealed that YouTube provided the most accessed instruction to this group of respondents, while a supplement form of a course-based e-learning platform was adopted to be YouTube alternatives to some extent. Of the 28 people who played games online, these varied across the genres. Games in the category 'battle royale competition', e.g. PUBG (n=8) and Free Fire (n=7), comprised more than half of the users currently playing games online. People also tended to play games of strategy, where Clash of Clans had a significant uptake from 6 users. A smaller number played 'online casual board games' i.e. Ludo (n=4) and 'online puzzle games' e.g. Candy Crush (n=3).

Participants' replies to the question "How confident do you feel about identifying and avoiding online scams?" revealed a varied picture of their digital literacy and awareness. A significant number of respondents, 13 people, stated that they were "very confident" in spotting and avoiding internet frauds. In addition, 17 people said they were "somewhat confident", indicating a modest level of confidence in their ability to traverse the digital realm safely. In contrast, 8 respondents stated that they were "not very confident", indicating a vulnerability to internet frauds. The study also indicated that 5 participants, a small but substantial proportion, were "not at all" confident in their ability to recognize and avoid online frauds, underlining the vital need for digital education and awareness in this area.

These different replies highlight the survey group's diverse degrees of digital literacy, emphasizing the significance of focused training activities to improve online safety and empower individuals to navigate the digital domain securely.

Regarding whether respondents have previously attended any digital awareness or online safety sessions or not. Many of the respondents (n=40) have never attended any sessions. Only two of them have participated in formal digital education program. The comparison shows the stark lack of digital education programs for those sampled. This demonstrates the need to implement more effective and affordable programs and campaigns to enhance students' knowledge.

Table-1: Cybersecurity Knowledge

Cybersecurity knowledge	Yes	No
Phishing	19	23
Identity theft	38	4
Social engineering	16	26
Data breach	18	24
Malware	39	3
Cyberbullying /harassment	36	6
Unsecured wifi network	12	30

The study gave a comprehensive perspective of participants' cybersecurity expertise, covering topics such as phishing, identity theft, social engineering, data breaches, malware, cyberbullying, and insecure Wi-Fi networks. Impressively, 38 respondents indicated knowledge of identity theft, demonstrating a high level of awareness in this sector. Similarly, a sizable majority of 39 participants demonstrated knowledge of malware, demonstrating their familiarity with this digital menace. Social engineering, a sophisticated cyber strategy, was identified by 16 respondents, indicating a modest degree of awareness. In contrast, the survey revealed areas where individuals lacked expertise. Only 19 respondents knew phishing, a common internet fraud, showing a significant knowledge gap. Furthermore, 18 participants were aware of data breaches, and 12 were aware of the hazards connected with insecure Wi-Fi networks. Cyberbullying, a disturbing online behaviour, was identified by 36 respondents, although there remained a group of 6 people who were unaware of the situation. These findings highlight both the participants' cybersecurity knowledge's strengths and flaws. While many people knew concerns like identity theft and malware, there were major gaps in understanding phishing, social engineering, and unprotected Wi-Fi network vulnerabilities. Addressing these gaps is critical for improving digital literacy and maintaining a safer online environment for everyone. The

findings highlight the importance of tailored educational activities that focus on specific cybersecurity issues in order to raise participants' awareness and encourage a secure digital experience.

Participants' replies to the question "Do you use strong, unique passwords for your online accounts?" revealed varied levels of password security practises. By consistently using strong and unique passwords for their accounts, 12 respondents displayed a great dedication to online security. A larger group of 19 participants recognized the significance of password strength, deciding to use strong and unique passwords on occasion, demonstrating a proactive attitude to their online security, but not consistently. On the other hand, 11 respondents highlighted a troubling trend, confessing to seldom using strong and unique passwords in their online accounts. These replies reflect a range of security practises among those polled. While many people understand the necessity of strong passwords, there is still a requirement for regular adherence to this critical cybersecurity practise. The findings highlight the significance of ongoing education and awareness programmes to urge users to prioritize strong password management, hence improving their overall digital safety. Developing a practise of using strong, unique passwords on a regular basis can considerably help to protect sensitive online information.

The survey revealed a profound lack of awareness regarding institutional digital literacy initiatives. Specifically, all 42 respondents (100% of the sample) stated they were entirely unaware of any digital literacy programs offered by the Central University of Rajasthan (CURAJ). This total absence of awareness indicates a severe communication breakdown between the university administration and the student body. The findings suggest that while CURAJ may provide resources, current outreach strategies are failing to reach the target demographic, thereby limiting students' access to critical digital skill development. Consequently, there is an urgent need for the institution to overhaul its communication strategies to ensure students are informed of, and can actively engage with, available digital literacy tools, fostering a more secure online academic environment.

6. Personal Experiences of Students

In a recent incident respondent 1, enrolled in the department of artificial intelligence, found himself facing financial difficulties and urgently needed funds. During this crisis, he learned about online money lending apps, providing instant financial assistance upon submission of identification documents and a selfie. He availed himself of this option, successfully securing the required funds after the initial registration. He diligently repaid the borrowed amount along with the stipulated interest rates. However, despite his timely repayments, he experienced an unexpected increase in the

interest rates. Ignoring the subsequent calls, he faced continuous and threatening messages via WhatsApp. Faced with this alarming situation, he took the matter seriously and filed a formal complaint with the local police station. Complicating matters, the lending company was headquartered in Delhi, posing logistical challenges. Fortunately, after some efforts, the issue was eventually resolved, highlighting the complexities and risks associated with online financial transactions.

Respondent 2, a student enrolled at CURAJ, accessed an educational platform for her academic needs. During her visit, she refrained from providing any personal information such as her phone number or email address. However, shortly after her interaction with the site, she began receiving a barrage of unsolicited emails from the platform. The situation escalated when, starting the next day, she received persistent phone calls from various numbers affiliated with the same education platform, continuing over several days. Perplexed and alarmed by this intrusion into her privacy, she decided to take a stand and informed the callers that she intended to report the matter to the police. The incident left her questioning the security measures of the platform, pondering over how her data was compromised and how the platform acquired her contact number without her consent.

Respondent 3, a student at CURAJ, found herself entangled in a deeply unsettling privacy breach. Unbeknownst to her, security cameras captured her images, which were then circulated among guards who sought further personal details about her. Upon discovering this violation of her privacy, she expressed her profound distress, stating, "I was anxious, worried, terrified. I don't know what was happening." This invasive incident was not only distressing but also had a significant impact on her mental well-being. Investigation revealed that a senior security officer was responsible for this breach of privacy. Subsequently, the officer was arrested, and legal proceedings are currently underway in the court to address this serious violation of her privacy rights.

Respondent 4, a diligent student enrolled in the Department of Social Work, found himself entangled in a distressing ordeal that shook his sense of security. The distressing situation unfolded when he began receiving a flurry of alarming phone calls and messages from concerned friends and relatives, all questioning the sudden financial desperation he seemed to be facing. Perplexed and initially unaware of the cause, he delved deeper into the issue and was horrified to discover that he had fallen victim to a malicious identity theft scheme. In this troubling scenario, an unknown impostor had craftily constructed a fake Facebook account under his name. Exploiting the trust of his friends and connections, this impostor deceitfully portrayed a scenario of urgent crisis, leading to solicitation for funds. Realizing the gravity of the

situation, he swiftly took action to protect his reputation and alert his network. He promptly informed his friends about the fraudulent account, aiming to raise awareness about the scam that was preying on his social circles. Understanding the need for formal intervention, he wasted no time and decided to escalate the matter to the authorities. With a resolute determination for justice, he filed a comprehensive complaint with the local police, initiating a formal investigation into the identity theft and financial fraud. Despite these efforts, the identity of the perpetrator remains elusive, shrouded in anonymity, leaving he and his social circle in a state of heightened vigilance and concern. This incident serves as a stark reminder of the challenges posed by digital impersonation and the importance of digital literacy and online security in the modern age.

7. Discussion

The findings of this study reveal a stark dual narrative among the students of the Central University of Rajasthan (CURAJ): they possess a high degree of digital participation, yet they face severe vulnerabilities in the online landscape. Digital devices are deeply ingrained in the students' daily lives, with a significant majority spending over six hours per day on screens during non-working days, and no participants reporting less than two hours of daily use. Social media engagement is universal, with all 42 respondents actively participating in networks like Instagram and Facebook, while heavily relying on WhatsApp for messaging and YouTube for online learning. Despite this extensive immersion, the study exposes a concerning gap in the students' ability to securely navigate the digital world. Confidence in identifying and avoiding online scams is highly mixed, with several students indicating they are "not very confident" or "not at all" confident in their abilities, exposing a direct vulnerability to online frauds.

This vulnerability is further highlighted by specific gaps in cybersecurity knowledge and inconsistent safety practices. While students demonstrate a high awareness of widespread threats like malware and identity theft, there are significant knowledge gaps regarding deceptive cyber tactics such as phishing, social engineering, and the dangers of unsecured Wi-Fi networks. This theoretical vulnerability is compounded by poor password management; only a fraction of respondents consistently use strong and unique passwords, while a troubling number admit to rarely using them, leaving their sensitive online information exposed to potential breaches.

The theoretical risks associated with these knowledge gaps are validated by the distressing personal experiences of the students interviewed, demonstrating that the digital landscape has subjected CURAJ students to severe, real-world consequences. Students reported falling victim to predatory online money lending apps that resulted in persistent harassment,

as well as experiencing unwarranted privacy intrusions and data compromises from educational platforms. Furthermore, students have faced severe identity theft schemes on Facebook utilized for financial fraud, deeply unsettling privacy breaches involving campus security cameras, and targeted harassment against minority students on platforms like WhatsApp. These incidents highlight the tangible dangers students face and the urgent need for a secure and tolerant digital community.

Perhaps the most critical finding of this study is the systemic failure of institutional outreach regarding digital education. An overwhelming majority of the sample 40 out of 42 respondents have never attended any digital awareness or online safety sessions. Furthermore, absolutely every participant (100% of the sample) stated they were completely unaware of any digital literacy programs offered by CURAJ. This total absence of awareness signifies a severe communication breakdown between the university administration and the student body. While the university may have resources available, current strategies are entirely failing to reach the target demographic, depriving students of the critical knowledge required to protect themselves and magnifying their insecurity over the internet. Ultimately, bridging this communication gap and mandating digital literacy education is vital for fostering a safe academic environment.

8. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study reveals a dual narrative: one of active digital engagement among participants, and another of insufficient awareness regarding essential digital literacy programs. The participants' heavy reliance on digital platforms, especially social media, underscores the need for comprehensive digital literacy education to ensure safe and responsible online behaviour. Furthermore, the lack of awareness about available digital literacy initiatives indicates a significant area for improvement within the educational institution.

Enhanced Digital Literacy Programs: CURAJ should invest in robust digital literacy programs, encompassing online safety, privacy protection, and responsible digital citizenship. These programs should be widely promoted and made easily accessible to all students.

Regular Workshops and Training Sessions: Organize regular workshops, webinars, and training sessions focusing on cybersecurity, online scams, and safe internet practices. These sessions should be interactive and tailored to address specific concerns raised by the students.

Collaboration with Industry Experts: Collaborate with cybersecurity experts, industry professionals, and digital safety organizations to conduct specialized workshops. Real-world insights can significantly enhance students' understanding of digital threats and how to mitigate them.

Promotion and Awareness Campaigns: Implement extensive awareness campaigns within the university, using various mediums such as posters, social media, and university newsletters.

Encourage students to actively participate in these campaigns to foster a culture of digital responsibility. Regular Updates and Refreshers: Given the ever-evolving nature of digital threats, provide regular updates and refreshers on the latest cybersecurity practices. Encourage students to remain vigilant and proactive in keeping their digital skills up-to-date. By implementing these recommendations, CURAJ can bridge the existing knowledge gap, empowering its students with essential digital literacy skills and creating a safer digital environment within the university community.

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Financial Knowledge or Financial Capacity? Financial Literacy and Income on Investment Decisions among Nepal's University Students

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Abstract

Investment is crucial for financial well-being and long-term wealth creation. Among young adults, particularly university students, investment decisions are influenced by financial literacy and financial capacity. This study investigates the impact of financial literacy and income on investment decisions among university students in the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal, and examines which factor has a stronger influence. Using a quantitative approach, data were collected from 122 university students through a questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation, multiple regression, and hierarchical regression. The findings reveal that both financial literacy and income have a positive and significant effect on investment decisions. Financial literacy is positively associated with investment decisions ($r = 0.254$, $p = 0.005$), but its influence is weaker than that of income ($r = 0.431$, $p = 0.001$). Multiple regression confirms that financial literacy ($\beta = 0.187$, $p = 0.013$) and income ($\beta = 0.425$, $p < 0.001$) are significant predictors. Hierarchical regression shows that income adds significant explanatory power beyond financial literacy ($R^2 = 0.041$, $p = 0.013$). The findings suggest that while financial literacy enhances investment knowledge and decision-making, financial capacity plays a greater role in shaping actual investment behaviour. This study contributes to the literature by comparing the relative influence of financial literacy and income on investment decisions in a developing-country context, highlighting the importance of strengthening both to encourage youth investment.

Keywords

Financial literacy, Income, Investment decision, University students, Nepal, Financial capacity, Investment behaviour.

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1. Introduction

Investment decisions are super important for securing your finances, building wealth, and ensuring you're economically comfy in the long run. People put their money into different stuff like stocks, bonds, mutual funds, and savings accounts thinking this will boost their wealth in the future. With the explosion of digital platforms and financial info available online, investing has gotten way easier, especially for college kids. Apps and the web now allow young students to dive into investments early in life.

Understanding what drives people to invest has become a key research topic in finance and behavioural economics. One big factor scholars look at is financial literacy how well someone gets financial stuff, knows about risks and rewards, and can plan smartly. Research shows folks who get finance better tend to make wiser investment choices. So in today's complicated markets, knowing your way around financially really helps pick good investment paths.

Financial smarts are great, but having extra dough also seriously impacts if and how people can invest. Income sets up a person's ability to save and then put that cash into market tools. If you earn more, you're usually in a better spot to handle life costs and stash some cash in stocks or bonds. So even when you know all the ins and outs, low income can still hold you back from investing.

Tons of past studies have checked out how both financial literacy and income shape how people choose to invest. They've seen positives from each, yet pinpointing which one money skills or actual income matters more hasn't been decided. Some data suggests knowing finance pushes investment habits more, while other reports say having extra cash does. This unclear link means there's heaps to learn still.

University students present an interesting case. Many pick up financial learning from classes or self-teaching, yet most don't exactly boom with riches. Their mix of financial savvy and limited cash makes them perfect guinea pigs for sorting out where knowledge and cash power lies when it comes to steering investments.

In Nepal, researchers keep looking into financial literacy, behaviours, and mental quirks affecting investment picks. Still, not many compare

knowledge against cold hard cash to see which pulls more weight in shaping what students do with their finances. Closing this info gap would clue us in on if beefing up financial lessons will nudge more students to start investing, or whether greater emphasis should also be placed on enhancing individual financial capacity.

Therefore, this study seeks to examine and compare the influence of financial literacy and income on investment decisions among Nepalese university students. By identifying the relative importance of financial knowledge and financial capacity, the study aims to contribute to the growing literature on investment decision-making and provide practical insights for promoting informed and sustainable investment behaviour among young adults.

1.2 Hypotheses

Based on the research objectives, theoretical foundations, and empirical evidence the following hypotheses are formulated to examine the influence of financial literacy and income on investment decisions among Nepalese university students:

H₁: Financial literacy has a significant positive influence on investment decisions among Nepalese university students.

H₂: Income has a significant positive influence on investment decisions among Nepalese university students.

2. Literature Review

The literature review offers a thorough look at the theoretical and empirical studies about financial literacy, income, and investment choices. It seeks to clarify the main variables and examine the existing evidence on how they affect investment decision-making. The review also emphasizes the results of earlier studies in various contexts and points out gaps in the current literature. By combining relevant theories and empirical data, this section lays the groundwork for exploring whether financial literacy or income has a greater impact on investment decisions among university students in Nepal.

2.1 Financial Literacy and Investment Decisions

Financial literacy means the knowledge, skill, and ability in the management of finance. Financial literacy involves basic concepts like saving, budgeting, investment, risk diversification, inflation, interest rates and financial planning and enables individuals to compare financial alternatives, evaluate risks and rewards associated with different investment opportunities and choose investment decision in a manner consistent with personal financial goals. As financial markets continue to expand in access and complexity, financial literacy has become increasingly important to individual well-being and to participation in financial investment markets.

Investment decision-making is the process through which individuals invest financial resources into various financial opportunities with the objective of obtaining optimal returns and minimizing risks. In effective investment decision making, individuals compare, analyze, and assess investment alternatives before making selection of the best investment alternatives. It involves use of knowledge on various investment alternatives, comparison of various financial characteristics of these investment alternatives and selection of the most appropriate investment alternative based on the investor's specific investment needs. Financial literacy has become an important component of making optimal investment decisions as it facilitates informed assessment of financial markets and evaluation of available opportunities, thereby improving investment behaviour.

The relationship between financial literacy and investment decision making has been consistently established in literature. Studies generally reveal that financial literacy exerts positive effects on investment decision-making behaviour. Financial literacy helps individuals to feel confident in managing finances, assessing investment risks, selecting appropriate investments, Reducing information asymmetry and uncertainty. As a result, financially literate investors make investment decisions based on analyses of investments rather than impulsively or under influence of external factors.

The empirical finding supports these arguments. The study of Awais *et al.* (2016) indicates that financial literacy makes an investor better at analyzing investment choices. Similarly, Baihaqqy *et al.* (2020), Kumari (2020), Utami and Sitanggang (2021) confirm that financial literacy positively impacts investment behaviour by enhancing financial knowledge, confidence, and understanding on investment markets and products.

Financial literacy has greater importance in emerging markets where broadening of financial services and investment opportunities compels individuals to be increasingly complex financial decisions makers. The studies on student and young adult investment behaviour indicate a positive association between financial literacy and investment participation. Some empirical studies suggest that financial knowledge alone does not determine investment behaviour as other factors like availability of resources and tolerance to risks are important, however financial literacy provides basic knowledge required to identify suitable investment opportunities.

Based on theoretical argument and empirical evidences presented, we assume that financial literacy influences investment decisions of university students in Nepal in positive and significant manner. A higher level of financial literacy of students would equip them with better understanding on availability investment alternatives and evaluation of their respective risk and reward, which then leads to improved investment decisions.

2.2 Income and Investment Decision

The income is one of the most significant economic determinants of financial behaviours and investment decisions. Income is defined as amount of money that can be attained by individual (salary, profits, allowance, etc). Income determines purchasing power, capability of saving and allocating financial resources into investment activities. Thus, income represents one factor for personal financial decisions on resources used for consumption, saving and investment.

To invest means that an individual allocates certain portion of the available financial resources with an intention to get future return. Financial knowledge aids people to determine investment opportunities and the risks involved but it might not be applied if the individual does not have enough resources to invest. A wealthy individual can continuously save money, invest them across different assets, diversify investments and is able to do various types of investments. But the poor individuals usually are struggling with investing funds for their goals after meeting needs of daily consumption, therefore there is an increasing disparity between intention of investing and the actual investment activities.

The role of income to investment decision making behaviour can be considered as the effect on individual financial capacity. Financial capacity is described as ability of individual to procure and employ financial resources for investing purpose. The individual who possesses greater financial capacity usually tends to tolerate with risks and able to invest in long term financial goals while people with lower financial capacity prioritized investment on necessary needs instead. As the result, it is inferred that the effect of income on investment behaviour is more than just on investment opportunities but also on the extent of participation in investments.

This study is supported by existing empirical findings showing positive relation between income and investment behaviour. Arianti (2018) found that there is a significant effect of income on investment decisions and a person with high income will more likely to invest because he has sufficient financial capability to invest. Prior research have also demonstrated that the high-income earner are more prone to invest because they has adequate finances and financial capacities for savings and investments. It means income play significant part in investment behaviour decision making.

The relevance of the income variable for university students is high, considering their financial resources come from parents (allowances and pocket money), scholarships and part-time jobs. Even if they have financial knowledge and information, students may be unable to invest if their available disposable income is too low to meet basic needs and other life costs. In other words, university students with high income level are more expected to be able to make investments compare to those with lower income level.

In the recent trends, it becomes easy to access to financial markets and to do the investments with digital investing application have been increases the financial awareness of youth toward the investments; however the actual investment will depend on the existence of financial resources. Financial knowledge is essential for decision making while the income is required to put those decisions into action. Therefore income is also expected to play the vital role on investment behaviour decision making among university students.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

The chapter describes the theoretical ground to be followed in finding out the relation of financial literacy and income to investment decision. In this study, the theory followed is theory of Planned Behaviour and Behavioural Finance Theory. Theory of Planned Behaviour can be defined as 'understanding behaviour through the concept of perceived knowledge, perceived control and behavioural intentions'. It also explains that decision making is based upon two primary factors: the individual's thoughts and feelings about the behaviour (attitude) and the perceived expectations of significant others (social norms). Behavioural Finance Theory is an approach that is driven by how finance is actually influenced by economic and behavioural factors.

2.3.1 Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)

The theory of Planned Behaviour, developed by Ajzen (1991), is a widely applied psychological theory that measures various factors as contributors to human behaviour and decisions. This theory states that behaviours are motivated by behavioural intentions, the motivation behind an action. Behavioural intentions are formed by attitude toward the behaviour, subjective norms and perceived behavioural control. When an individual thinks that the behaviour will likely lead to favorable outcomes and that socially significant others think they should perform the behaviour, and they can execute it with confidence, it is likely that they will want to perform that behaviour.

In case of investment behaviour, financial literacy might have impact on perception of control towards making investment decisions by increasing the knowledge of financial concepts, products, and services, and their risks. Knowing the options that one has and understanding risks associated can lead to greater perception and greater intention to participate in investment activities. So TPB helps to establish the relationship of financial literacy and investment behaviour by suggesting that financially educated people are likely to invest.

2.3.2 Behavioural Finance Theory

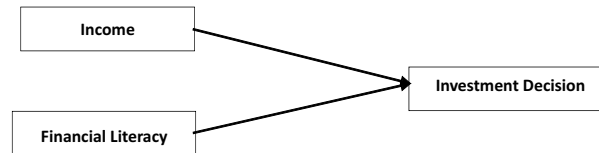
Behavioural Finance Theory is the alternative to the rational behaviour in finance which argues that there are factors other than rational analysis of financial decisions. Behavioural finance studies why individuals, instead of

the theoretically presumed rational investors, invest in the ways they do. This means the way in which individuals take financial decisions are influenced by economic and psychological forces which is applicable under uncertainty and resource constraints.

In this aspect financial capacity of individual plays a role in investment decision behaviour. Although, having proper financial knowledge is an aspect for investing, having financial capacity in hand influences on investment decisions. Income provides financial capacity for an individual to invest; it determines the ability of one to save and invest. In case of students, those with higher income have a higher tendency to invest compared to students with lower income. Thus, behavioural finance theory forms the base of the relationship of income and investment decisions.

2.3.3 Conceptual Framework

The concept used for finding the relationship between the variables (Financial Literacy, Income and Investment decision) based on the review of literature and above theoretical framework are represented in a diagram. The framework below represents that both financial literacy and income affect investment decision of students. Here, financial literacy and income are the independent variables and investment decision is the dependent variable.



3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

In this research a quantitative approach was used to analyze the influence of financial literacy and income on investment decisions of university students in Nepal. The study opted for the quantitative approach because it enabled measurements of the relations between variables and testing of hypotheses. The study incorporated both descriptive and explanatory approaches. Descriptive approach was employed to describe the respondents, whereas explanatory approach was employed to examine the relations between financial literacy, income and investment decision.

Primary data were gathered through a closed-ended questionnaire so that hypotheses of the study could be tested.

3.2 Population and Sample

The sample population was university students studying in Kathmandu valley. Students were considered because students are being exposed to many financial principles, investment opportunities and decisions made and the future financial future may be affected due to decisions made during this period.

Because of time and resource constraints, the sample was drawn from the 122 students and their responses were analyzed. These students come from varied backgrounds of education which could be one way to look at their decisions regarding investment.

3-3 Sampling Technique

Convenience sampling was used for data collection of university students in Kathmandu valley. Data was collected by approaching the respondents through academic networking and media such as Facebook. This technique makes data collection easier and student research often takes this course of action. In terms of limitation the generalizability is reduced to very low but it shows students view regarding the investment decision.

3-4 Nature and Sources of data

The data used was primary in nature that were collected using closed-ended questionnaire. The researcher used primary data because these data directly relate to the questions asked in the study, and variables that the researcher was interested in examining.

The questionnaire comprised of two section; one regarding information on the respondents such as sex, age, year, income and the second part regarding financial literacy, income and investment decisions by using five point Likert scale varying from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

3-5 Measurements of Variables

The study examines effects of financial literacy and income (independent variables) on investment decision (dependent variable).

1. Investment decision: this refers to an individual readiness, confidence, ability to assess and commit the investment behaviour. This is measure by three items focusing on confidence level of the respondent towards the investment decision and their inclination to make such decisions by using 5-point scale.
2. Financial literacy: refers to individuals' understanding of concepts about money, such as managing resources, handling finances and financial decision-making skills. It was measured by 3 items using a 5 point scale.
3. Income: is a measure of individuals earning capacity and how many resources they can put on investment. This is measure by 3 items based on respondents' perceived financial capacity to make investment with reference to their income by using 5-point scale.

3-6 Methods of Analysis

Collected data were coded and analyzed with the help of JAMOV. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the relationships between financial literacy, income and investment decision.

3.6.1 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics which comprise of frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation was used in order to describe respondents' characteristics, respondents' answer to the research variable. Standard deviation describes the dispersion about the mean, and the mean represents the average level of the respondent's agreement about a particular question.

3.6.2 Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis was employed to examine the degree to which financial literacy, income and investment decision are linearly related. The Pearson correlation coefficient value (r) varies between -1 to 1. The positive value of r indicates a positive relationship between two variables whereas a negative value signifies a negative relationship.

The Pearson correlation coefficient is calculated using the following formula:

$$r = \frac{n \sum xy - \sum x \sum y}{\sqrt{n \sum x^2 - (\sum x)^2} \sqrt{n \sum y^2 - (\sum y)^2}}$$

Where,

r = Pearson correlation coefficient

x = independent variables

y = dependent variable

n = number of observations

3.6.3 Multiple Regression Analysis

Multiple regression analysis was used to test the effect of financial literacy and income on investment decisions and the independent contribution of each of the predictor variables. Regression was useful to know how well the set of predictor variables is related with investment decisions and their respective importance to investment decisions of university students; hence, it also helps to test the hypotheses framed for the study. The analysis identified if financial literacy or financial capacity had more influence in investment decision of the students.

The regression equation of this study is presented as below:

$$Y = a + b_1X_1 + b_2X_2 + e$$

Where,

Y = Investment decision

a = Intercept

b_1, b_2 = Coefficients for each independent variable

X_1 = Financial Literacy

X_2 = Financial Behaviour

e = Error term

Statistical significance of regression coefficients was tested at 5% significance level, and the overall fit of the regression model was assessed by the Coefficient of Determination (R), explaining variation in investment decisions attributed to financial literacy and income.

4. Results and Discussion

This chapter shows the analysis of the collected data and discusses the results of the study against the study objectives. The data has been drawn from 122 university students in Kathmandu Valley. Inferential and descriptive statistical methods were used to study the effect of financial literacy and income on investment decision. The chapter begins with a description of the demographic profile of the respondents and then followed by the descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, regression analysis, and discussion of findings. The results are interpreted in relation to the study objectives, theories, and literature of previous studies.

4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic profile of respondents presents important basic information regarding the respondents and describes the composition of sample in terms of certain characteristics. A demographic profile of respondents may aid in interpreting the results and understanding representativeness of the study respondents. The selected demographic factors under consideration are gender, age, academic year, and income. A total of 122 valid responses are accounted for under study.

4.1.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic analysis was conducted to understand the background characteristics of the respondents participating in the study. The respondents consisted of bachelor-level management students from colleges within Kathmandu Valley, Nepal. Variables such as gender and age group were analyzed using descriptive statistics to provide an overview of respondent characteristics. Understanding demographic distribution is important because financial knowledge, Income and investment tendencies may vary across different respondent groups.

Table-1: Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Variables	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	61	50.0
	Female	61	50.0
Age	Group Below 20 years	15	12.3
	20-25 years	80	65.6
	Above 25 years	27	22.1

The demographic findings indicate that the respondents were equally distributed across gender categories, providing balanced representation

within the study. The majority of respondents belonged to the 20-25 years age group, indicating that most participants were young adults actively transitioning toward financial independence and investment awareness. The respondent profile supports the relevance of the study in examining investment decision-making behaviour among university students in Nepal.

4.1.2 Academic year of Respondents

Table-2: Academic Qualification of the Respondents

Year of study	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative %
1 st year	24	19.70	19.70
2 nd year	23	18.90	38.50
3 rd year	26	21.30	59.80
4 th year	49	40.20	100.00
Total	122	100	

The above table shows the distribution of respondents by academic year. Fourth-year students form the largest group of respondents accounting for 40.2% of all respondents. Third-year students are the second largest group accounting for 21.3% while first and second year students are for 19.7% and 18.9% respectively. It is understandable that older students (seniors) should have more access to information relating to investment concepts, information concerning investment and to more practical experiences in financial matters than younger students (freshmen).

4.1.3 Income of the Respondents

Table-3: Monthly Income Level of the Respondents

Monthly Income Level (Rs.)	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative %
Less than 5000	51	41.80	41.80
5000-10000	29	23.80	65.60
Above than 10000	42	34.40	100.00
Total	122	100.00	

Distribution of respondent by monthly income was shown as 51(41.8%) respondent had less than Rs. 5,000, 29 (23.8%) of them had income ranging from Rs. 5,000 to 10,000 and 42 (34.4%) had more than 10,000. These statistics shows that many of the respondents had a relatively low income and thus had limited capacity to engage in investment activities. On the other hand, there were respondent belonging to higher income group enabling a comparison across various levels of financial capacity.

A survey of the demographic profile also showed that most of the respondents had relatively close gender distribution and also that most respondent had a certain age range (Mostly between 20 and 25) and year of

study (fourth year students constituting the majority of sample). Also that many respondent earned less than Rs. 5,000, shows a restriction on the capacity of student to engage in investment activities.

4.2 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were also calculated to review average responses as well as the variation among variables in the study. This description indicates respondents' perceptions about their own financial literacy, financial security, and the decision to invest. Central tendencies were presented as mean values, while measures of dispersion around the mean were presented as standard deviations. The findings are presented in

Table-4: Descriptive Statistics for all Samples

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation
Financial Literacy	2.96	0.925
Income	2.97	0.807
Investment Decision	3.07	0.845

As observed from the table above, descriptive statistics shows that the average value of financial literacy is 2.96, which has a standard deviation of 0.925. This indicates that most respondents have moderate level of financial knowledge about investment-related concepts, risk-return assessment, and about the influence of economic variables like inflation and interest rates in the decision-making on investments. In addition, the larger standard deviation indicates there are variations in respondents' level of financial literacy.

Similarly, the average value of income is 2.97 and a standard deviation of 0.807. This suggests that the respondents have a moderate level of financial capability for carrying out investments activities although variation is exist among respondents.

Among the variables included in the analysis, investment decision has the highest mean value of 3.07 and standard deviation of 0.845. This implies moderate degree of propensity to participate in investments, to be able to assess the investment risk and return, confidence of in investment decision, and the tendency to invest.

Overall, the descriptive statistics indicates a moderate level of financial literacy, income, and investment decision among the respondents. From these results, it is hypothesized that since financial literacy and income both have comparable mean values, they are likely to have impact on investment decision. However, only a simple descriptive analysis cannot determine the relationship whether positive and/or negative and also significance of it. Thus, to investigate the influence of financial literacy and income on the investment decisions of the Nepalese university students, correlation and regression analyses were employed.

4.3 Correlation Analysis

Correlation analysis was done to investigate the association of financial literacy with income and investment decisions of university students in Nepal. The strength and direction of relationships among the variables of this study was assessed using Pearson's correlation coefficient. The correlation coefficients lie within the range of -1 to +1, in which a value of +1 or a close value indicates a strong positive relationship, while a value of -1 or a close value indicates a strong negative relationship, and a value of 0 indicates no relationship.

Table-5: Integrated Correlation between Variables

Variables	Financial Literacy	Income	Investment Decision
Financial Literacy	1	0.122	0.254**
Income	0.122	1	0.431**
Investment Decision	0.254**	0.431**	1

Note: **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As seen from the table above, financial literacy was found to be significantly positively correlated with investment decision ($r = 0.254$, $p = 0.005$). This implies that students who score higher in financial literacy tend to have better investment decision behaviour. The correlation coefficient shows weak positive relation between financial literacy and investment decision.

Similarly, income was significantly positively correlated with investment decision ($r = 0.431$, $p < 0.001$). It can be observed that the correlation coefficient implies that there is a moderate positive relation between income and investment decision. Students with higher financial resources can be seen engaging in investment related activities more and making investment decision accordingly. Income had a stronger correlation relation with investment decision compared to financial literacy.

Moreover, the study shows that there is positive but insignificant correlation between financial literacy and income ($r = 0.122$, $p = 0.179$). This implies that there is not strong correlation between financial literacy and income of the respondent. Hence financial literacy can be treated as an independent predictor variable separately from income in the regression analysis.

To sum up, financial literacy and income were both positively correlated with investment decision. It can be inferred that among the Nepalese university students the financial capacity is greater factor influencing investment decision compared to financial literacy. Further examination and testing of the hypotheses was done using regression analysis in the next section.

4.4 Regression Analysis

Multiple Regression Analysis of factors affecting investment decision-making on Nepalese university students: Financial literacy and income were considered as two independent variables that affect investment decisions among Nepalese university students. Multiple regression analysis was done to assess the explanatory power of the variables and which independent variable have stronger effects on the investment decision. Result of multiple regression analysis is displayed below:

Table-6: Model Summary

Model	R	R ²
1	0.476	0.227

The model summary indicates an R value of 0.476 and an R² value of 0.227. The coefficient of determination (R²) shows that financial literacy and income jointly explain 22.7 percent of the variation in investment decisions among university students. This implies that while the independent variables contribute significantly to investment decisions, other factors not included in the model may also influence investment behaviour.

Table-7: Regression Coefficient

Predictor	Estimate ()	SE	t-value	-value
Constant	1.254	0.321	3.91	<0.001
Financial Literacy	0.187	0.074	2.51	0.013
Income	0.425	0.085	5.00	<0.001

The regression results reveal that financial literacy exerts a statistically significant positive impact on investment decisions (= 0.187, =0.013). This leads to infer that a student who is knowledgeable in financial concepts and in investment opportunities, risks and rewards is more likely to make an investment decision. Hence hypothesis 1 (H₁), that financial literacy has a positive impact on investment decisions, is accepted.

Likewise income exerts a statistically significant positive impact on investment decisions (=0.425, <0.001). The results demonstrate that a student with higher level of financial ability is likely to take part in investment activities and thus makes investment decision. The larger coefficient for income than for financial literacy suggests that financial ability affects investment decision relatively more than financial literacy. Thus Hypothesis 2 (H₂) stating that income has a positive impact on investment decisions is accepted.

From the comparison of coefficients it is evident that income has a greater influence on investment decision than does financial literacy (=0.425 vs. =0.187). Financial literacy increases the likelihood of taking investment

decisions while financial ability has a larger role in determining the investment decisions for Nepalese college students.

4.4.1 Hierarchical Regression Analysis

An additional test was run to examine the relative impact of income and financial literacy in predicting investment choices: hierarchical regression analysis. Hierarchical regression allows testing of the additional variance in the dependent variable explained by one predictor over those variables already in the model. Financial literacy was added in the first model, and income in the second, to find out if income offers further explanatory value beyond financial literacy.

Table-8: Hierarchical Regression Model

Model	Predictors	R	R ²
Model 1	Financial Literacy	0.431	0.186
Model 2	Financial Literacy + Income	0.476	0.227

As can be seen in the table above, Model 1 that contained only financial literacy variables was able to account for 18.6 percent of the variability in investment decision-making ($R = 0.186$). Thus, financial literacy itself plays a significant role in accounting for university students' investment decision-making behaviour.

When income was added to the model as Model 2, 22.7 percent of the variability in investment decisions was explained ($R=0.227$). The higher R-squared indicates that income adds explanatory information over what is provided by financial literacy alone.

Table-9: Hierarchical Regression Model Comparison

Comparison	R ²	F	df1	df2	-value
Model 1 Model 2	0.041	6.32	1	119	0.013

From the model comparison, the analysis of the regression model with the inclusion of income proves to be of statistical significance as it showed a significant increase of $R=0.041$ with a statistic value of $F=6.32$ and $p=0.013$ in explaining for investment decision. In addition the income contributed an extra of 4.1 percent of variance explained of the investment decision, after considering financial literacy. Hence the significant increase in R assures the contribution of unique explanatory power of income beyond that of financial literacy. The result of hierarchical regression also supports the result from correlation and multiple regression. Financial literacy contributes significantly in explaining investment decision. Income also explains significantly the variance explained for the investment decision, enhancing the predictive strength of the model, which in turn proves that the financial capacity of university students do significantly play role in investment decision making process. Therefore, it is the financial capacity not the

financial literacy which determines the investment decision, the argument of the study, is supported by the result of hierarchical regression.

5. Discussion of Findings

This paper explores the extent to which income and financial literacy affect investment decisions among Nepalese university students, and compared the relative influence of the two variables. The paper found that income and financial literacy have positive and statistically significant effects on investment decisions; nevertheless, the extent of their influence was higher on income than on financial literacy through correlation, multiple regression, and hierarchical regression analysis. This implies that despite financial literacy of students in understanding investment opportunities, the influence of financial capacity appears stronger in deciding whether to actually invest or not.

5.1 Impact of Financial Literacy on Investment Decision

Based on the analysis, financial literacy has a significant and positive impact on investment decisions. Financially knowledgeable individuals tend to have better understanding regarding investment options, risks and benefits associated with them and thus make decisions relating to finance with better judgment. This result conforms to those obtained by Awais *et al.* (2016), Baihaqqy *et al.* (2020), Kumari (2020) and Utami & Sitanggang (2021), which demonstrated that financial literacy positively affects participation in investment decisions. The outcome is also in line with Theory of Planned behaviour which suggests that knowledge would enable individuals increase their perceived behavioural control thereby leading to the intended behaviour (investment).

5.2 Impact of Income on Investment Decision

The income has a significant and positive impact on the investment decisions. Students with higher levels of income are more likely to put their money to savings and investments compared to those with low financial resources who have limited opportunities to participate in investment decisions despite having sound knowledge about investments. The finding is consistent with that of Arianti (2018) and also confirms the principles of Behavioural Finance Theory which claims that individual behaviour is often determined by their circumstances.

5.3 Financial Knowledge or Financial Capacity?

A major contribution of this study is that income has been found to have a stronger effect on the investment decisions compared to financial literacy. Students may gain knowledge on investments but have limited amount of funds to actually take part in investment. As confirmed from hierarchical regression results, the additional explanatory power provided by the

financial capacity proves it is more significant than knowledge on investment decisions.

6. Conclusion

In this study, it was intended to find out that either the financial knowledge or the financial capacity makes more effect on investment behaviour of university students in Kathmandu valley, Nepal. Data collected from 122 university students and analyzed by the correlation, multiple regression and hierarchical regression techniques revealed that financial literacy and financial capacity positively and significantly impact on the investment behaviour.

It was found that financially literate students make appropriate financial decision on investment opportunities and financial literacy helps to understand how investment would take place. Income was found to be more significant than financial literacy. In addition to it, financial capacity also added additional variance to investment behaviour other than financial literacy; the result of hierarchical regression showed that income had more significant role to make the investment decision a reality than financial literacy among university students of Kathmandu valley.

In sum, it can be concluded that both financial literacy and income were influential in determining student investment decisions, yet financial capacity plays a crucial role for university students in Nepal compared to financial knowledge. Financial literacy may play an essential role in decision making regarding investment opportunities, financial capacity plays significant role for investment as well to realize it.

6.1 Theoretical Implications

This study has added evidence to investment literature by providing the evidence about the comparative effect of financial literacy and financial capacity on the students' investment behaviour. This finding supports the Theory of Planned Behaviour where financial knowledge increase people's confidence and capability in the process of investment. Moreover, this study supports the Behavioural Finance Theory in which economic circumstance is considered the key in influencing on people's financial behaviour.

This research extends literature in that financial literacy and financial capacity are compared together in one analysis. While previous studies have usually assessed the impact of either of them, present study confirms the superiority of financial capacity in influencing the students' investment behaviour in Nepal.

6.2 Practical Implications

The implications from this study are for the policy makers, education providers, financial institutions as well as the students. Educational institutions should enhance their financial literacy program by adding the

financial literacy course, seminars and workshops to improve their students' financial knowledge and financial decision making skill. Policy makers should complement the financial literacy with financial capacity building initiative by introducing various saving incentive programs, financial assistance schemes for investment or income earning project.

Financial institutions should cater their products and services by considering students' characteristics, i.e. Lower income and less asset for investment. Students should strive to improve their financial literacy, financial capacity by practicing sound financial management, saving and by involving in investment-oriented activity in order to enhance the potential for investment participation for future.

6.3 Limitations of the Study

The objectives of the study were addressed but certain limitations are to be kept in mind when analyzing the data; these limitations also create some room for future study.

- The scope of the study was restricted to university students in Kathmandu Valley; as such, these results may not be generalized to students in other areas of Nepal, or to the non-student population in general.
- This research used a cross-sectional design which captured financial literacy, income and investment behaviour at only one point in time and did not observe variations in the same over a period of time.
- The research used self-administered questionnaire responses, which may be prone to response bias and personal perception.
- Financial literacy and income were considered as determinants of investment decisions; however, there are a lot more factors that may affect students' investment behaviour such as financial behaviour, risk tolerance, financial self-efficacy, social influences, psychological influences, etc., which are not included in this study.

7. Recommendations for Future Research

There are numerous ways that future research could build on this study: Incorporate a larger and a more diversified sample for better generalization of findings covering various regions and different kinds of educational institution of Nepal. Future research may focus on student and non-student comparative analysis in understanding investment decision-making behaviour. Future researches could consider adding other potential variables affecting investment decision-making behaviour like financial behaviour, risk tolerance, financial self-efficacy, social influence and psychological factors of students. A longitudinal design study should be employed to establish cause and effect relationships of the variables among the university students.

Future researchers may apply Structural Equation modeling (SEM), mediation and moderation analysis in a rigorous manner for finding the effect of variable and for obtaining more in-depth understanding. Finally, the effectiveness of financial literacy programs and student financial capacity enhancement initiatives may also be undertaken by the researchers in order to help policymakers and financial institutions contribute more effectively.

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Mughal Monuments in Rajasthan: Revisiting the Tomb of King-Makers Barha Syed Brothers' Mother at Ajmer

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Abstract

This illustrative article revisits a lesser-known Mughal monument in Ajmer City of Rajasthan in India – the tomb associated with the mother of the celebrated Barha Sayyid brothers, who emerged as the powerful “King-Makers” of the Mughal Empire in the early eighteenth century. This monument, which is Situated within Ajmer’s rich Mughal architectural landscape, provides an important link between the political history of the Later Mughals and the architectural traditions of that period. The article briefly traces the historical background of the Barha Sayyid brothers and examines the tomb’s architectural features, including its marble construction, decorative elements, spatial arrangement, and surviving artistic details. The accompanying photographs document the monument’s present condition and architectural character, drawing attention to a relatively overlooked heritage structure. By combining historical interpretation with visual documentation, the article seeks to highlight the monument’s cultural and architectural significance and to encourage greater scholarly and public attention towards the lesser-known Mughal heritage of Ajmer.

