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Founder
S. S. Shashi

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Dharam Vir

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Affiliated to United Nations Organization (UNO)
(Autonomous, Regd. Recognized Charitable Organization of
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Frederick Eden Pargiter: An Orientalist countering the Traditional Colonial Historiography

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Abstract

This article critically evaluates the character and contributions of Frederick Eden Pargiter, a British Civil Servant and Orientalist who dedicated over three decades to the study of ancient Indian texts and traditions. Unlike many contemporary scholars, Pargiter exhibited an unbiased, meticulous, and deep appreciation for Indian culture and religion. The study delves into his significant works, including his analysis of time measurement in ancient India, his scientific justification of the geographical accuracy in the Ramayana, and his groundbreaking work on Ancient Indian Historical Traditions. By examining his methodologies and interpretations of Puranic texts, epics, and Vedic literature, this article highlights Pargiter's unique approach to reconstructing ancient Indian history, emphasizing the often-neglected importance of Puranic and epic traditions over solely Brahmanical perspectives. His efforts in translating the Markandeya Purana further underscore his commitment to making Indian religious and cultural knowledge accessible. The article concludes by asserting Pargiter's indispensable legacy in providing an authentic, diversified, and well-integrated understanding of Hindu scriptures, making his works essential for a comprehensive and critical examination of ancient Indian civilization.

Keywords

Ancient, Hindu, Brahmanical, Purana, Scriptures.

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Frederick Eden Pargiter: An Orientalist countering the Traditional Colonial Historiography

1. Introduction

Frederick Eden Pargiter was the second son of Rev. Robert Pargiter. Since his childhood he received excellent educational facilities. He attended Taunton Grammar School for primary and secondary education and Exeter College in Oxford in order to pursue senior-secondary education. He was Boden Sanskrit Scholar in the year 1872. Since his childhood, he was a meticulous student aspiring for a lucrative carrier at ICS. In the year 1875 he cleared the exam for Indian Civil Service and got Bengal Presidency as his first posting. He remained in Bengal for thirty one years and served at various posts of Under-Secretary to the Government of Bengal in 1885, District Judge in 1887 and Judge at Calcutta High Court in the year 1904. Most of his time was spent in Bengal Asiatic Society. He worked as a secretary of it in 1884-85 and later became President of the same in 1903-1905. In the year 1905, he also became the Fellow of Calcutta University. He was married to Florence Beverley, who was the daughter of Mr. Henry Beverley.

He belonged to that cadre of British Civil Servants who were greatly interested in Oriental Studies. He was a serious member of the Asiatic Society of Bengal. He contributed many articles to the Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal which include; Chittagong dialect, The Geography of Rama's exile, The Telling of time in Ancient India, Ancient Cedi, Matsya and Karusa and Ancient Countries in Eastern Bengal. He started the work of translating *Markandeya Purana* in 1888 and completed it 1905. One of his acquaintance named Dr. Fleet motivated him to invest his time in Studying of the old Indian inscriptions especially those written in Kharoshti script[1]. Also, he published several papers in the *Indian Antiquary* and *Epigraphia Indica* and the most important editions were of the Wardak and Manikiala inscriptions. He tried to develop an understanding of Puranic geography and history. In his work, Dynasties of Kali Age which was published in the year 1913 Pargiter has provided a comprehensive yet critical analysis of the Puranic accounts of historical dynasties who once ruled India. He has generously helped Dr. A.F.R. Hoernle in his important work on Manuscript Remains of Buddhist Literature Found in East Turkestan. The book was published in 1916. He took much pain to get published the list of Dr. Hoernle's papers lying in the India Office Library[2]. Also, the centenary volume issued by Asiatic Society of Bengal was the result of Pargiter's hard work and strong determination.