Keywords

Barha Syed Brothers, Mughal monument, Mughal heritage, Architectural traditions, Floral design, King-makers, Battle of Jajau, Imperial troops.

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Mughal Monuments in Rajasthan: Revisiting the Tomb of King-Makers Barha Syed Brothers' Mother at Ajmer

There stands the Syed Miyan's mausoleum in the city of Ajmer, almost near the adjoining area of the Railway Junction at Ajmer. It had two tombs belonged to the time of Mughal Empire. Actually, these two tombs were constructed by the sons of one Syed Miyan who had been serving as the Governor of the province of Ajmer¹ during the reign of Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb. Syed Miyan was his popular name otherwise his name was Syed Abdullah Khan Barha². He belonged to the Tehanpuri³ branch of the Barha Syeds of Mughal history who were earlier recognized as the Punjabi Syeds during the Delhi Sultanate period⁴. They claim to be the descendants of one legendry Abul Farah Wasti but the claim has no historical ground and these seem to be of pure Indian origin probably having their origin in Sindhi Brahmins⁵.

Under the heading "Account of the Barha Sayyids", in his famous book the Later Mughals, historian William Irvine mentions⁶:

"The Sayyids of Barha claim to be descended from Abul-farah of Wasit in Mesopotamia. Several hundred years ago, at a date which cannot be fixed exactly, Abul-farah and his twelve [12] sons came from Wasit to India, settling at first in four villages near Patiala in the sarkar of Sirhind and subah of Dihli. From these villages, the four branches into which they are divided, derive their names. Then crossing the Jamuna, they formed a settlement on the eastern side of the upper Duaba, halfway between Mirat [Meerut] and Saharanpur, in a sandy, unproductive piece of country, possibly at that time very is sparsely inhabited. The etymology of the name Barha is disputed; perhaps it is from the word *bara* (twelve), with some illusion to the number of their villages. From the time of Akbar, the men of this clan of Sayyids were famous as military leaders, and by their bravery, had acquired a traditional right to lead the vanguard of the imperial troops."

Discussing about the origin of the Barha Syeds, the author has suggested that it is more authentic to discover their root in Indian origin than to a legendary Arabic one. In this context the following matter is worth seeing⁷:

"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 towards a Punjabi Brahman 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 as 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 has been passed down through generations."

Mr. Irvine, further, writes⁸:

"Until the reign of Farrukhsiyar, they seem to have been little distinguished outside the profession of arms, and judging from what we know of their descendants. In the present age, they probably had little love of learning. Brave, proud, lavish, always were; and in our day when their swords have been perforce beaten into pruning hooks, they have succumbed only too completely before the wily money-lender. In Muzaffarnagar, many is the story current of the Sayyids Sahib's reckless improvidence and ignorance of the commonest rule of business."

Quoting the Siyar-ul-mukhterin, Mr. Irvine points out the most common image the Barha Syeds had⁹:

"In the 18th century a Barha ka ahmaq, or 'Barha blockhead', was a common saying and there was a rhyme to the effect that all the asses there were Bahadurs and all the Bahadurs, asses".

When Aurangzeb had once decided to take Bijapur, he ordered Raja Jai Singh to march and capture the Bijapur. Raja did it but failed. And so viceroyalty of Deccan was given to Prince Muazzam, assisted by Jaswant Singh. Finally, it was September 12, 1686 (Sunday) when the Mughals won and Bijapur Adil Shahi was ended. Sir Jadunath Sarkar, thus records the event¹⁰:

"Sunday, 12 September 1686, saw the downfall of the Bijapur monarchy. Amidst the tears and lamentations of his subjects who lined the streets, Sikandar, the last of the Adil Shahi Sultan's gave up his ancestors thrown and issued from the capital of his house at 1 o'clock in the afternoon in charge of Rao Dalpat Bundela, and went to Aurangzib's camp in Rasulpur."

Giving the details about Sikandar, the last Adil Shahi Sultan of Bijapur, the historian again writes¹¹:

"The last Adil Shahi Sultan was for some time lodged in the State prison of Daulatabad. Later, he was again carried about with the camp of Aurangzib, as a captive. In this condition he died outside Satara fort on 3 April 1670; he had not yet completed 32 years of age. According to his last wishes, his mortal remains were carried to Bijapur and there

buried at the foot of the sepulchre of his spiritual guide Shaikh Fahimullah, in a roofless enclosure.”

It was Bijapur where Mughal Emperor Aurangzib appointed Syed Abdullah Khan Barha, a Tihanpuri Barha Syed as the *Subedar* (Governor) of the Province of Bijapur.¹² Syed Abdullah Khan Barha earned a high reputation among the Bijapuri subjects. His popularity reached the ears of Aurangzeb and he was very much pleased with the Syed. As a result of ensuring high position in emperor’s mind, the Syed was made the Governor of the province of Ajmer¹³. It was his popularity that he was known as the Syed Miyan, a respectful title among the subjects. Syed Miyan died there in imperial service and was buried in Ajmer. Later on, his sons the famous Syed brothers, the King-makers built a grand tomb keeping his grave in centre. The entrance gate of Syed Miyan’s tomb had an Arabic Inscription which dates back to 1127 *Hijri*¹⁴. This corresponds to 1705 C.E. The author mistakenly took it as the date of construction of the Syed Miyan’s *Maqbara* while now, when writing this article, the author has changed his previous opinion on the basis of more historical data and now declares it as the year of Syed Miyan’s death in Ajmer serving the Mughal Empire as the Governor of that province.

Syed Miyan had 2 wives. The first wife’s name was Khurshida Begam¹⁵ who was the daughter of one Syed Hamid Ali Khan¹⁶, a Tehanpuri Barha Syed of Nawa¹⁷ (Nawaa-Jarhoda). It is a village of Tehanpuri Barha Syeds¹⁸. The historically important *Kothi* of Liyaqat Ali Khan, the first Prime Minister of Pakistan at Muzaffarnagar is the residence originally belonged to the descendants of Syed Hamid Ali KhanTehanpuri¹⁹.

By the two marriages, Syed Miyan had numerous sons:

Hasan Ali Khan, Husain Ali Khan, Sirajuddin Ali Khan, Nazmuddin Ali Khan,²⁰ Nuruddin Ali Khan²¹ who was found dead at the Battle of Jajau and Saifuddin Ali Khan. He had 3 more sons - all minors - found murdered while in the Ganga Khadir when on a hunting expedition²². Who killed them is not yet known²³.

The rise of Syed Miyan’s eldest son Syed Hasan Ali Khan Barha and next to him Syed Husain Ali Khan Barha was not a thing gained by them by chance. It took a very long time in real sense of the term. Highlighting this very fact, historian William Irvine records²⁴:

“The two Sayyid brothers, who now come into such prominence were not the mere upstarts, men of yesterday, that it was too often the fashion to make them out to be. Besides the prestige of Sayyid lineage of descent from the famous Barha branch of that race and the personal renown acquired by their own valour, they were the sons of a man who held in Alamgir’s first the subahdari of Bijapur in the Dakhin and then that of Ajmer, appointments given in that reign either to Princes of the blood or to the very foremost men in the State. Their father Sayyid

Abdullah Khan, known as Sayyid Miyan, had risen in the service of Ruhullah Khan, Alamgir's Mir Bakshi, and finally, on receiving an imperial mansab, attached himself to the eldest Prince Muhammed Muazzam Shah Alam."

The following list shows the high official positions the two Syed brothers²⁵ held till 1711 C.E.:

Hasan Ali Khan (Afterwards Abdullah Khan Kutub-ul-mulk)	1109 H/1697-98 Faujdar of Sultanpur Nazarbar in Baglana Suba (Khandesh) Faujdar of Siuni Hoshangabad (Khandesh)	May 1707 Mansabdar of rank 3000 Jat 2000 Sawar with kettle drum	18 June 1707 Fought in the Battle of Jajau	Feb 1708 Rank was raised to 4000 and Hasan Ali Khan received his father's title of Abdullah Khan October 1708 Appointed Subedar of Ajmer but the order was withdrawn before joining. 10 January 1711 Prince Azimushshan made his Naib (Deputy governor of Suba Allahabad
Husain Ali Khan (afterwards amir-ul-umara)	Faujdar of Ranthambhor in Suba Ajmer, Faujdar Hindaun Bayana in Suba Agra	May 1707 Mansabdar of rank 3000 Jat 2000 Sawar with kettle drum	18 June 1707 Fought in the Battle of Jajau Severely wounded in the Battlefield	1 April 1708 Prince Azimushshan made his Naib (Deputy Governor) of Bihar Patna





Syed Miyan's Tomb (Maqbara) at Ajmer having an Arabic Inscription (dated 1127 Hijri i.e. 1705 C.E.) on the top of the Entrance Gate.

Below the inscription is a floral design²⁶ probably of the flower of the Gulchini²⁷ or popularly known as Chini Champa²⁸ (*Plumeria alba*) or its close relative species. Observing its flower and leaves, the author was some confused to have a floral design of foreign origin. In fact, this variety (more correctly this species) was brought in India by the Portugese²⁹. Surprisingly it is reported surviving there in the famous temple of the Vijaynagar Empire³⁰. For last 5 centuries it is visible in graveyards tombs and mausoleums throughout in India³¹. The reason being firstly its survival easier as no herbivorous eats its leaves and secondly plant of this species demands no amount or a little amount of water to survive³². This species depicted on the Entrance Gate of Syed Miyan's mausoleum provides an evidence of the flora existed there in these memorials in India. According to a taxonomist³³, this floral design suggests to be of female genetic part of the species inscribed in stone. If so, it makes a value.





Tomb of the King-makers Barha Syed Brothers' mother in her husband Syed Miyan's Maqbara at Ajmer in Rajasthan (India)

It may be concluded that the tomb of the mother of the Barha Sayyid brothers is a significant yet relatively overlooked example of Mughal heritage in Ajmer. Its historical associations and architectural features reflect the political and cultural legacy of the Later Mughal period in India. Proper documentation, preservation, and wider scholarly attention are essential for safeguarding this valuable monument for future generations.

Notes and References

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3. There are 4 branches of the Barha Syeds (Punjabi Syeds) namely: Tehanpuri, Chhatrauri, Jajeri/Jagneri and Kundliwal. A very popular Hindi proverb to this effect is still prevalent among these Syeds. It reads:
*"Tehanpuri tikhi ani, Chhatrauri saal /
 Jagneri jagmag karein, asal Kundliwal//"*
By courtesy: Late Nawab Muzaffar Ali Saheb, Nawab of Kaithoda and his younger brother's wife in an Interview some where in 2006 C.E.).
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11. *Ibid.*, 223.
12. William Irvine, *op. cit.*, 202-203. The Syed was serving under Ruhulla Khan who was an important officer during the Bijapur expedition.
13. *Ibid.*
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15. **Interview**, Mr. Zahoor Mehdi, a direct descendant of Syed Barha ancestry, former Gram Pradhan of the village of Tanderha in Muzaffarnagar District of U.P. (India), presently resident of Nazar Colony, Ansari Road, Muzaffarnagar, Uttar Pradesh, India.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*
20. Nazmuddin Ali Khan fought in many-a-battles with his brothers.
21. William Irvine, *op. cit.*, 204.
22. **Interview**, *op. cit.* Also some 65 other Barha Syed descendants of all the four branches of the Saadat-i-Barha.

23. *Ibid.*
24. William Irvine, *op. cit.*, 202-203.
25. *Ibid.*, 203-205.
26. It has 5 petals clearly visible from naked eyes of a onlooker or visitor.
27. **Interview**, Kunwar Ajay Vansh Narayan Singh, former President and one of the leading founding members of the Indian Nurserymen Association, Hapur, U.P., India.
28. *Ibid.*
29. This species of *Plumeria alba* is reported to be in the Vitthal Temple of Hampi, the capital city of the Vijaynagar Empire now in Karnataka, the state in India.
30. The Vijaynagar Empire flourished in South India from 1336 to 1646 C.E.
31. **Interview**, Mr. N.P. Singh, President, INA, New Delhi; Mr M.K. Tyagi and others, the growers of the *Plumeria alba*.
32. *Ibid.*
33. **Interview**, former Prof. Vijay Malik, Department of Botany, Chaudhary Charan Singh University, Meerut;
Interview, Lt. Col. Kesri Singh, a direct descendent of Saint Poetess Meerabai's parental lineage of the Rathore - royalty of Merta, Rajasthan. ★

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Violence on Wheels: Representation of Violence in Hindi Film *Gadar: Ek Prem Katha*

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Abstract

*This article examines the representation of violence in Anil Sharma's *Gadar: Ek Prem Katha* (2001), one of the most commercially successful and ideologically contested Hindi films of the post-liberalization era. Situating the film within the broader discourse of popular cinema, historiography, communal identity, and the Bollywood star system, the article argues that *Gadar* does not merely depict violence; it aestheticizes, nationalizes, and religiously codes it in ways that speak to deeply entrenched social anxieties in Indian society. Drawing on scholars such as Robert Rosenstone, Pierre Sorlin, Hayden White, Bhaskar Sarkar, and Ashis Nandy, this study reads *Gadar* as a cultural text through which post-colonial Indian anxieties about nationhood, religious identity, and masculine honour are simultaneously expressed and amplified. The article further explores how the cinematic aesthetics of blood, the star persona of Sunny Deol, and the film's communal undertones collectively function as a vehicle for understanding the internal social divisions of Indian society. The conclusion suggests that popular cinema is an indispensable hermeneutic lens for comprehending the social, political, and cultural fault lines of modern India.*

Keywords

Partition, Violence, Identity, Star System, Aesthetics.

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Violence on Wheels: Representation of Violence in Hindi Film *Gadar: Ek Prem Katha*

1. Introduction

Cinema is never an innocent mirror. It is a social apparatus that simultaneously reflects and constructs the realities of its time and space. In the history of Indian popular cinema, few movies have stirred as much admiration, controversy, and scholarly interest as *Gadar: Ek Prem Katha* (Rebellion: A Love Story, 2001)¹, directed by Anil Sharma and starring Sunny Deol and Ameesha Patel. Released during a period of heightened Hindu nationalist politics in India, *Gadar* grossed approximately ₹2.37 billion at the box office, becoming one of the highest-grossing Hindi films of its era.² The movie is set against the background of the 1947 Partition of India, one of the most violent mass displacements in human history. The film tells the story of Tara Singh, a Sikh truck driver who rescues a Muslim woman, Sakina, from communal violence, falls in love with her, and ultimately wages a one-man war against the Pakistani state to reclaim her from her family. The film's narrative architecture is soaked in blood, violence, and spectacle. It begins with images of mutilated bodies on trains, moves through sword fights, mob lynchings, and rape-threat sequences, and culminates in a climactic sequence in which a single Indian man dismantles an entire Pakistani military establishment with his bare hands, most memorably by uprooting a hand pump from the ground as a weapon.

This article interrogates the nature and function of violence in *Gadar* from multiple analytical angles: as a form of popular historiography, as a mirror of communal hatred, as a product of the Bollywood star system, and as an aesthetic practice involving the symbolic use of blood. The article ultimately argues that to understand *Gadar* is, in significant measure, to understand the social psychology of a nation navigating the still-unhealed wounds of Partition, the resurgence of religious nationalism, and the spectatorial pleasures of a masculinist political imagination.³

2. Literature Review: Historical Films as a Source of History Writing

The relationship between cinema and the writing of history has been a subject of sustained scholarly debate since the mid-twentieth century. While traditional historiography privileged written archives, documents, and textual evidence, the emergence of film studies as an academic discipline gradually forced historians to reckon with the epistemic possibilities of visual media. The critical intervention in this conversation came from the

French historian Marc Ferro, who in the 1970s argued that cinema was not merely an entertainment medium but a significant historical document “one that revealed not so much the events of the past as the ideological and cultural anxieties of the moment of the film’s production.”⁴

This idea was further systematized by Hayden White, who coined the term *historiophoty* to describe “the representation of history and our thought about it in visual images and filmic discourse.”⁵ White’s contribution was significant because it suggested that the conventions of filmmaking like montage, characterization, and narrative arc were not dissimilar from the rhetorical strategies of professional historians. Both the historian and the filmmaker select, organize, and present events; both are shaped by ideological commitments that inflect the “facts” they present; both are, in White’s formulation, constructors of narrative rather than neutral transmitters of the past.

Robert Rosenstone, what he called “history on film”, argued that “fictional elaborations of dialogue and setting, or filmic strategies such as condensation, selection, and highlighting, do not vitiate the quality of a film’s contribution to the understanding of history.”⁶ For Rosenstone, what matters is not factual accuracy in the positivist sense but the emotional and interpretive truth that films convey, their ability to make the past present to contemporary audiences in ways that written texts often cannot.⁷

Pierre Sorlin extended this argument by suggesting that historical films are perhaps a branch of historiography in their own right.⁸ Eleftheria Thanouli, in her landmark study *History and Film: A Tale of Two Disciplines* (2019), proposed that cinematic history has in practice replaced academic history as the dominant form of meaning-making about the past in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, describing historical films as “magnified miniatures of a historical book.”⁹ She argued that because historical films do not claim to represent the past as it actually was, they paradoxically allow scholars to examine the underlying mechanisms through which any historical discourse, including academic historiography, constructs an “illusion of objectivity.”¹⁰

Historian John E. O’ Connor proposed a four-part framework for analyzing films as historical documents:¹¹

- a. Moving-image documents as representations of history.
- b. Moving-image documents as evidence for social and cultural history.
- c. Moving-image documents as evidence for historical fact.
- d. Moving-image documents as evidence for the history of film and television.

This framework is particularly useful for the study of *Gadar*, which operates on all four registers simultaneously: it is a fictional representation of

Partition history, a cultural artefact of post-liberalization India, a selective evidentiary account of 1947 events, and a milestone in Hindi film genre history.

3. Indian Cinema and Partition Historiography

Within Indian scholarship, the relationship between cinema and Partition history has been examined by a growing body of scholars. Bhaskar Sarkar's work *Mourning the Nation: Indian Cinema in the Wake of Partition* (2009) traces the shifting representation of the 1947 trauma across several decades of Indian Hindi cinema. Sarkar argues that Partition functions as a "national trauma", an originary wound whose cinematic traces are indexical of "acts of cultural mourning."¹² He identifies three broad phases: an initial phase of "denial" in which Partition is largely absent from cinema; a Nehruvian phase of "supracommunal trauma" that transcends sectarian boundaries; and a third phase, beginning in the 1990s, in which the Partition narrative shifts from collective consciousness into a "purely sectarian phenomenon."¹³ *Gadar* exemplifies this third phase with remarkable clarity.

Gyanendra Pandey has argued that "histories of communal violence have typically been written in terms of nationalist historiography, which sees violence as an aberration, 'a glitch, the result of an unusual conjuncture of circumstances' rather than as constitutive of the nation-making process itself."¹⁴ Pandey's intervention is vital because it forces us to acknowledge what *Gadar* represses: that communal violence was not an exception to the birth of India and Pakistan but was integral to the very process of their becoming.

Mushirul Hasan's observation that "literary narratives, whether in Hindi, Urdu, Bengali or Punjabi, are an eloquent witness to an unspeakable and inarticulatable history"¹⁵ points to a broader methodological premise for this article: that popular cinema, like literature, constitutes a primary site for the cultural processing of historical trauma. Historians Ayesha Jalal and Sugata Bose concur, noting that "the colossal human tragedy of the Partition and its continuing aftermath has been better conveyed by sensitive creative writers and artists than by historians."¹⁶ This article reads *Gadar* as one such cultural witness, imperfect, ideologically skewed, but deeply revealing of the social imagination of its era.

4. Film, Ideology, and Social History

Marc Ferro's insight that cinematic texts are "useful to the historian precisely because they are unreliable; they do not picture reality but an interpretation of reality"¹⁷ is particularly instructive here. Films like *Gadar* are unreliable as literal historical records but are extraordinarily reliable as documents of the fears, desires, prejudices, and power structures of the societies that produce them. As Fantoni observes in his survey of film historiography, an "eclectic and interdisciplinary approach merging history,

cultural studies, film studies" is required to do justice to the complexity of cinematic texts as historical sources.¹⁸

The significance of cinema as social history is especially acute in the Indian context, where, as M. Madhava Prasad has argued, the Hindi film industry has historically been a terrain where ideological contestations over nationhood, gender, caste, and religion play out with particular intensity.¹⁹ It is within this framework that the violence of *Gadar* must be situated and analyzed.

5. *Gadar* and the Spectacle of the Violence

Gadar: Ek Prem Katha opens with an extended and brutally graphic sequence of post-Partition violence: trains arrive carrying piles of blood-soaked bodies; mobs of Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims attack each other in frenzy; women are dragged, threatened with rape, and murdered. The film's very first act of characterization is telling: the character of Tara Singh (Sunny Deol), the film's Sikh hero, is introduced not as a romantic figure but as a sword-wielding participant in mob violence against Muslims. In the opening moments, he is a killer. This foundational ambivalence the hero as perpetrator of communal violence who is later redeemed through love is never fully resolved by the narrative. Instead, it is symptomatically displaced onto the Pakistani state in the film's second half, allowing the audience to enjoy the spectacle of violence without moral accountability.²⁰ The film structures its violence along a deeply asymmetric axis. While both communities are nominally shown to have committed atrocities Tara's family is killed by a Muslim mob; Sakina is nearly raped by a Sikh-Hindu mob the dominant trajectory of the narrative maps evil onto Pakistan and, by extension, onto Pakistani/Muslim male authority. Sakina's father, Ashraf Ali (Amrish Puri), the film's principal antagonist, is the Mayor of Lahore and the embodiment of an irrational, authoritarian, Islam-coded patriarchy that holds women captive and demands that Tara chant "*Hindustan Murdabad*" (Death to India) as a condition for his family's acceptance. As film critic Shabana Azmi pointedly observed, "The movie reinforces the canard that every Muslim is a Pakistani. It mixes issues of identity and nationalism, which should be handled sensitively."²¹ This conflation of religious identity with national enmity is precisely the mechanism through which *Gadar* converts what might have been a humanist anti-war narrative into what several critics identified as a vehicle of xenophobic nationalism.

Gadar's representation of Pakistan follows a pattern that scholars of postcolonial cinema have identified as characteristic of the Indian nationalist film of the late 1990s and early 2000s. In Prasad's formulation, the assignment of the role of "Pakistani and 'other'" to Muslim characters serves a "xenophobic ruling ideology that serves the interest of a corrupt and highly authoritarian political elite."²²

The film depicts Pakistan as a monolithically repressive, fundamentalist state in which individual will is crushed under the weight of anti-India hatred. Pakistani characters, except for a single sympathetic figure who helps Tara and Sakina escape, are presented as “pawns of their evil leaders, ready to be unleashed or sacrificed against India.”²³ This dehumanization is not incidental to the film’s ideological project; it is constitutive of it. By constructing Pakistan as an entity driven by religious fanaticism and anti-India sentiment, *Gadar* provides the moral justification for Tara Singh’s spectacular violence in the film’s second half.

The film’s political subtext was inseparable from the historical conjuncture of its release. The year 2001 in India was a moment of heightened Hindu nationalist politics. The right-wing party was in the service of the country, had recently fought the Kargil War (1999) with Pakistan, and the Godhra communal violence was only months away. The film’s anti-Pakistan sentiment, several scholars have noted, “gained a certain kind of legitimacy” within this context, with Indian audiences experiencing Tara’s violence as patriotic catharsis rather than as aggression.²⁴ The communal protests triggered by *Gadar*’s release were themselves a form of social evidence: Muslim groups in Mumbai, Ahmedabad, and Bhopal organized demonstrations; vehicles were torched; the Muslim League filed petitions calling for a ban. The Ahmedabad protests, in which theatres were set on fire, represented the real-world extension of the communal hatred the film had, arguably, helped to stoke.²⁵ That the film also drew the support of Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray, who found “nothing objectionable” in it, reveals the political terrain it occupied.²⁶

5.1 Women’s Bodies as Sites of Communal Conflict

A central mechanism through which *Gadar* stages communal violence is the figure of Sakina, a Muslim woman whose body becomes the literal site of contestation between Hindu-Sikh India and Muslim Pakistan. Feminist scholars have extensively documented how, during the actual Partition, women’s bodies were made into “sites of honour, control, and political assertion.”²⁷ *Gadar* reproduces this logic cinematically: Sakina is nearly raped by Hindu-Sikh rioters; she is “saved” by Tara Singh’s application of *sindoor* (vermilion) on her forehead, symbolically claiming her as a Hindu wife; she is later detained in Pakistan by her father; and her eventual return to India constitutes the film’s resolution.

In every phase of this narrative, Sakina’s agency is evacuated. She does not choose India – she is chosen for India by the men who fight over her. The film’s ideological unconscious reveals itself here: the woman is not a subject of history but its object, the prize around which male violence in both Indian and Pakistani contexts is organized, justified and depicted.

5.2 The Star System and the Body of Violence

The representation of violence in *Gadar* cannot be understood independently of the body and star persona of Sunny Deol. The star system in Bollywood functions, as Richard Dyer has argued in a different but analogous context, as a mechanism through which social values and contradictions are embodied, negotiated, and resolved in the spectacular figure of the star.²⁸ Sunny Deol's body is portrayed as muscular, hairy, working-class, and unpolished, encoding a very specific vision of Indian masculinity that is distinct from the urbane, glamorous masculinity of contemporaries like Shah Rukh Khan or Aamir Khan. Deol's screen persona personified masculinity and anti-authoritarianism. His characters are "men of modest backgrounds" entangled in "conflicts with crime syndicates and systemic corruption" who are "initially conflict-avoidant" but "pivot to unfiltered anger when met with opposition."²⁹ The trajectory from reluctance to explosive violence is the emotional arc that Deol's films rehearse across his career from *Ghayal* (1990) and *Ghatak* (1996) to *Border* (1997) and *Gadar* (2001). In each film, the violence he enacts is framed as reactive, righteous, and therefore morally unblemished.

In *Gadar*, this persona is invested with nationalist content. Tara Singh's violence is not personal vengeance — it is India striking back. When he uproots the hand pump and wields it as a weapon, when he roars "*Hindustan Zindabad*" (Long Live India) before a crowd of Pakistanis, when he dismantles the Pakistani military single-handedly, Deol's body becomes the synecdoche of the Indian nation — invincible, indignant, and ultimately triumphant. The film's famous climax, in which a single Sikh truck driver defeats a military battalion, operates less as realism than as nationalist fantasy — a compensatory myth for a nation still psychologically scarred by the trauma of 1947.

5.3 Hyper-Masculinity and the Politics of Spectatorship

The star system thus functions in *Gadar* as an apparatus for the production of what critics have termed "hyper-nationalism" — a fantasy of Indian male invincibility directed specifically at Pakistan. As one reviewer observed, Sunny Deol is "the OG poster boy of hyper-nationalism. An image that was, in retrospect, a big part of his Bollywood career."³⁰ The political economy of this spectatorship was not neutral. The film's audiences were, in significant part, drawn from constituencies invested in a Hindu nationalist politics that found in Tara Singh's violence both a mirror and a mandate. The social learning implications of this were noted by several scholars: "when likeable, attractive characters such as heroes perpetrate violence on screen, they are more likely to be imitated by viewers."³¹ The question of whether *Gadar*'s spectacular violence contributed to the normalization of real-world anti-Muslim sentiment in the post-Kargil, pre-Godhra climate remains a live scholarly debate. Importantly, Deol's filmography is also marked by graphic bodily

violence — the arm-tearing scene in *Ziddi* (1997), the hand-pump sequence in *Gadar*, the battlefield carnage in *Border* that consistently fetishises the male body's capacity to inflict and endure damage. This deployment of the aestheticization of bodily violence, in Deol's films more than those of any other Bollywood star of his generation, invites analysis through the lens of what Susan Sontag called "the pornography of violence."³²

5.4 The Use of Blood and Aesthetics of Violence

Blood in *Gadar* is not merely an indexical sign of injury; it is a full-blown cinematic language. The film's opening sequence establishes blood as the primary metaphor for the trauma of Partition: trains arrive packed with bloodied corpses; the railway platform is a charnel house; blood stains clothes, faces, and stone. This opening establishes a visual grammar in which blood signifies communal identity, victimhood, and the broken promise of the Indian nation.

The film's most iconic use of blood is symbolic rather than literal: when Tara Singh smears *sindoor* — traditionally associated with the blood-red of a Hindu wife's marital status — on Sakina's forehead to protect her from a mob, the gesture collapses the distinction between religious ritual and bodily violence. The *sindoor* saves her life precisely because it mimics the stain of blood, claiming her as Hindu in the eyes of a murderous crowd. Blood, in this moment, is simultaneously a mark of death and a sign of belonging. Subsequent uses of blood in the film are more conventionally spectacular but no less ideologically coded. The action sequences of the film's second half - in which Tara battles the Pakistani military - are staged with the maximalist aesthetics of the 1990s Bollywood action genre: blood spurts from wounds, bodies fly through the air, and the hero emerges bloodied but victorious. The hero's blood functions as a sign of his sacrifice for love and nation; the enemy's blood functions as a sign of justified retribution.

The aesthetics of violence in *Gadar* are inseparable from the conventions of the Bollywood *masala* film, a genre that has historically organized its spectacle around the pleasures of action, music, and melodrama.³³ Director Anil Sharma and action choreographer Karim Hajee constructed action sequences that were extravagant even by the standards of the genre; the hand-pump sequence in particular became a cultural touchstone, widely parodied and celebrated in equal measure.

The question that this aesthetic raises: what does it mean that spectacular violence is pleasurable? Cultural theorists from Walter Benjamin to Roland Barthes have argued that the aestheticization of violence, its transformation into spectacle, operates as a form of political narcosis, displacing real political engagement with vicarious emotional catharsis.³⁴ In the specific context of *Gadar*, the film's aestheticization of anti-Pakistan violence offered Indian audiences in 2001 a fantasy of national triumph that the political and military realities of South Asian geopolitics could not provide.

The film's use of music further amplifies this aesthetic of violence. Songs like "Udja Kale Kawa" and "Main Nikla Gaddi Leke" punctuate the film's violent sequences not as counterpoints but as emotional fuel, transforming violence into the culmination of romance and patriotism. The melodic structure of the Bollywood action film in this way domesticates violence, making it aesthetically consumable and emotionally affirming for mass audiences.

5.5 Violence, Memory, and the Partition Archive

Scholars of Partition history have noted the particular challenge of representing Partition violence in ways that neither sanitize its horror nor sensationalise it into entertainment. *Gadar* arguably fails this test: its opening sequences are horrifying enough to establish the reality of Partition's brutality, but the film's second half converts that horror into the raw material of nationalist entertainment. As Sarah Waheed has argued, the archive of Partition is a "wounded archive", a repository of fragmented, traumatic memories that conventional narrative cinema consistently fails to honour in their full complexity.³⁵

The film's representation of rape and sexual violence during Partition is particularly instructive in this regard. The threat of rape is a recurring motif - Sakina is nearly raped by Hindu-Sikh rioters in the first half, and Muslim women are threatened with sexual violence in the second half, but the film consistently uses the threat of rape as a plot device to motivate male heroism rather than as a serious engagement with gendered violence as a historical phenomenon. Women's trauma is instrumentalized for male narrative action, reproducing the very logic of Partition violence that feminist historians like Urvashi Butalia and Ritu Menon have spent decades critically excavating.³⁶

6. *Gadar*: A Contested Text

Gadar's ideological coherence is deceptive. A closer reading reveals significant internal tensions and contradictions that prevent the film from being dismissed as simply a communalist propaganda piece. The film does show, however briefly, violence perpetrated by Hindu-Sikh mobs against Muslims. Tara Singh himself begins the film as a participant in mob violence against Muslim refugees, a fact that the film subsequently represses rather than resolves. The film also includes a Pakistani Muslim character who assists Tara and Sakina in their escape, disrupting the binary of good Indian/bad Pakistani that the film otherwise constructs.

Moreover, the film's romance plot—a Sikh man falling in love with a Muslim woman and defending her right to choose her own life—carries within it a potentially progressive message about inter-communal love and human solidarity that cuts against its more nationalistic impulses. Several audience members interviewed by scholars noted the film's implicit critique of religious fundamentalism on both sides of the border.³⁷

These internal divisions suggest that *Gadar* is a contested text, one that cannot be reduced to a single ideological message but must be read as a site of negotiation between competing social meanings: love and hatred, tolerance and bigotry, historical memory and nationalist myth.

7. Conclusion: Understanding Indian Society through the Lens of Cinema

The study of *Gadar: Ek Prem Katha* reveals cinema as an indispensable instrument for understanding the internal social architecture of Indian society. The film is a lingering cultural artefact that defies classification in the official archives of Indian independence. What the film makes legible through its violence, its star system, its communal anxieties, and its aesthetic choices is a portrait of a society still wrestling, more than eighty years after Partition, with the unresolved traumas of that catastrophic rupture. Several conclusions can be drawn from this analysis:

First, popular Hindi cinema is not mere entertainment; it is a form of public history-making that shapes how millions of Indians understand the past. *Gadar's* version of 1947 has, for large sections of the Indian populace, become more emotionally real than the academic histories written by professional historians. This places a profound responsibility on filmmakers and a profound analytical imperative on scholars. *Second*, the violence in *Gadar* maps the fault lines of Indian society with unsettling precision. The film's anti-Pakistan, anti-Muslim undertones are not aberrations but symptoms of a nationalism that has been systematically constructed through cultural production over decades. To study the film's violence is to study the conditions of possibility for real-world communal violence. *Third*, the Bollywood star system—epitomized by Sunny Deol's hyper-masculine, nationalistic persona functions as an ideological apparatus that normalizes certain forms of violence (patriotic, retributive, male) while delegitimizing others. The social consequences of this normalization, particularly in the context of India's communal politics, demand continued critical scrutiny. *Fourth*, the aesthetics of violence in *Gadar* the language of blood, the spectacle of the male body, the use of melodic violence reveals the deep entanglement of pleasure and politics in popular cinema. As Sontag warned, the aestheticization of violence does not neutralize it; it amplifies its social impact by embedding it within the structure of desire.

Finally, and most broadly, the study of *Gadar* confirms what film theorists from Ferro to Rosenstone have consistently argued: that cinema is one of the most powerful archives of social experience available to historians and social scientists. To understand Indian society, its caste hierarchies, communal wounds, gender politics, class aspirations, and nationalist fantasies, one must engage seriously with the films it makes, the stars it celebrates, and the violence it finds pleasurable. As Bhaskar Sarkar wrote,

"Partition cannot be isolated from larger historical processes."³⁸ And neither can *Gadar*. It is a film of its time, a film of its nation, and a film for all its ideological contradictions that tells us more about who India is than many official histories dare to.

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Multidimensional Social Exclusion among Dalits in Nepal

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Abstract

Constitutional guarantees of equality and social justice have not eliminated caste-based discrimination against Dalits in Nepal. This study examines the level and nature of social exclusion among Dalits in Nepal. It integrates data from the National Population and Housing Census 2021: Dalit Statistical Report and the Nepal Living Standards Survey IV (2022/23). Similarly, it employed the International Labour Organization (ILO) report on Dalits and Labour, and the Nepal Country Inequality Report 2025. The study uses descriptive analysis of national-level secondary data broadly and the research is guided by social exclusion and capability theories to explore comparative level of exclusion. Dalits continue to face significant social and economic disadvantages and exclusion in Nepal in compared with non-Dalit people and the national average. They have low literacy and less secure employment because of caste discrimination and social exclusion which is practicing for decades entire the society. They also face poorer housing conditions and lower property ownership in general and particularly among women and differently among them between Hill Dalits and Tarai Dalits. Their opportunities for education and employment-related migration are also more limited due to economic hardship and social exclusion, which is practiced historically has taken a normal behaviour. The findings suggest that Dalit exclusion in Nepal is shaped by broader structural inequality associated with social and political aspects rather than economic deprivation and poverty alone reflected in statistics. The analysis emphasizes the need for a coordinated policy between the federal and local governments. Meaningful social inclusion mainly for Nepal's Dalits can only be reflected through better access to education, employment, and housing without social distance. Making constitutional provisions practical and accessible mainly for underprivileged social groups the empowerment is a primary task with a focus to marginalized groups within the Dalit population, which is a matter of debate regarding inclusion in the present context.

Keywords

Dalit, Social exclusion, Caste inequality, Multidimensional deprivation, Nepal.

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Multidimensional Social Exclusion among Dalits in Nepal

1. Introduction

Nepal is a socially and culturally diverse country with many caste and ethnic groups and existing inequalities arising from its diversity. Social inequality remains a major challenge even after the restoration of democracy in 1990s, and different constitutional and legal provisions have been adopted by the government since the 1950s after dissolved the 104 years Rana's rule. Nepali society is fundamentally caste-based with social and cultural hierarchy and exclusion primarily reflected in caste and gender. Caste continues to shape people's access to education, employment, land, housing, political participation, and public services unequally in Nepal. This inequality has been practiced historically because it is deeply rooted and reflected in various forms of social institutions such as religion, family, kinship and community organization. Therefore, Dalits have continued to experience multiple forms of disadvantage and exclusion for decades. These inequalities affect their living conditions and self-esteem in the society and limit opportunities for social and economic mobility and ownership.

The present Constitution of Nepal (2015) guarantees equality for all people before the law and prohibits caste-based discrimination and untouchability. It is important to do need for each democratic state to reduce caste based inequality but the situation is different and showing exclusion at different levels. Several policies and programmes have also been introduced mainly after 2005 through interim constitution to improve the social and economic conditions of Dalit communities. However, evidences show that legal protection alone does not removed deeply rooted structural inequalities without social transformation and proper inclusion in social and cultural sphere. Many Dalits still face barriers to take education, involvement in employment, securing land ownership, and participation in public institutions including politics. It means society is not yet prepared to accept Dalit people as usual in social practices. These challenges show that formal equality does not always result in equal outcomes even when legal provisions are in place which is reflected in fact and figures (NGO Federation of Nepal, 2025). Therefore, social exclusion provides an important framework for understanding caste-based inequalities and discrimination historically rooted in society. It is the process of structural discrimination through which individuals or groups are not permitted to participate fully in economic, social, political, and cultural life.

Social exclusion is a broader and multidimensional social process rather than simply poverty and economically weak conditions because it includes unequal access to opportunities, institutions, and social relationships (Silver, 1994). Social exclusion and life chances or a better and safe life are interconnected each other. Limited access to education, health services, decent work, and political representation resulting from social exclusion often occur together and reinforce disadvantage across generations (Sen, 2000). Studies have shown that Dalits in Nepal continue to experience discrimination in the labour market, politics and social and cultural participation. It is reflected in their concentration in traditional and low-paid occupations and social distance in different forms. Many Dalits have limited access to productive resources such as land and credit due to caste discriminations. Employment opportunities are often restricted by social norms and caste-based discrimination rather than individual skills or education in a caste-based society (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2005). Recent evidence also suggests that inequality in Nepal is multidimensional and historically rooted. Educational disadvantage, poor housing, unequal access to public services, labour insecurity, migration, and weak political representation are closely connected with Dalits and their lives need to be explored to examine nature and magnitudes of social exclusion. These disadvantages often overlap and reinforce one another to create a pattern of exclusion for Dalits in Nepal (NGO Federation of Nepal, 2025).

Many studies on Dalit issues in Nepal have focused mainly on legal provisions or a single dimension of inequality, such as education or political participation. However, fewer studies have examined Dalit social exclusion from a multidimensional perspective (Adhikari & Gellner, 2023; Nepali, 2024). This study addresses that gap by integrating evidence from four authentic sources in the context of Nepal. The National Population and Housing Census 2021, mainly based on the Dalit Statistical Report, provides a primary source of empirical evidence about Dalit exclusion. Similarly, the Nepal Living Standards Survey IV (2022/23) provides a national socio-economic context which make it possible to intersect data at national level. The ILO Report on Dalit and Labour in Nepal explains labour market discrimination and occupational exclusion which is persisted historically in Nepal. The Nepal Country Inequality Report 2025 similarly, provide a broader perspective on structural and multidimensional inequality, which is significant for examining the social dimension of Dalits. These sources in an integrative form provide a comprehensive understanding of Dalit exclusion in contemporary Nepal at national level.

The study has two main objectives in exploring Dalit exclusion. First, it examines the demographic, educational, economic, housing, health, migration, and political conditions of Dalits through current official national

data. Second, it analyses how different forms of disadvantage are associated and contribute to multidimensional social exclusion among Dalits. The findings of this analysis contribute to the literature in different ways for understanding Dalit exclusion and inequality. First, the study brings together multiple official sources and discussed facts beyond descriptive statistics. Secondly, it provides recent evidence that can support policy discussions on reducing caste-based inequality, which has been practiced for decades, and promoting inclusive development as per the current constitution of Nepal.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Social Exclusion: A Concept of Multidimensional Perspective

Social exclusion refers to unequal access to opportunities and resources for some people or groups due to social, cultural and political injustice and discrimination. It limits their participation in major social, economic, and political institutions in the community, which ultimately make them exclude from main stream development. It is not only restricted to poverty or low income among them. It also includes and promotes unequal access to education, employment, political participation, and social recognition. Therefore, people may experience social exclusion even when they are not considered or classified as poor (Silver, 1994). Social exclusion is a dynamic process depending on multidimensional phenomenon. It develops through unequal social relationships and institutional barriers over a long period of time. The situation is associated with capability and development. People who cannot access education, healthcare, employment and political participation due to any causes and context have fewer capabilities to achieve for a decent standard of living. Therefore, social exclusion represents a loss of both opportunities, a self-dignified life and human freedom (Sen, 2000). Studies also emphasize that different forms of exclusion are closely connected with poverty and exclusion. Poor education often limits employment opportunities and chances of a secure social life. Similarly, limited employment reduces income and asset ownership is also reflected in poverty. Material deprivation then affects health, housing, and social participation. It reflects the interconnected nature of social exclusion. These disadvantages reinforce each other and continue across generations for promoting poverty and exclusion. Therefore, social exclusion should be analyzed as a multidimensional process with its diverse contexts (Levitas *et al.*, 2007).

This perspective is also reflected under different forms of data provided in the Nepal Country Inequality Report 2025. The report explains that inequality in Nepal is shaped by the interaction of caste, gender, ethnicity, geography, disability, age, and economic status in an integrated form. The report therefore recommends analyzing inequality through multiple dimensions and how they intersect with each other which is significant for

inclusion study. The multidimensional approach for an inclusion study is particularly useful for understanding the situation of Dalits in Nepal.

2.2 Dalits and Caste-Based Social Exclusion in Nepal

The caste system has been shaped by the discriminatory social relations in Nepal for centuries. However, caste discrimination has been legally prohibited in Nepal after the implementation of legal code of 1993, which reshaped the Muluki Ain of 1910 BS (1854 AD) introduced by Jung Bahadur Rana. Historical exclusion is associated with Dalit and non-Dalit relations which has restricted their access to education, occupations, public institutions and decision-making processes. These disadvantages have accumulated and been reflected over generations and continue to affect social mobility (ILO, 2005). National data provided by mainly by the census report show that caste inequality exists in employment and other areas of social life and it making an important issue in sociological study. The Nepal Country Inequality Report 2025 indicates disparities in education, health, housing, wealth, migration, and political representation at a significant level among different social groups. These inequalities are closely associated with exclusion and caste remains an important factor influencing life opportunities for excluded social groups. This study explains census data with national living standards conditions and labour, and inequality evidence to provide a broader sociological understanding of Dalit exclusion.

Education is a key factor in shaping social conditions and social mobility and reducing inequality among people. It helps develop people's knowledge, skills, and opportunities which support to employment and empowerment. However, access to education is not equally distributed across social groups. Inadequate household income and associated caste discrimination have reduced educational opportunities for many Dalit children and continue into higher education (Bennett, 2005). Therefore, educational exclusion also leads to other forms of social exclusion (Silver, 1994). The Nepal Country Inequality Report 2025 identifies education as one of the major dimensions of inequality in Nepal. The report shows that access to education differs by caste, gender, geography, and economic status in Nepal. These differences can affect later access to employment, income, and public services among socially excluded groups. The National Population and Housing Census report 2021 provides recent data on literacy, educational attainment, and school participation among Dalit communities, which help to identify the nature of exclusion. These data provide a detailed examination of educational disparities across different Dalit groups.

2.3 Labour Market Exclusion among Dalits in Nepal

Employment is an important source of income, freedom, social mobility, and economic security, which work in an integrated form for a decent life. However, labour markets do not always provide equal opportunities for all

social groups due to exclusion that has been historically rooted for decades. In Nepal, caste has historically influenced occupational opportunities and working conditions and is also reflection in exclusion (ILO, 2005). Many Dalit communities have traditionally depended on hereditary or artisan occupations with low respect and income. These occupations were often associated with low income, limited social status, and restricted opportunities for occupational mobility in the current market scenario. Dalits so called lower-caste often face unequal access to formal employment, lower wages, insecure jobs, and limited opportunities for a secure and dignified life. Occupational inequality and hierarchies with restrictions also affect other dimensions of human well-being. Limited access to secure employment reduces household income and savings may affect to their education health. Labour-market exclusion due to the capability deficiencies reinforces other forms of social exclusion and contributes to inter-generational disadvantage (Sen, 2000).

2.4 Health, Disability and Capability Deprivation

Health is an important dimension of human well-being which is associated to quality of life. Good health improves people's ability to study, work, and participate in society to make a secure life for generations. Poor health, disability and limited access to healthcare and social protection reduce individual capabilities and increase the risk of long-term social exclusion and inter-generational poverty (Sen, 2000). Health inequality is closely related to social and economic welfare. If people with limited education, poor housing, unstable employment, and low income often experience poorer health outcomes than others which is the main issues of exclusion. These disadvantages are interconnected and reinforce one another over time for exclusion (Marmot, 2005). The Nepal Country Inequality Report 2025 identifies health inequality as a major development challenge for development and prosperity. The report shows that access to healthcare and health outcomes differ across caste, gender, geography, disability, and economic status which is significant in sociological research. These inequalities reduce equal opportunities and contribute to wider social exclusion among the disadvantaged social groups. Similarly, Dalit statistics provided by the National Population and Housing Census 2021 are related to disability and selected health-related indicators among Dalit communities. These data provide a prospect to examine health disparities using recent national evidence among social groups.

2.5 Political Representation and Institutional Exclusion

Political participation is an important indicator of social inclusion based on equal citizenship, decision making and democratic participation. Equal representation in public institutions allows different social groups to influence policies and decision-making for their empowerment and development. However, facts show that political equality cannot be measured

only by voting rights and policy-level reform. It also depends on representation in government institutions, public administration, and leadership positions through access from the local to the central level (Young, 2000). Dalits have historically experienced limited representation in public institutions such as politics, bureaucracy and public institutions in Nepal. Constitutional reforms and inclusion policies have increased political participation since 2005. However, inequalities remain in public employment and decision-making bodies. These inequalities limit the ability of marginalized communities to influence policies and decisions that affect their lives (NGO Federation of Nepal, 2025). The Nepal Country Inequality Report 2025 also shows that institutional inequality continues to affect different social groups across several sectors. The report further expose disparities in political representation, civil service employment, and access to public institutions. These patterns indicate that legal reforms have not fully support for inclusion due to structural barriers which is persisted for centuries. Social groups with inadequate representation often have less influence over public investment, education, employment policies, and social protection programmes (Fraser, 2008). Political inclusion should therefore be understood together with education, employment, health, and economic opportunities based on diverse social and cultural characteristics of social groups.

Studies on this issues have made important contributions to understanding caste-based inequality and exclusion in Nepal. Researches have examined education, labour discrimination, poverty, housing, migration, health, and political participation based on caste and ethnic groups. These studies provide valuable evidence on specific dimensions of Dalit exclusion in Nepal (Bennett, 2005; ILO, 2005). However, many studies focus on a single dimension of inequality beyond the social and cultural aspects of society. This study addresses these gaps by integrating multiple official data sources within a multidimensional framework of social exclusion. The Dalit-related statistical report based on participation education, access, opportunities and ownership is provided by the National Population and Housing Census 2021 and the Nepal Living Standards Survey IV (2022/23). Further supportive data were taken from the ILO report and the Nepal Country Inequality Report 2025 to explore a broader understanding of structural inequality to measure the exclusion of Dalits. This integrated effort provides a more comprehensive understanding of Dalit exclusion in contemporary Nepal.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 National Population Structure of Dalits

Table-1 presents the population aged 10 years and above by caste group and sex based on the 2021 census to explore the conditions and nature of Dalits. It shows the proportion of Dalits in comparison with the national population. Similarly, the gender distribution of Dalit and non-Dalit populations is also

examined. It provides the demographic context for comparing Dalit and non-Dalit populations to make the exclusion analysis comprehensive.

Table-1: Population Aged 10 Years and Above by Caste Group and Sex

Caste Group	Population (10+ years)	Total (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
Nepal	23,958,868	100.0	48.1	51.9
Total Dalit	3,052,622	12.7	47.0	53.0
Non-Dalit	20,906,246	87.3	48.2	51.8

Source: National Statistics Office (NSO), *Dalit Statistical Report, National Population and Housing Census 2021*.

Dalits represent 12.7% of Nepal's population aged ten years and above, which is a large national population group after the Chhetri remains with low development. The educational and economic conditions of the social groups therefore have direct importance for national development which is low in Dalit community. The data show that women form 53.0% and men form 47.0% of the Dalit population aged ten years and above at the national level. The female share was slightly higher among Dalits than in the national population (51.9%). This pattern may be reflected by male migration and absence in households, which were an increasing trend in Nepal among all social groups. However, the Census table does not provide the cause of migration among social group. The result by census data is projected only to examine a demographic pattern rather than a relationship. The size of the Dalit population also does not show that caste inequality is a major social issue directly as illustrated in the report which is incomplete and not relational analysis. However, disadvantage and marginalization affect more than one-tenth of Nepal's population which need to be measured with multidimensional indicators of development.

3.2 Literacy Inequality

Literacy is a key indicator of social inclusion an important factor in having access to opportunities. Table-2 compares literacy rates between Dalits and non-Dalits by sex. It explains the gender gap in literacy across the social groups, which helps to examine exclusion between non-Dalits and Dalits at the national level.

Table-2: National Literacy Rates by Caste Group and Sex

Group	Overall Literacy (%)	Male Literacy (%)	Female Literacy (%)	Gender Gap (%)
Nepal	76.2	83.6	69.4	14.2
Total Dalit	67.4	74.1	61.2	12.9
Non-Dalit	77.6	84.9	70.6	14.3

Note: The literacy rate covers the population aged five years and above. The gender gap was calculated by subtracting female literacy from male literacy.

Source: National Statistics Office, *Dalit Statistical Report 2021*.

The national literacy rate in Nepal was 76.2% in the 2021 census which is in improving trend. The literacy rate among Dalits was 67.4%, which was lower than the national average and remains in improving trend compared to previous census report. However, Dalit literacy has increased compared with previous censuses. The data shows that Dalit literacy in Nepal was therefore 8.8 percentage points below the national average. The difference between Dalits and non-Dalits was wider even in the present context after applying inclusive educational policy since 2005. Non-Dalit literacy was 77.6% at the same time above, which was 10.2 percentage points above the Dalit national rate, it might be affected by caste relations and centuries social exclusion.

A gender gap was also present in the current data between Dalits and non-Dalits at the national level. Dalit male literacy was 74.1%, while Dalit female literacy was 61.2% at the same time. It shows that 12.9 percentage difference among Dalits. Dalit women faced a double disadvantage by being women and Dalit women, which supports exclusion among Dalit women. Their literacy rate was 8.2 percentage points below the national female literacy rate. It was also 9.4 percentage points below the literacy rate of non-Dalit women, which shows that the impact of social exclusion has persisted for decades in caste-based Nepalese society. These results show that the expansion of education has not produced equal outcomes between social groups. National data show that Dalits remain behind the national population which indicated structural problem for it. Similarly, Dalit women remain further behind Dalit men, which shows the gender gap persists in all groups. Literacy is a basic capability for comprehensive well-being and social inclusion for each people. It supports access to information, public services, employment, and political participation which can make minimized gender and caste gap. Lower literacy therefore limits opportunities in several areas of life due to the absence of capability (Sen, 2000). The finding also shows that social exclusion is not limited to income alone. It proves that unequal educational access can reduce participation in economic and institutional life (Silver, 1994). The data in Table 6 show that access to education affects economic activities and household assets.

3.3 Educational Attainment and Exclusion

Educational attainment reflects access to higher levels of education and its future impact on access to opportunities for sustain better life. Table-3 compares the highest level of education completed by literate Dalit and non-Dalit populations on next page. Data contained in this table show that educational inequality increases at higher levels between Dalits and non-Dalits, which indicates unequal access to higher education. Among literate Dalits, 44.7% had completed only basic education, it shows excluded conditions by caste relations compel to drop out, whereas the national figure of dropout rate is 33.1%. Dalits were therefore more concentrated at the basic

level even after special provision for the targeted group through the initiations of national educational policy. The difference between the Dalit and national-level data was 11.6 percentage, which indicates that Dalit education is low as compared with the national trend. The proportion completing secondary education was 51.3% among Dalits, whereas the national rate was 57.6%. The data shows that the Dalits were 6.3 percentage below the national level. The largest difference appeared in higher education between Dalits and non-Dalits in the Dalit's ratio compared with national data. The data shows that only 1.6% of literate Dalits had completed a bachelor's degree, whereas the national proportion was 6.7%. The non-Dalit higher education rate was 7.4% at the same time which was more than four times the Dalit rate in higher education.

Table-3: Educational Level Completed by the Literate Population Aged Five Years and Above

Group	Below SEE (%)	SEE to Higher Secondary (%)	Bachelor's and Above (%)	Technical/ Other(%)
Nepal	33.1	57.6	6.7	2.6
Total Dalit	44.7	51.3	1.6	2.5
Non-Dalit	31.6	58.5	7.4	2.6

Source: National Statistics Office, *Dalit Statistical Report 2021*.

This gap in education level and access has important social effects on the further comprehensive development of the marginalized social groups. Higher education mainly provides access to professional work, administration, teaching and public institutions, which has ultimately positive impact on livings. Similarly, a low higher level of access to higher education attainment therefore reduces access to occupations with higher income, security, power and authority. Dalit students may enter education and face greater difficulty in continuing to higher levels, mainly due to poverty and exclusion, which is not elaborated in the respective reports in detail. The census does not explain the causes of dropout in comparison between the social groups. Household income, social discrimination, distance, and family responsibilities require separate study while comparing educational data. capability theory explains lower levels of educational restrict the potential of lives and careers related to individuals (Sen, 2000). Data show that school exclusion remains higher among Dalits than the national average is significant. Among the population aged 5-25 years, 13.1% of Dalits had never attended school compared with 8.1% nationally and 7.1% among non-Dalits. These data need to be considered while examining data from an exclusion perspective. These findings indicate that Dalit children and young people continue to face greater barriers to accessing formal education, which are associated to social exclusion that has persisted historically in Nepal.

3.4 Employment and Economic Activity

Employment, the nature of work and payment and participation in work are key indicators of economic participation, social inclusion and livelihood sustainability. Table-4 compares economic activity and employment status between Dalit and non-Dalit populations aged 10 years and above, which is shaped by which is shaped by structural and historical detriments of caste based inequality.

Table-4: Employment and Economic Activity among the Population Aged Ten Years and Above

Group	Economically Active (%)	Usually Active (%)	Usually Employed (%)	Usually Unemployed (%)
Nepal	34.3	29.6	93.0	7.0
Total Dalit	33.5	32.4	92.0	8.0
Non-Dalit	34.4	29.2	93.2	6.8

Note: Usually employed and usually unemployed are shares of the usually active population.

Source: National Statistics Office, *Dalit Statistical Report 2021*.

The above table shows that 92.0% of Dalits were employed compared with the national proportion of 93.0%. Dalit unemployment was 8.0% compared with the national unemployment rate of 7.0%, while the non-Dalit unemployment rate was 6.8% at the same time. The data show a modest gap between Dalits and non-Dalits in the respective indicator. However, employment status alone does not show employment quality and access to the nature of work and social support. The proportion classified as usually inactive was 32.4% among Dalits compared to the national figure of 29.6%, which is important for the impact of both categories on their social life. This was a difference of 2.8 percentage between them which was not significant size, but shows a nature of trend. Labour related research at different level and at different time has found that Dalits faced occupational segregation, limited mobility, and concentration in informal work (International Labour Organization, 2005). The present census data are not able to directly measure discrimination and exclusion between Dalits and non-Dalits. However, they show that Dalits remain disadvantaged in many sectors including social and economic, that lead to their condition of unemployment and exclusion

3.5 Household Assets and Digital Access

Household assets and digital access reflect the living standards of people, and it make possible to enhance access in further life chances and overall development. They provide access to information and technology, which support individual's livelihood and freedom. Table-5 compares the availability of selected household assets and facilities among Hill Dalits, Tarai Dalist, and non-Dalits.

Table-5: Selected Household Assets and Facilities

Household Asset/Facility	National (%)	Hill Dalit (%)	Tarai Dalit (%)	Other House-holds (%)
Television	49.4	36.7	29.8	51.7
Ordinary mobile phone	73.2	73.5	66.8	73.5
Smartphone	73.0	63.8	52.4	74.9
Computer or laptop	15.0	5.6	2.5	16.5
Internet access	37.8	27.0	12.4	40.1
Refrigerator	23.7	12.1	3.5	25.8
Electric fan	53.1	34.2	66.1	54.4

Source: National Statistics Office, *Dalit Statistical Report 2021*.

The data show that large differences appear in modern household assets between Dalits located in different areas at the national level. Only 5.6% of Hill Dalit households and 2.5% of Tarai Dalit households had a computer or laptop compared with the national rate of 15.0%. It further shows disparities between Dalits from the Hill and Tarai. Similarly, internet access was also unequal between intra and inter-groups, which is significant in sociological studies. It was available to 27.0% of Hill Dalit households and 12.4% of Tarai Dalit households. In comparison, the national rate was 37.8%, while the non-Dalit internet rate was 40.1%. This was more than three times the rate among Tarai Dalit households which shows caste based exclusion is in intensive level in Tarai. Similarly, smartphone ownership followed the same unequal pattern between them. The national rate was 73.0%, which was higher than the rates among Hill and Tarai Dalits. It was 63.8% among Hill Dalit households and 52.4% among Tarai Dalit households.

These differences show a clear digital divide, which is growing in the present context between social groups. Digital access is important in the present context because it is able to sharply affects education, access on employment, banking, communication, and government services. Therefore, it is an important indicator for understanding social exclusion and poverty. Limited access may therefore reproduce existing social inequality among different social group and increase the chances of continuing exclusion. Similarly, refrigerator ownership also showed a large material gap which indicate a kind of poverty. The national rate was 23.7% with compared with the rate of 12.1% among Hill Dalit and only 3.5% among Tarai Dalits, which shows that social disparities may be reflected in the economic sector. However, these assets are not perfect measures of intensive poverty. Sociologically, it shows major differences in purchasing power, infrastructure, and living standards, which are associated with the nature of poverty in society.

3-6 National Pattern of Exclusion

Table-6 documents key national indicators of social and economic exclusion among Dalits in Nepal. It compares Dalit and non-Dalit outcomes across education, employment, property ownership and migration. These indicators show the overall pattern of inequality between Dalits and non-Dalits.

Table-6: Selected National Indicators of Dalit Exclusion

Indicator	Dalit (%)	Non-Dalit(%)	Gap (%)
Literacy	67.4	77.6	– 10.2
Bachelor's degree or above	1.6	7.4	– 5.8
Never attended school (age 5-25)	13.1	7.1	+6.0
Worked six months or more	38.6	41.3	– 2.7
Usually unemployed	8.0	6.8	+1.2
Female property ownership	15.7	25.1	– 9.4
Migration for education or training	4.2	8.3	– 4.1

Source: National Statistics Office, *Dalit Statistical Report 2021*.

The combined data in above table show a consistent pattern of multi-dimensional disadvantage and exclusion between Dalits and non-Dalits. Dalits continue to lag behind non-Dalits across several key indicators which shows exclusion in Dalits. The largest gaps are seen in education, employment continuity, property ownership, migration opportunities and literacy at the national level. Higher education shows a major gap between Dalits and non-Dalits which contribute to enlarge their poverty status. The non-Dalit rate of completing a bachelor's degree or above was more than four times the Dalit rate. It shows a major example of social exclusion. The data show that Dalits aged 5-25 years were almost twice as likely as non-Dalits to have never attended school. This reflects unequal access to education at the national level or more widely. These educational inequalities influence employment and life-sustaining opportunities which are reflected in employment, income and other social indicators.

Migration patterns also expose unequal access to opportunities between social groups, which is associated with social mobility and personal development. Dalits were less likely to migrate for education, employment, or business compared with the pattern of non-Dalits. It may be associated with poverty and social exclusion. Their migration was more strongly connected with marriage rather than associated with opportunities and better livelihoods. Similarly, gender inequality operates across these dimensions between the two groups. The data show that Dalit women had

lower literacy than Dalit men. This reflects both caste and gender inequalities that affect Dalit women. This is also reflected in the lower rates of female ownership of houses and land among Dalit households. The consistency of the differences with facts at the national level across several indicators provides strong evidence of structural and multidimensional inequality between Dalits and non-Dalits in Nepal.

3.7 Institutional and Political Exclusion

Representation in public institutions enables social groups to influence national policy, resource allocation, and administrative decisions for their own communities which shows inclusion-exclusion variations. It is an important indicator of social inclusion that lead to equal participation. The Nepal Country Inequality Report shows that Dalits remain under-represented with compared to non-Dalits in many sectors including in the civil service and in the leadership bodies of major political parties.

Table-7: Dalit Representation in the Civil Service and Major Political Parties

Institution/ Political Party	Total Members	Dalit Members	Dalit Representation (%)
National population	—	—	13.00
Nepal civil service	—	—	1.40
Nepali Congress Central Committee	148	11	7.43
CPN (UML) Central Committee	301	20	6.64
CPN (Maoist Centre) Central Committee	236	23	9.74
CPN (Unified Socialist) Central Committee	335	17	5.07
Rastriya Swatantra Party Central Committee	40	3	7.50
Janata Samajwadi Party Nepal Central Committee	446	19	4.26
Democratic Samajwadi Party Central Committee	215	10	4.65

Note: The national population share of 13% is the scale used in the Country Inequality Report. Party-related figures represent central committee membership. It is not represented as elected parliamentary representation.

Source: NGO Federation of Nepal, *Nepal Country Inequality Report 2025*.

Data contained in the above table show that Dalits remain severely underrepresented in public institutions and political leadership. Their share in the civil service and major party committees is far below their proportion of the national population which is a major example of exclusion made

structurally. Similarly, Dalit representation remains remarkably below their population size across state administration and political-party leadership. This raises questions about the commitment to social inclusion at the national political level. The data show that the civil-service gap is particularly large, which reflects the continued exclusion of Dalits from state institutions historically. Dalit constitutes about 13% of the population and were able to hold only 1.4% of positions which is reflect acute level of exclusion. Similarly, representation in party central committees ranged from 4.26% to 9.74% which was also negligible. It therefore remains below the population size in every party listed which means that political representation of Dalits continues to be limited by caste discrimination. Institutional exclusion has persisted for decades in Nepal. It may weaken the capacity of Dalit communities to influence policies on education, employment and social protection (Sen, 2000; Silver, 1994).

4. Discussion

The national-level data show that Dalit exclusion in Nepal is multidimensional, reflected in many forms, varies within groups, and it affects many aspects of life. The differences are significantly reflected in education, employment, ownership, migration and digital access. These disadvantages are associated with each other and make them more disadvantaged and excluded. The findings support the multidimensional concept of social exclusion which is persisted historically, based on data associated with Dalits. The facts show that social exclusion discussed as by Silver is broader than income poverty, compared with Dalits of Nepal. People may experience disadvantages in several areas at the same time of exclusion (Silver, 1994). The analysis show that educational disadvantage remains a major dimension of Dalit exclusion in Nepal. Lower literacy, limited higher educational attainment, and higher rates of school exclusion and dropout among Dalits indicate that inequalities impact entry and continued into the labour market and economic empowerment. This is significant because it limits employment opportunities and long-term social inclusion with social ownership. Educational disadvantage therefore is therefore reflected in employment and material conditions among Dalits. They were also less represented in female property ownership, access on digital facilities, and household enterprises, which is associated to the structural inequality. It indicates that exclusion is reproduced across institutions from social inequality and structural unjust. This finding is consistent with Silver's argument that exclusion weakens social participation and capability. The Dalit population is comparatively found to have less access to social and material resources.

Sen argues that development is about people's freedom to make meaningful life choices (Sen, 2000). Social capital such as literacy and higher education and knowledge expand people's ability to access information,

employment, and decision-making. The lower educational position of Dalits therefore represents a reduction in substantive freedom which is signifies debates in current development. Low educational attainment and digital access remain important dimensions of Dalit exclusion and poverty. These inequalities in different sectors make it difficult to access better employment, information, and social mobility. It reinforces existing structural disadvantages further.

Dalits continue to face disadvantages in labour market participation and associated low-level income in Nepal. Their employment mainly concentrated in informal sectors is generally less stable, increasing economic vulnerability and limiting long-term opportunities. The census is unable to directly measure job types and quality of work, contracts and conditions, wages and discrimination associated with Dalits and non-Dalits. Therefore, employment status given by the census does not fully represent labour market inequality between caste and gender categories. The data therefore suggest that the main problem is access to stable, formal and rewarded work. The findings show that caste-based exclusion also exists directly and indirectly in public institutions like politics and bureaucracy directly and indirectly in Nepal. It is proved by the data associated with limited representation in decision-making bodies. It reduces the ability of Dalits to influence policies affecting their communities.

The findings suggest that Dalit exclusion may be reproduced across generations, which is reflected in the present condition of education, income, decision making and resources. It is proved lower parental education can reduce household income and educational support for their children. Similarly, insecure employment limits savings and investment for them sustain life. It may have an impact on ownership and education. Likewise, limited education reduces access to secure employment and access to resources which is significantly translated to Dalit families. The data therefore demand a structural explanation of exclusion and a vicious circle of poverty among Dalit communities.

5. Conclusion

This study shows that Dalit exclusion in Nepal remains multidimensional and reflected across different sectors despite constitutional provisions and policy commitments of inclusion initiated by the government since 1999s. The findings show significant inequalities in comparison with non-Dalits in education, employment, housing, digital access and migration opportunities. These inequalities exist both between Dalits and non-Dalits and within Dalit communities. However, these gaps remain substantial between Dalits and non-Dalits widely. Dalit women face even greater barriers across these areas in compared with Dalit male and the national average. It indicates that these inequalities are interconnected and intersect with each other and it reflected as a form of structural barriers for exclusion. The fact from this analysis supports

the argument that legal equality is not sufficient to achieve substantive social inclusion which is rooted under caste-based inequality in Nepal that has existed for centuries. It suggests that strengthening education, employment, digital inclusion, and access to public services should remain a policy priority for all excluded social groups. Now is an appropriate time, after two decades of implementation of inclusion policies, to assess whether they have improved social inclusion and supported equitable development.

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The Perception of Learners of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) towards Management of Learner Support Services: A Comprehensive Review

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Abstract

This comprehensive review examines learner perceptions of support service management in Open and Distance Learning (ODL) systems across eight critical parameters: Academic Support Services, Administrative Support Services, Technological Infrastructure Support, Psychosocial and Emotional Support, Communication and Feedback Mechanisms, Equity and Inclusivity Support, Financial Support Services, and Continuous Monitoring and Improvement. Through analysis of over 100 research papers, this review identifies significant gaps in current ODL support systems and proposes innovative approaches to enhance learner satisfaction and success rates. The findings reveal that while technological advances have transformed ODL delivery, the human element in learner support remains crucial for student retention and completion. The review concludes with recommendations for developing comprehensive, learner-centered support frameworks that address emerging challenges in digital education environments.

Keywords

Open and distance learning, Learner support services, Student satisfaction, Educational technology, Distance education management.

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The Perception of Learners of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) towards Management of Learner Support Services: A Comprehensive Review

1. Introduction

Open and Distance Learning (ODL) has opened up new ways for people to study without having to be on campus (Mishra, 2023; Commonwealth of Learning, 2025). With online classes, video lectures, printed study materials delivered by post or email, and mobile apps, learners can study from home at their own pace and convenience (Jain, 2023; UNESCO, 2012). This flexibility is especially helpful in India, where many students live in rural or remote areas, juggle jobs or family responsibilities alongside their studies, or cannot afford regular travel to educational centres (Gogoi & Jena, 2020; Lee, 2007).

Over the past two decades, ODL has grown rapidly across Asia, Africa, Europe and North America. In India alone, institutions like the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) serve millions of learners by offering dozens of programmes through regional centres, online portals and study circles (Jain, 2023; IGNOU, 2023). In Africa, ODL provides a vital route to higher education where campus capacity is limited, though challenges in electricity and internet access remain (Olugbara, Letseka & Akintolu, 2022; Musingafi, Mapolisa & Modise, 2024). European universities have developed robust quality assurance and collaborative teaching models via networks such as the European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (Distance Learning Portal, 2020; EADTU, 2013). In North America, institutions continue to innovate with learner support technologies, helping shape best practices worldwide (Lee, 2007; Distance Learning Portal, 2023).

At the heart of successful ODL is a strong system of support services designed to help learners at every step of their journey (Raphael, 1992; Tripathy, 2021). These services fall into eight key areas:

- **Academic support:** clear lesson guidance, tutoring, study resources and feedback.
- **Administrative support:** Easy admission, smooth fee payments, record keeping and exam arrangements.
- **Technological support:** Reliable online platforms, help desks and mobile-friendly tools.
- **Psychosocial and emotional support:** Counselling, peer groups and mental health resources.

- **Communication and feedback:** Timely, two-way contact between students and teachers.
- **Equity and inclusivity:** Special measures for learners with disabilities, different languages or low incomes.
- **Financial support:** Scholarships, loans and budgeting guidance.
- **Continuous monitoring and improvement:** Regular surveys, data analysis and service upgrades (Raphael, 1992; Commonwealth of Learning, 2025).

When these eight areas work well together, learners feel connected, confident and motivated to complete their courses (Rang'ara, 2024; Nsamba, 2021). Without good support, many ODL students struggle with isolation, slow responses to questions, technical glitches or unclear administrative processes-and these issues can lead to wasted effort, frustration and even dropouts (Musingafi, Mapolisa & Modise, 2024; Pitsoane, 2023).

This review brings together insights from more than one hundred peer-reviewed articles, case studies from Asia, Africa, Europe and North America, and major reports from UNESCO, the World Bank and the Commonwealth of Learning, as well as research published in the Indian Journal of Open Learning (Olugbara, Letseka & Akintolu, 2022; World Bank, 2022). By examining learner perceptions of each of the eight support areas, we aim to paint a clear picture of what works well and where improvements are needed. Following this introduction, we explore each support area in detail, highlight gaps in current practices and suggest practical ideas that can make ODL even more effective and inclusive for learners across India and around the world.

2. Literature Review by Parameters

2.1 Academic Support Services

Academic support services constitute the foundation of effective ODL systems, encompassing all activities directly related to facilitating student learning and academic success (Kariuki, 2022; Simpson, 2002; Raphael, 1992). Research from multiple continents consistently demonstrates that learner perceptions of academic support quality significantly influence their overall satisfaction and academic outcomes in distance learning environments (Nsamba, 2021; Mythili, 2023; Jain, 2023).

In the Indian context, the Indian Journal of Open Learning provides extensive documentation of academic support challenges and innovations within the world's largest ODL system. Jain's study of IGNOU Regional Centre Karnal revealed that web-enabled student support services showed positive attitudes among ODL learners during the COVID-19 pandemic (Jain, 2023). The research demonstrated that academic counseling provided

by universities was perceived as conceptual, clear, and knowledgeable, with students expressing comfort with assignment and examination processes (Mythili, 2023; Jain, 2023).

Mohapatra's investigation of learner support services in IGNOU during the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the transition from traditional ODL to online modes, emphasizing the importance of technology-integrated interventions for continuance of teaching-learning processes (IGNOU, 2023). The study revealed that Regional Centres adopted innovative approaches including ICT-enabled tools, web-based technologies, and social media platforms for effective academic support delivery (IGNOU, 2023).

Research in African ODL contexts identifies assessment, course design, and good learning/study skills as three critical academic support factors (Olugbara, Letseka & Akintolu, 2022). Their review revealed that fair and adequate assessment promotes institutional image and motivates students to learn, as they can easily analyze their performance based on internal assessment (Olugbara, Letseka & Akintolu, 2022).

In European settings, the APEC Quality Assurance of Online Learning Toolkit includes specific domains related to staffing profiles and professional development that directly impact academic support quality (Australian Government, 2022). Case studies from Australia and India show that leadership and management actively support the realization of quality online education through strategic plans and performance indicators (Australian Government, 2022).

North American studies find that academic/tutorial support in web-based distance education focuses on facilitating collaborative learning and increasing interactivity between distance students and instructors (Lee, 2007). Canadian institutions such as Thompson Rivers University demonstrate innovative approaches to academic support through flexible online and distance learning programs accessible anywhere, anytime (TRU, 2024).

2.2 Administrative Support Services

Administrative support ensures smooth navigation of enrollment, records, examinations and learner grievances. Effective administrative processes reduce procedural barriers and foster learner confidence.

In India, Tripathy (2021) found that clear pre-admission counseling, streamlined fee payment and timely dispatch of study materials at regional study centres greatly enhanced learner satisfaction. Gogoi and Jena (2020) observed that at KKHSOU, efficient handling of registration, academic records and examination scheduling led to fewer student complaints and improved retention. Conversely, IGNOU learners during COVID-19 reported occasional delays in digital transcript issuance and unclear online fee interfaces, highlighting areas for system refinement (IGNOU, 2023).

African studies reveal that administrative inefficiencies contribute significantly to attrition. Musingafi, Mapolisa and Modise (2024) reported that 80 percent of Zimbabwe Open University students experienced challenges in accessing study centres, receiving materials and obtaining academic records on time. Pitsoane (2023) noted that South African institutions lack robust referral and tracking systems, resulting in students becoming “lost” when transitioning between administrative and academic support functions.

European ODL providers implement comprehensive “one-stop” digital portals integrating enrollment, record access and payment services (EADTU, 2013). The Australian Government (2022) case studies illustrate how aligning administrative staff training with service quality indicators reduces learner wait times and enhances transparency.

In North America, Lee (2007) described how Canadian universities such as Athabasca University offer 24/7 online dashboards for admissions, course registration and grade tracking, significantly reducing administrative friction. Distance Learning Portal (2023) emphasizes the value of multilingual support and live chat functions in resolving queries swiftly.

Despite these innovations, research on the direct impact of administrative support quality on long-term learner outcomes remains limited. Future studies should assess how integrated digital administrative platforms affect retention and examine culturally tailored administrative processes for diverse learner populations.

2.3 Technological Infrastructure Support

Reliable technology platforms and support services are fundamental to ODL delivery. Learners gauge technological support by system uptime, help-desk responsiveness and accessibility across devices.

In India, Jain (2023) reported that IGNOU’s Learning Management System (LMS) achieved high uptime but learners still faced connectivity issues in remote regions. Mythili (2023) found that while web-based tutorials were appreciated, many students lacked sufficient bandwidth for synchronous sessions. Islam (2016) argued for lightweight, mobile-optimized educational resources to bridge digital divides.

Olugbara, Letseka and Akintolu (2022) identified technical support as the strongest predictor of student satisfaction across 84 African studies. However, Musingafi, Mapolisa and Modise (2024) noted inadequate rural internet infrastructure hampered LMS access, calling for offline resource options and mobile data subsidies.

European ODL institutions prioritize robust cloud-based LMS platforms with automatic scaling to prevent service outages (UNESCO, 2005). The UNESCO (2024) report emphasizes open-source technologies to

reduce costs and enhance local customization. EADTU (2013) recommends standardized API integrations to enable seamless tool interoperability.

North American providers lead in AI-driven help-desk chatbots and proactive system monitoring (Letseka *et al.*, 2023). Thompson Rivers University's 24/7 technical support line and extensive FAQ libraries significantly reduce resolution times (TRU, 2024).

Key research gaps include evaluating large-scale offline-first learning designs, assessing the pedagogical impact of emerging technologies such as virtual reality, and developing predictive maintenance models to preempt technical failures.

2.4 Psychosocial and Emotional Support

Distance learners often encounter isolation, stress and motivational challenges. Psychosocial support services address mental health, social engagement and resilience building.

CDE (2024) highlighted that emotional support frameworks, including peer mentoring and virtual clubs, help mitigate isolation in California's distance programmes. Wang *et al.* (2023) found that students participating in online counselling workshops reported reduced anxiety and improved study habits.

In India, IGNOU's student counsellors offered telephonic and email support during the pandemic; while effective, learners recommended more frequent group sessions to foster community (IGNOU, 2023). Gogoi and Jena (2020) noted that Assamese learners valued local language support groups to discuss coursework and personal challenges.

Olugbara, Letseka and Akintolu (2022) emphasized the role of social support in Africa, reporting that peer-led WhatsApp groups provided both academic assistance and emotional camaraderie. Pitsoane (2023) described successful South African initiatives pairing learners with trained alumni mentors for ongoing guidance.

European ODL providers integrate wellness modules into LMS dashboards, offering mindfulness exercises and stress-management resources (UNESCO, 2019). The EADTU (2013) toolkit recommends that institutions embed psychosocial check-ins at key programme milestones to identify at-risk learners.

North American studies (Lee, 2007; Letseka *et al.*, 2023) demonstrate that 24/7 teletherapy lines and mental health webinars significantly improve learner well-being. However, research on culturally responsive psychosocial interventions for international learners remains scant.

Future work should explore AI-driven sentiment analysis for early detection of distress signals in learner communications and assess the

effectiveness of gamified resilience-building platforms in diverse cultural settings.

2.5 Communication and Feedback Mechanisms

Clear, timely bi-directional communication is vital for learner engagement. Feedback quality influences motivation and perceived instructor presence.

JCMR Journal (2023) found that structured discussion forums with instructor facilitation led to deeper engagement than unmoderated threads. Ali and Ahmad (2023) reported that student-instructor interaction accounted for 58 percent of satisfaction variance in Asian ODL cohorts.

In India, web-enabled student support services at IGNOU included dedicated email IDs and WhatsApp groups; learners appreciated prompt responses but sought more synchronous office hours (Jain, 2023). Tripathy (2021) emphasized the importance of multilingual announcements to cater to India's linguistic diversity.

Olugbara, Letseka and Akintolu (2022) highlighted peer-to-peer communication via social media in Africa, which often supplemented formal channels. UNESCO (2005) advises combining synchronous webinars with asynchronous feedback mechanisms to accommodate varied time zones.

European providers use AI-powered chatbots for routine queries while reserving human instructors for complex academic feedback (UNESCO, 2019). The Australian Government (2022) case studies demonstrate that clear response-time SLAs enhance learner trust.

North American institutions such as Athabasca University employ integrated video feedback tools, where instructors record personalized responses; students report higher satisfaction and retention with this approach (Lee, 2007; Distance Learning Portal, 2023).

Research gaps include understanding optimal feedback modalities across cultures and evaluating the effectiveness of emerging technologies like automated formative assessment tools.

2.6 Equity and Inclusivity Support

ODL's promise of democratized education depends on equitable access and inclusive practices.

UNESCO (2025) guidelines mandate universal design principles in ODL content, ensuring accessibility for learners with disabilities. Saxena and Panigrahi (2017) identify assistive technologies-screen readers, subtitles and alternative formats-as crucial enablers.

In India, e-GyanKosh units integrate sign-language videos and regional language modules to address linguistic diversity (e-GyanKosh, 2024). Gogoi and Jena (2020) emphasize community-based learning circles in rural Assam to bridge resource gaps.

African ODL programmes often face digital divide challenges; Letseka *et al.* (2023) recommend device-lending schemes and partnerships with community centres to provide computer access. Mpofu's study in South Africa underscores the need for culturally relevant case studies and materials to enhance learner identification and engagement.

European ODL providers establish quotas and scholarships for underrepresented groups, tracking demographic data to monitor equity outcomes (EADTU, 2013). The UNESCO (2019) Global Education Monitoring Report advocates for disaggregated data collection to inform targeted interventions.

North American institutions implement financial aid workshops and peer-navigator programmes for first-generation and Indigenous learners, significantly improving retention (Lee, 2007; US Government, 2023).

Research should explore intersectional approaches to equity, examining how socioeconomic status, gender, disability and location jointly affect ODL experiences, and test scalable community-engagement models for resource-scarce environments.

2.7 Financial Support Services

Cost considerations influence access, persistence and completion in ODL programmes.

World Bank (2022) reports that distance learning reduces costs related to accommodation and travel, making higher education more accessible. However, hidden expenses-internet data, devices and printing-can create financial stress (SCDL, 2022).

In India, flexible installment plans and interest-free loans offered by IGNOU lowered dropout rates among working learners (Jain, 2023). Khan Academy (2025) financial literacy modules help learners budget effectively for additional ODL expenses.

African ODL students often depend on microfinance or employer sponsorship; Olugbara, Letseka and Akintolu (2022) recommend exploring income-share agreements and regional scholarship funds to expand access. Musingafi, Mapolisa and Modise (2024) found that 80 percent of Zimbabwean learners cited financial constraints as a primary barrier.

European providers use tiered fee structures and early-payment discounts, while offering targeted grants for low-income learners (UNESCO, 2018). The Commonwealth of Learning (2025) promotes employer partnerships to subsidize staff training through ODL.

North American institutions administer endowed scholarships and alumni-funded emergency grants, which research shows improve completion rates among economically disadvantaged students (Lee, 2007; Distance Learning Portal, 2023).

Further research is needed on innovative funding models-such as income-share agreements and blockchain-based micro-scholarships-and on the impact of integrated financial counselling services on learner persistence.

2.8 Continuous Monitoring and Improvement

Ongoing quality assurance ensures that support services evolve to meet learner needs and technological shifts.

Commonwealth of Learning (2025) outlines a cyclical process of data collection, stakeholder feedback, benchmarking and action planning. Nsamba (2021) demonstrates that learner feedback loops improve support effectiveness when formalized and communicated transparently.

In India, IGNOU's annual learner satisfaction surveys inform strategic enhancements to administrative workflows and academic support structures (IGNOU, 2023). SCDL (2021) uses dashboard analytics to monitor help-desk ticket resolution times and material dispatch metrics.

African institutions increasingly adopt learning analytics to identify at-risk learners; Muljana and Luo (2019) found that predictive models reduced dropout rates by 15 percent when linked to targeted interventions. Pitsoane (2023) argues for integrating psychosocial indicators into early-warning systems to address holistic learner needs.

European quality assurance frameworks, such as EQAVET adapted for online contexts, standardize monitoring across member institutions (EADTU, 2013). UNESCO (2019) recommends external accreditation reviews every five years to maintain international standards.

North American ODL providers leverage AI for real-time system health monitoring and automated feedback classification, enabling rapid iterative improvements (Letseka *et al.*, 2023).

Research should investigate cost-benefit analyses of continuous improvement investments, the role of cross-institutional benchmarking consortia, and participatory co-design approaches involving learners in service enhancement.

3. Research Gaps

Despite considerable advances, several gaps warrant further investigation:

- Few models holistically link academic, administrative, technological and psychosocial support dimensions. A unified theory could guide cohesive service design (Simpson, 2004; Nsamba, 2021).
- Comparative studies are needed to understand how cultural contexts influence support preferences and outcomes, particularly in multilingual and low-resource settings (Gogoi & Jena, 2020; UNESCO, 2019).

- Research on support service effects beyond programme completion – such as career trajectories and lifelong learning engagement – is scarce (Olugbara, Letseka & Akintolu, 2022; Rang'ara, 2024).
- Systematic evaluations of AI, VR and adaptive learning tools in support roles remain limited. Investigations should assess pedagogical efficacy and equity implications (UNESCO, 2005; Veletsianos, 2010).
- Resource-efficient service models for large-scale ODL provision in developing regions require empirical validation (Commonwealth of Learning, 2025; Shirazi, 2024).

4. Innovative Approaches based on Research Gaps

Building on identified gaps, the following innovations hold promise:

1. Adaptive chatbots and recommendation engines can tailor academic and mental health support to individual learner profiles (Veletsianos, 2010; Letseka *et al.*, 2023).
2. Secure, verifiable records of learner achievements and support interactions could streamline credit transfers and employer recognition (UNESCO, 2019).
3. Immersive social and tutoring environments may mitigate feelings of isolation and enhance engagement (Australian Government, 2022; UNESCO, 2019).
4. Just-in-time, bite-sized tutorials delivered via mobile apps can address specific learner challenges efficiently (Distance Learning Portal, 2020; IIS, 2024).
5. Achievement badges and collaborative challenges incentivize peer mentoring and build supportive communities (EADTU, 2013; UNESCO, 2019).
6. Integrating academic performance, engagement metrics and psychosocial indicators can trigger timely support referrals (Muljana & Luo, 2019; Pitsoane, 2023).
7. Unified portals combining academic resources, financial counselling and mental health services acknowledge the interconnected nature of learner well-being (CDE, 2024; Wang *et al.*, 2023).

5. Conclusion

To sum up, Open and Distance Learning relies heavily on strong support services to help students learn well and finish their courses. From providing clear study materials and responsive administration to offering technical help, emotional counselling, and regular feedback, every part of support matters a great deal. Good support makes students feel connected, confident, and motivated (Rang'ara, 2024; Olugbara, Letseka & Akintolu, 2022).

In India, we have seen how institutions like IGNOU quickly switched to online counselling and digital resources during the pandemic. This helped many learners continue their studies (Jain, 2023; IGNOU, 2023). But there are still areas to improve, such as helping students in remote areas who face internet problems and strengthening local study circles for better peer support (Mythili, 2023; Gogoi & Jena, 2020).

Looking ahead, embracing new ideas like chatbots that answer questions any time, mobile-friendly short lessons on specific topics, and virtual spaces where students can meet and study together will make learning easier for everyone (Veletsianos, 2010; IIS, 2024). At the same time, we must keep checking what works best by listening to student feedback, measuring key results, and making changes quickly (Commonwealth of Learning, 2025; Nsamba, 2021).

Overall, if we keep improving all eight support areas-academic help, administration, technology, emotional well-being, communication, fairness, financial aid, and continuous review-ODL can truly become a flexible, accessible, and high-quality way of learning for millions of students in India and beyond.