In order to understand Pargiter's perspectives on India one need to develop an understanding of the theories given by him in his works on Indian Puranic texts and two epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata. The first work taken into consideration is his contemplation on calculating the time and muhurtas in India. In his essay on the technique of time measurements by Indians, he has mentioned the two ways employed by them to calculate the time. He has given reference of Kautilya's *Arthashastra* in which Chanakya has comprehensively discussed the concept of water clock and the Indian ways of time-measurement. Apart from technical information provided by Pargiter in his article, one can find minuscule details of Indian Political, Social, Economic life. Kautilya in his *Arthashastra* advised the King to divide his day and night into eight half watches. Also, he suggested the rulers to take help from his religious preceptors and court ministers to prevent him from wasting his time by disturbing his concentration by striking of the gnomon-shadows. In another section of his work Kautilya has mentioned about the daily routine of elephants. He has said that the first and the seventh parts of the day were their feeding times, eighth part immediately was used for feeding them. Forenoon was the time for their exercising and afternoon was the time for drilling. The longest measure of time during ancient period was the half-watch of ninety-minutes and the shortest one was the nalika of twenty-four minutes. One can find the word, 'Murta' or 'Muhurta' on the Manikiala stone. The inscription has mentioned about the Greek hour which was not known in India during that time. The word Muhurta was stated as its Indian equivalent. Thus, muhurta was adopted as an important period to be notified by the beating of drums and blowing of trumpets[3]. There were around thirty muhurtas that signified the day and night and were realized by Hindus, Buddhists and Jains. Day contained fifteen muhurtas and the next fifteen belonged to night. Some evidences from *Vayu* and *Brahmanda Purana* stated that the names of the muhurtas were distinguished by capitals. However, Harinarayana, the author of *Muhurtamanjari* has given a list of day-muhurtas and have considered them to be sixteen in number. One can find the mention of day and night muhurtas in the Buddhist text named *Divyavadana*. Jain text called *Surapannatti Sutra* has used the name 'Pahuda' in place of *Muhrat*. Some of the names of the *muhrats* are: *Bambho (Brahma Muhrat)*, *Balavam (Balavant Muhrat)*, *Vayu (Vayu Muhrat)*, *Vesamane (Vaisravana Muhrat)*, *Varune (Varuna Muhrat)* and others. The names of the night *Muhuratas* are as follows: *Anamde (Ananda Muhrat), Vijae (Vijaya Muhrat), Visasene (Visvasena Muhrat), Gamdhavve (Gandharva Muhrat)* and many others. F.E Pargiter has concluded from his meticulous study of *Muhratas* that the names of the *Muhratas* were also kept on the names of the deities which they thought empowered that particular hour of time.

2. Geographical locations of Ramayana in the Eye of Pargiter

A comprehensive analysis of his research article entitled, The Geography of Rama's Exile, helps one to have a peep into the scientific study he conducted and pursued to justify the authenticity of Ramayana. He looked upon the classic with the curious eye of a person having rational approach towards religion and mythology. He found the text an interesting heterogeneous composition of religion, mythology, dynastic history, social life and topography. He tried to trace the migration of Aryans and their acquaintance with whole of North India, Bengal and chief mountains and rivers of South India. He appreciated the role played by religious sages in discovering new places, establishing their hermitages and inviting the factors of civilization to inhabit the region. Aryans settled across the country and led to the establishment of hermitages, sanctuaries and all sorts of *tirthas* which not only led to the influx of pilgrims but also facilitated travel and intermingling of people from different regions. According to him, story of Ramayana has been passed down to generations in three versions; Valmiki's *Ramayana*, Ramopakhyana in the Vana Parva of the *Mahabharata*, in the Shodasa-Rajika in the Drona Parva[4]. Also, North and West of the Ganges and Jumna was divided into Kingdoms and cradled advanced civilization. However, the forest in the south of Yamuna consisted of *Rakshasas*, demons and monkeys. He moved on to discuss the significance of Prayagraja in *Ramayana*. During the period of Lord

Rama Allahabad was nothing more than a cleared forest. In the north of it was situated the Kingdom of Nishada with Sringavera-pura as its capital[5]. Ramayana has also mentioned about the district of Shahabad situated in Bihar in between the two holy cities of Banaras and Gaya. Ramayana has presented it as a depopulated place which was once was very prosperous. There has been no mention of the Southern Kingdom of Pandya's, which was one of the oldest Kingdom of Southern India and Lord Rama must have passed this region before moving on to Lanka. The Southern Kingdom has been described as a safe haven for numerous tribal communities and natural resources such as rivers, mountains, hills and dense forests where famous sages resided. Also, Rishi Agastya used to dwell near the Malaya Mountains.

Pargiter in his article on geographical description of Rama's exile has given a vivid description of his journey and has intertwined it with the small commentary on the political and social conditions prevalent during that time. He has stated that Rama began his Journey after he got to know about Mata Kekayi's three demands from his father with one including Rama's exile for fourteen years. Rama travelled on a charioteer accompanied by his wife Sita and brother Laxman till the threshold of Ayodhya. The first river that they crossed was Tamasa. Next they reached the river Srimati Mahanadi and took a direct route towards the Kingdom of Kosala. They crossed many rivers such as- Vedasruti, Gomati and Sarpika and also passed the forest of Sarayu. Lastly, they arrived at Sringavera-pura, a city which was situated on Ganges and thereafter began their journey on foot. After such discussion of Rama's route author has tried to trace the current geographical location of these places. River Tamasa has been identified as river Tons and it was the same river on which Maharishi Valmiki had his hermitage. Rishi Agastya's region has been traced to Southern part of India as he was called the conqueror of South. River Gomati has been identified with river Gumti situated in Lucknow. Sringavera-pura has been identified with the modern town of Singror, situated in Allahabad. Author has denied the reference of river Vedasruti in the main text of *Mahabharata* and has associated it with modern river Chauka. River Sarpika has been associated with river Sai, a tributary of Gomati River in Lucknow. Sringavera-pura has been described as a large city full of hustle and bustle. It was ruled by the King of Nishadas named Guha. Pargiter has stated that Nishada race was an aboriginal race living with primitive civilizational values and inhabited the forest areas. King Guha was a good friend of Rama and received Lord Rama with friendly warmth and affection. It is a part of popular culture that King ferried Lord Rama's brother Bharata, his mothers and troops from Ayodhya to reach rishi Bharadvaja's hermitage where Rama was residing[6]. The forest has been described in the poem as less dense and having lackacity of enough water to support men in great number. Rama stalled for a period in rishi Bharadvaja's hermitage but after his family members get to know about his place of dwelling he decided to move from there. Lord Rama along with his wife Sita and brother Laxman crossed river Yamuna and found abode in Chitrakoot. It has been noted by Pargiter that Rama crossed the river using a raft instead of boats which were numerous in number at Sringaverapura, was a clear indication of the fact that Prayaga (place of rishi Bharadwaja's settlement) was completely ignorant of resources of civilization. After crossing Yamuna, Rama reached a forest about a mile from the river which was called Nila. From Chitrakuta, Rama halted at rishi Atri's hermitage. Rishi Atri and his wife Anasuya welcomed them with great affection and warmth. From there he migrated to several forests such as- Dandaka forest, forest of Madhukas, Panchavati forest and Kraunchalaya forest. It was at Chitrakuta that Rama was asked to help the hermits against rakshasas who were molesting them while praying and doing sadhanas.

So, while passing these forests he encountered the most troublesome *rakshas* Viradha and killed him. Author has given reference of the main area of settlement of *rakshasas*, which was in Janasthana near Godavari River. Pargiter has tried to compare Rama's journey with that of the Pandavas who also bore the brunt of thirteen years of expatriation. The major difference between both these episodes was that Rama didn't prevent himself from meeting Kings or entering into towns, unlike Pandavas who chose the status of complete seclusion. Rama, while travelling passed the river Maha-java which hasn't found mention in any other text including Mahabharata. Hence, author has identified it with some swift stream may be an upper part of river Narmada, running in between Sohagpur and Narsinghpur and most probably have dried up in later years. Rama while travelling came across the most auspicious lake of Panchapsaras, currently located in Lonar in Buldhana district of *Maharashtra*. Its reference has been given in Third Book of *Ramayana*, The literal meaning of this Sanskrit term is five apsaras. Rama visited this lake while crossing through Dandak forest. Ramayana associates a legend with this lake which was created by Sage Mandakarni. Indra grew jealous of the increasing power of rishi Mandakarni. So, he sent five apsaras to vitiate his sadhana. Unfortunately, Indra was successful in his hideous motive and the sage broke his vow of standing over the lake by consuming only air for ten thousand years. Thereafter, rishi Mandakarni married those five apsaras and started living in a Palace located upon an island submerged in the centre of the lake.

Ramayana also illustrates Lord Rama's experience while passing the lake. He was mesmerized by the air surrounding the lake which bore the fragrance of music played by the apsaras. Pargiter has also given reference of Surpa-nakha. He stated that Surpanakha confronted Rama at Panchavati, used to reside in Jana-sthana which can be located somewhere around the Nasik district of Maharashtra. Also, the story of Surpanakha's infatuation towards Rama is also accompanied by the story of killing of fourteen thousand rakshasas by Lord Rama who confronted him to fight the cause of Ravana's sister Surpanakha. About the inhabitants of Jana-sthana, Pargiter has stated that they were an aboriginal tribe whose features weren't fully developed and thus were like *rakshas*. However, Shodasarajika of *Mahabharata* contains an entirely different narrative related to Jana-sthana. It states that Rama killed fourteen thousand demons after his father commanded him to do so in order to protect the sages inhabiting the place. Pargiter has interpreted the entire scene in his own way and has commented that initially Jana-sthana was inhabited by Aryans who were drove out by the notorious demons[7]. In order to restore the place to its original inhabitants, Lord Rama defeated these barbarians and established peace there. According to author, almost all accounts written on Rama's life as an ascetic and a King mentions the fact that he killed many rakshas and most of them were encountered by him in the Deccan. Author has mentioned another important episode from Rama's life as a young prince when he and his brother Lakshmana were guided by rishi Visva-mitra to get rid of a frightful Yakshini Tadaka who was troubling the population inhabiting the region[8]. Author has identified this region by present district of Shahabad in the state of Uttar Pradesh. Also, it once was an abode of rishi Agastya before he shifted his hermitage to Nagpur.