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Beyond the National Frame: Vernacular and English-Language Press Coverage of China's Belt and Road Initiative in India and Nepal

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Abstract

This study looks at how China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is portrayed in Indian and Nepali print media, through a comparative content analysis of four leading newspapers: The Hindu and Dainik Jagran in India, and The Kathmandu Post and Kantipur Daily in Nepal. Based on structured coding of 200 news articles (2022-2024) across tone, theme, and narrative, the study asks how India's cautious, non-participant position and Nepal's more engaged, participant position towards the BRI shape the way their national media report on the same transnational initiative. The findings, confirmed through chi-square tests and Cramér's V, show that Indian coverage is considerably more critical and centred on strategic rivalry with China, often set against alternatives such as the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), while Nepali coverage is more evenly balanced between developmental optimism and governance-related caution over debt and implementation. The study's central and more original contribution is a language-level divergence that a country-only comparison would miss: within India, the Hindi-language press is markedly more negative and rivalry-focused than its English-language counterpart, while within Nepal the pattern reverses, the Nepali-language press is the most favourably disposed outlet towards the BRI in the entire sample. Drawing on Media Systems Theory, framing theory, and geopolitical communication perspectives, the study argues that national policy orientation and language market work together, rather than separately, to shape how a single global initiative is narrated to different domestic publics.

Keywords

Belt and road initiative, Media representation, Media framing, Geopolitical communication, India-Nepal comparison, Content analysis.

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1. Introduction

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), launched by Xi Jinping in 2013, is one of the most ambitious transnational infrastructure and geopolitical projects of the twenty-first century. It has expanded rapidly across Asia, Europe, and Africa through investment in transport, energy, and digital connectivity. Chinese official discourse presents the BRI as cooperative and mutually beneficial, but its reception around the world has been far from uniform. It has generated different interpretations that reflect wider geopolitical tensions and competing visions of regional order (Rolland, 2017; Hillman, 2020).

These competing interpretations are not limited to diplomatic settings; they are built and debated within national media systems, which shape how domestic audiences make sense of large-scale global initiatives. Media systems do not simply transmit information in a neutral way. Instead, they select, frame, and interpret events in ways that favour certain narratives over others (Entman, 1993). In the case of the BRI, media narratives become important sites where geopolitical meanings are produced, negotiated, and contested.

In South Asia, India and Nepal offer a particularly useful comparative context for studying these dynamics. India has consistently expressed reservations about the BRI, pointing to concerns over sovereignty, territorial integrity, and regional security, especially in relation to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which runs through disputed territory. Indian policymakers and strategic analysts have described the initiative as a challenge to regional stability and national interests, reflecting broader geopolitical competition with China (Pant 2019). Nepal, by contrast, has largely welcomed the BRI as a chance to address long-standing infrastructure gaps, improve connectivity, and diversify its economic partnerships. Its engagement with the BRI is usually framed within a developmental narrative that emphasizes economic growth, modernization, and regional integration (Paudel, 2022).

These contrasting policy positions provide a starting point for examining how media narratives are shaped by, and in turn help reproduce, national geopolitical stances. A comparative analysis of coverage in these two countries gives insight into how media, politics, and international relations interact in the Global South. This study also reveals a dimension

that existing scholarship has largely overlooked: the difference between English-language and vernacular-language coverage within the same country. Although scholarship on BRI-related discourse continues to grow, most existing research focuses on single-country analyses or on Western media systems. Comparative studies within South Asia remain limited, especially studies that systematically examine how media narratives differ across national contexts with distinct geopolitical orientations (Thussu *et al.*, 2018; Wasserman, 2018). Few studies apply framing and agenda-setting concepts systematically across more than one national media system at a time, and even fewer break down coverage within a country by language market. This leaves open the question of whether framing differences attributed to national policy orientation are consistent across a country's press, or whether they vary according to the audience a given outlet serves.

To address these gaps, this study carries out a comparative content analysis of BRI coverage in India and Nepal, examining how competing narratives are built and given legitimacy within distinct national and linguistic media contexts. It treats media as active sites of meaning-making, shaped by political, economic, and institutional forces, rather than as neutral channels for information (Strömbäck and Esser, 2014; McChesney, 2008). By comparing four newspapers across two countries and two language markets, the study offers new empirical insight into how global development initiatives are localized, contested, and reinterpreted within specific socio-political contexts (Hallin and Mancini, 2004).

1.1 Conceptual Framework

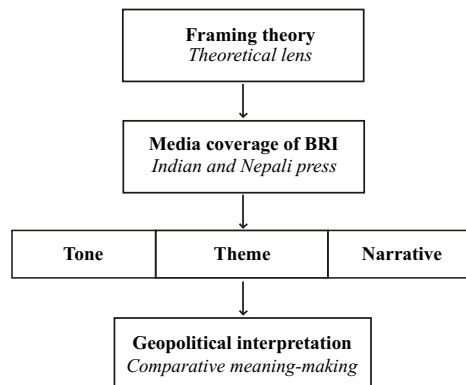


Figure-1: Conceptual framework of the study

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Belt and Road Initiative in Contemporary Global Scholarship

Since it was announced in 2013, the BRI has become one of the most widely discussed topics in international scholarship. Initially presented as a connectivity and infrastructure initiative, it has gradually grown into a

broader geopolitical and geoeconomic strategy that influences trade, diplomacy, regional integration, and global governance (Rolland 2017; Hillman 2020). Scholarship in international relations, political economy, and communication studies suggests that the BRI goes beyond economic cooperation and reflects China's expanding global influence and strategic ambitions (Mações, 2021).

Recent scholarship increasingly points to the BRI's communicative and symbolic dimensions, arguing that it works not only as a development framework but also as a strategic narrative that promotes China's vision of multipolarity and development-centred diplomacy (Hong and Wei 2022; Dellios and Ferguson, 2025). Interpretations vary depending on geopolitical alignment and economic dependency (Duggan *et al.*, 2024): several Asian and African states frame the initiative as a developmental opportunity, while critics in Western and strategically cautious states view it through the lens of geopolitical rivalry, strategic expansion, and debt dependency (Brautigam, 2020). Within South Asia, scholarly interest has grown considerably, with research on India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka addressing sovereignty, regional influence, infrastructure diplomacy, and strategic balancing (Tekir, 2025; Xavier, 2022). Relatively little attention, however, has been paid to how national media systems construct and circulate competing narratives. Media discourse around the BRI is strongly shaped by national political environments and geopolitical interests, which reinforces distinct understandings of development, security, and regional order (Shi and Zhang, 2025).

2.2 Media Framing and the Construction of Geopolitical Meaning

Framing theory offers a useful analytical lens for understanding how the BRI is represented across different political and cultural contexts. Framing scholarship argues that media institutions actively shape public understanding by selecting, emphasizing, and organizing certain aspects of reality while pushing others to the margins. This in turn influences how audiences interpret political actors, international initiatives, and geopolitical developments (Entman, 1993; Tuchman, 1978).

Research on BRI-related media discourse consistently finds polarized and competing representations across national media systems. Chinese state-affiliated media generally frame the initiative through narratives of regional connectivity, economic cooperation, and "win-win" development, whereas many Western media outlets portray the BRI as a geopolitical strategy linked to strategic expansion, debt dependency, and growing Chinese influence in global affairs (Repnikova and Fang, 2018; Hillman, 2020). Comparative framing studies suggest that these divergent narratives are shaped not only by ideological differences but also by institutional media structures, political interests, and geopolitical alignments (Thussu, 2020).

Recent scholarship has moved beyond China-West comparisons to look at regional framing dynamics within Asia and the Global South. Studies of South Asian media suggest that BRI narratives follow domestic political discourse and historical relations with China (Shi and Zhang, 2025). Indian coverage foregrounds sovereignty, strategic competition, and regional security, particularly regarding the CPEC, while Nepali coverage emphasizes infrastructure development, economic modernization, and regional connectivity (Tekir, 2025; Xavier, 2022). The data in this study confirm this pattern and extends it further.

2.3 Dominant Narratives: Development, Dependency, and Strategic Risk

A central theme in BRI scholarship is the coexistence of developmental and risk-oriented narratives. Supportive perspectives describe the initiative as transformative for infrastructure, regional integration, and growth in developing countries facing investment gaps (Mações, 2021; Rolland, 2017), while a substantial body of scholarship points to debt sustainability, governance transparency, and strategic dependency, often through the concept of “debt-trap diplomacy” (Hillman, 2020). Brautigam and Rithmire, (2021), however, question overly simplistic debt-trap narratives, arguing that media and policy debates often overstate Chinese control while underestimating the agency of recipient states.

Strategic risk narratives are strongest where sovereignty and regional-influence concerns carry political weight (Mokdad and Zreik, 2025), and within South Asia these tensions are sharpened by growing India-China rivalry. Indian discourse frequently presents the BRI as a strategic challenge to regional balance and sovereignty, particularly regarding the CPEC, which runs through territory disputed by India (Ghoshal, 2021; Xavier, 2022). Nepal and several smaller South Asian states, by contrast, tend to stress developmental opportunity and economic pragmatism; Nepali scholarship frames the BRI as a way of addressing infrastructure gaps and diversifying partnerships beyond India (S. Adhikari, 2024), even as supportive narratives sometimes register concerns about debt and implementation. Developmental and risk-oriented frames are therefore not mutually exclusive but coexist within complex national contexts, a coexistence that this study confirms quantitatively for Nepal (Section 5).

2.4 Geopolitical Communication and Strategic Narratives

Recent scholarship increasingly approaches the BRI through the framework of geopolitical communication, focusing on the role of narratives, media diplomacy, and strategic messaging in contemporary international politics. From this perspective, the BRI works not only as a physical infrastructure network but also as a communicative project through which

China seeks to shape global perceptions and expand its soft power (Thussu, 2020; Hong and Wei, 2022).

The concept of strategic narratives, politically constructed stories designed to shape domestic and international understandings of political reality (Miskimmon *et al.*, 2014) has been influential in explaining how states communicate geopolitical goals through media and public diplomacy (Neumann and Sending, 2021). Official Chinese discourse consistently promotes peaceful development and mutual benefit, but international reception varies considerably across political and media environments. Contemporary scholarship frames geopolitical competition as a struggle over narrative legitimacy (Castells, 2013), and studies of BRI communication in Asia and Europe show that media discourse often reflects broader geopolitical tensions rather than purely economic considerations (Repnikova and Fang, 2018).

Within South Asia, geopolitical communication around the BRI is especially important because media narratives intersect with nationalist discourse, regional security concerns, and debates over strategic autonomy. Indian media narratives frequently frame the BRI through strategic and security-oriented discourse that emphasizes competition and sovereignty (Tekir, 2025; Xavier, 2022; Price, 2002), while Nepali media discourse tends to emphasize development and connectivity reflecting the complexities of balancing relations between India and China.

2.5 Regional and Comparative Gaps in Existing Scholarship

Despite the rapid growth of BRI scholarship, important regional and comparative gaps remain. Existing research has focused mainly on China-West comparisons or on case studies in Africa, Europe, and Central Asia; comparative analyses within South Asia remain limited, particularly studies of how neighbouring countries with contrasting geopolitical orientations construct competing narratives (Li, 2020). South Asia remains understudied in communication and media research despite its strategic importance in China's regional diplomacy (McCargo, 2003; Acharya, 2023), and existing studies tend to prioritize economic diplomacy and foreign policy analysis over media discourse and framing (Bajpae, 2023).

An important gap concerns comparative research involving both participating and non-participating South Asian states: India has consistently opposed the BRI on territorial grounds, while Nepal has taken a more supportive, development-oriented position. Yet few studies examine how these contrasting positions shape media narratives across neighbouring states (Singh, 2020). Nepali media scholarship on China-Nepal relations also remains underdeveloped, focusing more on economic cooperation and foreign policy than on media representation (Chand, 2024). A third gap, largely unaddressed and one this study address, is the near-absence of

research comparing English-language and vernacular-language coverage of the BRI within the same national media system, even though vernacular outlets have substantially larger domestic readerships in both countries.

2.6 Contribution of the Present Study

This study contributes to existing scholarship in three ways. First, it extends BRI research into the comparatively underexplored India-Nepal context, examining how contrasting national political orientations shape media narratives (Acharya, 2023; Li, 2020). Second, unlike most earlier framing studies, it adds a language dimension by comparing an English-language and a vernacular-language outlet within each country. This allows the analysis to separate framing differences driven by national context from those driven by audience and editorial orientation. Third, methodologically, it combines structured content-analytic coding of 200 articles with formal chi-square/Cramér's V significance testing (Jensen, 2002), providing a replicable, statistically grounded basis that much of the existing qualitative literature on BRI media framing lacks.

2.7 Research Questions

Building on the gaps identified above, this study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1: How does the overall tone of BRI coverage differ between Indian and Nepali newspapers, and between English-language and vernacular-language outlets within each country?

RQ2: What thematic emphases (Development, Geopolitics, Security, Governance) characterize BRI coverage in Indian versus Nepali media, and how, if at all, do these emphases vary by language market within each country?

RQ3: What dominant narratives (Risk, Opportunity, Strategy, Competition, Uncertainty) structure BRI coverage across the two countries and their respective English-language and vernacular-language outlets?

Taken together, RQ1-RQ3 allow the analysis to distinguish framing differences attributable to a country's policy orientation toward the BRI from those attributable to language market and audience orientation within a single country the central comparative aim of this study.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Media Systems Theory, as developed by Hallin and Mancini (2004), whose comparative framework helps explain the relationship between media institutions, political structures, and public communication. Rather than treating media as neutral or universally standardized. Media Systems Theory holds that media systems are historically and politically embedded in national contexts, so that news

production and discourse are shaped by broader political, economic, and ideological structures.

Hallin and Mancini identify several comparative dimensions, including political parallelism, state intervention, media market development, and journalistic professionalization. Political parallelism is the degree to which media organizations align with political actors or national interests. It is particularly relevant here: in highly politicized media environments, coverage often reflects dominant political narratives rather than following norms of neutrality alone (Waisbord, 2019).

Applying Media Systems Theory to this comparative context helps explain how differing political and media structures shape representations of the BRI in India and Nepal. India's media environment is marked by intense political competition, commercialized news markets, strong nationalist discourse, and growing geopolitical concern over China's regional influence (Ji *et al.*, 2016). Coverage of the BRI is therefore likely to foreground security, sovereignty, and strategic rivalry (Ibnat, 2024), which is consistent with research showing that Indian media discourse on China is increasingly shaped by nationalist framing and geopolitical anxiety (Nguyen *et al.*, 2022).

Nepal's media system operates within a different political-economic environment. As a smaller developing state positioned between India and China, Nepal's engagement with the BRI is often framed through developmental and economic perspectives, though such coverage can also reflect domestic political divisions and dependency concerns (D. Adhikari, 2016).

The theory also anticipates within-country variation, which this study is specifically designed to test: commercialized, internationally oriented English-language outlets and vernacular outlets serving mainly domestic, nationalistically inclined readerships may show different degrees of political parallelism even within the same national media system. As detailed in Section 5, this expectation holds clearly for India, where the Hindi-language *Dainik Jagran* is markedly more negative than the English-language *The Hindu*, but not for Nepal, where the vernacular *Kantipur Daily* is the more favourable outlet, a divergence discussed further in Section 6.

In addition to Media Systems Theory, this study draws on framing theory to examine how geopolitical meanings are constructed within media narratives, following Entman's (1993) account of framing as the selection and emphasis of particular aspects of reality. It also draws on geopolitical communication scholarship, which shows how media narratives give legitimacy to state interests and construct geopolitical identities (Surowiec and Manor, 2021). Together, these frameworks place media representations of the BRI within broader political and institutional structures, treating media as an active participant in the construction of geopolitical meaning rather than a simple channel of information.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

This study uses a structured content analysis combined with narrative interpretation to examine how the BRI is represented in Indian and Nepali print media. It contrasts coverage between the two countries and, within each country, between an English-language and a vernacular-language outlet. Systematic coding of tone, theme, and narrative provides a quantitative basis for comparison, while close reading of headlines and article content supports an interpretive analysis of how meaning is constructed.

4.2 Selection of Media Outlets

The study focuses on four leading newspapers recognized for their national influence and reach. From India: *The Hindu*, an English-language daily known for in-depth, policy-oriented reporting on international affairs; and *Dainik Jagran*, one of the most widely circulated Hindi-language newspapers, chosen to capture vernacular media discourse and broader public narratives. From Nepal: *The Kathmandu Post*, the country's leading English-language daily; and *Kantipur Daily*, Nepal's highest-circulation Nepali-language newspaper. Pairing English- and vernacular-language outlets helps distinguish policy-driven framing differences from those shaped by audiences, editorial stances, and language markets.

Table-1: Distribution of Newspaper Articles by Country and Outlet

Country	Newspaper	Language	Articles	Type
India	<i>The Hindu</i>	English	50	National daily
India	<i>Dainik Jagran</i>	Hindi	50	National daily
Nepal	<i>The Kathmandu Post</i>	English	50	National daily
Nepal	<i>Kantipur Daily</i>	Nepali	50	National daily
Total			200	

4.3 Time Frame

The study examines media coverage published between 2022 and 2024. This period reflects how discourse around the BRI evolved after its first decade of implementation, capturing a shift from earlier optimism to a more critical, evaluative phase marked by growing global scrutiny and debate over financial sustainability.

4.4 Data Collection

Data were collected through targeted keyword-based searches of online newspaper archives and search engines, using the primary terms "Belt and Road Initiative", "BRI", "China Nepal project", and the Nepali-language equivalent "बीआरआई". Because BRI-related developments are often folded into broader China-Nepal or China-India relations reporting without an explicit "BRI" label in vernacular media, additional context-based searches identified relevant articles on China-led infrastructure and connectivity

cooperation even where the label itself was missing. Articles were included if they explicitly mentioned the BRI or clearly referred to China-led infrastructure, investment, or connectivity projects linked to it; articles focused only on unrelated domestic or international issues were excluded. This approach produced a fully balanced final dataset of 200 articles, 50 from each outlet (Table-1), avoiding the outlet imbalance that has limited some earlier convenience-sample studies of vernacular BRI coverage.

4.5 Unit of Analysis

The primary unit of analysis is the individual news article. Headlines served as the main analytical entry point, since they capture the dominant framing and narrative emphasis of each article. Article summaries and key paragraphs were consulted where needed to ensure an accurate reading of tone and thematic content.

4.6 Coding Framework

A structured coding scheme was applied to each article across three dimensions: tone, theme, and narrative.

- ▶ **Tone:** This reflects the article's overall evaluative stance towards the BRI: Positive (emphasizes benefits, cooperation, or development outcomes); Negative (highlights risks, criticism, or concerns); Neutral (mainly descriptive or informational).
- ▶ **Theme:** The main issue emphasized in the article: Development (infrastructure, economic growth, investment); Geopolitics (strategic influence, diplomacy, power relations); Security (military concerns, threats, regional stability); Governance (debt, transparency, policy issues).
- ▶ **Narrative:** The dominant storyline structuring the article's meaning: Risk (debt dependency, economic or political concern); Opportunity (development benefits and cooperation); Strategy (China's expansion of influence); Competition (rivalry between China and other actors, e.g., India, the West); Uncertainty (ambiguity or mixed signals). Each article was assigned one primary category for each dimension to keep the analysis consistent. No article in the final dataset was coded as Uncertainty on the narrative dimension, an absence discussed in Section 5.4.

Table-2: Coding Dimensions and Categories

Variable	Categories	Description
Tone	Positive/Negative/Neutral	Overall orientation towards the BRI
Theme	Development/Geopolitics/ Security/Governance	Main issue emphasized
Narrative	Risk/Opportunity/Strategy /Competition/Uncertainty	Dominant storyline

4.7 Data Analysis

Coded data were analyzed in two stages. First, descriptive frequency and percentage distributions of tone, theme, and narrative were calculated overall and cross-tabulated by country and by outlet. Second, to test whether these distributions differ by more than chance, Pearson's chi-square (χ^2 test of independence) was applied to each cross-tabulation, with Cramér's V calculated as a standardized effect-size measure (V small, medium, .50 large, following Cohen's conventions for tables with more than two categories). Six tests were carried out: tone $\times$ country, tone $\times$ outlet, theme $\times$ country, theme $\times$ outlet, narrative $\times$ country, and narrative $\times$ outlet. All tests were evaluated at $\alpha = .05$. Because the Security theme category was sparse ($n = 8$ overall) and produced expected cell counts below the conventional threshold of 5 in some cells for the theme-based tests, Security was collapsed into Geopolitics for the two theme chi-square tests only, on the grounds that both categories concern strategic or regional-stability framing; the full four-category Theme breakdown is kept in all descriptive figures and tables. Quantitative patterns were then interpreted alongside close reading of representative headlines, to examine how meaning was constructed rather than relying on frequency counts alone.

4.8 Reliability and Validity

All 200 articles were initially coded by one researcher using the category definitions in Section 4.6. Ambiguous cases were resolved through full-article re-reading. Inter-coder reliability was assessed using an independent second coder who coded a random 10% subsample ($n = 20$), evenly distributed across the four outlets. Cohen's kappa indicated strong agreement for Tone ($\kappa = .828$, 90.0% agreement), Theme ($\kappa = .788$, 90.0%), and Narrative ($\kappa = .728$, 80.0%). Following Landis and Koch's (1977) benchmarks, these values indicate substantial to near-perfect agreement. Disagreements mainly occurred between conceptually adjacent categories, particularly Geopolitics-Security and Development themes, and Competition-Risk-Strategy narratives. Validity was further strengthened through a transparent coding scheme, coverage of four outlets across two countries and language markets, full-article contextual reading, and chi-square/Cramér's V tests of cross-tabulation differences.

4.9 Limitations

The methodology has three main limitations, discussed further in Section 7.1. *First*, the inter-coder reliability check reported in Section 4.8, while strong, covers only a 10% subsample rather than the full dataset. *Second*, the focus on four newspapers cannot represent the full South Asian media landscape; it notably excludes broadcast, digital-native, and social media coverage and the emerging affective, networked forms of political engagement found there (Papacharissi, 2015). *Third*, the headline-centred

coding approach, despite contextual verification, may not capture all the nuances of longer-form or opinion writing.

5. Findings

5.1 Overall Framing of the BRI

Across the full dataset (N = 200), media coverage of the BRI is mostly negative: 50.5% of articles (n = 101) were coded Negative, 34.0% (n = 68) Neutral, and 15.5% (n = 31) Positive (Figure-2). Neutral coverage mainly consists of event-based reporting- official visits, agreements, diplomatic meetings while positive coverage is concentrated in articles that emphasize infrastructure completion, expanded cooperation, or China's diplomatic outreach.

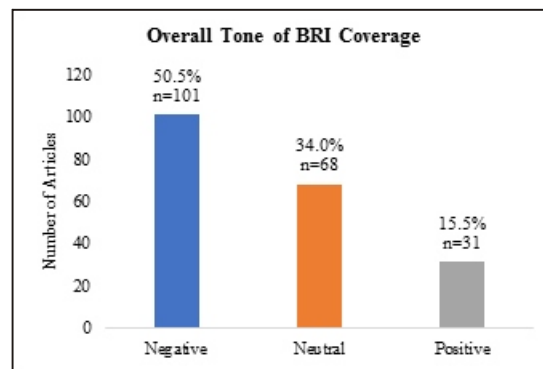


Figure-2: Overall Tone of BRI Coverage (N = 200)

5.2 Comparative Tone: Country and Outlet

The overall negative-leaning tone hides a substantial difference between the two countries. Indian coverage is markedly more critical than Nepali coverage: 66% of Indian articles were coded Negative, compared with 35% of Nepali articles. Conversely, only 7% of Indian articles were Positive, compared with 24% of Nepali articles. A chi-square test of independence confirmed that this association between country and tone is statistically significant and not simply due to chance, $\chi^2(2, N = 200) = 21.72$, with a medium-to-large effect size (Cramér's $V = .330$).

This divergence is even sharper at the outlet level (Figure-3). *Dainik Jagran*, the Hindi-language daily, is the most negative outlet in the entire sample—78% Negative, 20% Neutral, and just 2% Positive (1 of 50 articles) noticeably more critical than its English-language counterpart, *The Hindu* (54% Negative, 34% Neutral, 12% Positive). *Kantipur Daily*, Nepal's Nepali-language outlet, shows the opposite pattern: it is the least negative outlet in the sample (20%) and the most positive (34%), clearly more favourable than the English-language Kathmandu Post (50% Negative, 14% Positive). The association between outlet and tone is also statistically significant, $\chi^2(6, N = 200) = 39.27$, $p < .001$, Cramér's $V = .313$ a medium-to-large effect, and in fact

the largest chi-square statistic of any test in this study. This indicates that outlet-level differences in tone are the single strongest patterned association in the dataset. In other words, the vernacular-English divide runs in opposite directions in the two countries: in India, the vernacular outlet is the more critical of the BRI, while in Nepal, the vernacular outlet is the more favourable one. This finding qualifies any simple assumption that vernacular media are uniformly more nationalistic or more appositional than English-language media, a point returned to in Section 6.3.

This contrast is visible in individual articles too. A representative *Dainik Jagran* headline frames China as a “Chinese threat in Indian Ocean”, calling for India to expand its naval capacity in response (*Dainik Jagran*, 19 May 2022) an example of the outlet’s recurring tendency to frame Chinese regional activity as a security concern that requires an Indian response. This is far removed from the tone of *Kantipur*’s more favourable coverage, where a Nepali government minister describes China’s development achievements as “a source of inspiration for Nepal” (*Kantipur Daily*, 24 July 2023). Table-3 lists these and two further illustrative headlines, one from each outlet, with the original URLs for verification.

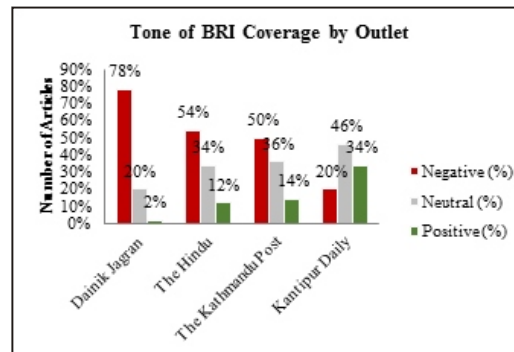


Figure-3: Tone Distribution Across Media Outlets (% , N = 200)

5.3 Thematic Distribution

Geopolitics is the dominant theme overall (50.0%, n = 100), followed by Governance (28.5%, n = 57), Development (18.0%, n = 36), and Security (3.5%, n = 7). This distribution also differs by country (Figure-4). Indian coverage is heavily centred on Geopolitics (60%), with Governance (21%) and Development (13%) comparatively minor, and Security present but small (6%, versus 1% in Nepal). Nepali coverage is more evenly split between Geopolitics (40%) and Governance (36%), with Development somewhat more prominent than in India (23% vs. 13%). To test this association, Security was collapsed into Geopolitics to satisfy the expected-cell-count assumption of the chi-square test (Section 4.7); the resulting three-category test confirmed a statistically significant association between country and theme, $\chi^2(2, N = 200) = 12.57$, $p = .002$, Cramér’s V = .251 (small-to-medium effect). This is a

real but comparatively modest association compared with the tone and narrative results below.

At the outlet level, *The Hindu* is the most geopolitics-focused outlet (64%), while *The Kathmandu Post* is the most governance-focused (46%). This suggests that Nepali English-language coverage foregrounds debt and transparency concerns, even as the country's Nepali-language coverage (Kantipur, 46% Geopolitics) leans more geopolitical while also being more positive in tone, a reminder that theme and tone are separate dimensions. The outlet-level association between outlet and theme (with Security collapsed into Geopolitics) is also significant, $\chi^2(6, N = 200) = 19.76, p = .003$, Cramér's $V = .222$, the smallest effect size among the six tests. This suggests theme is more consistent across outlets within a country than tone or narrative are.

The Kathmandu Post's Governance-heavy coverage is well illustrated by a recurring cluster of articles that question implementation progress and debt exposure, for instance, a piece headlined "Five years on, BRI projects are nowhere on the horizon" (*The Kathmandu Post*, 20 May 2022), one of several Kathmandu Post headlines that raise pointed, skeptical questions about project status and financing terms. This questioning tone contrasts with the more descriptive, opportunity-oriented tone found in Kantipur's coverage of the same broad China-Nepal relationship.

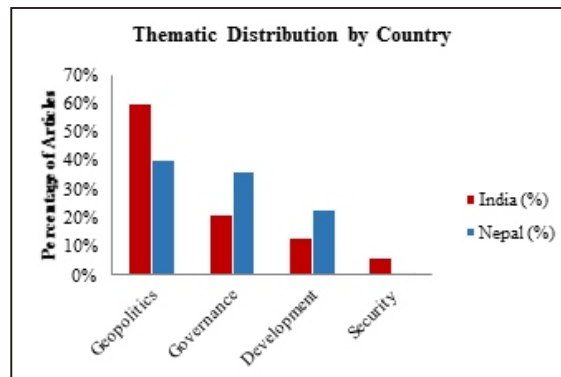


Figure-4: Thematic Distribution by Country (% , N = 200)

5.4 Dominant Narratives

Among the four narrative categories found in the dataset, Competition is the most frequent overall (27.0%, $n = 54$), followed closely by Risk (25.5%, $n = 51$), Strategy (24.0%, $n = 48$), and Opportunity (23.5%, $n = 47$) a far more even distribution than the tone results, showing that "negative tone" coverage is not narratively uniform. No article was assigned the pre-defined Uncertainty category; whatever its tone, BRI coverage in this sample was consistently built around one of the four defined storylines. This suggests that Indian and Nepali outlets alike resolve the initiative into a definite narrative position rather than presenting it as genuinely unsettled.

The country-level breakdown (Figure-5) shows the strongest association in the entire study. In India, Competition dominates (43%), far ahead of Risk (26%), Strategy (21%), and Opportunity, which is marginal (10%). This fits a media discourse that reads the BRI mainly through the lens of India's own strategic rivalry with China. In Nepal, by contrast, no single narrative dominates to the same degree: Opportunity (37%) and Strategy (27%) are the two leading categories, Risk is present but not dominant (25%), and Competition is comparatively marginal (11%). This reflects Nepal's position as a direct BRI participant, for whom the initiative is debated mainly in developmental and implementation terms rather than as a proxy for rivalry with a third country. This is both the largest effect size and the most significant result of any test carried out: $\chi^2(3, N = 200) = 35.24, p < .001$, Cramér's $V = .420$ a medium-to-large effect by conventional standards, and the largest Cramér's V among all six tests. This confirms narrative as the coding dimension on which India and Nepal diverge most sharply.

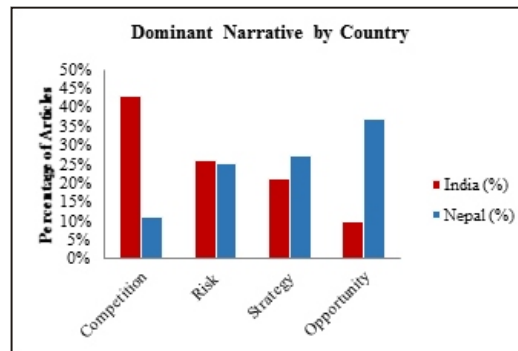


Figure-5: Dominant Narrative by Country (% , N = 200)

At the outlet level, *Dainik Jagran* again stands out: 46% of its articles carry a Competition narrative, the highest of any outlet, against just 6% Opportunity, the lowest. The outlet-level association is also significant, $\chi^2(9, N = 200) = 46.70, p < .001$, Cramér's $V = .279$ (small-to-medium effect), a somewhat smaller effect than the country-level test. This indicates that national context is a stronger driver of narrative choice than outlet identity, though outlet differences remain statistically reliable. Consistent with the qualitative literature (Section 2.3), a recurring pattern within the Indian Competition narrative, most visible in *The Hindu*, is the explicit framing of the BRI against alternative connectivity initiatives, particularly the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), which positions Indian and Western-backed alternatives as direct counterweights to Chinese infrastructure diplomacy.

A representative Hindu headline, "What purpose does the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) serve? | Explained" (*The Hindu*, 16 September 2023), is a good example of this pattern of explaining the BRI in relation to India's own competing connectivity project, a pattern also visible

in *Dainik Jagran's* coverage, which questions the BRI's viability in India-linked strategic terms. By contrast, articles coded Opportunity in Kantipur typically report Nepali openness to Chinese investment in straightforward, welcoming terms, new cooperation agreements, feasibility studies, investor interest, with markedly little of the rivalry framing that dominates the Indian Competition narrative.

Table-3: Illustrative Headlines by Outlet

Outlet	Headline (as published)	Date	Narrative/ Theme	URL
<i>The Hindu</i>	"What purpose does the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) serve? Explained"	16 Sep 2023	Competition	https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/what-purpose-does-the-india-middle-east-europe-economic-corridor-imec-serve-explained/article67302606.ece
<i>Dainik Jagran</i>	"Chinese threat in Indian Ocean" (English lead-in; full headline continues in Hindi)	19 May 2022	Competition	https://www.jagran.com/world/china-india-should-increase-naval-capabilities-to-counter-chinese-threat-in-indian-ocean-says-expert-22725536.html
<i>The Kathmandu Post</i>	"Five years on, BRI projects are nowhere on the horizon"	20 May 2022	Governance	https://kathmandupost.com/national/2022/05/20/five-years-on-bri-projects-are-nowhere-on-the-horizon
<i>Kantipur Daily</i>	"China's achievement is a source of inspiration for Nepal: Acting PM Khadka" (translated from Nepali)	24 Jul 2023	Opportunity	https://ekantipur.com/news/2023/07/24/169017465893811732.html

Note: The *Dainik Jagran* and *Kantipur Daily* headlines were published in Hindi and Nepali respectively; the English text given here is a translation prepared for this article, not the outlet's own wording, and readers wishing to verify exact original phrasing should consult the linked source.

5.5 Summary of Comparative Patterns

Table-4 summarizes the principal divergence between the two countries across all three coding dimensions, and Table-5 reports the full set of chi-square and Cramér's V results.

Table-4: Summary of Tone, Theme, and Narrative by Country (%)

Dimension	Category	India (n = 100)	Nepal (n = 100)
Tone	Negative	66.0	35.0
	Neutral	27.0	41.0
	Positive	7.0	24.0
Theme	Geopolitics	60.0	40.0
	Governance	21.0	36.0
	Development	13.0	23.0
	Security	6.0	1.0
Narrative	Competition	43.0	11.0
	Risk	26.0	25.0
	Strategy	21.0	27.0
	Opportunity	10.0	37.0

Table-5: Chi-Square Tests of Independence and Cramér's V

Test	χ^2	df	N		Cramér's V	Effect size
Tone × Country	21.72	2	200	< .001	.330	Medium-large
Tone × Outlet	39.27	6	200	< .001	.313	Medium-large
Theme × Country ^a	12.57	2	200	.002	.251	Small-medium
Theme × Outlet ^a	19.76	6	200	.003	.222	Small-medium
Narrative × Country	35.24	3	200	< .001	.420	Medium-large
Narrative × Outlet	46.70	9	200	< .001	.279	Small-medium

^a Security (n = 7) collapsed into Geopolitics to satisfy the expected-cell-count assumption (Section 4.7); the four-category breakdown is retained in Figure-4 and Table-4.

All six associations are statistically significant at $p < .01$, confirming that the tone, theme, and narrative differences observed between India and Nepal, and between individual outlets, are unlikely to be due to sampling variation alone. The narrative × country comparison shows both the highest chi-square value relative to its degrees of freedom and the largest effect size ($V = .420$), making dominant narrative the coding dimension that most reliably distinguishes Indian from Nepali coverage. Theme, by contrast, shows the smallest effects at the outlet level ($V = .222-.279$), suggesting that the four outlets are comparatively more alike in what they write about than in how (tone) or through what storyline (narrative) they write about it.

Taken together, these results indicate that India's non-participant, strategically competitive relationship with the BRI produces media coverage centred on geopolitical rivalry, while Nepal's position as a participant state produces more evenly balanced coverage that weighs development

opportunity against governance risk. These associations are statistically confirmed rather than merely descriptive. Within each country, the vernacular-language outlet does not simply amplify the national pattern but can diverge from it, most strikingly in Nepal, where the vernacular *Kantipur Daily* is the single most favourably disposed outlet towards the BRI in the entire sample.

6. Discussion

6.1 Media as a Site of Geopolitical Contestation

One of the clearest outcomes of the analysis is that geopolitical and strategic narratives dominate over developmental ones, particularly in Indian coverage (Sections 5.3-5.4). Rather than being framed as an economic or infrastructure initiative, the BRI is often portrayed, especially in *The Hindu* and *Dainik Jagran* as a tool of China's expanding influence. The recurring comparison with alternatives such as IMEC shows how media narratives are shaped by national strategic priorities, consistent with a competition-centred logic in which development projects are read through the lens of power balancing rather than cooperation.

6.2 Risk, Competition, and the Limits of a Single "Negative" Category

The prominence of the Risk narrative overall supports the expectation from the risk-communication literature that media institutions amplify uncertainty around complex transnational initiatives, particularly regarding debt sustainability and project viability. However, the narrative-level results complicate a simple "negative coverage equals risk framing" reading of the tone data: in India, the dominant narrative behind negative tone is Competition, not Risk (Section 5.4). This means Indian negativity towards the BRI is driven more by strategic rivalry than by concern for the debt sustainability of other countries' BRI projects. This is the strongest association found anywhere in the study ($V = .420$), and the clearest statistical signature separating the two countries' coverage: Indian media negativity is largely a story about India's own geopolitical positioning rather than about the BRI's developmental merits or risks as such.

6.3 The Vernacular Divergence: A Finding That Cuts Against a Simple National-Frame Model

A key finding of this study is the divergent behaviour of vernacular-language outlets in the two countries. In India, the Hindi-language *Dainik Jagran* is markedly more negative (78%) and more competition-oriented (46%) than the English-language *Hindu* (54% negative, 40% competition). This fits the political-parallelism prediction that vernacular outlets serving domestic, nationally oriented readerships adopt more nationalist framing than English-language outlets oriented towards policy elites. In Nepal, the pattern reverses: the Nepali-language *Kantipur Daily* is markedly less negative (20%)

and more opportunity-oriented (44%) than the English-language Kathmandu Post (50% negative, 30% opportunity). A single “vernacular media are more nationalistic” hypothesis, which would predict similar patterns in both countries, is not supported here; the outlet-level tone association ($\chi^2 = 39.27$, $V = .313$) confirms this is a genuine difference rather than sampling noise.

One plausible interpretation, consistent with Nepal’s position as a BRI participant, is that Nepali vernacular coverage speaks more directly to a domestic public with concrete development expectations, while Nepali English-language coverage targets an internationally attentive readership focused on governance and debt-sustainability debates. In India’s non-participant context, vernacular coverage instead appears to channel nationalist and security-oriented sentiment more directly than English-language coverage aimed at an internationally engaged elite. This asymmetry suggests that the relationship between language of publication and BRI framing is mediated by a country’s own participation status a pattern that future work extending to a third or fourth country pairing could usefully test.

6.4 Divergent National Contexts and Media Framing

The comparative dimension of the study confirms that national policy positioning plays a substantial role in shaping media narratives, but the size and make-up of the effect differ meaningfully from a simple “India critical, Nepal supportive” binary. Nepali coverage is not uniformly favourable: Governance concerns are the single largest theme in *The Kathmandu Post* (46%), and Risk appears in almost exactly the same share of Nepali articles as Indian ones (Table-4). What differs is less the presence of risk-related concern than the narrative it sits within: in Nepal, risk coverage coexists with substantial Opportunity coverage, rather than being dominated, as in India, by a Competition frame centred on a third country’s rivalry with China. This is precisely why the theme association ($V = .251$) is markedly weaker than the narrative association ($V = .420$): India and Nepal write about broadly similar issues but resolve them into very different underlying storylines.

6.5 From Developmental Optimism to Critical Reassessment

Although this study’s cross-sectional design (2022-2024) cannot directly test change over time, the concentration of Governance and Risk coverage across both countries is consistent with the broader post-decade reassessment of the BRI documented in the literature (Section 2.1), in which initial optimism has given way to more evaluative coverage centred on financial sustainability and implementation outcomes. A longitudinal extension, discussed in Section 7.2, would be needed to confirm this trajectory empirically rather than simply infer it from the literature.

6.6 Implications for Understanding Media-Policy Linkages

Media framing does not operate in isolation; it both reflects and potentially informs policy debates. In India, the concentration of coverage on

Competition and Geopolitics is consistent with, and may reinforce, the country's cautious policy stance towards the BRI. In Nepal, coverage that balances Opportunity against Governance concern mirrors the government's own position of engaging with the BRI while negotiating debt safeguards. Media discourse can therefore serve as an indicator of, and potentially a contributor to, national policy positioning, though establishing a causal direction lies beyond the scope of this design.

6.7 Theoretical Contribution of the Study

By moving beyond a single tone or frequency measure to combine theme and narrative coding with formal significance testing and a cross-linguistic design, this study contributes to the literature in three ways. *First*, the narrative-level findings (Section 5.4) show that aggregate "negative" tone is not uniform, in India it is driven by a substantially different narrative (Competition) than the risk-dominant framing often assumed in the debt-trap literature. *Second*, the vernacular-language finding (Section 6.3) shows that national context alone is not enough to predict BRI framing; language market and audience orientation interact with a country's participation status in ways that a country-level comparison alone would miss. *Third*, the chi-square/Cramér's V results (Table-5) establish an effect-size hierarchy narrative × country strongest theme weakest offering a falsifiable, replicable benchmark for future comparative BRI framing studies, rather than the purely qualitative "coverage differs" claims common in the existing literature.

7. Conclusion

This study examined how the BRI is represented in Indian and Nepali media, through a comparative content analysis of four leading newspapers in India and Nepal. Overall framing is predominantly negative, with Geopolitics the dominant theme and Competition the leading narrative. These aggregate figures, however, conceal substantial and in some respects counter-intuitive variation, confirmed as statistically significant through chi-square tests of independence.

Indian coverage is markedly more critical than Nepali coverage and is dominated by a Competition narrative that is often framed against alternatives such as the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor. Nepali coverage is more evenly balanced between Opportunity and Governance concerns, consistent with the country's position as a BRI participant navigating both developmental expectation and debt-sustainability caution. The study's most distinctive contribution is that this national divergence does not carry over uniformly to the vernacular press: the Hindi-language *Dainik Jagran* is the most negative outlet in the sample, while the Nepali-language *Kantipur Daily* is the most positive. This reversal points to the need for comparative media research to disaggregate by language market, not only by country.

Methodologically, the study offers a transparent, replicable coding framework, with reported frequencies, cross-tabulations, and chi-square/Cramér's V significance tests across tone, theme, and narrative for four outlets. This goes beyond the largely qualitative treatment of BRI media framing found in much of the existing South Asian literature.

7.1 Limitations

Three limitations should be acknowledged. *First*, the inter-coder reliability check reported in Section 4.8 ($\kappa = .73-.83$ across Tone, Theme, and Narrative), while strong, was carried out on a 10% subsample ($n = 20$) rather than the full dataset; full double-coding would give a more complete picture, and the remaining disagreements, concentrated at adjacent category boundaries, suggest that refining the categories could further improve consistency. *Second*, the study is limited to four print newspapers and does not capture broadcast, digital-native, or social media coverage, which may frame the BRI differently, particularly for younger audiences. *Third*, the cross-sectional 2022-2024 design cannot directly show the shift from early optimism to later scrutiny that the literature describes over time. Consistent with its exploratory nature, the study did not pre-register directional hypotheses, so the effect sizes reported (Cramér's V) should be treated as an initial empirical benchmark rather than a confirmatory test of prior theory.

7.2 Future Research

Future research could extend this design in three directions: *First*, extending the reliability check from a 10% subsample to full double-coding of all 200 articles, refining the Theme and Narrative category boundaries where disagreement was concentrated; *Second*, extending the timeframe backward (for example, to 2014-2024) to test longitudinally whether the shift from developmental optimism to critical reassessment, documented qualitatively in the literature, appears in this study's own coding categories; and *Third*, extending the vernacular-versus-English design to additional country pairs (for example, Pakistan's Urdu and English press, or Sri Lanka's Sinhala, Tamil, and English press) to test whether the participation-status-mediated pattern found here holds more generally across South Asia.

7.3 Policy Implications

For Nepal and other BRI-participant states, the coexistence of substantial Opportunity and Governance narratives in media coverage suggests that public communication emphasizing transparency and implementation safeguards is likely to resonate with an audience that is open to the initiative but not uncritical of it. For India, the dominance of a Competition narrative suggests that public discourse around the BRI is likely to remain closely tied to how India's own connectivity alternatives, such as IMEC, are received domestically, rather than to an independent assessment of BRI project outcomes. More broadly, for communication strategists, the vernacular-

divergence finding shows that a single national messaging strategy is unlikely to reach English-language and vernacular-language audiences in the same way, particularly in participant states such as Nepal.

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Author Contributions

Bandana Singh conceived and designed the study and was responsible for data collection, manuscript drafting, and formal analysis. Yonghong Dai provided supervision, critical revisions of the manuscript, and funding acquisition and proofread the manuscript. Both authors reviewed and approved the final version and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

Not applicable. This study is based exclusively on publicly available newspaper articles and secondary sources; no human participants or personal data were involved.

Data Availability

The datasets generated and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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**Social Media, Youth Behaviour and
Changing Social Relationships in
Godawari, Nepal**

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Abstract

This study investigates the influence of social media on youth behaviour and social relationships in Godawari Municipality, Lalitpur, Nepal. With the rapid growth of digital platforms, social media has become a central avenue for communication, self-expression, and peer interaction among youths. The research examines the effects of social comparison, peer influence, emotional impact, and parental guidance on the behaviour and social interactions of young people aged 15-24. By exploring these dimensions, the study seeks to understand how social media shapes identity, decision-making, and social norms in an urbanizing Nepali context. An exploratory design was used, combining qualitative insights from semi-structured interviews. The study found that most youths in Lalitpur use social media daily for 1-4 hours, mainly on Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook, primarily for socializing and entertainment. Many experience peer pressure, social comparison, and some level of addiction, while parental guidance helps regulate usage. Social media shapes online identities, peer interactions, and emotional well-being, providing opportunities for connection but also causing misunderstandings, stress, and occasional cyberbullying. Social media has both positive and negative effects on youth behaviour and social relationships, enhancing connectedness while also creating emotional challenges. Overall, the study concludes that mindful social media use can foster positive social interactions, personal growth, and learning among youths, while minimizing potential negative behavioural and emotional effects.

Keywords

Social media, Youth behaviour, Social connection, Social relationship.

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Social Media, Youth Behaviour and Changing Social Relationships in Godawari, Nepal

1. Introduction

Social media are the online platforms that allow users to interact, share and network with each other across time and space. Unlike traditional media, social media is participatory, real-time, and user-led, enabling people to interact both with a variety of media and with each other using texts, images, sound and video (Joo & Teng, 2017). Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, as well as YouTube have (in just a generation) revolutionized how we communicate with one another, creating new forms of expression, community, and self-staging. These sites are the only daily reality of growing up for many of today's generations of young people and an integral part of the lifeworld, influencing not only how they get access to information, but also how they make social connections and their self-understanding (Annet, 2024).

For young people, social media is a defining factor in what to do and how to behave. It affects how relationships form and deteriorate, and even end. With the advent of technology, young adults are developing, maintaining and navigating friendships, emotions and validation digitally (Shetty et. al, 2015). The transition from face-to-face to screen-facilitated communication has also changed the process of youth socialization, frequently limiting physical communication, enhancing reliance on online validation, as well as reshaping conflict, intimacy and trust management (Saeed, 2023). The use of social media is associated with both positive and negative effects like increase in connectivity and peer support on one hand and cyberbullying, emotional detachment and relationship conflict on the other (Rustam *et al.*, 2023).

While the South Asian connectivity in the form of a digital has proliferated, the youth of today have access to dimensions in their social behaviour. In Nepal, the internet penetration rate was 85.5% for 2023 and over 65% of the youth age 13-25 use social media daily (NTA, 2023). In spite of this massive penetration and proliferation, we have almost no serious, empirical research on how the digital revolution is affecting the development of societies and cultures on the grassroots level. Hamal (2020) and Khadka (2023) reveal that the social media has been making psychological as well as social impacts in individuals' lifestyle, daily activities, social communication and even religious activities. However, these studies are limited on further exploring

behavioural and psychological changes among the youth or analyzing how such changes occur in specific local contexts like this of Godawari.

Social relationships play a primary role in adolescent development and for most young people today, social media has become the primary means of forging peer connections, establishing norms, and shaping shared values. For example, Al Hasibuzzaman *et al.* (2022) documented displacement of Bangladeshi adolescents from offline to online modalities of talk, and associated altered perceptions and grades of trust, closeness and communicative frequency. Also, in Kathmandu, the studies done by Rijal *et al.* (2024) reported that excessive social media use was associated with higher anxiety and relational conflict among adolescents. Fareed *et al.* (2024) added that social platforms' addiction has significantly associated with aggression, particularly among Pakistani youth that can highlight emotional implications of online behaviour. The implications are that the virtual space is one of the key sites of negotiation with identity, emotion and peers.

The nature of material being read through social media also has an effect upon behaviour. Chung *et al.* (2021) noted a comparable relationship between peer-driven food content and the dietary behaviours and social relationships of adolescents across countries. In Nepal, Subedi *et al.* (2025) demonstrated that personality factors of youth, namely emotional instability and low conscientiousness, were positively associated with the severity of Facebook addiction, impeding social life and relationships of real life. Relational postings such as friendship pictures, support messages and life updates were identified as promoting social media engagement and regulating the manner in which youth experience intimacy and relationships (Muhammad & Shahrom, 2020). Online connections like this are frequently the stand-in for face-to-face bonding, depriving them of the chances to connect one-on-one with real feelings and touch base in physical community space.

In Nepal, overuse of social media is also making way for the decay of family-based socialization. Niroula and Upadhaya (2023) found that, more than half of the Nepalese youth takes 3-5 hours online, and has limited participation in family activities. Regmi *et al.* (2022) pointed out that social media platforms now take center stage in conversations about sensitive subjects such as sexuality that in the past were often addressed by schools or families. These transitions reflect larger trends in social organization, authority, and inter-generational communication. This research is carried out to the effects of social networking sites use on youth behaviour, emotions and relationships.

2. Methodology

This study has used explanatory research design to achieve the objectives of the research. The primary data are collected through semi-structured

interviews from respondents to generate in-depth qualitative details. Primary as well as secondary data has been collected from academic journals, research articles, government reports, reference books and other published sources. These secondary references have given the theoretical base, general knowledge and wider perspectives for evaluating and narrating collected primary data in the study. The research is carried out in Godawari Municipality, Lalitpur district, Nepal and a sample of fifty youths have been considered after considering their availability and willingness to participate in the study using a convenience sampling method. The researcher identified the respondents who use social media as it is through family and friends that the research is be able to collect data from social media users by accessing youths at schools, colleges, community centers and public places in Godawari Municipality. This enabled the researcher to gain information broadly and both males and females of various educational levels have been included, thus yielding adequate insight into social media's impact on youth behaviour and social relationships. The qualitative data has been analyzed using thematic analytical methods.

3. Understanding Social Media

Social media are computer-mediated technologies that facilitate the creation and sharing of information, ideas, career interests and other forms of expression via virtual communities and networks. Social media include software apps, like Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp and Twitter, that are widely used by youth to meet communication and information-sharing purposes as well as increasingly entertainment uses (Joo & Teng, 2017). Social media is characterized by the production of user-generated content (Safia *et al.*, 2019) which provides users the means to both access and post digital information. This aspect of being part of the editorial process distinguishes social media from traditional mass media.

The 21st century has brought about an accelerated transformation in what social media means, and communication has become naturalized behaviour to young people. Sinkin and Shaharom (2020) have highlighted that platforms were designed to encourage more of an ongoing interaction through likes, shares, stories, reels, algorithm-based recommendations and content feeds. For youths, social media is both an outlet for self-expression and a means of building and maintaining friendships. Yet, while this also provided the opportunity for individuals to socialize in an online environment and expand their social network, it has raised concerns emerging from e.g., identity presentation, social comparison and reduction of face-to-face interaction (Ryan *et al.*, 2017).

But the effects of social media are not limited to communication: It affects behaviour, mental health, lifestyle and education most of all. Individuals in adolescence are also more susceptible to risk, exposure to peer pressure,

cyberbullying and social validation pursuit at this stage of development (Fareed *et al.*, 2024; Smith *et al.*, 2021). For these digital scaffolds are not only a fabric of lives, but their affordance and consequence become increasingly clear for those connected with supporting youth development in the digital era.

4. Impact of Social Media on Youth Behaviour

Social media has also drastically changed the manner in which we interact and communicate with one another. Instagram, TikTok and Snapchat encourage currency of staying relevant and being acknowledged with likes, comments, shares etc., which could shape the way young people perceive themselves; they come to learn their own worth (Joo & Teng, 2017). Such altered behaviour is also linked to enhanced online leisure-time activity behaviour and potential negative effects in terms of physical activity, sleep patterns as well as the preference for virtual rather than face-to-face social interaction (Paakkari *et al.*, 2021).

Moreover, social media significantly affects trends and behaviours that are influenced by peers and viral posts. Research has also demonstrated that looking up to or following popular individuals on social media can lead to behaviour imitation, particularly of the type of influential group an individual is a member of (Chung *et al.*, 2021). It has also been linked to impulsivity, aggression and reduced emotional control among young adults (Fareed *et al.*, 2044).

Social networking activity also has implications for identity and social values. Young people are prone to follow online role models and this can lead to skewed self-view, FOMO i.e. fear of missing out and anxiety (Rustam *et al.*, 2023). A constant desire to prove oneself can foster a need for validation on the internet, and that influences decision-making, especially in response to peer pressure. In connection, delivering of cyberbullying and adverse comments in online setting is also an impact on emotional well-being and social behaviour (Raheeq *et al.*, 2021). Although attitudes toward social media use for social, emotional and cognitive skills were generally positive and while many avenues for connectivity and creativity are provided by social media, the attribute of socializing via new media with youth can have both beneficial and negative effects depending upon the context in which it takes place, along with how individuals are using it.

5. Impact of Social Media on Social Relationships

With social networks, the youth change their social links with mobile technologies Social networks have transformed the way that individuals born post-2000 create and cultivate relationships. Young people can interact with others beyond physical space including keeping in touch with friends and family members when not together, through social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp (Joo & Teng, 2017). Such online

networks and communities, where experiences, emotions, and views can be exchanged, may in turn contribute towards enhanced experiences of belongingness and social support for at least segments that feel socially disconnected in their offline environment (Taylor *et al.*, 2022).

In the face of advantages of heightened connectivity, social media undermines relationship quality. Further, many of the activities that youth engage in via the internet are shallow or footings for attachment relationships founded on manipulation and curation of a self which may not be conducive to genuine emotional connections (Ryan *et al.*, 2017). The constant need to keep up the online persona could erode away at relationships, in which kids put virtual thumbs ups and likes first before authentic connections in reality (Saeed, 2023). This can be destructive of relational trust and intimacy which are necessary for successful social interaction.

Additionally, social media supports social comparison and is linked to lower quality relationships. Repetitive exposure to idealized images and pages is likely to produce both jealousy, insecurity and dissatisfaction about one's social life (Smith *et al.*, 2021) which may then prompt conflict or withdrawal by peer groups. These perspectives can make young individuals more vulnerable to feeling lonely or upset especially when the identity is not sufficiently established or when they are predisposed to emotionally relying on the self relatively easily (or readily). In the extreme cases, such as cyber bullying and social exclusion in cyberspace, damages affect the social well being and causes to have its effects on social isolation (Al Hasibuzzaman *et al.*, 2022).

Finally, the impact of social media use on social relationships can vary by whether youth utilize these mediums and their digital literacy. In becoming a prudent social media user, social media can be used as a means to social capital, emotional support and positive online interactions (Chen *et al.*, 2023). But if unguided, excessive or inappropriate use may result in relational difficulties, psychological issues and social isolation or estrangement (Khadka, 2023; Regmi *et al.*, 2022). It is essential to underpin these two conflicting effects in order to inform attempts to enable young people to use social media in ways that promote healthy, supportive relationship development.

6. Social Media and Social Relationship Among Youth

Social Networking is a critical application in the delivery of care to adolescents by virtue of providing youth with the means to build and maintain social connections. It makes it possible for young people to stay in touch with friends and far-away family members they wouldn't otherwise have contact with, fostering closer ties among distant relatives and a circle of close friends. (Al Hasibuzzaman *et al.*, 2022). These online spaces can generate ongoing

flows of experiences, affects and everyday life that might reinforce relationships and provide forms of emotional support. Social Media in the Context of Meeting New People and Socializing with New People Among others, youth use social media as a vehicle for building relationships and expanding their social circle outside geographical location (Taylor *et al.*, 2022).

While there's a lot more communicative options available on online platforms, sometimes this is lacking depth and emotional closeness compared to face-to-face relationships (Ryan *et al.*, 2017). Youth also develop online relationships with edited versions of themselves such as text and photo edits which creates an illusion of intimacy (Saeed, 2023). This can result in confusion and a lack of self-belief when it comes to forming meaningful connections outside the online space.

Social media also influences youth relationships, including libraries, through social comparison and referent group effects. Youth are particularly vulnerable to peer influences and behaviours from social media, where they are bombarded by curation lifestyles and social mores (Chung *et al.*, 2021). This type of exposure influences self-esteem, can arouse jealousy or exclusion, and is related to relationship problems both in friendship and romantic relationships. Cyberbullying and online harassment in social media is another menace that negatively impact social well-being and confidence level of the young users (Al Hasibuzzaman *et al.*, 2022).

However, despite the barriers in place, social media allows youth to participate in generating awareness and engagement while providing emotional support. There are opportunities for expression, social activism, community building and support based on shared interests and experiences as well as for young people (Regmi *et al.*, 2022; Niroula & Upadhaya, 2023). Social media may be a vehicle for increasing social capital and strengthening relationships with peers when used mindfully, thus suggesting that its influence on adolescent relationships might be nuanced and dependent upon use and domain.

7. Social Media Addiction and Youth Behavioural Patterns

Social media addiction is an unhealthy use of social networking platforms and websites to the extent that it interferes with normal functioning, relationships, productivity and in work. This aspect is particularly important in adolescents, because their developmental age renders them vulnerable to addiction induced by psychoactive substances (Fareed *et al.*, 2024). Young people can feel some hard-to-resist urges to stay checked in, fed and engaged online about notifications, scrolls and clicks; these factors then make it difficult for them not to lose control over the duration of both time and brain space they're giving social media. Such compulsive behaviour is reminiscent of those found in behavioural addictions such as intensity, tolerance, and withdrawal from off-line activities (Subedi *et al.*, 2025).

The degree of social media addiction in youth is affected by psychological and social factors. For example, the need for social approval, or FOMO (fear of missing out), and peer pressure force adolescents to remain virtually connected throughout the day (Fareed *et al.*, 2024; Shuvra, 2024). Social media is intentionally designed with imbedded 'like' and 'comment' functions together with instant feedback loop that in the long run triggers the reward regions of our brains leading to an addiction cycle (Muhamad & Shahrom, 2020). It's these mechanisms that urge young to disengage and multitask, to be distracted, to focus not as long or deeply as they should on academic and personal tasks.

The impacts of social media addiction on the youth behaviour are also diverse. Excessive use of it may entail disruption of sleep rhythm, reduction in physical activity and damaged cognitive abilities, including attention, memory capacities (Paakkari *et al.*, 2021). When temporarily deprived from using social media, addicted adolescent users experience increased anxiety, anger and mood disturbances (Fareed *et al.*, 2024). Moreover, addictions may foster the withdrawal of the individual from social interactions if adolescents attach more significance to virtual relationships and less to real ones damaging therefore interpersonal skills and emotional competences (Rustam *et al.*, 2023).

Preventing social media addiction in youth requires a mix of educative, awareness and behavioural approaches. Encouraging digital literacy, promoting self-regulatory behaviours may help children to recognize problematic use and form better habits (Subedi *et al.*, 2025). There is thus an expectation that parents, teachers and policy-makers should play a key role in creating nurturing online environments to diminish excessive use and enhance positive online experiences. In an age where digital media infiltrates conversations, body image awareness, and risk factors and protective gestures: its importance being aware of social media as addictive nature to youth is undeniable (Niaz *et al.*, 2044).

8. Social Media and Youth Behaviours in Godawari

Godawari municipality has a diverse economy, with trade, retail, banking, and service sectors providing employment and income for many residents. The town attracts people from surrounding rural areas for business, work, and education, creating a mix of social and economic backgrounds. This economic diversity influences youth lifestyles, including leisure activities, socialization, and use of digital technology.

Godawari is home to many ethnic and cultural groups, including Brahmin, Chhetri, Tamang, Pahari and Newar. The cultural diversity influences social interactions and community life. Cultural practices shape how youth communicate, interact, and express their identity. Social media

provides a space to share cultural experiences and connect with peers across different groups. The town's ethnic and cultural variety makes it a suitable site to study the relationship between social media, youth behaviour, and social relationships in a sociological context.

Young people use social media to maintain friendships, participate in peer groups, and stay informed. The availability of digital infrastructure also influences social behaviour, including how youth spend time with family, engage in peer networks, and express their identities online. Social life in Godawari includes both traditional family structures and youth peer groups. Many families are nuclear; though extended families still exist. Community organizations, youth clubs, and social events provide spaces for young people to interact and develop social skills. These social structures influence friendships, peer pressure, and behaviour both offline and online. Participation in community life and social groups shapes how young people perceive social norms, handle relationships, and negotiate identity. Understanding these social structures is key to analyzing the impact of social media on youth behaviour and social connections.

Based on the data collected from the field study in 2025, Instagram emerged as the most used social media platform, with 17 out of 50 participants (34 percent) reporting it as their primary platform. Following closely, TikTok was preferred by 15 participants (30 percent), while Facebook was used by 13 participants (26 percent). YouTube and Twitter were less popular, with only 4 participants (8 percent) and 1 participant (2 percent) using them, respectively. This distribution indicates a strong preference among youth and young adults for visually engaging and entertainment-oriented platforms like Instagram and TikTok, which offer short-form content and interactive features. Facebook, while still significant, appears slightly less favored, possibly due to perceptions of it being less trendy or more oriented toward older users. YouTube's lower usage suggests that participants primarily engage in brief, scrollable content rather than longer videos, and Twitter's minimal presence highlights limited interest in text-heavy or news-focused platforms among the sample. Overall, the data reflects the growing trend of entertainment and visually driven platforms dominating youth social media behaviour.

The main reason participants use social media is socializing, with 21 out of 50 respondents (42 percent) indicating that staying connected with friends and peers is their primary motivation. Entertainment closely follows, with 19 participants (38 percent) using social media to watch videos, reels, or other enjoyable content. Education accounts for a smaller portion, with 7 participants (14 percent) using platforms for learning purposes, while only 3 participants (6 percent) primarily use social media to access news and updates. This distribution suggests that social media is largely perceived as a

tool for connecting and engaging with peers as well as for leisure, rather than for educational or informational purposes. The high percentages for socializing and entertainment indicate that interactive and enjoyable content drives usage, reflecting youth and young adults' preference for platforms that offer social interaction and amusement simultaneously.

Social media plays a significant role in the daily lives of youth, shaping their behaviour, emotions, and interactions. It influences how they communicate with friends and family, perceive themselves, and respond to peer pressure. This section examines both the positive and negative effects of social media on youth behaviour and social relationships, based on survey data and interviews. According to the survey, 30 percent of respondents reported that social media increased their confidence, 46 percent felt no change, and 24 percent experienced a decrease in confidence. The qualitative interviews help explain these patterns: many youths indicated that exposure to entertaining, educational, or motivational content online positively influenced their mood and self-esteem, making them feel inspired or encouraged. Others noted that constant comparison with peers' achievements or curated lifestyles could sometimes lead to feelings of inadequacy, though this was not universal. For the majority, social media had little effect on their confidence, suggesting that individual mindset and the type of content consumed play a significant role in shaping emotional responses.

9. Impact on Youth Behaviour

Social media plays a pivotal role in shaping youths' sense of belonging with their peer groups. Several participants emphasized its positive influence in maintaining friendships despite physical distance. One participant noted, "Even when I travel to distant places, such as India, it enables me to maintain connections with my friends." Similarly, next participants explained, "After finishing plus two, all my friends went their own ways, and we became distant. Even though we are far apart now, social media helps us stay connected. We can talk on calls daily and share updates about our lives." These accounts highlight that social media allows youth to sustain bonds that would otherwise weaken due to geographical separation.

However, not all participants reported a wholly positive impact. Another participant shared that social media sometimes diminishes the quality of in-person interactions: "Although they are physically present, they are often not fully engaged, which has weakened their overall sense of belonging within the peer group." Next participants echoed this concern, noting that while connections exist online, they are less meaningful than face-to-face engagement. This indicates that digital communication cannot fully replace physical socialization and that over-reliance on online platforms may hinder active participation in peer groups.

Overall, social media serves as both a connector and a barrier. It enables youth to maintain friendships over long distances and stay informed about each other's lives, yet excessive reliance may reduce engagement in meaningful in-person interactions. Youth experiences vary depending on how they balance online communication with physical social engagement, showing that social media's role in peer belonging is nuanced and context-dependent.

Concerns about overuse and its effects on health were common among participants. Another participant shared, "Yes. When I feel lazy, I turn off the lights and use my phone for a long time. Because of that, I get dark circles under my eyes and my head feels heavy." A participant mentioned, "Yes, I have noticed that using social media has affected me, particularly by disrupting my sleeping habits", highlighting the physical consequences of prolonged online engagement. Another participant also reported, "Sometimes, using it too much makes my eyes irritated, I don't get enough sleep, and I start feeling lazy."

However, some participants perceived minimal or manageable risks. One participant explained, "Social media can affect a person's mental and emotional health, but in my case, it has not affected me that much. Personally, I don't feel that it has had a negative impact on me." This shows that youth experiences of risk are mediated by personal discipline, parental guidance, and the type of content consumed.

Overall, while social media can lead to overuse and physical or mental strain, individual experiences vary. The data indicate that risk behaviours are often linked to excessive screen time, nighttime usage, and habitual engagement, emphasizing the importance of moderation and self-regulation among youth.

10. Influence on Social Relationships

Social media has reshaped family communication in diverse ways, particularly in families experiencing physical separation due to migration, work, or education. Several participants highlighted that social media has strengthened long-distance family relationships by enabling frequent and meaningful interaction. For instance, one participant shared, "My father lives abroad, and he often shares useful videos with me on YouTube, and later we discuss what I learned from them." This indicates that social media is not limited to casual conversation but also supports emotional bonding, learning, and parental involvement despite physical distance. Similarly, participants with siblings or relatives living abroad emphasized that video calls and messaging help maintain emotional closeness.

At the same time, participants living with their families reported that social media has not entirely replaced face-to-face communication. Many

stated that conversations still occur naturally at home, especially during meals or shared time. One participant explained, "Since all of us live together at home, social media hasn't really changed the way we communicate." However, several participants also noted a subtle shift in family dynamics, where increased phone usage has reduced the quality of shared time. Statements such as "after meals, everyone becomes busy on their own phones" reflect a growing concern that digital engagement may reduce meaningful family interaction even when members are physically present.

From an interpretive perspective, these findings suggest that social media acts both as a connector and a distractor within family relationships. While it plays a crucial role in maintaining communication across distance, it can also fragment family time in co-residential households. The impact largely depends on family structure, living arrangements, and individual usage patterns, highlighting the need for balanced and mindful social media use within families.

Social media has significantly influenced friendships by increasing the ease and speed of communication. Many participants described social media as an essential tool for staying connected with friends who live far away. One participant stated, "Because many of my friends live far away, social media helps us stay in touch and communicate more easily." Others emphasized its usefulness in coordinating group activities, academic projects, and sharing important information, suggesting that social media enhances functional and practical aspects of friendships.

However, despite improved connectivity, several participants expressed concerns about declining interaction quality. A common theme was that in-person interactions have become less engaging due to excessive phone use. As one participant explained, "Even when we meet, people are often busy on their phones, which reduces the quality of our interactions." This indicates that while social media increases communication frequency, it may simultaneously weaken emotional depth and attentiveness in friendships.

Additionally, some participants reported conflicts arising from social media content, particularly in group chats. One participant mentioned that offensive jokes or misunderstandings can lead to arguments, although these are usually resolved later. Interpreting these findings, social media appears to strengthen friendships structurally by enabling constant contact but may weaken them emotionally when digital interaction replaces meaningful face-to-face engagement. Thus, social media enhances friendships in terms of accessibility while challenging their emotional quality.

Social media emerged as a crucial source of emotional support, particularly for youth experiencing loneliness, stress, or social transitions. Many participants described reconnecting with old friends or maintaining

long-distance friendships as emotionally comforting. Next participant shared, "When I moved to Godawari, I lost contact with many friends, but through social media, I was able to reconnect even with my childhood friends." Such reconnections helped reduce feelings of isolation and restored emotional security.

Participants also reported using social media content to manage emotions. Comedy reels, motivational videos, and interest-based content were commonly used to improve mood. Additionally, some participants highlighted using platforms like ChatGPT to express emotions they could not share with others, indicating that digital spaces provide alternative forms of emotional expression and support.

However, not all emotional effects were positive. Some participants noted that social media can intensify sadness when content mirrors negative moods. This dual impact suggests that social media functions as an emotional amplifier, capable of both comfort and distress. Interpreting these findings, social media serves as an important emotional resource for youth, but its effectiveness depends on content exposure, emotional state, and individual coping strategies.

Emotionally, social comparison on social media was largely reported as positive or neutral. Many participants expressed feelings of motivation, happiness, and inspiration when viewing others' posts. another participant shared, "Seeing other people's posts doesn't make me feel discouraged; instead, it increases my inner confidence." Another noted, "When I see others' achievements, I feel happy for them and motivated to work harder." These responses suggest that social media serves as a source of aspiration rather than emotional harm.

Parents play a significant guiding role in shaping young people's social media behaviour, particularly during early adolescence. Many participants reported that their parents did not impose extremely strict restrictions from the beginning but instead focused on providing guidance and moral direction. One participant stated, "My parents did not impose strict restrictions on my social media use from an early age, but they have been supportive and provided guidance, which influenced me to post responsibly." This indicates that parental involvement was more preventive and educational rather than authoritarian. Such guidance helped participants develop an understanding of responsible posting, privacy awareness, and respectful online behaviour without feeling excessively controlled.

A recurring theme across responses was parental advice related to limited and purposeful use of social media. Several participants mentioned that their parents consistently advised them to avoid excessive use, focus on educational or meaningful content, and stay away from unnecessary games

or distractions. One participant explained, "They advise me to use it only occasionally and not excessively, to view content that is useful, and not to share private information." Another added, "My parents' guide me in a positive way. They tell me to focus on study-related content, avoid unnecessary games, and use my phone wisely." This reflects parents' concern about academic performance, time management, and exposure to harmful online content, especially in the context of rising cybercrime and digital risks.

Parental control was found to be stronger during school years and gradually reduced as children grew older and demonstrated responsibility. Many participants noted that during their school days, phone usage and social media access were closely monitored or restricted. One participant shared, "During my school days, I was not allowed to use my phone, but after I started college, my parents guided me rather than giving strict instructions." Another mentioned, "Until grade 8, I did not have a social media account because my parents believed it could affect my studies." As participants matured, parental control shifted into trust-based guidance, indicating a transition from external regulation to self-regulation. Overall, the findings suggest that parental guidance plays a crucial role in fostering responsible social media habits, encouraging self-discipline, and promoting digital awareness. Rather than strict control, supportive guidance combined with trust appears to be the most effective approach in shaping healthy social media use among youth.

11. Conclusion

The study examined the influence of social media on youth behaviour and social relationships in Godawari Municipality, focusing on peer influence, online social comparison, emotional impact, and parental guidance. The findings revealed that social media plays a significant role in shaping youth identity, social interactions, and emotional responses. While many youths reported feeling motivated and inspired by observing their friends' posts, others experienced subtle pressure to conform or engage in risky behaviour, though most avoided extreme risks due to personal caution or parental guidance. It was also observed that youths tend to maintain consistent behaviour online and offline, with some expressing themselves more freely in the digital space, highlighting the nuanced ways social media affects self-perception and social engagement.

Overall, the study underscores the importance of responsible social media use in the context of youth development. Parental guidance emerged as a key factor in helping youths navigate digital spaces safely and mindfully, encouraging educational and positive content consumption while minimizing exposure to harmful influences. The research demonstrates that social media can support learning, peer connection, and self-expression when used thoughtfully, but it also requires awareness of potential emotional

impacts and social pressures. These findings contribute to understanding how urban youth in Godawari interact with social media, offering insights for promoting balanced, safe, and socially responsible digital practices aligned with the objectives of the study.

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Rivers as Witnesses: Sacred Geography, Historical Memory, and American Indian Sovereignty along the Missouri River

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Abstract

This paper is about the Missouri River and the Oceti Sakowin: Dakota, Lakota, and Nakota peoples and others who lived along the river, especially the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara. It examines spatial change in the Missouri river - treaties, dams and reservoirs, drowned communities, and continuing ceremonial significance - to make the case that it is a living historical document, reflecting contestation of land and water use and management regimes. Tribal lands were curtailed in the nineteenth century through treaties, and considerable bottomland was flooded in the twentieth century when dams were constructed under the Pick-Sloan Missouri Basin Program, resulting in the loss of cultural features. Water protection is connected to treaty rights and historical survival through oral history, tribal commemorations and cultural practices, and the Standing Rock movement against the Dakota Access Pipeline. It foregrounds and refocuses American Indian knowledge and sovereignty and reveals that environmental change is also political and cultural history.

Keywords

American Indian history, Missouri river, Sovereignty, Sacred Geography.

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1. Introduction

In U.S. history, rivers are frequently depicted on maps, as routes of travel, as a source of water for irrigation, or as locations for dams. These descriptions are incomplete and are symptomatic of a specific manner of knowing that is more concerned with Western notions of cartographic rationality and resource extraction frameworks. The river Mni Sose (Howe and Young) is more a geography of relationship than a system of property to the Oceti Sakowin, the Dakota, Lakota, and Nakota peoples.

The term ‘river as witness’ highlights the fact that rivers have evidence that is often segregated and even made inaccessible in conventional archives. The metaphor of the river as witness does not imply water has a human voice and anthropomorphic consciousness. Rather, it is a material inventory of reshaped shorelines, inundated cities, cultural landscapes and place-names, graveyards and memories in the landscape. This archive can be accessed via hydrological and ecological data, historical documentation and, most importantly, through the testimonies and knowledge carried forward by communities whose relationships to the river are integral to their lives.

This paper contends that the Missouri River is not only a living archive but also a contested space of sovereignty, plural, because multiple nations still assert and enact their sovereignty within the Missouri River. In contrast, the government of the United States increasingly used the river as a territorial boundary for administrative purposes and an engineered resource for commodity extraction and development. Still, the American Indian river nations have unrelentingly preserved and continue to claim their historical memory, political sovereignty, and rights to govern in response to these dispossessions. The Standing Rock movement’s cry to “defend water is to defend life” was not a slogan. It was a distillation of a longstanding history of relational sovereignty (Estes, *Mni Wiconi* 14-17).

2. Sacred Geography and Relational History

Sacred geography is the geography of a territory as understood and shaped by its spiritual and historical experience, its ecological knowledge and ethical responsibility.

This idea is not to claim that all communities view all rivers in the same way, or that sacred geography is the same in all “Indigenous” worldviews. American Indian nations have unique histories, celebrations, governments,

and languages that are rooted in a place. A responsible historical approach would therefore steer clear of the essentialism of generic pronouncements that “American Indians are naturally close to nature”, and the romanticism that would lump all Indigenous peoples into something like a generic stewarding of the environment. Rather, rigorous historical scholarship seeks to understand specifically how certain communities characterize their responsibilities toward certain places, how place-based knowledge is passed on and preserved, and how it actually becomes embodied in political action, particularly vis-à-vis the state.

Memory is tied to place: burial grounds, village sites, ceremonial locations, and places of prayer are all ways in which this is the case, and when this is broken, there is no easy way to recreate those places elsewhere. Theory is provided by Vine Deloria’s premises that American Indian religious beliefs often stress the sacredness of place over the belief of a universal sacred time (61-77).

From a very legalistic point of view, sovereignty is about government powers, jurisdiction, and treaty rights. But there is another dimension to river sovereignty that cannot be captured by the law: the capacity or the responsibility of a people to meet commitments with water, with the future and with more-than-human life. Based on Mishuana Goeman’s scholarship on American Indian spatial practices and nationhood, American Indians create national identity not just by borders put on the map by colonialism, but also by living relations and by stories that are passed on through time (1-15).

The archive of Missouri River history is a simultaneous engagement of multiple documentary forms. Therefore, it is necessary to consider written treaties, federal agency records in conjunction with and against oral histories, tribal publications, place-name systems, and ecological changes over the landscape through the lens of the genealogical record.

The methodological approach of sacred geography illustrates a sense of loss and endurance in relation to language systems, memory practices, ceremony, and political action.

3. The Missouri River Before European Colonization

The Mandan people built a row of farming villages along the middle Missouri River, mainly in the present-day state of North Dakota. In the rich bottomland soils, which are recharged each spring by flooding, women grew corn, beans, squash (the “three sisters” polyculture system), and sunflowers. Similar agricultural economies and regional trade systems were shared by the Hidatsa, whose villages were clustered near Mandan villages. Along the Missouri, especially in the present state of South Dakota, the Arikara nation also lived in earth-lodge villages and had similar agricultural systems (“Earthlodge”).

The Missouri River served as a meeting center for trade. Archaeological and ethnohistorical data show that trade goods, such as shells from the Pacific coast, copper from the Great Lakes, and obsidian from volcanic areas, found their way to these villages via networks that were in place for centuries before the arrival of any Europeans in the region.

It was an inhabited system of production, exchange, and political authority in which a number of nations had advanced skills in the management of their resources, in diplomatic protocol, and in governance.

River valleys and their tributaries were significant resource zones, seasonal grounds, and routes for bands of Dakota, Lakota, and Nakota peoples. Hunting territories, gathering places, and sacred sites were found throughout the region, and were not related to present federal reservation boundaries. In fact the river did not only help to divide the territories, it also helped them to be connected for commerce, diplomacy and ceremonial assembly.

The world of indigenous nations and their knowledge was the foundation of early Euro-American travel along the Missouri. Today, the National Park Service's historical documentation has recognized that the Lewis and Clark expedition, so often described in popular histories as an "exploratory trip" into the wilderness, was in fact dependent on the hospitality, food gifts, trade, and guidance given by American Indian communities that they met along the river.

Steamboat traffic grew in the nineteenth century, carrying commerce and the military up the river, along with disease. Smallpox reached upper Missouri communities via the St. Peters steamboat in 1837. Some estimates suggest that most of the Mandan nation perished, and the tribe was almost wiped out. The waterway, which for centuries had provided a means of sustaining relationships, trading, and exchange, came to provide access to outside power and biological disaster in indigenous territories.

4. Translation of Indigenous Space into Colonial Territory

Rather than being merely a technical means of mapping what was already there, cartography was a technology of colonial rule that rendered the river and its lands legible to a federal government wanting to delineate lands for settler benefit. Such cartographic style of permanence, of acres measurable, boundaries clearly defined, of jurisdictions made distinct, was in contrast with the relational geography of communities that lived and worked on both sides of the river, that stretched out in their seasonal camps across the land, whose villages, meeting places, and sacred sites were linked by kinship, trade, and ceremony.

The 1858 Yankton Sioux treaty gave over a vast tract of land to the United States and made much of what is now south-eastern South Dakota

open to non-Indian settlement. The Yankton Reservation was limited to a smaller portion along the Missouri River itself, and their territory and access to the river resources and hunting grounds that had sustained them were cut down. The treaty was negotiated under conditions of coercion and inequality, and the treaty itself used language of "cession" and permanent transfer ("Treaty with the Yankton Sioux").

Decade later the treaty of Fort Laramie was negotiated after fighting on the northern Plains, and in the treaty's text, the land was to be kept apart for the undisturbed use of the Sioux Nation with the creation of the Great Sioux Reservation. The description of the reservation, contained in the treaty, started from a definite point on the east bank of the Missouri River; and the course of the river was used as a fixed boundary between Sioux country and the lands beyond the river ("Treaty of Fort Laramie"). Eventually, the treaty negotiated was broken by the federal government which took the Black Hills for themselves, despite treaty obligations. The treaty is of great importance today legally and historically; it is referred to in the political and legal claims of the Sioux. But federal actions and the appropriation of the Black Hills clearly showed that treaty recognition could be revoked when American Indian land was in the way of settler desires and resource exploitation.

Federal maps represented a reservation as a finite area that was isolated from and under the jurisdiction of the United States, thus obscuring the historical and continuing significance of hunting territories, kinship territories, and important sacred places that lay outside the boundaries of the reservation. Maps can thus be interpreted as technologies of power which render indigenous sovereignty illegible and naturalize colonial claims.

Tribal lands were further divided and weakened through federal Indian allotment policies, especially following the Dawes Act of 1887. Allotment involved dividing reservations that were held in common by the Indians into individual allotments given to every tribal member, and "surplus" land for non-Indian settlement. The policy, based on the concepts of "civilization" and individual property rights, was used to dispossess and marginalise the indigenous people ("Dawes Act").

5. The Pick-Sloan Missouri Basin Program and the Transformation of Indigenous Homelands

Following the destructive floods of 1943, which caused extensive losses in the Missouri Valley, Congress passed the Flood Control Act of 1944. This act placed the Pick-Sloan Missouri Basin Program, an integrated plan of development which integrated the plans of the Army Corps of Engineers (Pick Plan) and the Bureau of Reclamation (Sloan Plan) (United States, Congress 887-907). The combined program was touted as having many advantages: flood control, improvements in navigation for commercial shipping, irrigation development for agricultural production, hydroelectric power

production for regional electricity supply, and a general enhancement of regional development. But benefits were hugely inequitably distributed and costs disproportionately experienced by indigenous nations and their territories.

Several dams were built on the Missouri and flooded rich American Indian lands of significance. Federal and tribal officials say the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Nation's reservation at Fort Berthold was inundated by the flood by about 25 percent ("Supporting Question 3"). The submerged area encompassed the most productive Missouri bottomlands, fertile floodplain lands on which families farmed, raised livestock, harvested wild plants for food and medicine, cultivated gardens, and lived near their extended family.

Communities were isolated from each other by broken roads, extended families had disrupted social networks, and the reservation itself was broken up with isolated parcels.

Burial grounds, archaeological sites of village history and occupation, ancestors' gravesites, homes, and gardens were flooded. Moving a house building did not and could not move the relationships that are found in a place: the relationship between living people and the ancestors buried there, between a family and a landscape formed by years of living and working there, between a community and a river. The tribes Standing Rock Sioux and Cheyenne River Sioux had land inundated by Oahe Dam. The dams changed the physical nature of the river, its current, sediment load, temperature and seasonal variations, which adversely affected aquatic and riparian ecosystems.

The new, modified river, with its reservoirs, regulated flows and modified thermal regimes, did not provide the same support for older methods of seasonal harvesting and hunting. Federal planners viewed the Missouri as water to store and distribute bureaucratically, while indigenous nations saw it as a homeland governed by treaties, kinship, ceremonies, and reciprocity with more-than-human life. In the face of significant limitations on their power, American Indian leaders and governments responded with legal claims, economic analysis, lobbying, historical evidence, and political organization to confront the development regime which disregarded tribal sovereignty and considered American Indian territories as available for sacrifice. Annual events and family stories mapped the displacement of communities to memory, and to current consciousness; younger people were taught where people used to live and where the ancestors were buried.

6. The River as an Alternative Archive: Material Evidence and Tribal Knowledge

The Missouri River implies a much broader notion and conception of the nature of an archive and of what historical sources can tell us. Material

evidence of decisions taken over many generations and centuries can be seen in the banks, reservoirs, islands, altered ecosystems, and modified hydrology of the river. The locations of submerged settlements indicate decisions made regarding whose land could be inundated with the arrival of development and federal power. Eroding shorelines can cause cultural materials and burial sites to become exposed and be available for study and, in some instances, return to the communities for proper reburial.

By contrast, tribal place names show relations and historical memories that official maps seem intent on ignoring, if not rendering invisible. History has fundamentally transformed the material form of the river, and that material transformation carries embedded decisions, power dynamics and historical contingencies, making the river an archive. Without oral history and community testimony, that material evidence is illegible, uninterpretable.

The contemporary surface of a reservoir is linked to the world that was there before it was built and that has been “frozen” in the landscape by memories of gardens and their productivity, ferry crossings, homes and their locations, and experience of forced relocation. Tribal testimony is not just personal recollection to supplement what otherwise could be considered a complete governmental documentary record. It might document aspects of historical experiences not captured in official sources, such as federal project reports, treaty documents, survey documents, such as the emotional meaning of a burial ground, the time to rebuild a household or community, the loss of certain plants or locations of gathering that formed part of foodways and medicinal practices, or what the relocation meant in terms of relations among and within communities.

Narrators are restoring communities and places to public history and resisting federal efforts to exclude them in the process of naming submerged places and teaching younger generations where their ancestral homes had stood. Archival reading of the river is a process that must be done with care and consideration of ethics and boundaries. Some ceremonial knowledge, spiritual teachings, and sensitive historical information may not be subject to scientific documentation and disseminating to the public.

Tribal governments and recognized knowledge keepers have a legitimate authority on what kinds of information can be shared, with whom, and under what conditions. Rigorous scholarship thus is based on consent, and on an explicit recognition and celebration of difference between nations and communities, and a primary recognition of tribal sources as intellectual and historical authority rather than as an add-on to “official” archives (Smith 15). The process for conducting research must be organized from start to finish in a manner that will involve consulting with and respecting tribal sovereignty. The river archive is a way to bring together processes that are

ecological, legal, cultural and political and that are frequently separated and treated as distinct by federal bureaucracies and academic disciplines.

7. Standing Rock and the Return of Sacred Geography

The Dakota Access Pipeline protests of 2016-2017 thrust the history of the Missouri River, historically marginalized and erased from consciousness by colonial dispossession and environmental change, into unprecedented global public view. The Dakota Access Pipeline passes near the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation and crosses beneath Lake Oahe, a reservoir on the Missouri River. Tribal leaders and other water protectors then raised a number of overlapping concerns about the project: a spill would pose a threat to water supplies needed by people for drinking, irrigation and livestock. The project would damage cultural and sacred sites, including burial grounds and places of prayer; and the federal consultation process, required by law and facilitated by the Army Corps of Engineers, was inadequate to include tribe's contention (*Standing Rock Sioux Tribe* 8-9).