3. Pargiter views on Ancient Indian Historical Traditions

The most important work produced by Pargiter is his narrative on Ancient Indian Historical Tradition. He has discussed about the merits and demerits of ancient Indian texts. According to him Ancient Indian History hasn't been drafted with precision and while discussing the importance of Vedas and Vedic literature, writers have rudely neglected the significance of Puranic and epic traditions. Hence, Pargiter through his work has tried to reflect upon the indispensable significance of the study of Puranas and epics in order to reconstruct the history of Ancient India. His interest grew in Puranic studies after he translated *Markandeya Purana*. He tried to examine the history of ancient Kingdoms through a comprehensive study of their dynastic genealogies, geographical location, social and religious traditions and political divisions. According to Pargiter a Brahman who lacked the knowledge of *Puranas* shouldn't be considered as proficient in the knowledge of scriptures[9]. He is of the opinion that a major portion of Ancient Indian History can be extracted from traditions which were prevalent during such times. He believed that the history of those times is mainly the stories related to Aryan Conquest of the country and their migration. He criticized the didactic tone of writers who have given a meticulous description of ancient traditions but have failed to enrich it with the element of historicity. He has stated an example of Rig-Veda which contains many historical statements or official notices roughly arranged in chronological order and cannot be termed as historically connected. He has stated about the process of settlement of Aryans on Indian Peninsula and the struggle they pursued to establish their supremacy over other hostile tribes inhabiting the country.

According to Pargiter, the victorious military careers of these Aryan rulers and the different ways of livelihood pursued by them or the various civilizational values propitiated by them became the foundation for these historical traditions. He further commented that one can find a lacuna of historical sense in both Vedic literature and traditions of Kshatriya, because Vedic literature favours Brahmanic or religious point of views while Kshatriya traditions narrate the political and social stories of the Ancient Indian Society satiating the interests of Kshatriya class[10]. Brahmanic historical traditions favoured Brahmanic perspectives and tried to assert dignity, sanguinity, greatness and sometimes the super human character of a

Brahman. It includes within its folds the glorious stories of Kings as they were the chief patrons of Brahmanic beliefs. In contrast, Kshatriya narratives discussed the past events which suited the political interests of Kshatriya rulers. The type of history accumulated on account of exaggerated tales of military expeditions, majestic courts and other duties performed by the King have somehow damaged the authenticity of historical writing and have created polarized viewpoints. However, Pargiter has attached some sense of chronology with the history presented by Kshatriyas, whereas Brahmanic history has been nouned by him as fabricated, untrue and chronologically poor. He substantiated his perspective with few reasons which are as follows;

- In the first place, Brahmanic literature mixed up different persons of the same name. For example, there is an episode in Satapath Brahman where Bharata seized the Ashwamedha horse of Satavatas and claimed that Bharatas were greater than any other king reining India[11]. However, in the later part of the discussion the text get confused Bharata who was a Paurava King with that of Bharata, Rama's brother.
- Secondly, they confused Rishis, Kings and other Sages with mythological persons of the same name. For example, Brihaspati who was a *rishi* before Bharata reign was confused with the heavenly priest Brhaspati. Also, Madhu who was a King of Yadavas and a friend of Lord Krishna was confused with Rakshas Madhu who was killed by Lord Vishnu.
- According to Pargiter, Brahmanic interpretations of history failed to distinguish between two different time periods and messed up the rulers or persons chronologically. From many historical episodes it can be extracted that the names of people belonging to two separate times were clubbed together as contemporaries. Also, he commented that Brahmanic traditions mythologized history as the authors were incapable of distinguishing between reality and mythology. He blamed Brahmans on creating a fabricated version of historical episodes. For example, stories regarding the ancient Kings such as Harischandra, Jayadhvaja and Surasena are mere concocted religious tales to eulogize the religious zeal of these great rulers and have no relatedness with history[12]. Lastly, Pargiter expressed his disgruntlement over the lacuna of proper geography in Brahmanic description of history. The next type

of Historical tradition about which he discussed about was the Kshatriya tradition. According to him, Kshatriya tradition of history writing consisted of genealogies of rulers of ancient Indian dynasties, ballads singing the heroic battles fought by the rulers, tales, official notices issued by the reigning rulers or courts and allusions. Author emphasized on the types of tales that were written during that time. He deciphered two different natures of the tales in which the first type belonged to the tales reciting the historical incidents in precised manner without the slightest use of blasphemy or exaggeration whereas the second category belonged to the tales which were purposely written to buttress the political authority of the rulers and religious superiority of the Brahmans. Pargiter credited Puranic Brahmans for preserving Kshatriya tradition without modification to some extent. However, the class of Brahmans who followed them re-shaped it, tampered it to suit their needs and produced a fabricated version of the Kshatriya tradition which not just eulogized the reigning Kings as someone sent form heaven but also established social status of Brahmins as that of a sole protector of religious beliefs.