In the Tribe's public history documentation and statements, they explicitly named this river as Mni Sose, and tied their defense to the principle of Mni Wiconi, which translates to "water is life" and encompasses both biological needs and spiritual connection (Estes, *Standing Rock* 1-25). The encampments that were set up in opposition to the pipeline brought together members of several American Indian Nations-Oceti Sakowin Nations, as well as members of nations throughout the continent, and their non-Indian allies and supporters. The camps served as places of prayer and ceremony, direct action and resistance, media production, legal advocacy, and political deliberation. The participants referred to themselves as "water protectors", as opposed to "protesters", thereby conveying not only a negative sense of opposition to an individual pipeline project, but a positive sense of obligation to protect water for collective survival and spiritual connectedness. These were not solely instrumental, in the sense of being only about stopping the pipeline; they were also constitutive, as places where intertribal diplomacy, political education, and historical knowledge could be passed on from one generation to the next.

The pipeline controversy unfolded directly in the lands of Standing Rock that had been appropriated decades ago by the federal Oahe Dam, which created the lake reservoir, and which had changed the physical and ecological nature of the river (Whyte 320). The site was correlated to two different historical periods of energy development: the mid-twentieth century with the flooding of tribal land for hydroelectric generation and flood mitigation to communities below the dam, and the twenty-first century with the Dakota Access Pipeline's potential threat to the environment and spirit of the reservation. It is this continuity in space and time that accounts

for the ability of the movement against the pipeline to invoke and carry forward past experiences of dispossession, and for the significance of water in the movement as a site of ongoing sovereignty.

Scholar Nick Estes puts Standing Rock in the context of the Oceti Sakowin resistance to colonialism and dispossession (Standing Rock 1-25). The movement linked to contemporary treaty claims of consultation and environmental protection with previous treaties, such as Fort Laramie, and demonstrated the intrinsic connection between sovereignty and ecological protection. “Water is life” was not just a biological statement (water is a requirement for life), but a relationship and ethical obligation: the responsibility for protecting water was seen as a responsibility of the ancestors and a responsibility of the descendants, who did not yet exist. Camps were the site of the struggle, which was documented in real time using drone footage captured by the members of the water protectors, social media, tribal statements and press releases, court filings, interviews, and artistic productions, thus creating new archives.

Lake Oahe was at the same time a drinking water source, a federal reservoir built at the hands of previous dispossession, a site of pipeline risk, a place of prayer and a sacred relation.

8. Reframing Western Expansion, Infrastructure, and Sovereignty

A focus on the Missouri River radically recalibrates familiar histories and periodizations of the histories of the western United States. Water isn’t just a supporting cast to a story that is mainly about land; water is a key to understanding how colonialism operated and how indigenous nations responded. Federal planners and policymakers took action within a much longer history of systematically devaluing American Indian property rights, treaty promises, and political authority when the bottomlands of reservations were made available for inundation to support the federal infrastructure initiatives.

When called unfortunate side effects or costs of progress, the outcomes of dams—displacement, cultural damage, ecological transformation- are pushed out of sight and ignored, along with the governmental decisions and power relations that caused them. These are revealed as choices within the structures of colonialism and continued dispossession when attention is given to the river. Lastly, sacred geography and relational history can account for sovereignty in a more comprehensive way than law and jurisdiction. Relational sovereignty is not a substitute for legal sovereignty, but rather, it is an account of the cultural, spiritual, and social bases that constitute legal claims, and makes them real and playable in the lived experience of communities.

9. Conclusion

The Missouri River has been an eyewitness and a document of great historical transformation: of its agricultural villages and broad regional trade networks; of the steamboat, the epidemic disease and the military power; of treaty negotiation and violation, of flooding and inundation of reservation homelands; of thousands of river protectors gathering to defend the river and its peoples. These are not isolated historical incidents, but are events in the one history, united by the one geography.

Even though the physical shape of the Missouri was altered by the power of the federal state, state power did not eliminate its tribal meanings, knowledge systems or political authority.

Submerged places and broken promises have survived in public memory and in communities' memory of their historical responsibilities through oral histories, treaties, annual commemorations, cultural practices and political movements.

To invoke the river as witness is thus to make a historical and a methodological claim. The physical and ecological transformations of the Missouri's material, the changed channel, reservoirs, dams, and changes in the ecology, show who had the authority to reconfigure the land and water to suit their will, and who paid the price. At the same time, indigenous oral histories, testimonies, place-names and political movements exposed the official state narratives that were systematically omitted. To read these various types of evidence together, recognizing each as a legitimate source of information, is to bring American Indian sovereignty into the middle of environmental history, rather than to the margins or as a footnote. The duties to the river are not just for the living, but for future and past generations as well; the relationship of care and accountability binds past, present, future.

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Hindu-Muslim Unity in Athseni and Muradpur: A Study of Blood Lineage, Customs and the Ethics of Coexistence

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Abstract

This paper traces Hindu-Muslim genealogical and cultural continuity across Athseni, Muradpur, and Sarurpur in Garhmukteshwar Tehsil and the Simbhaoli area of District Hapur, Uttar Pradesh. Drawing on oral testimony from village informants, supplemented by a 1700 CE family register, a Persian-language plaque, and the memory of a carved two-storey haveli whose mason cut one brick a day while two men fanned him, the study reconstructs a migration chain and social world in which religious conversion separated branches of the same family without severing kinship obligations, customs, and material culture. The founding story reaches back to Kithaval (present-day Kithor, Meerut district), where one of two Pandit brothers moved to the 'Meerut ke kothe', faced social ostracism under the term 'tyag', and adopted Tyagi as a surname, transforming exclusion into clan identity. His descendants settled successively in Rachhauri and Athseni, before royal patronage by Raja Tejveer of Kuchesar brought them to Muradpur, where they became zamindars of five villages. Three brothers later shaped the village's internal structure: two converted to Islam while one remained Hindu, their descendants occupying the pattis of Pachhayle and Pohayle, whose names preserve this division in the land's layout. The Maheshre gotra was independently confirmed by four informants among Muslim Tyagi families of Muradpur and Athseni. The thali custom, allocating wedding-day offerings to both mosque and temple while giving precedence to the 'other' community's milai, provides a distinctive expression of shared belonging. Other lifecycle customs (mandha, bhat, haldi, mehndi, ghudchadi, Salami/Tilak, godbhrai, Chhathi, chhuchak), the role of Rajasthani bhaats as genealogical custodians, and the unresolved identity of Raja Tejveer Singh complete the evidentiary picture.

Keywords

Gotra, Hindu-Muslim unity, Migration chain, Elephant episode, Thali custom, Oral history, Zamindari, Neem River, Upper Ganga plain.

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Hindu-Muslim Unity in Athseni and Muradpur: A Study of Blood Lineage, Customs and the Ethics of Coexistence

1. Introduction

There is an image at the heart of this paper that refuses to stay merely architectural. A single mason, working on a two-storey *haveli* in Muradpur, carved one decorated brick each day. Two men stood beside him, fanning him against the heat of a northern Indian summer, so that his hands could remain steady and his eye accurate. The *haveli* itself has not survived. But the memory of that mason, of the patience required, of the two men standing by simply to keep him cool enough to keep working has outlasted the building. It opens a window into what Muradpur has historically understood itself to be: a place where things of lasting value are made slowly, carefully, and by people who sustain one another in the effort.

This paper follows the lineage (based on interviews) that built that *haveli*, a Muslim Tyagi family that traces its ancestry seven generations back to a Hindu ancestor named Ram or Rama Tyagi, and further back still to a founding act of naming in Kithaval, where the word for rejection was transformed into a clan identity. It follows the migration that brought this family from Kithaval to Rachhauti, from Rachhauti to Athseni, and from Athseni to Muradpur, where royal patronage turned migrants into *zamindars* of five villages. It follows the three brothers whose descendants occupy separate *pattis* of the same village, one Hindu, two Muslim living in a spatial arrangement that encodes their common ancestry in the very layout of the land. And it follows the customs, above all the *thali* at weddings, in which Muradpur has turned mutual recognition into a ritual precise enough to be counted and regular enough to be repeated at every family celebration.

The question this paper asks is one that runs through this entire study: what happens to kinship when faith divides a family? Another historical question is deliberately left open: the identity of Raja Tejveer Singh. The oral record preserves two possibilities—a Jat ruler situating the narrative after 1761, or a Tyagi ruler pushing the chronology significantly further back. Since available evidence does not permit a definitive resolution, this article presents both possibilities and identifies the Raja's identity as the central historical question requiring further documentary investigation.

2. The Name That Came from Rejection: Kithaval and the Origin of Tyagi

Every family history has a beginning that is also an ending - a moment when the story could have gone one way but went another. For the Tyagi

families of Muradpur and Athseni, that moment occurred in Kithaval, a place now known as Kithor in Meerut district, where two Pandit brothers shared a household and a social standing rooted in their Brahminical identity.

One of the brothers made a move that the family found deeply transgressive: he went to the '*Meerut ke kothe*' a term carrying connotations of social degradation. The family's response was formal. They performed 'tyag' a Sanskrit-rooted word meaning renunciation or rejection, socially ostracizing the brother.

What the ostracized brother did next is the founding act of this entire lineage history. Rather than disappearing under the weight of rejection, he inverted its meaning. He took the word used to exclude him tyag and adopted it as his surname: Tyagi. In one act of naming, a term of exclusion became a marker of identity. A wound became a banner. That surname, carried forward from Kithaval through Rachhauti, Athseni, and Muradpur, is today shared by dozens of villages and by both Hindu and Muslim households across the Upper Ganga Plain none of whom, perhaps, pause to consider that the name they bear began as an act of defiance by a man rejected by his own family.

2.1 The Etymology of Tyagi: Rejection Transformed into Identity

The Tyagi surname, on the oral account preserved in Muradpur, does not derive from the Sanskrit term for renunciation in a devotional sense. It derives from a specific act of social ostracism performed upon a Pandit brother in Kithaval. The ostracized man's response—adopting Tyagi as his own surname - transformed the vocabulary of exclusion into a vocabulary of selfhood. Farahim Usman Tyagi's genealogy, tracing seven generations back to Ram/Rama Tyagi, ultimately traces back to this founding act of naming.

3. From Rachhoti to Athseni: The First Foothold

The Kithaval brother settled in Rachhauti, and it is from this household that the documented chain of migration begins. Farahim Usman Tyagi states that as many as eighty-four villages of the Maheshre community trace their origin to Rachhauti a claim that, if accurate in broad outline, places Rachhauti at the centre of a genuinely regional settlement network, with Athseni and Muradpur as merely two nodes among many radiating outward from a single ancestral point.

From Rachhauti, descendants moved to Athseni. The village of Athseni carries a layered history that the oral record preserves with unusual candour: locals describe Athseni as having been, in earlier times, a Pathan village whose social character was shaped by Pathan landholders. Over generations the demographic texture shifted until today a significant Muslim Tyagi population inhabits the village, farming its lands and maintaining settlement networks that connect it to Muradpur and the wider corridor. The current village is organized into several *mahallas* and *pattis*: *Mahalla Barhwala*,

Beechpatti, Kangle, Emli, and Teetval—a layered internal geography reflecting the sequence of settlement and the kinship structures of the families who arrived there.

Javed Tyagi of Athseni, whose genealogy traces five generations from himself back to Masitullah Khan, independently confirmed the Maheshre *gotra* in interviews without reference to the Muradpur accounts. Danish Ali of Athseni provided a second independent Maheshre confirmation. This cross-village corroboration, obtained from separate informants on a separate interview date, is treated in this paper as one of the strongest pieces of evidence for common ancestry across the Athseni-Muradpur network.

4. Royal Patronage and the Elephant That Changed Everything

The story of how the Tyagi family moved from Athseni to Muradpur is told in two registers: agricultural opportunity and royal patronage. Elders in Muradpur recount that Raja Tejveer of Kuchesar would arrive at the nearby Simbhaoli railway station riding an elephant, hunt with the assistance of Muradpur's residents, and then proceed to the Ganga to bathe. Through these recurring encounters, the Raja met the Tyagis of Athseni and, recognizing a capable community, invited them to settle in Muradpur. In this telling, royal patronage functions as the hinge on which the family's fortunes turned: from migrants to *zamindars* with a recognized place in the local order.

4.1 The Elephant Incident: Dignity as a Shared Property

The relationship between Muradpur's Tyagi community and Raja Tejveer included one remembered act of remarkable direct confrontation. Once during the Raja's absence, when he was in Lucknow, his elephants left in the care of *mahawats* near the village damaged standing crops. Muradpur's residents addressed a pointed remark to the *mahawat*, unmistakably meant for the Raja's ears:

"Agar katde paalne ka itna shauk hai to apni jageer mein paalo. If you are so fond of elephants, raise them in your own jagir."

The remark made the Raja furious; he began preparing to escalate matters into open conflict. It was at this point that the Raja's mother intervened. Her words have been preserved with a precision suggesting they have been considered worth repeating across many generations:

"Agar tu zamindar hai to zamindar woh bhi hain... bas tu bada zamindar hai aur woh chhote. If you are a zamindar, they too are zamindars.....you are only a bigger zamindar and they smaller ones."

With two sentences the Raja's mother accomplished what formal declarations of equality rarely achieve: she acknowledged the hierarchy of scale between a raja's estate and a village's landholding while insisting that both rested on the same underlying claim—to land and to the dignity that land confers. She did not deny her son's standing. She refused to allow his

standing to erase anyone else's. The aftermath was constructive: Raja Tejveer commissioned the Kuchesar railway station and the Syana Road, infrastructure that improved connectivity for villages including Muradpur.

5. The Four Brothers & the Haryana-Rajasthan Connection: The Hindu Tyagi family of Muradpur

The Muradpur oral record preserves a migration memory that reaches further back—a group of four brothers who migrated from the region remembered as Haryana/Rajasthan. The precise point of departure is held in two traditions one names Bhiwani, another names Gopalgarh but both converge on Rajasthan as the broader origin and on the same subsequent movement toward the Ganga Plain.

Of the four brothers, one moved to the Gangapar region (present-day Bijnor, Moradabad, and Sambhal). One moved to Bihuni, One moved to Vaira in Bulandshahr district. The fourth line is the one that reached the Hapur corridor, initially settling in Khudliya before branching into Mohammadpur, Baddha, Girdharpur, and Muradpur along the banks of the Neem River.

The Neem River deserves particular attention. The oral record repeatedly names it as the geographical spine of this settlement cluster, with habitation developing along its banks. The Hindu family respondent Sudhir Tyagi's house in Muradpur sits today on the Neem River's bank a physical continuity between the founding settlement pattern and the present-day household that is itself a form of living evidence. The river was not merely a geographical feature; it was a determining factor in where families chose to put down roots, and those roots have remained anchored there across the generations.

6. Three Brothers, Two Conversions: How the Village Divided Without Breaking

The internal history of Muradpur's Tyagi community is organized around a moment of religious divergence that, rather than shattering the family, was absorbed into the village's spatial and social structure with deliberate care. Three brothers once formed the core of the household at a critical juncture. Two converted to Islam; one remained Hindu.

The spatial consequence of this division is still visible in Muradpur's village map today. The two brothers who embraced Islam settled in different parts of the village: those in the western strip (*Paschimi Patti*) came to be called Pachhayle, while those in the eastern strip (*Purvi Patti*) were known as Pohayle. The Hindu Tyagi branch maintained its own distinct domestic and ritual space including a *chaupal* that served as the social hub for Hindu Tyagi households. This arrangement Pachhayle in the west, Pohayle in the east, the Hindu Tyagi quarter set apart from both encodes in the village's physical geography a settled and long-negotiated arrangement of kinship, religious identity, and everyday coexistence.

Table-1: The Three-Brother Division: Spatial and Social Encoding in Muradpur

Branch	Faith	Patti/Quarter	Khandaans	Spatial Position
Brother 1 (converted)	Muslim	Pohayle-Purvi (Eastern) Patti	Chirag Ali; Do Bishay; Bhendale; Bichpatiya	Eastern strip of the village
Brother 2 (converted)	Muslim	Pachhayle- Paschimi (Western) Patti	Aadhe Wale; Chauthai Wale; Dhakoliye; Bhootle	Western strip of the village
Brother 3 (remained Hindu)	Hindu	Hindu Tyagi quarter	Pohayle and Pachhayle (mirror naming)	Separate domestic space; own chaupal

7. The Maheshre Gotra: Seven Generations and One Ancestor

The genealogical centrepiece of this paper is the seven-generation family line preserved by Farahim Usman Tyagi and Imran Tyagi. Their account, independently consistent across interviews conducted on different days, traces the following descent:

Ram/Rama Tyagi Chirag Ali Rustam Abdul Kareem Ali Hasan
Ghulam Rabbani Usman Tyagi Farahim Usman Tyagi/Imran
Tyagi

The first name in this chain – Ram or Rama Tyagi – is a Hindu name. It is the name of the ancestor from whom a Muslim family now in its seventh Muslim generation continues to trace its descent. The *gotra* running through this line is Maheshre confirmed in the same interviews and, crucially, confirmed independently by Javed Tyagi and Danish Ali of Athseni, who have no reason to align their testimony with the Muradpur account other than the fact that they share the same ancestry.

The family also reports that at the time of Farahim Usman Tyagi's birth, The bhats came and recorded their names in the same family register. This is a detail of extraordinary significance. The bond between the Hindu and Muslim branches was not merely a matter of remembered ancestry; it was a living social practice, enacted at life-cycle moments within living memory. The names inscribed by the bhats of the Muslim branch's newborn in their own genealogical record - treating them as part of the same family tree.

8. Zamindars of Five Villages: Land, Standing, and the Material Archive

The family's arrival in Muradpur under Raja Tejveer's patronage was not the arrival of tenants but of people who became *zamindars*. Farahim Usman Tyagi and Imran Tyagi state that their family held *zamindari* over five villages: Muradpur (the principal seat, site of the *haveli*), Khudliya, Mohammadpur, Baddha, and Girdharpur. A *zamindari* spanning five

villages in the Garhmukteshwar-Simbhaoli corridor would have made this family one of the more substantial landholding lineages in the area a position consistent with the oral accounts of royal patronage, the carved *haveli*, and the 1700 CE family register.



8.1 The 1700 CE Register and the Persian Plaque

Material culture anchors the family's memory in ways oral testimony alone cannot. Farahim Usman Tyagi reports possession of a register dating to 1700 CE, a document that likely recorded land transactions or household accounts of the kind that landed families of the Mughal and post-Mughal period routinely maintained. Its survival across more than three centuries, passed down through a family that has undergone religious change and territorial dispersal, is a testament to how seriously this family has treated the documentary traces of its own past.

He also mentions a *takhti* (plaque) inscribed in what the family remembers as '*farsi*' script almost certainly a reference to Persian, the administrative and literary language of Mughal and post-Mughal north India. The survival of a Persian-language plaque in this rural Muslim Tyagi household is evidence of the family's participation in the broader administrative culture of the Mughal world, available in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to landed families of sufficient standing to maintain written records in the court language.

8.2 The *Haveli*: One Brick a Day

The most vivid piece of material memory this paper contains concerns the construction of the family's carved *haveli*. A single mason worked on one carved brick per day so intricate was the detailing required while two men stood beside him to fan him against the summer heat, so that his hands could remain steady. The building rose to two storeys in lime mortar: modest by later urban standards, but a considerable statement of wealth and aesthetic ambition for a rural *haveli* of its period.

That the memory which has survived is not the building's dimensions or cost, but its human texture the pace of the mason's work, the presence of the two fanning assistants says something important about what this family has chosen to preserve and transmit. The balance sheet of construction is forgotten; the quality of the effort is remembered. This is precisely the kind of detail that marks a community's sense of what it values: not merely what was built, but how it was built, and at what human cost, and with what care.

9. The *Thali*: Muradpur's Most Precise Statement of Belongingness

Of all the evidence gathered in this paper, the *thali* custom is the most structurally elegant and the most deliberate. At Hindu weddings in Muradpur, a *thali* carrying approximately one lakh rupees is prepared with portions allocated to both the mosque or *idgah* and the temple. The allocation follows one invariable rule: the Muslim *milai* is given first. At Muslim weddings, the pattern runs in exact reverse: a similarly constituted *thali* is prepared, and the Hindu *milai* is given first.

Table-2: The *Thali* Custom Structure of Reciprocal Precedence

Occasion	Amount (approx.)	Recipients	Precedence Rule
Hindu wedding	₹1,00,000	Mosque/Idgah + Temple + Muslim <i>milai</i> + Hindu <i>milai</i>	Muslim <i>milai</i> given first
Muslim wedding	₹1,00,000	Mosque/Idgah + Temple + Hindu <i>milai</i> + Muslim <i>milai</i>	Hindu <i>milai</i> given first

The symmetry is exact and intentional: each community, at its own most significant life-cycle celebration, formally prioritizes the other community's customary due. This is not a gesture of tolerance, it is a ritualized structure of mutual recognition, repeated at every wedding because it is what the village has decided it means to belong here. The allocation to both mosque and temple at both Hindu and Muslim weddings means that neither sacred space is acknowledged only when it is the host community's own: both are acknowledged at every celebration. In a country where questions of whose sacred space takes precedence have produced some of the most violent conflicts in living memory, Muradpur's *thali* custom offers something quietly extraordinary: a village that has already answered that question, in practice, at every wedding - by giving precedence, always, to the other.

10. Lifecycle Customs Across the Divide

The *thali* is Muradpur's most distinctive custom, but it is not the only form in which the village's composite culture expresses itself at life-cycle occasions. Both Hindu and Muslim Tyagi households observe a shared set of wedding and childbirth rituals in broadly similar form.

Table-3: Shared Lifecycle Customs - Muradpur

Custom	Occasion	Description	Observed By
<i>Mandha/Mandap</i>	Wedding	Ceremonial erection of the wedding canopy	Both communities
<i>Bhat</i>	Wedding	Customary gifts from the maternal family	Both communities
<i>Haldi</i>	Wedding	Turmeric ceremony for bride and groom; pre-wedding purification	Both communities
<i>Mehndi</i>	Wedding	Henna application; pre-wedding celebration	Both communities

<i>Ghudchadi</i>	Wedding	Ceremonial groom's procession on horseback	Both communities
<i>Godbhrai</i>	Pregnancy	Blessings for expectant mother; maternal family's ceremonial visit	Both communities
<i>Chhuchak</i>	Childbirth	Customary gifts and rites at birth; maternal family's gifts	Both communities
<i>Chatthi</i>	Childbirth	On the sixth day when a child is born	Both communities

These customs share more than a name and an occasion. They share a body: *haldi*-stained hands, a *thali* passed carefully from one set of hands to another, the specific language of blessing recited over a pregnant woman regardless of which mosque or temple her family attends. Culture in Muradpur is not confined to doctrine or to the separate religious calendars of Hinduism and Islam; it is lived in the household, in the body, in the regular repeated gestures of celebration that a family owes its neighbours.

11. The Rajasthani Bhaats: When Genealogy Travelled

Until a generation ago, Bhaats, bardic genealogists travelling from Rajasthan, would visit Tyagi households, both Muslim and Hindus in Muradpur and stay for extended periods, reciting lineage histories aloud and connecting local families to the broader regional narratives of descent and prestige that bardic traditions across northern India have long preserved. Their presence indicates that the family's Rajasthan connection - the four brothers' migration from Haryana/Rajasthan, was not merely a founding memory but an ongoing relationship maintained through the bhat's regular visits.

The Rajasthani bhat no longer arrives in Muslim Tyagi family of Muradpur. But the genealogical memory he once carried in person now survives in the family's own oral record in the seven-generation line from Ram Tyagi to Farahim and Imran, in the Maheshre *Gotra*.

12. Reiteration of the Tradition of Raja Tejvir Singh

Raja Tejvir Singh, the identity of this individual is uncertain and constitutes one of the most important areas requiring documentary verification. The narrative surrounding Tejvir Singh becomes particularly interesting when it intersects with memories of hunting and the movement of large groups of people. The oral testimony describes hunting expeditions involving substantial numbers of people and animals, including references to elephants and the transportation of hunted animals.

Such descriptions may indicate that these were not ordinary individual hunting activities. The movement of elephants, animals and large groups would have required considerable logistical arrangements, including provisions, transport and temporary accommodation.

This possibility opens another historical dimension: the region may have occasionally received politically or militarily significant travelling groups. The role attributed to Tejvir Singh in this context may therefore have

been connected not simply with permanent landholding but also with local arrangements made during the movement or temporary residence of powerful groups. One particularly revealing element is the tradition that, when assistance was required, two Muslim Tyagi brothers were approached. Their involvement is remembered not simply in terms of religious identity but through the language of common kinship or members of the same broader lineage/community.

13. The Unresolved Identity of Raja Tejvir Singh and the Chronology of Muradpur

The reconstruction of Muradpur's history ultimately leads to a significant unresolved question: Who was Raja Tejvir Singh? The answer to this question has the potential to substantially alter the chronology of the entire narrative.

The oral tradition preserves the memory of a ruler referred to as Raja Tejvir Singh. More importantly, the community tradition does not provide a definitive answer regarding his social and political identity. Two competing possibilities emerge from the available evidence.

The first possibility is that Tejvir Singh was a Jat ruler. If this identification is correct, the episode associated with him would have to be situated within a later historical context, potentially after the Third Battle of Panipat in 1761, when the political configuration of the region underwent major changes. Under this interpretation, the traditions concerning the ruler, settlement and associated communities would belong to a comparatively later phase of eighteenth-century regional history.

The second possibility is considerably more consequential. If Tejvir Singh was a Tyagi ruler, the chronology of the narrative would have to be pushed significantly further back. In that case, the traditions concerning Tyagi political authority, settlement formation and the associated villages could belong to a period substantially earlier than 1760.

Such an interpretation would also potentially connect the narrative with the wider traditions concerning the Tyagi ruling lineages of Kuchesar preserved in the oral genealogies. The distinction between these two possibilities is therefore not merely a question of identity. It represents a chronological fork in the historical reconstruction of Muradpur.

14. Conclusion

This paper relies heavily on oral histories gathered through interviews with residents of Atsani and Muradpur, whose combined testimony forms the backbone of the genealogical and narrative material presented above. Oral history of this kind is indispensable for reconstructing local pasts that rarely appear in official archives: the precise wording of a decades-old rebuke to a raja's *mahawat*, the daily rhythm of a mason's work on a long-vanished haveli, the *Thali* ritual. No colonial gazetteer or revenue settlement report

would have preserved these details with anything like the vividness that living memory still supplies.

This paper do not close the story it tells; it opens it. The villages of Athseni, Muradpur, and Sarurpur are not static points fixed on a revenue map but living archives of movement, memory, and mutual obligation, continually renewed by the people who inhabit them. To write their history is, above all, to listen: to the elders' voices as they recount a migration route that has been told the same way for generations; to the silences between names, where a family's own uncertainties about its past show through; and to the weight of a *thali*, passed carefully from hand to hand at a wedding, carrying within it a whole community's understanding of what it owes to its neighbours.

In that listening, this paper has tried to find not only the past but also the contours of a possible future, one in which belonging continues to be built, brick by brick and ritual by ritual, in the same patient, unspectacular way that a mason once carved a haveli's walls, one stone at a time. The coexistence of Hindu and Muslim communities in Muradpur was not built in a day, this coexistence required and continues to require support: the support of elders who transmit the founding stories, of customs that encode mutual recognition, of social institutions that make belonging structural rather than merely sentimental.

At a wedding in Muradpur, the *thali* moves from hand to hand, to the mosque, to the temple, to the other community first. That movement is Muradpur's answer to every question this study has asked. It does not speak. It acts

At present, the available oral evidence does not permit a definitive conclusion regarding identity of Raja Tejveer Singh. Consequently, the paper does not attempt to force the evidence into a single chronological framework. Instead, it identifies the question of Raja Tejvir Singh's identity as the central historical problem requiring further investigation. Thus, the conclusion of this paper is deliberately provisional: the history of Muradpur cannot yet be assigned a single definitive chronology until the identity of Raja Tejvir Singh is established.

Details of Respondents Interviewed

1. *Interview*, Date: 24-25 July 2026, Mr. Farahim Usman Tyagi (36 years), s/o Shri Usman Tyagi, gs/o Shri Ghulam Rabbani, ggs/o Shri Ali Hasan, gggs/o Ch. Abdul Kareem, ggggs/o Shri Rustam, gggggs/o Shri Chirag Ali, ggggggs/o Shri Ram/Rama Tyagi, *Gotra* – Maheshre, Residence – Village Muradpur, Post – Simbhaoli, District – Hapur, Uttar Pradesh and 5 other Villagers
2. *Interview*, Date: 24 July 2026, Mr. Imran Tyagi (42 years), s/o Shri Usman Tyagi, gs/o Shri Ghulam Rabbani, ggs/o Shri Ali Hasan, gggs/o Ch. Abdul Kareem, ggggs/o Shri Rustam, gggggs/o Shri Chirag Ali, ggggggs/o Shri Ram/Rama Tyagi, *Gotra* – Maheshre, Residence – Village Muradpur, Post – Simbhaoli, District – Hapur, Uttar Pradesh and 9 other Villagers.

3. *Interview*, Date: 28 July 2026, Mr. Sudhir Tyagi (42 years), s/o Shri Rajeshwar Tyagi, gs/o Shri Chatar Singh, ggs/o Shri Girdhari Singh, gggs/o Shri Dharam Singh, *Gotra*—Jamadagni Vats, Residence—Village Muradpur, Post—Simbhaoli, District—Hapur, Uttar Pradesh and 12 other Villagers.
4. *Interview*, Date: 28 July 2026, Mr. Rahul Tyagi (36 years), s/o Shri Pramod Tyagi, gs/o Shri Karan Singh, ggs/o Shri Bihari Singh, gggs/o Shri Dharam Singh, *Gotra*—Jamadagni Vats, Residence—Village Muradpur, Post—Simbhaoli, District—Hapur, Uttar Pradesh
5. *Interview*, Date: 20 July 2026, Mr. Javed Tyagi (42 years), s/o Shri Sakhawat Khan Tyagi, gs/o Shri Maqsood Khan, ggs/o Shri Kale Khan, gggs/o Ch. Rehmat Khan, gggs/o Shri Masitullah Khan, *Gotra*—Maheshre. Residence—Village Athseni, Post—Garhmukteshwar, District—Hapur, Uttar Pradesh and 3 other Villagers
6. *Interview*, Date: 20 July 2026, Mr. Danish Ali (35 years). Caste—Tyagi. *Gotra*—Maheshre. Residence—Village Athseni, Post—Garhmukteshwar, District: Hapur, Uttar Pradesh.
7. *Interview*, Date: 15.07.2026, Prof. Mahaveer Singh Tyagi (100 year), Caste—Tyagi, *Gotra*—Jamdagini Vats, Residence—Village Bihuni, Post—Garhmukteshwar, District—Hapur.
8. *Interview*, Date: 26.07.2026, Mr. Furkan Tyagi (45 years) s/o Mr. Tohseeb, gs/o Mr. Abdul Rasheed, ggs/o Mr. Lateef, Residence—Village Phuldi, Post—Garhmukteshwar, District—Hapur and 5 other Villagers.
9. *Interview*, Date: 12.07.2026, 15.07.2026, 26.07.2026, Mr. Amanullah Khan (61 years; Assistant General Manager Cane, Simbhaoli Sugar mill) s/o Mr. Hazi Osaf Ali, gs/o Mr. Ali Hasan, Caste—Tyagi, *Gotra*—Mahesre, Residence—Village Vaith, Post—Garhmukteshwar, District—Hapur, Present Residence—Simbhaoli and 15 other Villagers.
10. *Interview*, Date: 15.07.2026, 26.07.2026, Mr. Sher Ali (89 years) s/o Mr. Nazir Ahmad, gs/o Mr. Abdul Gaffar, Caste—Tyagi, *Gotra*—Mahesre, Residence—Village Vaith, Post—Garhmukteshwar, District—Hapur and 15 other Villagers.
11. *Interview*, Date: 21.07.2026, Mr. Nadeem Khan (40 years) s/o Mr. Aaqil Khan gs/o Naseer Khan, Caste—Tyagi, *Gotra*—Mahesre, Village—Phuldi, Post—Garhmukteshwar, District—Hapur.
12. *Interview*, Date: 28 July 2026. Mr. Pradeep Tyagi (28 years), s/o Mr. Mulchand Tyagi, gs/o Shri Harlal Singh, ggs/o Shri Kachhedu Singh Tyagi, Caste—Tyagi. *Gotra*—Kaushik, Residence—Village Sikheda, Post—Simbhaoli, District—Hapur, Uttar Pradesh and 3 other Villagers.
13. *Interview*, Date: 15.07.2026, Dr Bhudev Singh s/o Prof. Mahaveer Singh Tyagi, Caste—Tyagi, *Gotra*—Jamdagini Vats, Residence—Village Bihuni, Post—Garhmukteshwar, District—Hapur and 5 other Villagers. ★

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Between Danda and Dharma: The Indian Knowledge System and the Long Conversation on Statecraft from Kautilya to the Early Modern Courts

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Abstract

Scholarship on the history of political thought has long treated systematic reflection on power as a Graeco-Roman inheritance transmitted through Renaissance Europe, a framing that marginalizes the Indian subcontinent's substantial and continuous engagement with the theory and practice of rule. This article addresses that gap by reconstructing the intellectual history of statecraft within the Indian Knowledge System from the late centuries BCE to the early modern period. Drawing on critical editions and scholarly translations of Sanskrit, Pali, Persian, Tamil and Telugu sources, and on the secondary literature that has accumulated since the recovery of Kautilya's Arthashastra in 1905, it examines four interrelated domains: the conceptual vocabulary of arthashastra, dandaniti, rajadharma and niti; competing theories of the origin of political authority, encompassing coercive, contractual and electoral accounts; the analytical apparatus of the Arthashastra, particularly the seven constituents of the state and the mandala theory of interstate relations; and the subsequent diversification of political thought across Brahmanical, Buddhist, Jain, Indo-Persian and vernacular traditions. Three findings emerge. First, the Indian tradition articulated a coherent theory of political obligation grounded in the state's function of preventing predation among unequals. Second, the apparent opposition between realist and dharmic conceptions of kingship reflects a historical process of textual redaction rather than an enduring civilisational dichotomy. Third, medieval Indo-Persian and vernacular writing sustained, rather than displaced, the recognition that governance requires a distinct form of knowledge. The article argues that the tradition's significance lies in its unresolved contestation over the reconciliation of effective rule with justice, and that its scholarly recovery requires philological rigour rather than commemorative endorsement.

Keywords

Indian knowledge system, Statecraft, Kautilya, Indian political thought.

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Between Danda and Dharma: The Indian Knowledge System and the Long Conversation on Statecraft from Kautilya to the Early Modern Courts

1. Introduction

There is an old habit, still alive in some seminar rooms, of speaking about political thought as though it were born in Athens and came of age in Florence. In that telling, India appears as a land of metaphysicians and renouncers, rich in philosophy of the soul and poor in philosophy of power. The habit deserves to be confronted at the outset, because the historical record does not support it. Few civilisations argued as long, as candidly, or in as much practical detail about how a ruler should acquire, hold and use power as the Indian subcontinent did between the last centuries before the Common Era and the eighteenth century. When Max Weber read the *Arthashastra*, he came away convinced that, beside it, Machiavelli's Prince looked harmless (Weber, 1946: 124). The remark tells us as much about European assumptions as about the Indian text, but it captures the shock of recognition that has accompanied the modern rediscovery of Indian statecraft.

The renewed interest in these traditions today is bound up with the wider project of the Indian Knowledge System (IKS). The National Education Policy 2020 committed Indian higher education to integrating indigenous knowledge traditions into its curricula (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020). A new generation of textbooks has tried to present IKS as a structured body of knowledge with its own epistemology and ontology rather than as a cabinet of antiquarian curiosities (Kapoor & Singh, 2005; Mahadevan *et al.*, 2022). Statecraft, known in the sources variously as *Arthashastra*, *dandaniti*, *rajadharma* and *niti*, sits both awkwardly and centrally within that project. It is awkward because it contradicts the romantic image of an otherworldly India. It is central because it is perhaps the clearest proof that Indian thinkers produced systematic, empirically grounded knowledge about society and government.

2. Objectives of the Study

This article explores how ancient and medieval Indian thinkers conceived of the state, what problems they believed statecraft existed to solve, and how modern scholarship has read, misread and re-read them. It moves from the vocabulary of the tradition and its theories of political origin, through Kautilya's *Arthashastra* and the *dharmashastra* literature, to Buddhist, Jain and Tamil voices, then to the post-Kautilyan *niti* texts. Then to the

Indo-Persian and vernacular political thought of the Sultanate, Mughal and Vijayanagara empires. This study focuses on respect for the sophistication of these traditions and a refusal to flatten them into a single timeless 'Indian view' of politics. As Bhikhu Parekh (1986) reminded us long ago, the Hindu tradition possessed political thought of genuine depth, even if it did not develop the free-standing political philosophy that the Greeks built around the *polis*.

3. Methodology

This study is a work of interpretive intellectual history, resting on the close reading of primary texts alongside a critical survey of the scholarship that has grown around them. The primary sources are consulted in established scholarly translations, chief among them Kangle's and Olivelle's renderings of the *Arthashastra*, Olivelle's *Law Code of Manu*, Fitzgerald's *Shantiparvan*, Collins's annotated *Aggañña Sutta*, Habib and Khan's *Barani*, Blochmann's *Ain-i Akbari* and Pope's *Tirukkural*. Classical works are cited by their canonical book, chapter and verse numbers, so that readers may consult any edition they prefer.

Three principles guide the reading. The *first* is chronological caution: texts are placed within the periods that recent philological research assigns to them, and dating controversies, such as those surrounding the *Arthashastra* and the *Shukraniti*, are treated as part of the evidence rather than as distractions from it. The *second* is plurality: Brahmanical, Buddhist, Jain, Persian and vernacular sources are read alongside one another, in the belief that no single tradition speaks for Indian political thought as a whole. The *third* is critical sympathy: these writings are treated as serious contributions to political knowledge, yet their uncomfortable features, among them espionage, coercion and hierarchy, are examined rather than explained away.

4. The Vocabulary of Statecraft

Any honest account has to begin with words, because the tradition's own terms carry its assumptions. The oldest and most technical of them is *Arthashastra*, the 'science of *artha*'. *Artha* is usually translated as wealth, but the *Arthashastra* defines it more broadly as the livelihood of human beings and, by extension, the earth that human beings inhabit; the science of *artha* is therefore the science of acquiring and protecting the earth (*Arthashastra* 15.1.1-2; Olivelle, 2013). Trautmann (2012) has argued that this makes the text as much a treatise on political economy as on politics, and he is right. For Kautilya, the treasury, agriculture, mining and trade are not auxiliary to power; they are its very substance.

A second term, *dandaniti*, literally "the conduct of the rod", names the disciplined use of coercive authority. The *Arthashastra* gives it a strikingly functional definition: government by the rod is the means of securing what

one does not yet possess, preserving what one has, augmenting what has been preserved, and bestowing the surplus on worthy recipients (*Arthashastra* 1.4.3; Kangle, 1972). Punishment here is not mere retribution. It is the instrument through which order, prosperity and expansion become possible at all.

The third term, *rajadharma*, the “duty of the king”, belongs to the vocabulary of the *dharmashastras* and the epics. It places kingship inside a moral and cosmic order, making the king the protector of the social order of *varna* and *ashrama* and the guarantor of dharma (Kane, 1946; Lingat, 1973). The fourth, *niti*, meaning guidance or policy, became the most elastic of all, stretching from Kamandaka’s Sanskrit *Nitisara* to proverbial verse in Telugu and other vernaculars (Rao & Subrahmanyam, 2009).

The *Arthashastra* also preserves a remarkable glimpse of the arguments that preceded it. In its opening discussion of the sciences, it reports that the school of Manu recognized only three branches of knowledge (the Vedic triad, economics and government), that the school of Brhaspati admitted only economics and government, and that the school of Ushanas held government to be the sole science on which all others depended. Kautilya insists on four, adding *anviksiki*, critical and reasoned inquiry, which he calls the lamp of all the sciences (*Arthashastra* 1.2.1-12; Kangle, 1965). The passage matters for two reasons. It shows that statecraft in India was a field of competing schools rather than a single inherited doctrine, and it shows that at least one strand of that field grounded political knowledge in reasoned inquiry rather than in scriptural authority alone. The text’s style of citing earlier teachers such as Bharadvaja, Vishalaksa and Parashara, only to disagree with them, reinforces the point (Kangle, 1965; McClish, 2019).

5. Imagining the Origins of the State

Where does political authority come from and why should anyone obey it? Indian thinkers returned to these questions again and again, and their answers reveal what they believed the state was for.

The most influential image is *matsyanyaya* (law of the fishes), in which the larger fish devour the smaller ones. The *Arthashastra* invokes it directly: where the rod is not applied, the strong swallow the weak, and it is the rod that allows the weak to survive (*Arthashastra* 1.4.13-14; Olivelle, 2013). The image recurs across the *Mahabharata*, the *dharmashastras* and later *niti* literature. It anchors what one might call a Hobbesian intuition – social life collapses into predation without a coercive sovereign (Ghoshal, 1959; Spellman, 1964). Scholars of Kautilyan realism, notably Liebig (2014), have emphasized how much of the *Arthashastra*’s operational thinking rests on this premise.

The *Shantiparva* of the *Mahabharata*, in which the dying Bhishma instructs Yudhishthira in the duties of kings, offers two memorable origin stories. In the first, humanity in a primordial age needed no king because people protected

one another through *dharma*. When delusion and greed crept in, *dharma* decayed, and the gods turned to Brahma, who composed a vast treatise on *dharma*, *artha* and *kama* that was later abridged by a line of divine teachers, until at last a king was appointed to uphold it (*Mahabharata* 12.59; Fitzgerald, 2004). In the second, people suffering under the law of the fishes approach Manu and agree to give him a share of their grain, livestock and gold in return for protection (*Mahabharata* 12.67; Fitzgerald, 2004). How far the second story amounts to a genuine contract theory has long been debated. Ghoshal (1959) and Sharma (1959) saw in it an early notion of kingship founded on mutual obligation, with taxation as the price of protection. Spellman (1964) and Drekeimer (1962) were more cautious, noting that once royal authority was established, it was rarely imagined as revocable.

Buddhist tradition supplied a quite different myth. The *Aggañña Sutta* of the Digha Nikaya describes how, as beings grew greedy and began to hoard rice and steal from one another, they choose from among themselves the most capable person to rebuke wrongdoers, paying him a share of their rice; he became the Mahasammata, the 'Great Elect' (Collins, 1993). Steven Collins's annotated translation shows that the sutta is in part a satire on brahmanical claims to cosmic superiority. Its political significance lies precisely in the fact that kingship emerges from a social contract rather than from divine creation or the hierarchy of *varna* (Collins, 1993; Tambiah, 1976).

Alongside these theories, the historical record points to early institutions that tempered monarchy. The *Atharvaveda* speaks of the *sabha* and *samiti* as the two daughters of Prajapati (*Atharvaveda* 7.12.1), and Buddhist and Jain sources describe the *gana-sanghas*, oligarchic or "republican" polities such as the Vajjis, in which decisions were taken in assembly (Sharma, 1959; Thapar, 2002). K. P. Jayaswal (1924) famously read this evidence as proof of a Hindu constitutional tradition of popular sovereignty. Later historians found his reading overstated and shaped by the anti-colonial need to demonstrate Indian fitness for self-rule, yet his work had the lasting merit of showing that monarchy was only one of several political forms that early India knew (Altekar, 1949; Sharma, 1959).