Pargiter has also raised the issue of authenticity of *Rigveda* in later part of his research. He has stated that *Rigveda* is the most important Brahmanical book. It consist of hymns composed by various authors and is arranged on some unknown principles but Vedic literatures are silent about it. Pargiter laid stress on the fact that a detailed information should have been provided in these texts regarding the names of the authors who added their compositions to the sacred text as it would have aggravated its historical authenticity. Indian Epics and *Puranas* credit great *rishi* Parasara's son Vyas for arranging the Vedas. However, Vedic Index fails to mention the name of rishi Vyasa or Krsna or Dvaipayana, which makes the declaration either incorrect or doubtful. The only Vyasa one can notice at the end of Samavidhana Brahmana and Taittiriya Aranyaka was Vyasa Parasarya, who was a mythical sage in the Vedic period and he was only a student of a teacher named Visvaksena[13].

Thus, Pargiter considered Vedic literature as of little trust because in order to prove it as a text descending from heaven, Brahmans deliberately neglected the contribution of a learned sage who must have played an important role in its compilation and systematic arrangement. Pargiter gave three reasons to express his suspicion on the authenticity of Vedic literature. The first one was religious nature of the text, the second being lack of historical sense among the Brahmans and third one was the unacquaintance with the prevalent social, political and economic conditions of the times, as these Brahmans led a secluded lives in hermitages located in the midst of dense forests. Thus, Pargiter strictly rejected the idea of drawing upon conclusions about Ancient Indian History using Vedic Literature, Classical Epics and Puranas.

Pargiter stated that Vayu, Vishnu and Brahmanda Purana has discussed the theory regarding the origin of Puranas. According to the three Puranas, it was Krsna Dvaipayana who divided the huge text of Veda into four parts and arranged them systematically[14]. Later, he passed on his knowledge to four of his many disciples—Paila, Vaisampayana, Jamini and Sumantu. The knowledge Vyasa gave to his students became a part of local songs, folklores, anecdotes and were passed on to coming generation in the form of *Sruti* and *Smriti* Sources. Later, Sage Vyasa composed *Mahabharata* and made a statement that a Vaishnava would gain the same merit by listening to the Epics that he would gain from listening to the Eighteen Puranas. Pargiter further speculated that the materials for Purana has been derived from the auspicious Sutas which have conserved the ancient folklores, genealogies of Gods, Goddesses, rishis and Kings, ballads about militarily celebrated men and heroic tales. Vyasa also gave the knowledge of Puranas to his disciple Romaharsana, who later taught it to his son Ugrasravas and six other of his disciple. Thus, the knowledge was transmitted to Brahmans and they developed it in due course of time.

He further stated that the sanctity which once was an integral part of Brahmin class ruptured as they grew ambitious and power hungry. In order to secure their prestigious religious position they incorporated high-sounding adjectives for themselves and supplemented *Puranas* with Brahmanic teachings and practices. In due course of time these sacred religious texts lost its value and utility after being tampered by some Brahmins. Undoubtedly, Brahmins eulogized the moral and religious significance of Puranas and Epics but they popularized themselves as the one holding the monopoly of illuminating people and helping them to perform all sorts of religious ceremonies and rituals.

4. Conclusion

It is quite conspicuous to note that a British Civil Servant took this much pain to read, comprehend and facilitate the English translation of an Indian religious text. His tenacity, hard-work and passion to dwell upon the deeper meaning of Hindu Cultural beliefs and appreciate it whole-heartedly is remarkably commendable and command reverence. The translation of *Markandeya Purana* was pursued by Asiatic Society of Bengal and the Sanskrit version of it was prepared by Dr. K.M Banerjee and was published in Bibliotheca Indica in the year 1862. Later, it was translated by F.E Pargiter in English. *Markandeya Purana* deals with the religious questions that perturbed the peaceful mind of rishi Jamini. Initially, he tried to quench his thirst for knowledge by having a discussion with Sage Markandeya but he asked Jamini to resolve his queries from oviparous sages. Rishi Jamini agreed to take wisdom from feathered philosophers and went to them to settle the questions troubling his mind. The first question that he asked was the reason for multiple human forms taken by Lord Vishnu to save the earth when he is all powerful to do the judgement in a single day? His second question concerned the character of Indra who was an atrocious King and conducted many evils but got his energy divided into five Pandavs who were again married to a single woman named Draupadi? The third question was regarding the decision of Balarama to leave his brother Lord Krishna alone in the battle of Mahabharata and chose to go on Pilgrimage? As a matter of fact, the oviparous sages found the questions very dense to answer and suggested rishi Jamini that only Sage Markandeya have the wisdom to resolve his queries. Thus, the text which consist of five distinct parts is a treasure trove of knowledge and wisdom which was imparted in the form of questions and answers and has been said to be composed by *Rishi* Markandeya himself.

Thus, it can be concluded after having a comprehensive reading of F.E Pargiter's works that he was greatly influenced by oriental religion. His un-biased scholarly approach towards Ancient Indian History helped him to left Indians with an authentic, diversified and well-integrated text to understand the minutest offering of their own religion and culture. Also, his writings have critically examined the merits and short-comings of Indian texts such as-Vedas, Puranas and Ramayana and have affirmatively questioned its historicity and authenticity of its genealogical. Hence, Pargiter's works are a must read for those who wishes to critically examine Hindu Scriptures and get a comprehensive knowledge of the religion. Hence, Pargiter's works are a must read for those who wishes to critically examine Hindu Scriptures and get a comprehensive knowledge of the religion.

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A Critical Analysis of Issues Related to Education in the Santal Community

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Abstract

This research paper presents a critical analysis of the current educational situation among the Santal community, one of the largest Scheduled Tribes in India. Despite significant strides in primary school enrollment, the community faces persistent challenges, including high dropout rates at higher educational levels, low literacy rates compared to national averages, and a pervasive issue of educated unemployment. The analysis identifies multifaceted barriers such as extreme socio-economic disparities, profound language barriers due to non-mother tongue instruction, cultural disconnects within mainstream curricula, inadequate educational infrastructure, and a critical shortage of culturally sensitive and linguistically competent teachers. Furthermore, the paper highlights gaps in policy implementation and instances of discrimination that impede educational progress. Drawing on recent data and ethnographic studies, this paper argues for a comprehensive, culturally responsive, and economically integrated approach to Santal education, emphasizing mother-tongue instruction, targeted economic support, and enhanced teacher training to foster genuine empowerment and social equity.

Keywords

Santal, Education, India.

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A Critical Analysis of Issues Related to Education in the Santal Community

1. Introduction

Education is universally acknowledged as a fundamental human right and a powerful catalyst for social transformation, particularly for marginalized communities. For the Santal community, a prominent indigenous group, education is increasingly recognized as vital for improving living conditions, securing gainful employment, and integrating successfully into broader societal structures. It also serves as a crucial mechanism to protect individuals from various forms of exploitation that the community has historically endured.

The Santal population, numbering over five million, is concentrated in Indian states such as West Bengal, Jharkhand, Bihar, and Odisha, with significant populations also in Bangladesh and Nepal. They constitute the third-largest tribal group in India and the largest in West Bengal. Predominantly engaged in agriculture or daily wage labor in sectors like coal mines and tea gardens, they often face extreme poverty and economic marginalization. Their language, Santali, belongs to the Munda (Austroasiatic) family, forming a distinct cultural identity (Dutta & Sinha, 2022).

Despite growing awareness within the Santal community regarding the importance of education, their educational journey is fraught with complex and interconnected challenges. This paper critically examines the current state of education among Santals, delving into the socio-economic, linguistic, cultural, infrastructural, and policy-related barriers that impede their educational attainment. It aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of these challenges and propose actionable recommendations for fostering equitable and quality education for the Santal community.

2. Importance of Education for Scheduled Tribes

The concept of education for scheduled tribe (ST) extends beyond mere literacy; it encompasses the development of critical thinking, skills, and character, enabling them to participate fully as citizens and avail themselves of the fruits of modern development (SHIVAA, n.d.). While some movements among Scheduled Castes historically championed education as a primary means to overcome oppression, for STs, government policy has largely focused on education as an avenue for integration into mainstream society (Mandal, 2023; Venkateswarlu & Kumar, 2023).

Education is a basic prerequisite for the removal of poverty and the development of any country (Concern Worldwide U.S., 2023; World Bank, n.d.), and this holds true for STs. Studies demonstrate a direct correlation between educational development and improved socio-economic status

3. Current Status of Santal Education

3·1 Literacy Rates and Trends

Literacy rates among the Santal community remain significantly lower than national and state averages, indicating a persistent educational disparity. According to the 2011 Census, the overall literacy rate for Santals in West Bengal was 54.72%, with a notable gender gap: 66.12% for males and 43.51% for females. While these figures are low, there has been a satisfactory decadal increase in literacy from 2001 to 2011, particularly among Santal females (Ahmed & Tattwasarananda, 2018).