6. Kautilya's *Arthashastra*: The Science of the Possible

No text dominates the study of Indian statecraft as the *Arthashastra* does, and none has generated more scholarly argument. Tradition ascribes it to Kautilya, also called Chanakya or Visnugupta, the Brahmin minister who helped Candragupta Maurya overthrow the Nandas at the end of the fourth century BCE. Modern scholarship has complicated this picture considerably. Trautmann's (1971) statistical study of vocabulary suggested that different books of the text bear the marks of different hands. Olivelle (2013), in the most rigorous translation now available, places the composition of the original treatise around the first century CE and its final redaction in the

centuries that followed. McClish (2019) argues that the extant text is a third-century CE redaction of an earlier work. What emerges is not a solitary ancient genius but a living scholarly tradition that absorbed, revised and systematized earlier teachings. It makes the *Arthashastra* a record of several centuries of disciplined thinking about power.

At the heart of the text lies the seven constituent elements of the state, the *saptanga* (seven limbs) : the lord (*swami*), the minister (*amatya*), the countryside and its people (*janapada*), the fortified city (*durga*), the treasury (*kosha*), the army (*danda*) and the ally (*mitra*) (*Arthashastra* 6.1.1; Kangle, 1972). It is tempting to read this as an organic theory of the state. What is more striking is its analytical quality. Kautilya weighs the relative importance of each element, asks which calamity is graver (the ruin of the minister or the ruin of the countryside), and reasons carefully through the consequences (Kangle, 1965). The state here is not a mystical body. It is a system of interdependent capacities that can be measured, strengthened and attacked.

The *Arthashastra*'s ruler is anything but an unbound tyrant. His education is long and exacting, and the text insists that he must conquer his own senses before he can conquer anyone else (*Arthashastra* 1.6; Olivelle, 2013). His day is divided into precise segments for hearing petitions, reviewing revenue and expenditure, consulting ministers and receiving reports from spies (*Arthashastra* 1.19). His interests are explicitly bound to those of his subjects. In their happiness lies his happiness and in their welfare his own (*Arthashastra* 1.19.34). The concept of *yogaksema*, the acquisition of what is needed together with the secure enjoyment of what has been acquired, gives this commitment an institutional shape. It has encouraged some modern readers to speak of a Kautilyan welfare state (Kohli, 1995). The label is anachronistic but the underlying point stands. Legitimacy in the *Arthashastra* depends on performance.

Punishment is also calibrated rather than indiscriminate. A ruler who punishes too harshly terrifies his people and the one who punishes too mildly is held in contempt. Only the one who punishes justly commands respect (*Arthashastra* 1.4.8-10). Torkel Brekke (2004) has shown how carefully the text theorizes coercion, treating violence as a resource to be economized rather than spent freely. The king is not the sole source of law. The *Arthashastra* recognizes four foundations of legal decision, namely *dharma*, transactions, custom and royal edict, and it gives the royal edict precedence when these conflict (*Arthashastra* 3.1.39; Olivelle, 2013), a quietly radical claim about the autonomy of political authority.

Arthashastra's describes an elaborate apparatus of secret agents disguised as ascetics, merchants and householders. It discusses testing the loyalty of ministers through covert temptations, the use of poison and assassins against enemies and the manipulation of religious sentiment for political ends

(Boesche, 2002; Liebig, 2014). Roger Boesche (2003) catalogues Kautilya's willingness to sign treaties he intends to break and his doctrine of silent war against an unsuspecting rival. He also notes the text's insistence that conquered peoples be treated humanely and their customs respected (*Arthashastra* 13.5). Boesche (2002) therefore calls Kautilya the first great political realist, a thinker who understood that politics has its own logic and must be studied on its own terms.

Nowhere is that realism more visible than in the conduct of foreign relations. The *mandala* theory imagines the would-be conqueror (*vijigishu*) at the centre of concentric circles of states. The immediate neighbour is the natural enemy, the neighbour's neighbour the natural ally, and beyond them stand the middle king and the neutral king, whose weight can tip the balance (*Arthashastra* 6.2). Against this map, the text sets out six measures of foreign policy (*sadgunya*): peace, war, remaining stationary, marching, seeking shelter, and the dual policy of making peace with one power while waging war on another, each chosen according to whether a state is declining, stable or advancing (*Arthashastra* 7.1). Alongside these sit the four *upayas*, the means of conciliation, gifts, sowing dissension and open force. George Modelski (1964) was among the first to read this in the *American Political Science Review* as a genuine theory of an international system, and the literature on Kautilya in International Relations has grown steadily since (Bisht, 2020; Shahi, 2019).

McClish (2019) has added an important twist to this story. He argues that the original treatise was empiricist and pragmatic, largely indifferent to the political theology of *dharma*, and that its dharmic framing, in which the king appears as upholder of *varna* and sacred law, was grafted on during later redaction. If he is right, the familiar opposition between a "realist" *Arthashastra* and a "moralist" *dharmashastra* is not a timeless feature of Indian thought. It is the product of a historical process in which an independent political science was gradually absorbed into a religious frame.

7. Kingship within Dharma: Manu, the Epics and the Brahmin Question

If the *Arthashastra* represents Indian statecraft at its most secular, the *Manava Dharmashastra*, the *Law Code of Manu*, represents its absorption into a comprehensive vision of cosmic and social order. The seventh chapter of Manu presents the king as fashioned from the eternal particles of the gods *Indra*, *Vayu*, *Yama*, *Surya*, *Agni*, *Varuna*, *Candra* and *Kubera*, so that he surpasses all beings in splendour (Manu 7.3-7; Olivelle, 2004). In the same chapter, however, the true ruler is *danda* itself: punishment governs all creatures, protects them and stays awake while they sleep (Manu 7.14-18; Olivelle, 2004). Manu's king is thus exalted and constrained at once. He is exalted as a quasi-divine figure, and he is constrained because his purpose is to enforce a *dharma* he does not author and that brahmins interpret.

Jan Gonda (1966) assembled the evidence for the sacral character of the king and showed how Vedic ritual, above all the royal consecration, invested the ruler with religious significance. Yet the sacral king is not the whole story. Louis Dumont (1962), in one of the most debated essays in Indian sociology, argued that Indian kingship was precociously secularized. Because spiritual authority lay with the brahmin, royal power was subordinated to brahmanical status, and politics was thereby freed to become an instrumental domain, the domain of *artha*. J. C. Heesterman (1985) pressed the argument further, identifying what he called the conundrum of the king's authority. The king needed a transcendent legitimacy that only the brahmin could confer, but the ideal brahmin, as a renouncer, stood outside the world of exchange and could never fully give it. Kingship was forever seeking a legitimacy it could not wholly possess.

These theories have drawn serious criticism for their reliance on normative Sanskrit texts and for reproducing a picture of India as a society governed by hierarchy rather than by politics (Inden, 1990). Still, they illuminate something real in the sources. The *dharmashastra* tradition insists that the king take counsel especially from the learned. He respect the customs of regions, castes and guilds (Kane, 1946; Lingat, 1973). The result is what Drekmeier (1962) described as an enduring tension between kingship and community. The king rules and protects the social order but he cannot remake that social order.

The medieval texts carried this dharmic conception forward. Works such as the *Rajadharma* of Laksmidhara's twelfth-century *Krtyakalpataru* and Candeshvara's fourteenth-century *Rajanitiratnakara* compiled older authorities on kingship, taxation and justice for working courts, showing that the classical vocabulary of *rajadharma* remained a living idiom of political legitimation long after the classical age had passed (Kane, 1946).

8. Other Voices: Buddhist, Jain and Tamil Conceptions

Buddhist thought developed its own ideal of the righteous ruler, the cakkavatti or wheel-turning king, who conquers by dhamma rather than by the sword. Stanley Tambiah (1976) described the enduring tension in Buddhist political thought between the world conqueror and the world renouncer, two figures who mirror one another and together define the moral horizon of kingship.

The emperor Ashoka gives this ideal historical flesh. His thirteenth rock edict records his remorse after the conquest of Kalinga and his resolve to pursue conquest by dhamma rather than by arms, and his separate edicts in Kalinga declare that all people are his children (Thapar, 1961). Romila Thapar (1961) warned against reading Ashoka's *dhamma* as a straightforwardly Buddhist programme. It should be interpreted instead as a policy of social

cohesion for a vast and heterogeneous empire. Whichever reading one prefers, the edicts remain an extraordinary document: a ruler publicly reflecting on the moral cost of his own violence. Amartya Sen (2005) has drawn on this legacy, together with that of Akbar, to argue that India possessed a long tradition of public reasoning about tolerance and good government.

Jain political thinking, less often discussed, is equally instructive. Somadeva Suri's *Nitivakyamrta*, composed in the tenth century, adapted the *Arthashastra* tradition to a Jain ethical framework, keeping its practical counsel while seeking to temper its violence (Singh, 2017). Upinder Singh (2017) shows that neither Buddhism nor Jainism, for all their commitment to non-violence, could escape the problem of political force. Both ended up negotiating with it rather than abolishing it.

In the Tamil south, the *Tirukkural* offers perhaps the most succinct statement of statecraft in any Indian language. Its second book, on *porul* (wealth and public life), devotes some seventy chapters to kingship, ministers, fortresses, alliances and war. One couplet names the six possessions of a true king as army, people, resources, ministers, allies and fortifications, a list that closely parallels the *saptanga* doctrine while standing in its own literary tradition (*Kural* 381; Pope, 1886). Two adjacent chapters contrast the "right sceptre" of just rule with the "cruel sceptre" of oppression, and the text leaves no doubt that tyranny destroys itself (Pope, 1886). The *Kural* belongs in this account because it demonstrates that the Indian knowledge system of statecraft was plural in its languages and communities, not the property of a single tradition.

9. After Kautilya: Kamandaka, the *Niti* Tradition and the Problem of Dating

The *Arthashastra* did not close the conversation; it opened a long line of successors. The most important is Kamandaka's *Nitisara*, composed around the middle of the first millennium CE, which openly salutes Visnugupta as its master and restates much of his teaching in verse (Dutt, 1896). Upinder Singh's (2010) close reading of the *Nitisara* is among the finest studies of the post-Kautilyan tradition. She argues that Kamandaka's text, while clearly indebted to the *Arthashastra*, represents a later and less exultant reflection on power, one in which the ideal of non-violence has visibly softened the treatment of punishment, the royal hunt and war. Where the *Arthashastra* imagines an assertive, expansionist state, the *Nitisara* is more preoccupied with the limits of monarchical power and the dangers of royal vice (Singh, 2010). This is a valuable corrective to the assumption that Indian statecraft froze after Kautilya.

The *Shukraniti* teaches a different lesson: the need for critical caution. Benoy Kumar Sarkar's (1914) translation made the text widely known, and

early twentieth-century scholars drew on it freely as a source for ancient administration. Sarkar (1922) himself enlisted it in a larger argument that the Hindus possessed positive, secular political institutions comparable to those of Europe. Lallanji Gopal (1962), however, demonstrated through a careful study of its references to firearms and its administrative detail that the text as we have it is very late, possibly no earlier than the nineteenth century. The episode is a reminder that a knowledge system must be studied with the same philological rigour as any other. Enthusiasm is not evidence.

10. Statecraft in the Medieval World: Sultanate, Mughal and Vijayanagara

The establishment of Turkish and later Mughal rule did not interrupt Indian reflection on statecraft; it enriched it with Persian and Islamic traditions of kingship and ethics. The most arresting political text of the Sultanate period is Ziya' al-Din Barani's *Fatawa-i Jahandari*, written around 1358-59. *Barani* confronts, with unusual candour, a problem that troubled Muslim political thinkers everywhere: the practices required to rule effectively, from courtly pomp to severity in punishment and the customs of the pre-Islamic Persian emperors, seemed to contradict the simplicity of the Prophet's example. His resolution was to argue that rulers must frame *zawabit*, state regulations that supplemented the *shari'a* in the practical business of government (Habib & Khan, 1961). Mohammad Habib's introduction to the translation argued that the Delhi Sultanate was therefore not a theocracy in any simple sense, since much of its working law rested on royal regulation rather than on religious law alone (Habib & Khan, 1961). One can hear, across very different traditions, an echo of the *Arthashastra's* recognition that the royal edict is itself a source of law.

Under the Mughals, Abu'l Fazl's *A'in-i Akbari* articulated an exalted theory of kingship in which royalty was a light emanating from God, and the emperor's task was to maintain *sulh-i kull*, peace with all, among subjects of many faiths (Blochmann, 1873). Muzaffar Alam (2004) has shown how Mughal political culture drew on the Persian ethical tradition of *akhlaq*, above all the *Akhlaq-i Nasiri* of Nasir al-Din Tusi, which grounded good government in justice and in the balance of social groups rather than in strict jurisprudence. Alam's argument matters for our theme because it suggests that the Mughal state developed its own languages of political Islam in dialogue with its Indian environment, producing a conception of statecraft in which accommodation and balance were cardinal virtues.

Meanwhile, in the Deccan and the south, Sanskrit and vernacular traditions of *niti* flourished. The Vijayanagara emperor Krsnadevaraya (r. 1509-1529) embedded a substantial discourse on *rajaniti* in his Telugu poem *Amuktamalyada*, advising the king on ministers, forts, revenue, the treatment of foreign merchants and the development of ports (Reddy, 2010). Velcheru

Narayana Rao and Sanjay Subrahmanyam (2009) have reconstructed a whole corpus of Telugu *niti* writing, from Baddena and Madiki Singana to Krsnadevaraya himself, and argue that it constituted a political discourse distinct from, and at times opposed to, the more conservative, caste-bound vision of the *dharmashastras*. Their work overturns the colonial habit of treating such texts as mere moral maxims, revealing a practical, worldly literature of political wisdom that continued to shape South Indian politics well into the colonial period (Rao & Subrahmanyam, 2009).

What unites these medieval traditions, for all their differences of language and faith, is a shared recognition that politics requires its own kind of knowledge, distinct from religious law though never wholly separate from it. The persistence of that recognition across Sanskrit, Persian, Telugu and Tamil texts is perhaps the strongest argument for speaking of an Indian knowledge system of statecraft at all.

11. Rediscovery and Interpretation in the Modern Era

The modern study of Indian statecraft begins with a single manuscript. In 1905, R. Shamasastri identified a manuscript of the *Arthashastra* in Mysore; he published the Sanskrit text in 1909 and a complete English translation in 1915 (Shamasastri, 1915). The impact was immediate. For nationalist scholars, the text proved that India had possessed a hard-headed science of government long before European contact, and it helped dismantle the colonial claim that Indians were politically immature (Shahi, 2019). Jayaswal's (1924) *Hindu Polity*, Sarkar's (1922) comparative studies and later surveys by Altekar (1949) and Ghoshal (1959) built an entire historiography on this foundation. Jawaharlal Nehru (1946), writing *The Discovery of India* in prison, found in Chanakya a figure of daring intellect. Liebig (2013) has since traced this special relationship between Nehru and Kautilya, arguing that Kautilyan thought retained a latent presence in Indian political and strategic culture even where it went unacknowledged.

Kangle's (1965, 1972) critical edition, translation and study set the standard of philological rigour for half a century, and Rangarajan's (1992) thematically rearranged translation brought the text to a wide readership, particularly in the civil and military services. Olivelle (2013) and McClish and Olivelle (2012) have since provided translations that reflect later advances in the study of the text's history and language.

At the same time, critical voices have warned against uncritical celebration. Ronald Inden (1990) argued that Orientalist scholarship constructed an essentialised India, a timeless civilisation of caste and spirituality lacking historical agency, and that some nationalist responses merely inverted the same framework. R. S. Sharma (1959) insisted on situating political ideas within their material and social contexts, resisting the temptation to read modern democracy into ancient assemblies. More

recently, Deepshikha Shahi (2019) has cautioned against presentism, the reading of neorealist assumptions back into Kautilya, and has proposed treating the *Arthashastra* instead as a resource for a non-Western, eclectic theory of International Relations. Mitra and Liebig (2016) take a different route, emphasizing the modernity of tradition and the ways in which Kautilyan concepts can be productively re-used today.

12. Conclusion

This study concludes with three lessons. The first is that Indian thinkers conceived of the state neither as a purely sacral institution nor as a mere instrument of domination but as a response to a real problem: the collapse of social order into the law of the fishes. Whether the remedy was imagined as divine creation, human agreement or the plain necessity of the rod, the state existed to protect the weak from the strong and to make prosperity possible. This is a far more robust theory of political obligation than the old stereotype of an unpolitical India allows.

The second lesson concerns the relationship between power and morality. The tradition never settled this question and it is to its credit that it did not. The *Arthashastra's* empiricism, Manu's dharmic order, Ashoka's remorse, Kamandaka's tempered realism, Barani's uneasy negotiation with the *shari'a*, Abu'l Fazl's universal peace and Krsnadevaraya's worldly *niti* are different settlements of the same tension. To collapse them into a single "Indian view" would be to lose what is most valuable about them, namely that they argued with one another, across centuries and languages, about how to reconcile the demands of effective rule with the demands of justice.

The third lesson is methodological. If the Indian Knowledge System is to be more than a slogan, its study of statecraft must meet the standards of critical scholarship: careful dating, attention to textual history, awareness of social context, and a willingness to confront uncomfortable features such as espionage, violence and hierarchy. McClish's (2019) history of the *Arthashastra*, Singh's (2017) study of political violence and Rao and Subrahmanyam's (2009) recovery of vernacular *niti* show what such scholarship can achieve. They also show that the most faithful way to honour an intellectual tradition is not to venerate it but to argue with it, as its own authors did.

Kautilya opened his treatise with a salutation to Shukra and Brhaspati, the legendary preceptors of politics (*Arthashastra* 1.1.1), and then proceeded to disagree with almost every authority he cited. That blend of reverence and independence remains the right spirit in which to approach the Indian tradition of statecraft today.

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Understanding the Digital Divide through the Capability Approach: A Sociological Study of Youth in Contemporary Indian Society

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Abstract

The digital divide has emerged as a major social issue in contemporary India. It has become an important form of social inequality. It is closely linked with class, caste, gender, region, and disability. This paper focuses on the digital divide among Indian youth through Amartya Sen's Capability Approach. Using secondary data from NSSO reports, national surveys, and existing literature, it examines digital access, skills, and opportunities. The study finds that although access to digital devices and the internet has increased, digital capabilities remain unequal. Thus, digital exclusion is not only a technological issue but also a social and economic issue that can deepen existing inequalities. The paper suggests improving digital literacy, affordability, gender-sensitive programmes, and social support so that technology can promote equal opportunities for all.

Keywords

Digital divide, Capability approach, Youth, India, Digital inequality, Social stratification, Digital capability.

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1. Introduction

Digital technologies have transformed the social, economic, and cultural life of contemporary societies. In India, the expansion of affordable smartphones and data services has produced what scholars describe as a new techno-social phase of society, in which digital connectivity is woven into education, employment, governance, banking, and everyday sociability. Yet this transformation has been profoundly uneven. Digital society and physical society remain interconnected, and India's prevailing socio-economic divide has proven to be the source of a wide digital divide rather than a problem that technology alone could resolve. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed this reality with particular force: when schools, colleges, and labour markets moved online, millions of young people found themselves unable to participate in activities that had suddenly become exclusively digital.

The concept of the digital divide has evolved considerably since its early usage in the 1990s. Originally understood as a binary gap between those with and without access to computers and the Internet, it is now widely recognised as a multidimensional phenomenon encompassing disparities in infrastructure, devices, affordability, skills, usage, and the outcomes that digital engagement produces. Youth are among the most exposed to these disparities. Despite the global rise of ICTs, the digital divide - the disparity in access to the Internet and other digital devices - continues to affect various segments of society, and youth worldwide are among the most affected. In India, the category of "youth" is internally fractured: the experience of a young urban professional with a high-end smartphone differs radically from that of a rural or tribal adolescent sharing a single device with an entire household, or a young woman whose access to digital space is regulated by family norms and gendered expectations.

India is home to one of the largest youth cohorts in the world, and the country's developmental depends substantially on whether this demographic dividend is converted into educated, skilled, and employed adulthood. Digital exclusion threatens at multiple points: in education, in employment and in civic participation. Understanding the digital divide among Indian youth is therefore not merely an academic exercise but a question of social justice and inclusive development.

This paper presents Amartya Sen's capability approach as its theoretical lens. The capability approach evaluates well-being and development not by the resources people possess but by the freedoms and opportunities they actually enjoy to achieve functionings—the “beings and doings” that constitute a life of value. The digital divide is not simply a distributional problem of devices ; it is a question of whether young people possess the opportunities to convert digital resources into meaningful capabilities: to learn, to work, to communicate, to access public services, and to participate as equal citizens. It has important sociological consequences, because conversion depends on social position such as gender, caste, class, region, disability and on the enabling environments that families, schools, communities, and the state provide.

2. Objectives of the Study

The study has three objectives:

1. To understand the digital divide among youth in contemporary India.
2. To examine the influence of digital capability on educational, employment, and skills-development opportunities.
3. To understand whether digital inequalities contribute to the reproduction of existing social inequalities.

3. Literature Review

The digital divide has emerged as an important area of research in recent years. Existing studies examine digital inequality from different perspectives, including access to devices and the internet, digital skills, patterns of use, and the social and economic outcomes of technology. And here we have discussed few of them.

Ray (202) emphasize conceptual and policy-oriented analysis of the digital divide among Indian youth. He argues that, despite the rise of ICTs, disparities in access to the Internet and digital devices continue to affect various segments of society, with youth worldwide among the most affected; his article examines the issues and challenges hurdling youth Internet access in India and concludes with policy measures aimed at expanding youth participation in the digital economy .

Basak (2024) conducted an ethnographic study of young men from low-privileged backgrounds in Kolkata, finding that affordable smartphone-Internet access allowed them partially to overcome the second digital divide by acquiring livelihood skills and information from platforms such as YouTube, yet they remained entangled in the third digital divide: the efficacy of applying online resources was limited by the nature of available livelihoods, the scarcity of energy and time, social expectations, and dependence on offline networks for finding employment. The study shows that the extent of the divide varies not merely across groups but across uses,

and that digital engagement among disadvantaged youth must be understood within specific life contexts that shape what can be achieved with information .

Singh (2024) studied dimension of the Indian divide - disability. Singh argues that in India, where rapid technological advance coexists with enduring social disparities, the digital divide significantly affects disabled youth, and that understanding this requires integrating classical sociological theories of marginalization and exclusion with contemporary science, technology, and society research .

Laskar (2023) conducted a comparative study of urban and rural localities in India. The study frames the digital divide as a complex techno-social problem. Rural areas were found to have inadequate digital infrastructure, limited access and insufficient capability to make use of digital facilities; although smartphones were available to most but they were mostly used for phone calls and entertainment rather than for productive, learning or skill-oriented purposes. Schools functioned with minimum facilities and without digital infrastructure, teachers were not well trained in technology.

Nayak and Alam (2022) investigated the digital divide during the COVID-19 pandemic among tribal youth in rural Jharkhand, with particular attention to gender and education. Their study documents difficulties the tribal students faced when education moved online: teachers relied primarily on WhatsApp, rather than Zoom or Google Meet, and the absence of digital infrastructure undermined both students' and teachers' capacity to realise the potential of online teaching. The study is sociologically valuable in showing how tribal identity, rural location, poverty, and gender intersect in shaping digital exclusion.

Dhaygude, Lapsiya, and Chakraborty (2022) examined the digital divide during COVID-19 school closures. They found that students in under-funded government schools faced major barriers to online education. Teachers and non-profit organizations used mass-media technologies to overcome some of these challenges. The study emphasized economic difficulties forced some students to leave school and work to support their families. The authors therefore stressed the importance of digital infrastructure, supportive home environments, and economic safety proposing Digital Welfarism as a broader approach to digital inclusion.

4. Theoretical Framework: The Capability Approach

The capability approach, developed by Amartya Sen and elaborated by Nussbaum and others, is a normative framework for the evaluation of well-being, inequality, and development. Its point of departure is a critique of approaches that evaluate development by utility—by incomes, goods, services, or subjective satisfaction—which Sen argues are at best means to

certain ends rather than the ends themselves. Capabilities refer to the opportunities available to individuals to pursue a life they have reason to value, while functionings are the actual “beings and doings” of a person - states such as being educated, healthy, employed, socially connected, or able to communicate. Within this framework, functionings are realized achievements and capabilities are the freedoms and opportunities to achieve them. For Indian youth, digital resources are converted into opportunities through conversion factors such as income, caste, gender, literacy, disability, family support, school quality, and regional infrastructure. Therefore, having a smartphone does not guarantee equal digital opportunities. A young person may own a device but lack skills, affordability, freedom, or social support to use it effectively. Thus, this paper explain the digital divide as unequal digital capabilities to use technology for education, employment, communication, and social participation. The Capability Approach therefore helps explain how digital inequality can reproduce existing social inequalities.

5. Research Methodology

This study adopts a secondary data-based research design to examine the digital divide among Indian youth. Secondary data are appropriate because large-scale national surveys and published studies provide information on digital access, skills, and outcomes across different social groups, regions, and economic categories. The study mainly uses four types of secondary sources. *First*, the ‘NSSO 75th Round (2017-18)’ on Household Social Consumption: Education provides information on household access to computers and the internet. *Second*, education surveys provide information about smartphone access and digital use among students. *Third*, UNICEF as reported in Banerjee *et al.* (2019) provide data on gender differences in mobile phone, smartphone, and internet use. *Fourth*, recent peer-reviewed studies used to examine digital education, youth engagement, employment, skills, and disability. The analysis follows three stages. *First*, it examines digital inequalities based on rural-urban location, economic status, caste, and gender. *Second*, it studies how digital capabilities influence education, employment, and skill development. *Third*, it examines how social factors such as income, caste, gender, and disability affect the ability to convert digital resources into meaningful opportunities.

6. Findings

6.1 Smartphone Access and Control

The secondary data show that the digital divide in India is shaped by rural-urban location, economic status, caste, and gender. The differences in household access to computers and the Internet between rural and urban areas, based on the NSSO 75th Round. Among rural households there are 4.4 percent households possess a computer and 14.9 percent have Internet

connectivity. In urban 23.4 percent households possess computer and 42 percent have Internet connectivity. The digital divide remains wide between rural and urban households, with rural areas having much lower access to computers and the Internet. Richer households also have better digital facilities, while the rural-urban gap has narrowed mainly due to the spread of mobile Internet rather than improved computer access. Sharma found that only 9% of students had essential digital infrastructure and just 11% of households had a computer or tablet suitable for online classes. Beyond access, young people also face gaps in digital skills and outcomes. Laskar found that rural youth mainly used smartphones for calls and entertainment rather than education or skill development. Gaikwad's secondary analysis shows the same multidimensional pattern persisting even after two decades of Digital India and BharatNet initiatives.

Table-1: Smartphone Access and Control among Enrolled Students in India (per cent)

Indicator	Percentage
Students with smartphone at home	67.6
Of whom do not have access to it	27.4
With full control over the household smartphone	27.0
With access only on rare occasions	47.0
With no access at all	26.1

Source: National survey as reported in (Gautam, 2022)

The evidence shows that having a smartphone does not always mean having the capability to use it for education. More than one-fourth of students with a smartphone at home could not access it, while fewer than one-third had full control over the device. Among college students, poor connectivity and limited data affordability further restricted online learning. During COVID-19, these barriers affected government-school and tribal students most severely, with some students dropping out. Disadvantaged youth used digital platforms such as YouTube to develop skills, limited job opportunities, time, and offline networks prevented them from converting these skills into employment.

6.2 Digital Inequality & the Reproduction of Social Inequalities

Digital inequality refers to disparities in access to, use of, and ability to benefit from digital technologies and online resources. These disparities are shaped by differences in living area, income, education, gender, age, caste, geographical location, and digital skills. It is a well documented fact that Unequal digital access can limit opportunities for education, employment, communication, public services, and social participation. Consequently, digital inequality does not merely reflect existing social inequalities; it can

also reproduce and deepen them, as socially and economically advantaged groups are often better positioned to acquire and effectively use digital resources.

Table-2: Gender Distribution of Mobile Internet Users in India

Living Area	Women	Men
Urban India	38%	62%
Rural India	28%	72%
All India	33%	67%

Source: Department of Telecommunications (DoT), *Telecom Statistics India 2019*, as reported in Banerjee *et al.*, 2019; and Prakash and Srinivasan, 2023).

The digital divide is strongly shaped by gender, caste, tribal status, and disability. Although the smartphone gap narrowed in 2020, it returned to 23% in 2021, showing that temporary access does not ensure long-term digital empowerment for women. According to the GSMA Mobile Gender Gap Report 2025, India's gender gap in smartphone ownership widened from 32% in 2023 to 39% in 2024, indicating that women remained substantially less likely than men to own smartphones. According to the GSMA Mobile Gender Gap Report 2025, India's gender gap in smartphone ownership widened from 32% in 2023 to 39% in 2024, indicating that women remained substantially less likely than men to own smartphones.

Women also remain less represented among Internet users, especially in rural areas. Social restrictions, caste-based inequalities, tribal disadvantage, and limited accessibility for disabled youth further reduce their ability to benefit from digital technologies. These disparities are further reinforced by differences in digital literacy (like use a smartphone, computer or tablet effectively as well as search for and evaluate information on the Internet), affordability of devices (like high cost of devices such as mobiles, tablets, laptops, desktops etc.), data services (like high cost incurred on getting sufficient data) and also unequal access to reliable digital infrastructure (like poor or unstable Internet connectivity in rural, remote, and tribal areas compared with urban centres; Frequent electricity interruptions etc.). Consequently, digital exclusion can reproduce existing social and economic inequalities by limiting opportunities for education, employment, financial inclusion, and access to public services.

7. Conclusion

This paper shows that the digital divide among Indian youth should be understood as a form of capability deprivation. It is about whether young people have the skills, resources, and social support needed to use technology for education, employment, skills, and other meaningful

opportunities. These capabilities are shaped by class, caste, gender, region, tribal identity, and disability. The study found three major findings: *First*, the digital divide is multidimensional. Rural youth, poorer households, and socially marginalized groups have less access to computers and the internet. *Second*, digital capability strongly influences educational and employment opportunities. Limited access to smartphones, skills, and digital job platforms can restrict young people's opportunities. *Third*, digital inequality can reproduce existing social inequalities through gender norms, caste differences, tribal marginalization, and disability. The Capability Approach helps sociology move beyond the question of access and focus on what young people can actually achieve through digital technology.

8. Suggestions

The policies should improve not only connectivity but also digital skills, affordability, social support, and equal opportunities. First, connectivity policies require supplementation by affordability and device measures. Even where programmes such as BharatNet extend physical infrastructure devices and data plans remain prohibitively expensive for poor households, and the evidence shows that cost is a daily, practical barrier to online education. Second, digital literacy must be reconceived as a social capability rather than a technical skill test. The digital gender gap requires long-term digital literacy and skill-development programmes. Digital inclusion should also be linked with education, vocational training, employment, and social networks so that digital skills lead to real opportunities, especially in rural areas.

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Women's Right to Ancestral Property: A Study of Siranchok Rural Municipality, Gorkha

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Abstract

This article examines women's rights to ancestral property among women in Siranchok Rural Municipality, Gorkha, and explores local perceptions of women's property rights. Although Nepal has introduced laws and legal provisions to protect women's property rights, local practices do not always align with these legal requirements. The study focuses particularly on women's access to property following divorce or the death of their husbands or parents. Property is an important economic and social asset that contributes to security, well-being, and quality of life. In Nepal's traditionally patriarchal social structure, legal provisions recognize women's rights to inherit and share family property. However, in practice, women in many communities continue to face social, cultural, and familial barriers that restrict their access to their lawful share of ancestral property. This study therefore investigates the gap between legal provisions and actual inheritance practices, and their implications, in Siranchok Rural Municipality. Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative research approach and collects primary data through semi-structured interviews with women, family members, community representatives, and other relevant local informants. Informal conversations and field observations also explain how households and the wider community practice property distribution. Participants are selected purposively based on their experience and knowledge of inheritance and property distribution. The study reviews relevant laws, policies, and existing literature as secondary sources. The data are analyzed thematically, with particular attention to legal provisions, patriarchal norms, family practices, and women's actual access to ancestral property. It considers how these factors shape women's decisions to claim property rights.

Keywords

Women, Property rights, Local practice, Provision of property rights, Ancestral property.

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Women's Right to Ancestral Property: A Study of Siranchok Rural Municipality, Gorkha

1. Introduction

From the early stages of social development, men were generally regarded as physically strong and courageous and were assigned responsibilities outside the household, including leadership roles. Men were expected to hunt and bring food, while women prepared the food, cared for children, and carried out other household duties. In this way, a gender-based division of labor gradually developed. Nevertheless, when we examine social development, both men and women contributed equally to society. However, because domestic responsibilities were largely assigned to women, their participation in productive and leadership-oriented activities remained limited, and they were increasingly confined to domestic work (Joshi, 2079 B.S.).

Women constitute approximately 51.13% of Nepal's total population and 52.8% of the study area (NSO, 2021). However, because women have not historically enjoyed equal access to property on the same basis as men, many have not been able to live with full self-respect, independence, and economic agency. In some cases, even when women possessed property, they could not exercise control over it or use it in the same way as men, which further reinforced their dependent position.

Following the political changes of B.S. 2062/63, significant progress was made in recognizing women's rights, particularly regarding property rights. Nevertheless, Nepali society continues to face problems such as discrimination against women, gender-based violence, accusations of witchcraft, and various forms of gender inequality.

Along with this background, this study examines existing constitutional and legal provisions relating to women's property rights. It also explores whether women can access ancestral property equally and whether such access can contribute to women's empowerment. Because relatively little research has examined these issues in depth, this study is confined to the constitutional and legal provisions relating to women's property rights and the social impacts of these rights.

From the past to the present, significant changes and achievements have occurred in the field of women's rights, particularly regarding property. In Nepal, the Eleventh Amendment to the Muluki Ain and the Constitution of Nepal promulgated in B.S. 2072 clearly established women's equal rights to

ancestral property. The Muluki Civil Code, 2074 B.S., further clarified these provisions. As a result, women have, to some extent, been able to establish and exercise property rights on a basis more equal to that of men.

When women remain confined within the household, they cannot become economically capable and independent. Even today, many women continue to depend on men. However, despite these restrictions, women have gradually broken these barriers and entered the public sphere. Compared with other developed countries, Nepali women still have not enjoyed the same level of rights. Although the constitution has promoted 33% women's participation in the political sector through reservation, they have not participated equally with men because invisible yet significant practical difficulties and inequalities still remain in Nepali society.

In this sense, property rights should be systematically guaranteed as an essential requirement for human beings to maintain their existence and live with dignity. In earlier times, women's property rights were not given sufficient importance. However, as society developed, it gradually became clear that women are an integral part of society. As men came to understand that depriving women of various rights, including property rights, would harm society, they placed greater emphasis on ensuring those rights.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides that every individual has the right to own property (UDHR, 1948, adopted through Resolution 217 A (III)). Similarly, the United Nations has recognized women's property rights and other rights through various international conventions, including Article 13 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1979).

In the past, Nepali society generally treated women as second-class citizens, and little importance was given to their rights. However, with growing social awareness, the development of international human rights standards, Nepal's membership in the United Nations, the strengthening of women's voices, and ongoing international pressure and advocacy, Nepali women have gradually gained property rights and other legal and social rights. Regarding how women in Nepal gradually obtained legal rights, the Muluki Ain introduced during the reign of Jung Bahadur in B.S. 1910 provided women with limited property-related rights, although these provisions were not effectively implemented in practice.

It also declared the objective of ensuring women's representation at all levels and in all organs of the state. The Supreme Court of Nepal has played an important role in raising Nepali women's awareness of discriminatory laws and in protecting and promoting women's rights. In particular, Supreme Court decisions and directives contributed significantly to the development of women's property rights by directing the government to establish appropriate legal provisions.

In a country like Nepal, where many women remain disadvantaged economically, socially, politically, and educationally, the state has introduced various laws, policies, and rights-based provisions intended to improve their situation. Nevertheless, except for some educated and socially aware women, many women have not been able to fully exercise the rights legally guaranteed to them. Enacting laws alone is not sufficient; if those laws and rights are not effectively publicized, communicated, and implemented at the grassroots level, they may remain largely formal provisions rather than rights women can exercise in practice (FWLD, 2014; Pradhan *et al.*, 2018). This study will undertake an in-depth exploratory examination of women's rights to ancestral property and their social implications, using both descriptive and analytical approaches.

2. Objectives of the Study

The right to property has been recognized as one of the fundamental rights of human beings (Ojha, 2079 B.S.). In Nepal, women's property rights have a long historical background. However, the issue remains complex and highly debated.

At both the international and national levels, property rights have been closely linked to feminist movements and the broader question of women's empowerment. In this context, the present research focuses on women's property rights in Nepal and their social impacts.

The major objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To examine the constitutional and legal provisions relating to women's property rights.
2. To analyze the current social impacts of women's property rights.

3. Limitations of the Study

Property plays an important role in human life. Ownership over such property is closely connected with the exercise of individual rights. Therefore, no person should be deprived of property rights. This study mainly discusses and analyzes women's property rights under different chapters of the Muluki Civil Code, 2074 B.S. Because laws are generally guided by constitutional principles, the study also discusses provisions relating to women's rights in Nepal's different constitutions. In addition, the study examines various international movements related to women's rights and the international treaties and agreements to which Nepal is a party, particularly those that aim to guarantee and protect women's rights.

Limited research resources and facilities may make it difficult to address every aspect of the study comprehensively. The study area is limited to Siranchok Rural Municipality, Ward No. 2, Gorkha District, Gandaki Province, and includes only 45 households, covering 5 households in each

village. Therefore, the findings do not represent Nepal's entire population and cannot be generalized to all geographical areas or communities.

The study is also limited specifically to women's rights to ancestral property and the social impacts associated with those rights. Since this research focuses only on women residing in Ward No. 2, Siranchok Rural Municipality, Gorkha, the findings and conclusions may not fully correspond with the situation of women living in other regions.

The study examines and analyzes selected social and economic conditions of women living in the study area. Although this study focuses on women in Ward No. 2, Siranchok Rural Municipality, it may still help inform further research on women's property rights in other areas. Because this study was done within limited time and resources, it covers only a restricted geographical area and a limited number of respondents.

4. Theoretical Perspective

Women's empowerment has remained a topic of discussion and debate in every society. In particular, property rights, which have a direct bearing on women's economic autonomy and social empowerment, have become increasingly complex. In this process, various countries, including Nepal, have gradually made efforts to manage and secure women's property rights through legal provisions. Women's empowerment, particularly in relation to their access to, control over, and ownership of property, has consequently become an important subject of academic research in Nepal. In this context, numerous studies have examined women's empowerment and property rights from historical, social, cultural, and legal perspectives. The present study draws upon these studies, research works, and related literature to develop its theoretical perspective on women's rights to ancestral property.

The theoretical understanding of women's property rights in Nepal needs to be situated within the broader structure of patriarchy and gender relations. Nepali society has historically been characterised as a patriarchal and dependent social system influenced by the Hindu *Varnashrama* framework. Under the Hindu social framework, "*Moksha*" (liberation) is defined as the ultimate pursuit (*Purushartha*). The Vedas provide directive rules concerning religion and social organisation, including marriage and its forms, types of sons, adoption (*Dharmaputra*), division of property (*Anshabhandha*), inherited property, female property (*Streedhan*), and ritual offerings (*Shraddha*) (Shrestha, 2055 B.S.). These provisions amply provide an important historical-cultural context for understanding the development of gendered norms concerning family, inheritance, lineage, and property in Nepalese society.

The patriarchal history of Nepali society further indicates that women's social status and autonomy were historically constrained despite their

participation in religious deeds, donations, and other pious activities. Historical references also suggest the existence of normative expectations that women should remain gentle, submissive, and dependent upon male members of the family. Such perceptions are reflected in a 1,500-year-old inscription located in Chabahil, Kathmandu (Joshi, 2039 B.S.). At the same time, the historical position of women was not uniform across different periods. Since men and women were created together, there was initially no gender-based discrimination according to some historical interpretations. During the Vedic period, women were even recruited into military service, while men and women are described as having enjoyed relatively equal status during the Kirat period (Bhandari, 2015). These historical variations indicate that gender relations and women's access to social resources have changed over time rather than remaining completely static.

The patriarchal perspective becomes particularly relevant in understanding the relationship between women, family, lineage, and property. During the Smriti period, although the maxim "where women are worshipped, the gods rejoice" gained influence, women were simultaneously represented as tender-hearted beings who required compassion and protection rather than independent social responsibilities. The expectation that women should remain within the male lineage, irrespective of their independent wealth, strengthened the association between property, descent, and male authority. The principle that a woman should be protected by her father during childhood, by her husband during youth, and by her son during old age further institutionalized women's dependence upon male members of the family (*Manusmriti*, 9.3). From a theoretical perspective, such norms are significant because control over property is closely associated with power, autonomy, bargaining capacity, and social status within the family and wider community.

The historical development of legal provisions in Nepal demonstrates the gradual movement from customary and religiously influenced norms towards greater formal recognition of women's property rights. Even after the enactment of the *Muluki Ain* (Civil Code) in 1910 B.S., religious scriptures continued to influence the understanding and practice of women's rights. The 1910 B.S. *Muluki Ain* provided for marriage expenses for unmarried daughters below the age of 35. Subsequently, the 2020 B.S. *Muluki Ain* introduced a provision under which an unmarried daughter who reached the age of 35 could receive an equal share of parental property (*Ansha*). However, the provisions concerning intestate property continued to place daughters in a relatively disadvantaged position. According to Number 2 of the Chapter on Intestate Estates (*Aputali*), a daughter could not inherit intestate property as long as immediate rightful heirs, such as the deceased person's husband, wife, son, or grandson, were living together (Dulal, 2075 B.S.).

Thus, the theoretical perspective of the present study is located at the intersection of patriarchy, gender relations, economic empowerment, and the institutional transformation of property rights. Property is not merely an economic resource; it also represents access to power, security, decision-making as well as social status. Consequently, women's rights to ancestral property can be understood as an important dimension of women's empowerment. The historical persistence of patriarchal norms, together with subsequent legal reforms, provides the conceptual basis for examining how women's formal entitlement to ancestral property is translated into actual ownership, access, control, and use at the local level. In the context of Siranchok Rural Municipality, Gorkha, this perspective helps examine whether changes in legal provisions have been accompanied by corresponding changes in social practices, family relations, awareness, and women's actual enjoyment of ancestral property rights.

5. A Brief Review of Literature

Because relatively little research has examined these issues in depth, this study is confined to the constitutional and legal provisions relating to women's property rights and the social impacts of these rights. The Government of Nepal Act, 2004 B.S., the Civil Rights Act, 2012 B.S., the Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal, 2019 B.S., and the Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal, 2047 B.S. gradually expanded women's legal rights. In particular, the Eleventh Amendment to the Muluki Ain, 2020 B.S., introduced a provision granting unmarried daughters inheritance rights equal to those of sons. This provision helped establish the principle that women have property rights. Similarly, gender-equality laws amended or repealed many discriminatory provisions that treated women and men differently, thereby extending equal legal rights to women. The Interim Constitution of Nepal, 2063 B.S., further strengthened constitutional protection for women by introducing broader provisions on property rights and other fundamental rights (Acharya, 2079 B.S.).

To evaluate gender equality in Nepal-where women constitute nearly half of the population-it is essential to analyze the historical evolution of women's rights awareness internationally. As early as 1919, countries such as China, Brazil, the United States, and the United Kingdom began advocating for equal social and political rights between men and women. The United Nations subsequently institutionalized these efforts through a series of foundational instruments, adopting principles in 1949 against human trafficking and exploitation, establishing the principle of equal remuneration for equal work in 1951, recognizing political rights as civil rights in 1952, and granting women the right to retain or change their nationality independently upon marriage in 1957 (Chalise, 2077 B.S.).