Regional variations in literacy are also evident. For instance, studies in Jhargram district, West Bengal, reported a higher Santal literacy rate of 71.18% (79.82% male, 63.09% female). Similarly, a Santal village in Gujarat's Mahesana district showed a literacy rate of 75.34% (82.10% male, 68.14% female) (Ahmed & Tattwasarananda, 2018). These variations suggest that localized factors and interventions can significantly influence educational outcomes.

3·2 Enrollment and Dropout Patterns

Recent data from the Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE+) 2023-24 indicates near-universal Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) for ST students at the primary (Grades 1-5) level, at 98.3%. This high initial enrollment suggests progress in ensuring basic access. The GER remains relatively high at the upper primary level (Grades 6-8) at 95.2%, and for elementary education (Grades 1-8) combined, it is 97.1% (Government of India, Department of School Education & Literacy, 2024).

However, a critical challenge emerges at higher educational stages. The national GER for ST students drops significantly to 76.9% at the secondary level (Grades 9-10), meaning nearly a quarter of ST children in this age group are not enrolled. The most dramatic decline occurs at the higher secondary level (Grades 11-12), where the GER plummets to 48.7%, indicating that less than half of ST youth access this level of education (Government of India, Department of School Education & Literacy, 2024).

Dropout rates remain alarmingly high, reaching almost 50% after the implementation of the Right to Education Act 2009. This issue is particularly severe from Class VII onwards, with Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS) also showing a steep decline in enrollment at this stage (Rajalakshmi, 2025).

3·3 Higher Education Attainment and Educated Unemployment

Attainment of higher education among Santals is "alarmingly very low". In a study area in West Bengal, only 2.22% of the Santal population had an undergraduate degree, and a mere 0.44% had a postgraduate degree (Ahmed & Tattwasarananda, 2018). This low attainment is attributed to low K-12 educational achievement, widespread poor economic conditions, and a scarcity of higher education institutions in their regions.

A significant consequence of this educational landscape is the prevalence of educated unemployment. The high rate of educated unemployment creates a paradoxical disincentive for Santal families to invest further in education, even as aspirations for upward social mobility are increasing. If education does not reliably lead to improved livelihoods and dignified employment, it reinforces the perception that it is a waste of precious time and resources (Baski, 2013), especially when child labor provides immediate economic value for survival.

4. Multifaceted Challenges and Barriers in Santal Education

4·1 Socio-Economic Disparities and Livelihood Pressures

Extreme poverty is pervasive within Santal communities, with many individuals working as daily wage laborers in sectors like tea gardens, coal mines, and agriculture, often earning low wages. They are frequently landless and economically marginalized (Rathee, Sarkar & Hooda, 2023).

The pressing economic situation often compels children, particularly among poor and landless tribal communities, to engage in labor to contribute to family income, frequently involving migration for daily wage work. This economic necessity is a primary driver of high dropout rates. Rapid population growth and increasingly fragmented small landholdings mean that traditional agricultural livelihoods can no longer support entire families, necessitating migration for work. This labor is often unregulated and informal, making them highly vulnerable to exploitation. The opportunity cost of schooling, the direct and immediate loss of potential income from child labor, often outweighs the long-term, uncertain benefits of education for these families, making immediate survival a rational priority (Baski, 2013).

4·2 Language Barrier and Medium of Instruction

Santal children consistently struggle in mainstream public schools due to a severe language barrier. They speak Santali as their mother tongue but are often taught by educators unfamiliar with their language. This linguistic mismatch results in low literacy rates.

The communication gap and lack of understanding can lead teachers and educational authorities to mistakenly perceive tribal children as not competent enough, exacerbating the problem and contributing to higher dropout rates. Educationists emphasize that learning a second language without mastering one's mother tongue leads to self-alienation and significantly hinders learning speed and depth. Reading and writing skills developed in the mother tongue are easily transferable to other languages (UNESCO, 2008).

The fragmentation of the Santali language community, with speakers dispersed across different states, poses challenges to language standardization, including the choice of a common script (Ol Chiki, Roman, or Devanagari). While Santali language has received some recognition, including its acceptance as an optional paper at the Matriculation level by some examination boards and postgraduate degrees in Santali language and literature by some universities, the constitutional provision (Article 350A) for mother-tongue instruction at the primary stage for linguistic minorities is not consistently practiced in government schools.

4·3 Cultural Disconnect and Curriculum Relevance

Santal students frequently encounter discrimination and culturally insensitive pedagogical practices in mainstream educational settings. A significant issue is the lack of culturally relevant content in the curriculum, often missing references to Santal culture, rituals, festivals, and historical figures (Das, 2025). This absence contributes to feelings of alienation.