International standards continued to broaden over the following decades to cover employment, family, and global governance. In 1960, international bodies adopted non-discrimination standards for employment, followed by 1962 principles governing minimum marriage ages and registration. The United Nations further elevated the movement by declaring the International Women's Year and the subsequent UN Decade for Women, prioritizing equality, development, and peace. A major milestone came in 1979, when the UN General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), followed by the 1980 Second World Conference on Women in Copenhagen, which assessed progress and refined strategies for the decade's second half.

By the 1990s, global policy explicitly integrated women's rights into human rights and development agendas. Global progress data compiled in 1991 led into the 1992 Earth Summit in Brazil, which recognized women as essential actors in sustainable development. In 1993, the UN adopted principles to eliminate violence against women, and the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights formally recognized that "women's rights are human rights." Shortly after, the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo confirmed that empowering women is an indispensable component of the development process. Alongside these policy achievements, feminist theory emerged-particularly after the 1950s-as a systematic academic framework for analyzing, explaining, and transforming structural gender disparities and evolving social roles across societies (Dulal, 2075 B.S.).

Women's Property Rights, Bishwaraj Sigdel (2063 B.S.): In the research conducted by Bishwaraj Sigdel titled Access of Women to Property, the issue of what rights were granted to women from Nepal's Constitution of 2004 B.S. to the Interim Constitution of 2063 B.S., as well as the provisions in other acts and laws, has been raised.

Discrimination Against Women, Public Administration Campus, Jamal, Mainadevi Rawat (2059 B.S.): The research paper written by Mainadevi Rawat, based on her study, explores discrimination against women in great depth. It addresses women's past status, how women gained rights in various countries, and when and where they acquired those rights. It also explains which rights the United Nations granted, when Nepal ratified them, and how Nepal's constitution, acts, and other laws provide for women's rights.

Women's Property Rights in the History of Nepal: Hariram Joshi (2038 B.S.), while discussing women's property rights, also explains the nature of women's political participation (Joshi, 2038 B.S.).

The above brief review of literature indicates some important **research gaps**. In fact, every scientific study operates within defined parameters and

established methodological norms. Reviewing existing literature provides a foundation for connecting new empirical findings with prior scholarship. While previous research has examined women's property rights, it has largely overlooked the broader social implications.

Following the *Muluki Ain* of B.S. 1910, which guaranteed marriage expenses only for unmarried daughters under age 35, the *Muluki Ain* of B.S. 2020 marked a significant shift by granting unmarried daughters who reached age 35 an equal share of parental property (*Ansha*). Nevertheless, structural barriers to inheritance persisted; as Dulal (2075 B.S.) notes, daughters were disqualified from inheriting intestate property whenever primary rightful heirs-such as a surviving spouse, son, or grandson-remained in a joint household. This legal dependency aligns with traditional patriarchal frameworks like *Manusmriti* (9.3), which prescribe that women must remain under male protection throughout every stage of life.

While scholars have documented various facets of gender and inheritance-such as Shrestha (2055 B.S.), who examined property division, inherited assets, female-held property, and ritual offerings, and Joshi (2038 B.S.), who analyzed legal property rights-empirical research focused on localized practices remains minimal. Specifically, no existing literature addresses how women's ancestral property rights operate within Siranchok Rural Municipality. This study fills that critical gap by exploring how property laws translate into local practice and examining the broader, unaddressed social impacts on women in the community.

6. Research Methodology

This topic examines awareness, legal recognition, and practical impacts of women's equal property rights in rural Nepal. Specifically, it assesses the positive and negative perceptions of conscious residents in Siranchok, Gorkha. This study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design. The study analyzed data on women's property rights and community perceptions. The study area comprises 844 households with a total population of 2725. The researchers selected a sample of 45 men and women using simple random sampling and collected data through semi-structured questionnaires.

7. Data Presentation and Analysis

7.1 Socio-economic and Demographic Profile of Respondents

This section analyzes respondents' socio-economic and demographic characteristics. This section presents and analyzes key variables-including gender, age group, religion and economic status-in tabular format.

7.1.1 Population Profile (Ward Level)

Based on the Village Development Committee (VDC) profile used for this research, the ward-level details regarding settlements, total households, and population distribution are outlined in Table-1.

Table-1: Population Distribution of the Rural Municipality

Ward	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Total
Number of households	564	844	1184	878	747	1119	827	831	6,994
Female	912	1105	1382	1356	1362	1579	1216	1495	10,407
Male	868	1082	1188	1939	1250	1374	1087	1324	10,112
Total	2440	2725	2570	2705	2612	2953	2303	2829	21,137

Source: RMC Profile 2020.

The demographic distribution across the eight wards reveals a total population of 21,137 residents residing in 6,994 households. Overall, females outnumber males, accounting for 10,407 residents (50.8%) compared to 10,112 males (49.2%). Settlement density and population size vary significantly across the wards, with Ward 1 recording the smallest settlement footprint at 564 households and 2,440 total residents, while Ward 3 contains the highest concentration of households at 1,184. Ward 6 is the most populous locality, with 2,953 residents and the highest number of females (1,579). Conversely, Ward 4 deviates sharply from the broader female-majority trend, with a male-leaning demographic profile: 1,939 males compared to 1,356 females. Ward 7 has the smallest overall population, totaling 2,303 residents.

7.1.2 Gender-based Breakdown

Perceptions regarding women's property rights and their social roles vary by gender. While women view legal ownership as necessary, men may not. Because this study focuses specifically on women, we sampled more female respondents than male respondents, as detailed in the following table.

Table-2: Population Distribution of Respondents according to Gender

Sex	Number	Percentage
Female	27	60.0
Male	18	40.0
Total	45	100.0

Source: RMC Profile 2020.

The above table outlines the demographic breakdown of the sample population, comprising 27 women (60%) and 18 men (40%), totaling 45 respondents. Although women represent the majority of participants, the study intentionally included male respondents to ensure a well-rounded analysis. Because ancestral property rights in this socio-cultural context traditionally favor male lineage, capturing male viewpoints is critical to understanding legal, familial, and economic inheritance dynamics from both sides.

People in the study area are not well informed about their property rights. Some have little knowledge, while others have never heard of their property rights. Findings highlight the need to implement existing rights and further amendment of laws to grant sons and daughters equal rights to ancestral property, thereby expanding women's rights. The presence of individuals who remain unaware underscores the need for dissemination and public awareness campaigns. Based on the survey of female respondents' knowledge of Nepal's property laws, most respondents do not have a thorough understanding of these laws. A significant proportion of women remain unaware of Nepal's property laws. Without knowledge of these rights, legal provisions cannot be effectively exercised or utilized, underscoring the urgent need for women to become proactive and informed about their legal rights.

Under traditional social customs, property rights were historically reserved exclusively for sons. However, legal amendments in Nepal have granted women rights to ancestral property. The study assessed the level of involvement, whether equal or unequal, in household decision-making; respondents reported on decisions to buy or sell household property, and their responses were presented and analyzed. For property sales, most decisions are made through joint discussions between men and women. Although women may not yet have full sole decision-making authority over property, their collaborative participation in domestic financial decisions remains strong.

Respondents' attitude toward transferring property via a will concerns whether individuals should have the legal right to transfer property to a son, daughter, or anyone of their choice. Their perspective regarding whether the concept of the will system is positive and needs to be solely transferred to biological children, rather than an individual being permitted to bequeath property to whoever inspires trust and takes responsibility for supporting them in old age. A strong majority of respondents hold a positive view that granting women property rights brings about meaningful social change. They explicitly expressed a positive outlook and believe that transferring property does not affect or play a role in driving societal change.

Securing property rights elevates social prestige, emphasizing that property ownership allows women to become more active in productive sectors. Given that existing economic, social, and religious structures often marginalized women, access to property rights enhances their self-confidence, boosts economic participation, fosters self-reliance, and provides vital encouragement to take independent initiative.

8. Summary and Conclusion

Based on the preceding data, securing equal property rights for women has a positive impact across society, family units, and kinship networks.

However, because implementing equal property rights in practice encounters social inertia and resistance to easy acceptance, widespread legal and social awareness is essential. Beyond individual families, women's property rights contribute significantly to broader community development and national progress. Furthermore, equal access to property ownership directly enhances women's self-esteem and confidence.

This structural shift in property rights has also transformed traditional family attitudes regarding early marriage. Rather than viewing daughters as temporary burdens to be married off early-knowing they hold equal shares in family property-families and brothers increasingly recognize the importance of empowering women before marriage. Consequently, community consensus is growing that women should obtain education, acquire skill-based vocational training, and secure employment opportunities before marriage.

The synthesis of the empirical findings demonstrates that securing equal property rights for women generates a profound, transformative impact across society, family units, and broader kinship networks. Granting women legal ownership over property does not merely redistribute assets; it fundamentally dismantles historic dependencies, serving as a primary catalyst for social upliftment, economic autonomy, and national development. Furthermore, equal property ownership directly enhances women's self-esteem, agency, and confidence, enabling them to navigate both domestic and public spheres with greater status and security.

However, the transition from legal policy to practical social implementation faces entrenched socio-cultural inertia. Because patriarchal norms make the seamless acceptance of women's property rights difficult in daily practice, sustained, community-wide legal literacy and social awareness campaigns are imperative. Widespread consciousness is necessary to ensure that statutory rights translate into genuine structural empowerment rather than remaining theoretical legal guarantees.

Critically, this institutional shift in property ownership is reshaping traditional family dynamics around marriage and gender roles. Historically, deep-seated societal norms encouraged early marriage for daughters, often viewing them as financial liabilities within the parental household. With the recognition of equal inheritance rights, families and male siblings are shifting their approach. Rather than rushing into early matrimonial arrangements, the community is increasingly agreeing that women must achieve individual independence first. Consequently, families increasingly prioritize providing daughters with quality education, practical vocational skills, and formal employment opportunities prior to marriage, ensuring long-term self-reliance and elevated standing in society.

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**Displacement and the Reshaping of
Indigenous Livelihoods: A Review of
the Literature on Mumbai's Koli
and Agri Communities**

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Abstract

The Koli and Agri communities have occupied a visibly glaring space in the landscape of Mumbai since time immemorial. They have made their presence felt not only demographically, but also culturally and politically. However, despite being the city's age-old inhabitants and landowners, both communities have been pushed to the margins for various reasons. From facing a serious bout of identity crisis to being introduced to other religions, the Koli and Agri communities are plagued with a whole host of problems. As a permanent solution to these problems and also for a sense of security, the two communities have chosen to assimilate and subsequently integrate into the mainstream religions like Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam. In the course of time, they face marginalization in different forms, particularly becoming victims of land displacement, which hindered their livelihood. This article reviews various texts that trace this process of assimilation, integration, and consequent marginalization of the Agri and Koli communities. From tracing their origins in Mumbai to examining their current status in various literary texts, the article offers a brief primary-data review of both communities.

Keywords

Koli and Agri, Urban displacement, Indigenous communities, Mumbai, Assimilation, Marginalization.

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Displacement and the Reshaping of Indigenous Livelihoods: A Review of the Literature on Mumbai's Koli and Agri Communities

1. Introduction

The literature review is one of the most intellectually demanding and analytically significant components of academic research. Far from being a mere cataloging exercise in which existing scholarship is listed and summarised in sequence, a well-constructed literature review serves as the epistemological and theoretical scaffolding upon which the entire edifice of a scholarly argument rests. As Hart (2018) has argued, the literature review is not a passive recounting of what others have said; it is an active, critical engagement with the intellectual traditions, methodological approaches, and substantive findings that define a discipline at a given historical moment.

For the present study, which investigates the processes of assimilation, integration, and marginalization experienced by the Koli and Agri communities of Mumbai, the literature review is particularly significant for several interrelated reasons. First, these communities represent what may be termed indigenous or autochthonous populations of the Mumbai region, peoples whose histories, livelihoods, and cultural practices are intimately tied to the coastal and agrarian ecologies that predated the emergence of the city as a colonial and post-colonial metropolis.

Second, assimilation, integration, and marginalization are not static conditions but dynamic, historically contingent processes that unfold differently across spatial, temporal, and social contexts. The challenge for the present study is to remain attentive to the specificities of the Mumbai context, where colonial urbanization, post-colonial industrialization, and neoliberal restructuring have created a distinctive landscape of opportunity and dispossession. The review engages with the substantial literature on development-induced displacement in India, then narrows its focus to Mumbai's historical development and the specific experiences of its Koli and Agri communities.

However, it is imperative to keep in the background of the entire article David Harvey's Right to the city. David Harvey's "right to the city" reframes urban space as a collective rather than individual entitlement - not merely a right to access existing city resources, but a right to actively shape and remake the city according to the needs and desires of its inhabitants. Drawing on Henri Lefebvre's original formulation, Harvey argues that urbanization

has historically been driven by the absorption of surplus capital, producing cities that serve accumulation rather than the people who live in them - displacing the poor, commodifying housing, and privatizing public space. For Harvey, reclaiming the right to the city means challenging this capitalist logic of urban development and asserting democratic control over the processes of urbanization itself, making it a fundamentally political and collective struggle rather than a legal or individual claim. This framework has been widely taken up in critiques of gentrification, eviction, and displacement in cities like Mumbai, where informal settlements and resettlement politics sit directly at the intersection of capital accumulation and the right to inhabit urban space.

2. Indigenous Communities of Mumbai

The Koli and Agri communities are among the oldest inhabitants of the Mumbai region, with histories that predate the city's emergence as a colonial and post-colonial metropolis by several centuries. Their distinctive cultures, occupational practices, and patterns of settlement have been shaped by the coastal and agrarian ecologies of the Bombay archipelago, and their experiences of urbanization, development, and displacement reflect the broader dynamics through which indigenous communities in the global South have been incorporated into, and often marginalized by, the processes of urban growth and economic modernization. This section reviews the available scholarly literature on the Koli and Agri communities, examining their historical origins, social organization, occupational practices, cultural life, and the contemporary challenges they face in the context of Mumbai's ongoing urban transformation.

3. The Koli Community

3.1 Historical Origins and Social Organization

The Koli community is widely recognized as one of the oldest and most culturally distinctive communities of the Mumbai region. The origins of the Koli Community remain a subject of considerable scholarly debate, with some authorities tracing their ancestry to the aboriginal inhabitants of India's western coast, while others suggest a more complex history of migration, intermarriage, and cultural synthesis. Enthoven (1920), in his comprehensive ethnographic survey of the tribes and castes of Bombay, identified the Kolis as a heterogeneous group, encompassing a range of sub-castes and territorial divisions, including the Son Koli, the Kharva Koli, the Mangela Koli, and the Mahadev Koli, each with its own distinctive customs, dialect, and social organization. Ghurye (1969), in his monograph on the Mahadev Kolis, provided a detailed account of the social structure, religious practices, and economic life of one of the major Koli sub-groups, documenting the complex interplay between tribal and caste identities that has characterized Koli social organization.

The social organization of the Koli community has traditionally been characterized by a strong sense of territorial identity, with individual koliwadadas functioning as semi-autonomous social units, each with its own traditions, deities, and patterns of internal governance. The koliwada, or Koli village, is not merely a residential settlement but a comprehensive social world, encompassing community members' dwellings, spaces for work and leisure, shrines and temples dedicated to community deities, and landing places and boat sheds where fishing activities are organized. The social life of the koliwada has traditionally revolved around a calendar of religious festivals, including Narali Pournima, which celebrates the beginning of the fishing season after the monsoon, and the Holi and Ganpati festivals, which provide occasions for communal celebration and reinforce social bonds. Punekar (1959), in her study of the Son Kolis of Bombay, documented the importance of these festivals for the maintenance of community identity and social cohesion, arguing that they served as mechanisms through which the Koli community articulated its distinctive cultural identity in the face of the homogenising pressures of urban life.

3.2 Occupation, Economy, and Livelihood

Fishing has been the traditional occupation of the Koli community for centuries, and the economic life of the koliwadadas has traditionally been organized around the rhythms and requirements of the fishing calendar. The methods of fishing employed by the Koli community are diverse, ranging from small-scale, shore-based fishing using cast nets and hand lines to more ambitious deep-sea fishing expeditions using motorized boats and sophisticated navigational equipment. The work of Vicziany (1986) provided a detailed account of the economic organization of the Bombay fishery, documenting the complex system of credit, marketing, and labour allocation that structured the relationship between boat owners, crew members, fish merchants, and wholesale traders. Her analysis highlighted the vulnerability of the Koli fishing economy to fluctuations in fish stocks, market prices, and weather conditions, and documented the growing pressure on marine resources resulting from the expansion of industrial fishing, pollution, and the destruction of mangrove forests and coral reefs.

The contemporary challenges facing the Koli fishing economy are formidable and multidimensional. The decline of fish stocks in the waters surrounding Mumbai, driven by overfishing, industrial pollution, and the destruction of coastal habitats, has significantly reduced the productivity of traditional fishing grounds, forcing many Koli fishermen to venture farther from shore in search of viable catches, often at considerable cost and risk. The construction of the Mumbai Coastal Road and other infrastructure projects along the city's shoreline has further disrupted fishing activities, destroying breeding grounds, obstructing navigation routes, and restricting access to

traditional landing sites. Scholarly analyses and community reports have documented the impact of the Coastal Regulation Zone notifications on the Koli fishing community, arguing that the regulatory framework, while ostensibly designed to protect the coastal environment, has had the unintended consequence of restricting the traditional activities of fishing communities while doing little to curb the more destructive practices of industrial and commercial interests (Government of Maharashtra, 2016). The growing import of fish from other parts of India and from abroad has also affected the competitiveness of locally caught fish, putting further downward pressure on prices and profit margins.

3.3 Political Participation and Social Change

The Koli community has a long history of political engagement and collective action, both within the formal structures of democratic politics and through informal mechanisms of community mobilization and resistance. Vicziany (1986), in her analysis of the limits of traditional politics among the Bombay fishermen, documented the ways in which the Koli community sought to articulate its interests through the existing political system, including the formation of community-based organizations, the cultivation of relationships with political parties and elected representatives, and the use of petitions, protests, and legal challenges to resist the encroachment of development projects on their lands and fishing grounds. Her analysis revealed the structural constraints that limited the effectiveness of these strategies, including the fragmentation of the Koli community along sub-caste and territorial lines, the relative weakness of the community's position within the broader political economy of Mumbai, and the tendency of political parties to co-opt community leaders without addressing the substantive grievances of the community as a whole.

Contemporary scholarship on the Koli community has documented the complex and often contradictory processes of social change that have characterized the community's engagement with urban modernity. Ranade (2008), in a study drawing upon ethnographic fieldwork in multiple koliwadās, documented the growing occupational diversification among younger generations of Koli families, many of whom have pursued higher education and entered the formal sector economy, often in occupations far removed from traditional fishing. This occupational diversification, while offering new economic opportunities, has also created tensions within families and communities as younger community members navigate competing demands of traditional expectations and modern aspirations. The relationship between education, employment, and community identity among the Kolis remains under-researched, with significant implications for understanding the long-term trajectory of community change.

4. The Agri Community

4.1 Historical Origins and the Salt-Pan Economy

The Agri community, like the Koli community, has a long and deeply rooted history in the Mumbai region. The name Agri is derived from the Sanskrit term *agara*, meaning salt pan, reflecting the community's traditional association with salt production, an occupation that has been practised in the coastal lowlands of the Bombay archipelago for centuries. Enthoven (1920) documented the social organization and economic practices of the Agri community, describing a community whose livelihood was intimately tied to the tidal rhythms and saline soils of the coastal zone, and whose seasonal cycle of work was organized around the production of salt during the dry months and the cultivation of rice and vegetables during the monsoon season. The salt produced by the Agri community was historically an important commodity, traded extensively within the western Indian Ocean world and contributing significantly to the regional economy.

The salt-pan economy of the Agri community represents a distinctive form of livelihood that has been shaped by the specific ecological conditions of the Mumbai coastal zone. The production of salt requires access to flat, low-lying land that is periodically inundated by tidal waters, conditions that are found in the areas between the original seven islands of Bombay and in the broader metropolitan region, including Thane, Mira-Bhayander, and Navi Mumbai. Salt production involves a complex series of steps, including building bunds and channels to control tidal flow, evaporating salt water in a series of graduated pans, and harvesting, drying, and storing the finished product. This process requires not only specialized ecological knowledge but also collective forms of labour organization, as the construction and maintenance of salt pans typically involve the cooperation of multiple families and the sharing of equipment, water rights, and marketing arrangements.

4.2 Social Organization and Identity

The social organization of the Agri community has traditionally been characterized by a combination of territorial identity and caste-based social structure. The *gaothan*, or Agri village, has functioned as the primary unit of social organisation, providing the physical and social context within which community life is conducted. Unlike the *koliwadas* of the Koli community, which are typically located along the coastline and oriented towards the sea, the *gaothans* of the Agri community are typically located inland, in areas where agricultural land and salt pans were historically available. The Agri community has its own distinctive cultural practices, including the worship of local deities, the observance of community-specific festivals, and the maintenance of oral traditions that recount the community's history and its relationship to the land.

The question of Agri identity has become increasingly contested in the context of Mumbai's urban transformation. The Agri community's claim to indigeneity, like that of the Koli community, is rooted in the historical depth of their connection to the land, a connection that predates the emergence of the city by several centuries. However, the Agri community's identity has been complicated by the process of Sanskritization, through which some Agri families have sought to raise their social status by adopting the customs, rituals, and caste names associated with higher-status groups within the Hindu social hierarchy. This process, which Srinivas (1956, 1966) described and theorised in his influential work on social change in India, has been documented among the Agri community by several scholars, who have noted the adoption of Brahminical rituals, the restriction of widow remarriage, and the adoption of vegetarianism among some sections of the community. The relationship between Sanskritization, social mobility, and the maintenance of community identity among the Agris remains a complex and under-researched area.

4.3 Occupational Transition & Contemporary Transformations

The contemporary economic condition of the Agri community is characterised by a profound and ongoing process of occupational transition, driven by the progressive loss of agricultural and salt-pan land to urban development, the declining profitability of traditional occupations, and the growing attractiveness of urban employment for younger members of the community. The conversion of salt-pan land and agricultural land to residential, commercial, and industrial use has been one of the most significant drivers of economic change for the Agri community, depriving many families of their primary source of livelihood and forcing them to seek alternative sources of income. The Agri communities of Mira-Bhayander, Thane, and Navi Mumbai, which historically had some of the most productive salt-pan lands in the Mumbai metropolitan region, have been particularly affected, as the city's rapid suburban expansion has progressively encroached on their traditional lands.

The occupational diversification of the Agri community has taken a variety of forms, including wage labour in the construction and service sectors, small-scale entrepreneurship, and, for a growing minority, higher education and professional employment. However, the transition from traditional to modern occupations has not been smooth or equitable. Many Agri families, displaced from their lands without adequate compensation or rehabilitation, have found themselves in a position of economic vulnerability, lacking the skills, education, and social networks required to compete effectively in the urban labour market. The experience of the Agri project-affected persons of Navi Mumbai, documented by Parasuraman (1999) and others, illustrates the challenges faced by communities undergoing

forced occupational transition, including prolonged unemployment, underemployment, and the erosion of community-based forms of social support.

The gender dimensions of occupational transition among the Agri community warrant particular attention. In the traditional economy of salt production and agriculture, gender roles were relatively clearly defined, with men and women performing different but complementary tasks within the household production unit. Women's labour was central to the salt-production process, involving tasks such as the raking and harvesting of salt, the maintenance of bunds and channels, and the management of household finances. The transition from household-based production to wage employment in the formal sector has disrupted these gendered divisions of labour, creating new patterns of male and female employment, household income management, and domestic responsibility. The limited available evidence suggests that Agri women have faced particular challenges in the urban labour market, including lower wages, poorer working conditions, and greater vulnerability to exploitation, while also bearing a disproportionate burden of the unpaid domestic and care work that sustains the household. These gendered dimensions of occupational transition represent an important area for further research, as the existing scholarly literature on the Agri community has paid insufficient attention to the differential experiences of men and women in the process of community transformation.

5. Literature on Development-Induced Displacement in Mumbai

The scholarly literature on development-induced displacement in Mumbai is extensive and multifaceted, reflecting the city's long history of urban transformation, its role as India's financial and commercial capital, and the intensity of the conflicts over land, space, and livelihood that have characterised its development. This section reviews the major literature on specific development projects and processes that have affected the Koli and Agri communities, examining the empirical findings, theoretical implications, and policy debates that have emerged from this work.

5.1 Koliwadas and Gaothans under Threat

The koliwadas and gaothans of Mumbai represent a distinctive form of urban settlement increasingly threatened by urban redevelopment and infrastructure expansion. These settlements, which predate the colonial and postcolonial city, occupy some of the most valuable land in the Mumbai metropolitan region, including coastal areas with commanding views of the Arabian Sea, low-lying areas suitable for reclamation and development, and suburban areas with high potential for residential and commercial construction. The growing value of this land, driven by the speculative dynamics of Mumbai's real-estate market, has created powerful incentives

for the acquisition and redevelopment of koliwadās and gaothans, often in disregard of the rights and needs of the communities that inhabit them.

Appadurai (2000), in his influential essay on spectral housing and urban cleansing in millennial Mumbai, provided a theoretical framework for understanding the dynamics through which established communities are rendered invisible and illegitimate within the dominant narratives of urban progress. His concept of spectral housing refers to the condition of communities whose presence in the urban landscape is acknowledged only to be negated, who are treated as ghosts haunting the spaces that the city wishes to claim for its own purposes. This concept is directly applicable to the situation of Mumbai's koliwadās and gaothans, which are often depicted in planning documents and media representations as obsolete, encroaching, or out of place, even as the communities that inhabit them continue to assert their historical claims to the land and their right to remain *in situ*. Scholarly and activist accounts have documented the specific ways in which the Coastal Regulation Zone notifications have been used to restrict the activities of fishing communities while facilitating the construction of high-value commercial and residential developments in adjacent areas, a pattern that illustrates the uneven application of environmental regulation in the service of powerful economic interests (Sampat, 2012).

5.2 The Navi Mumbai Project and Project-Affected Persons

The development of Navi Mumbai, planned as a counter-magnet to the congested island city, represents one of the most significant episodes of development-induced displacement in the history of the Mumbai metropolitan region. Conceived in the early 1970s and implemented by the City and Industrial Development Corporation (CIDCO), the project involved acquiring approximately 159 villages and displacing an estimated 117,000 families, a significant proportion of whom belonged to the Agri community (Fernandes, 2008). The land acquisition and resettlement process for the Navi Mumbai project has drawn considerable scholarly attention, with studies documenting inadequate compensation, failed resettlement policies, and the long-term socio-economic consequences of displacement for affected communities.

Ethnographic and survey-based studies of the Navi Mumbai project-affected persons have provided detailed accounts of the lived experience of displacement and the strategies through which displaced Agri families sought to reconstruct their lives in the new urban environment (Parasuraman, 1999; Fernandes, 2008). These analyses have highlighted the disjunction between the abstract, standardized categories of state planning, which treated displaced persons as undifferentiated units of population to be relocated and compensated, and the complex, differentiated realities of community life, in which land, livelihood, and identity were intertwined in

ways that could not be captured by the bureaucratic categories of compensation and rehabilitation. The experience of the Navi Mumbai project-affected persons, as documented by these and other scholars, illustrates a recurring pattern in which the benefits of large-scale urban development accrue primarily to new migrants, investors, and developers, while the costs are borne disproportionately by the original inhabitants of the land.

5.3 The Coastal Road Project and Other Mega-Infrastructure

The Mumbai Coastal Road Project, a 29.2-kilometer roadway connecting south Mumbai to the western suburbs, represents one of the most contested infrastructure projects in the city's recent history. The project, which involves extensive land reclamation along the city's western coastline, has been opposed by environmental activists, fishing communities, and civil society organizations on grounds that include the destruction of marine biodiversity, the disruption of fishing activities, the inadequacy of environmental impact assessments, and the disproportionate burden that the project places on marginalized coastal communities. The scholarly and activist literature on the Coastal Road project has highlighted the ways in which the project exemplifies a broader pattern of urban development in Mumbai, in which the demands of automobile-dependent middle-class commuters are privileged over the livelihoods and environments of fishing communities and other marginalized urban populations.

The Metro rail project and the Slum Rehabilitation Authority (SRA) schemes represent additional vectors of development-induced displacement that have affected the Koli and Agri communities, albeit in different ways. The Metro construction has involved the acquisition of land and the demolition of structures in areas adjacent to or overlapping with koliwadadas, while the SRA schemes, which are intended to provide formal housing to slum dwellers through the mechanism of cross-subsidized redevelopment, have been criticized for their failure to address the specific needs of koliwada residents, whose patterns of settlement, occupation, and community life are fundamentally different from those of the typical slum household (Patel et al., 2002). The work of Mukhija (2003) on slum redevelopment in Mumbai provided a critical analysis of the SRA model, arguing that its emphasis on the provision of individual housing units, combined with its reliance on market mechanisms and private-sector participation, has produced outcomes that are inequitable and that fail to address the structural causes of urban poverty and inadequate housing.

5.4 Port Expansion and Special Economic Zones

The expansion of the Mumbai Port Trust and the development of the Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust at Nhava Sheva have had significant consequences for the coastal ecology and for the livelihoods of the Koli fishing communities that operate in the waters adjacent to the port facilities. Dredging

shipping channels, constructing berths and container terminals, and increasing maritime traffic have all contributed to marine degradation, reducing fish stocks and creating navigational hazards for small-scale fishing vessels. The development of special economic zones in the Mumbai metropolitan region, including those planned for areas adjacent to Agri salt-pan lands, represents a further threat to the livelihoods and territories of indigenous communities, as SEZ development typically involves the acquisition of large areas of land, the provision of tax incentives and regulatory concessions to private investors, and the creation of enclaves of economic activity that are physically and administratively separated from the surrounding areas.

Chatterjee (2014), in her analysis of de-colonising the city and urban planning in post-colonial Bombay, highlighted the continuities between colonial and post-colonial approaches to urban planning, arguing that the post-colonial state has inherited and intensified the colonial tendency to treat the city as an object of technical management rather than a lived social environment shaped by the histories, aspirations, and struggles of its inhabitants. This perspective is directly relevant to the analysis of SEZ development and port expansion, which are typically justified in the language of economic growth, employment generation, and global competitiveness, but which have the effect of further marginalizing communities whose claims to land and livelihood are perceived as incompatible with the demands of the global economy. The work of Sampat (2012) on the political economy of land acquisition in India provided additional evidence of the ways in which the legal and administrative frameworks governing land acquisition for SEZs and other development projects create structural incentives for the dispossession of marginalized communities.

6. Land Issues

6.1 Land Alienation and the Politics of Ownership

The question of land ownership and land alienation is perhaps the most fundamental issue confronting the Koli and Agri communities of Mumbai. Despite their historical presence in the region, many Koli and Agri families lack formal title to the land they occupy, a consequence of the colonial and post-colonial legal frameworks that have consistently privileged formal, documented forms of property rights over customary and occupancy-based forms of tenure. The absence of formal title makes these communities vulnerable to state land acquisition and encroachment by private developers, who exploit legal ambiguity around the status of *koliwadas* and *gaothans* to advance their own claims to the land. Mukhija (2003), in his study of slum redevelopment in Mumbai, documented the complex and often contradictory ways in which the absence of formal property rights affects the lives and livelihoods of urban communities, noting that the lack of legal title,

while rendering communities vulnerable to displacement, also creates opportunities for collective mobilization and the assertion of de facto ownership through occupation and community organization.

The Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) notifications, issued by the Ministry of Environment and Forests, add another dimension to the land question by affecting the Koli and Agri communities. The CRZ framework, which restricts development activities within specified distances from the high-tide line, was designed to protect the coastal environment from the damaging effects of unregulated construction and industrial activity. However, as analyses of the CRZ framework have demonstrated, it has had the paradoxical effect of restricting the traditional activities of fishing communities, including the construction and repair of boats, the drying of fish, and the expansion of dwelling space, while providing inadequate protection against the more destructive impacts of large-scale infrastructure projects, industrial pollution, and real-estate development. The politics of the CRZ, in which environmental protection, community rights, and development interests intersect and conflict, illustrates the broader dilemma faced by indigenous communities in Mumbai: that the legal and regulatory frameworks ostensibly designed to protect them often have the unintended consequence of further constraining their autonomy and restricting their access to the resources upon which their livelihoods depend.

6.2 Real Estate Pressures and Gentrification

The explosive growth of Mumbai's real-estate market has created enormous pressures on the remaining koliwadass and gaothans, which occupy some of the most sought-after land in the metropolitan region. The concept of gentrification, originally developed by Smith (1979, 2002) to describe the process by which capital flows back into the urban core, displacing working-class residents and transforming the social and physical character of neighbourhoods, provides a useful, if imperfect, framework for understanding these pressures. In Mumbai, gentrification takes distinctive forms, shaped by the dynamics of the Indian real-estate market, the legal and regulatory framework governing land use and development, and the cultural politics of community, identity, and heritage surrounding the koliwadass and gaothans.

Smith (2002) argued that gentrification should be understood as a global urban strategy, driven by the efforts of urban governments to attract capital investment and to reposition their cities within the hierarchies of global economic competition. In Mumbai, this global strategy has manifested itself in the construction of luxury residential towers, shopping malls, and entertainment complexes, often on or adjacent to land historically occupied by Koli and Agri communities. The case of Worli Koliwada, where the construction of high-rise residential towers has dramatically altered the

physical and social landscape surrounding the traditional settlement, exemplifies the dynamics of gentrification as they affect Mumbai's indigenous communities. The juxtaposition of traditional koliwada structures and gleaming glass-and-steel towers creates a visual representation of the inequality and displacement that characterize Mumbai's contemporary urban development, a juxtaposition that has been analyzed by scholars including Banerjee-Guha (2002) and Anjaria (2016) in their studies of the spatial politics of Mumbai.

7. Occupational Challenges

7.1 Decline of Fishing and Marine Livelihoods

The decline of the fishing economy is one of the most consequential and well-documented challenges facing the Koli community. Multiple factors have contributed to this decline, including the overexploitation of fish stocks by industrial trawlers, the pollution of coastal waters by industrial effluents and domestic sewage, the destruction of mangrove forests and other critical coastal habitats, the disruption of fishing activities by infrastructure development, and the increasing costs of fishing equipment and fuel. Vicziany (1986) documented the vulnerability of the Bombay fishery to these pressures as early as the 1980s, and subsequent studies have confirmed that the situation has continued to deteriorate, with significant consequences for the economic viability of traditional fishing and for the communities that depend upon it.

The occupational diversification that has accompanied the decline of fishing has taken multiple forms, including wage labour in the construction, transport, and service sectors, small-scale trade and entrepreneurship, and, for a growing minority, higher education and professional employment. However, the transition from fishing to other occupations has been neither smooth nor equitable. Older members of the community, who have spent their entire working lives in the fishing economy, often lack the skills and education required to compete in the formal sector labour market, while younger members, who may have acquired education and training, frequently face discrimination and social exclusion in the urban workplace. The loss of fishing as a primary occupation also has significant cultural implications, as it severs the connection between the community and the sea that has been central to Koli identity for centuries, undermining the transmission of traditional ecological knowledge and eroding the social and cultural practices that have historically sustained community life.

7.2 Decline of Salt Production and Agricultural Practices

The decline of salt production and agriculture among the Agri community mirrors, in important respects, the decline of fishing among the Kolis, though the specific dynamics and timelines differ. The conversion of

salt-pan land and agricultural land to urban use has been the primary driver of occupational decline for the Agri community, as the expanding urban footprint of Mumbai has progressively encroached upon the low-lying coastal areas where salt production and agriculture have traditionally been practised. Competition from industrially produced salt, which benefits from economies of scale and government subsidies unavailable to small-scale traditional producers, has further undermined the economic viability of traditional salt production, making it an increasingly marginal activity even where land remains available.

The occupational transition experienced by the Agri community has been documented in a number of studies, though the scholarly literature on the Agris is considerably less extensive than that on the Kolis, reflecting the Agri community's relative invisibility within broader scholarship on Mumbai's indigenous populations. Studies of the project-affected persons of Navi Mumbai, including those drawing upon CIDCO's own resettlement records, provide some of the most detailed available evidence on the consequences of displacement for Agri families, documenting the loss of land, the inadequacy of compensation, the challenges of adapting to urban livelihoods, and the long-term social and economic consequences of forced occupational transition. Additional research is needed to document the experiences of Agri communities in other parts of the Mumbai metropolitan region, including Mira-Bhayander, Thane, and the remaining salt-pan areas of the island city, where urban development pressures continue to threaten traditional livelihoods.

8. Identity and Culture

8.1 Assimilation and Sanskritization

The processes of assimilation and Sanskritization have played significant roles in shaping the contemporary identities of the Koli and Agri communities. Assimilation, as conceptualized by Gordon (1964), refers to the process by which a minority or marginalized group progressively adopts the cultural norms, values, and practices of the dominant society, losing its distinctive cultural identity in the process. Gordon identified seven dimensions of assimilation, ranging from cultural or behavioural assimilation, involving the adoption of the language, dress, and customs of the dominant group, to structural assimilation, involving the entry of minority group members into the social institutions and organizations of the dominant society, to marital assimilation, involving intermarriage between members of the minority and majority groups. For the Koli and Agri communities, the process of assimilation has been driven by multiple factors, including the expansion of formal education, the influence of mass media, the growing participation of community members in the urban economy,

and the erosion of the spatial and occupational boundaries that historically separated these communities from the broader urban society.

Sanskritization, the process through which lower-caste groups adopt the customs, rituals, and social practices associated with higher-caste groups in an effort to improve their social status, represents a distinctive form of cultural change that is specific to the Indian context. Srinivas (1956, 1966), who coined the term and developed the concept, argued that Sanskritization was one of the primary mechanisms of social mobility in the Indian caste system, enabling lower-caste groups to achieve a higher social standing without challenging the fundamental principles of the caste hierarchy. Both the Koli and Agri communities have exhibited tendencies towards Sanskritization, adopting Brahminical rituals, restricting widow remarriage, adopting vegetarianism, and claiming Kshatriya status within the Hindu social order. However, the extent and significance of Sanskritization have varied across communities, localities, and generations, and the relationship between Sanskritization and the broader processes of urbanization, modernization, and marginalization that affect these communities remains a complex and contested area of scholarly inquiry.

8.2 Religious Transformation and Cultural Erosion

Religious transformation among the Koli and Agri communities reflects the broader dynamics of cultural change that have characterized their engagement with urban modernity. The traditional religious practices of both communities are characterized by a distinctive blend of animistic, folk, and Brahminical elements, including the worship of local deities and spirits, the observance of community-specific festivals, and the maintenance of sacred sites and shrines that are intimately connected to the local landscape. The process of religious transformation has involved, on the one hand, the adoption of more standardized, text-based forms of Hinduism, often promoted by religious reform movements and organizations that seek to bring marginalized communities within the fold of mainstream Hindu practice. On the other hand, it has involved the growing influence of other religious traditions, including Islam and Christianity, particularly in areas where the pressures of urban poverty and social exclusion have created conditions favourable to religious conversion.

Cultural erosion, understood as the progressive loss of distinctive cultural practices, knowledge systems, and forms of social organization, represents one of the most profound and consequential dimensions of the marginalization experienced by the Koli and Agri communities. The loss of traditional ecological knowledge about the sea, the coastline, and the salt pans; the decline of community-specific festivals, rituals, and oral traditions; the erosion of community-based forms of governance and collective decision-making; and the weakening of inter-generational bonds and the

transmission of cultural values from older to younger generations, all represent forms of cultural loss that are intimately connected to the broader processes of displacement, occupational change, and social transformation that have been documented in the preceding sections. Barth (1969), in his influential analysis of ethnic groups and boundaries, argued that ethnic identity is maintained not through the preservation of cultural content but through the maintenance of social boundaries that define the group and regulate interaction between groups. From this perspective, the question for the Koli and Agri communities is not merely whether their cultural practices are being preserved but whether the social boundaries that define their communities as distinct collective entities are being maintained, eroded, or transformed in the context of Mumbai's urban development.

9. Research Gap

The preceding review of the literature reveals a substantial and growing body of scholarship on the processes of urbanization, development, and displacement in Mumbai, and on the histories, cultures, and contemporary challenges of the Koli and Agri communities. However, a careful and critical assessment of this literature also reveals several significant gaps, lacunae, and areas of scholarly neglect that the present study seeks to address. The identification of these research gaps is not merely an academic exercise in cataloging what has not yet been studied; it is a fundamental step in establishing the rationale, significance, and original contribution of the present research.

First, and most significantly, there is a striking absence of comparative studies that examine the experiences of the Koli and Agri communities in relation to one another. The available literature treats these communities largely in isolation, with studies focusing either on the Kolis or on the Agris, but rarely on both. This is a significant omission, given that both communities share a common historical relationship to the Mumbai region, both have been affected by similar processes of urbanization, development, and displacement, and both face comparable challenges of land alienation, occupational decline, and cultural erosion. A comparative analysis of the two communities would enable the identification of similarities and differences in their experiences of assimilation, integration, and marginalization, shedding light on the factors that mediate the impact of urban development on different communities and on the ways in which specific occupational traditions, cultural practices, and social organisational forms shape the trajectory of community change. The present study addresses this gap by examining the Koli and Agri communities within a single analytical framework, enabling systematic comparison across a range of dimensions.

Second, the existing literature on Mumbai's indigenous communities has not adequately addressed the triadic relationship between assimilation,

integration, and marginalization that is the central concern of this review. While individual studies have documented aspects of cultural assimilation, economic integration, and social marginalization, these processes have not been systematically analyzed in relation to one another, nor has sufficient attention been paid to the ways in which they interact, reinforce, and contradict one another. For example, the adoption of mainstream cultural practices by members of indigenous communities, conventionally understood as a form of assimilation, may also represent a form of social integration, enabling community members to participate more fully in the economic and political life of the city. Conversely, economic integration into the urban labour market may be accompanied by cultural marginalization, as community members who enter the formal economy are forced to abandon the cultural practices and social relationships that define their community identity. A systematic analysis of these interactions and contradictions is essential for a comprehensive understanding of the contemporary condition of the Koli and Agri communities.

Third, there is a notable absence of longitudinal studies that trace the processes of change experienced by Mumbai's indigenous communities over time. The available literature is dominated by cross-sectional studies that provide a snapshot of community conditions at a particular point in time, but do not capture the dynamic, processual character of community transformation. This is a significant limitation, because the processes of assimilation, integration, and marginalization unfold over extended periods of time, often across multiple generations, and their full consequences may not be apparent from a single point of observation.

Fourth, the sociological understanding of development-induced displacement in the Mumbai context remains underdeveloped. While there is a substantial body of policy-oriented and activist literature on displacement in Mumbai, much of this literature is descriptive and advocacy-oriented, lacking the theoretical depth and analytical rigour that characterize the best sociological scholarship. The application of sociological theories of community change, social marginalization, and cultural transformation to the specific context of development-induced displacement in Mumbai has been limited and fragmented.

Fifth, the voices and perspectives of the community members themselves have been inadequately represented in the existing scholarly literature. While ethnographic studies by scholars including Vicziany (1986) and Ranade (2008) have made important contributions to documenting the lived experiences of Koli and Agri communities, there remains a tendency in much of the literature to treat community members as objects of analysis rather than as agents of their own transformation. The present study addresses this gap by adopting a methodology that prioritizes the voices,

narratives, and perspectives of community members, seeking to understand the processes of assimilation, integration, and marginalization not only from the standpoint of the external observer but also from the standpoint of those who experience these processes directly.

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