The traditional Santal way of life, characterized by a more lenient approach to rules for children and contentment with minimal material comforts, can conflict with the discipline and formal lifestyle often required for academic success in conventional schools. Some community members have expressed a belief that distancing themselves from their Santal culture is necessary for acceptance by the majority population, though many disagree, believing it is possible to be both Santal and integrated into mainstream society.

4·4 Infrastructural Deficiencies and Access Issues

Many tribal areas suffer from a severe lack of educational facilities, forcing children to travel considerable distances to attend schools. In Santal areas, the land tenancy system, specifically the Santal Parganas Tenancy Act 1949 (SPT Act 1949), prohibits land transfer, meaning many schools operate without legal title to their land (Rathakrishnan & Kumar, 2013). This lack of legal ownership prevents schools from obtaining recognition under the RTE Act 2009, which mandates specific physical infrastructure requirements (Rathakrishnan & Kumar, 2013).

Nationally, a considerable number of schools lack basic amenities: 1.5 lakh out of 14.7 lakh schools do not have regular, functional electricity, and 24,580 schools lack drinking water facilities (Government of India, Department of School Education & Literacy, 2024). Additionally, about 3.7% of toilets for girls are non-functional. Access for children with disabilities is inadequate, with only 52.3% of schools having handrails and ramps. Digital infrastructure is also limited, with only 57.2% having computers and 53.9% having internet access (Government of India, Department of School Education & Literacy, 2024). While the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* aimed to establish schools within reasonable distances, there has not been a proportional increase in secondary and higher secondary schools after the RTE Act, posing a significant risk of large-scale student dropouts at higher levels. Although this situation affects the general population, it has particularly adverse effects on the Santal community, which is already grappling with multiple challenges.

4·5 Teacher Availability, Training, and Cultural Sensitivity

Teacher shortages are a widespread problem in tribal areas, with many positions vacant. A significant communication barrier exists due to many teachers being deputed from other states and being unfamiliar with local tribal languages (Mohanty, 2009). In Santal areas, many teachers do not understand Santali.

Many teachers lack understanding and sensitivity towards tribal culture. This creates a significant social and psychological distance between teachers and students, impacting the learning environment (Nganga & Kambutu, 2024). To make the situation worse, there is a problem of shortage of capable teachers in general (ETV Bharat, 2024). Current teacher preparation programs are often inadequate, overlooking crucial aspects such as cultural competence, inclusive teaching practices, and emotional intelligence, leaving new teachers unprepared for diverse classrooms (Economic Times, 2025).

4·6 Policy Implementation Gaps and Discrimination

Despite comprehensive constitutional provisions guaranteeing equal access to education, including Article 21-A (Right to Education), Article 46 (interests of Scheduled Tribes), and Article 350A (instruction in mother tongue), the Santal community continues to be treated as an ethnic minority, with their basic educational demands often overlooked.

Government programs, though well-intentioned, are often criticized for being cumbersome and inefficient in their implementation. For example, the 5% quota for Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) in EMRS is not being met, partly because PVTG children struggle to pass entrance exams, indicating a mismatch between policy design and foundational learning levels (Rajalakshmi, 2025).

5. Recommendations

To foster genuine educational empowerment and social equity for the Santal community, a comprehensive and multi-pronged approach is essential.

To improve educational outcomes for Santal communities, a comprehensive approach must prioritize mother-tongue-based multilingual education by implementing Santali as the primary medium of instruction at elementary levels while developing high-quality textbooks and learning materials in Santali for all Santal-populated areas. The curriculum should be revised to integrate Santal history, culture, oral traditions, festivals, and historical figures, alongside pedagogical practices that align with traditional learning styles such as storytelling and experiential learning.

In addition, initiatives led by the community itself will help a lot. Lakshmi Murmu Smriti Vidyalaya in Chaachanpur, West Bengal, exemplifies a successful community-led initiative that integrates Santali traditions into mainstream schooling. The school places equal emphasis on both Santali and Bengali languages, using Santali as the primary medium of communication in entry-level classes. This dual-language approach helps overcome language barriers and affirms cultural identity. The curriculum merges conventional education with day-to-day life experiences, incorporating Santali art and culture through performative arts and contextual learning. The school actively engages the community through a school committee and regular parent-teacher meetings combined with cultural events, fostering a sense of ownership and influencing community members about the importance of education (Suneja & Devi, 2019).

Another example is the Ghosaldanga Adibasi Seva Sanga (GASS) in West Bengal, which runs pre-schools and a primary school, teaching children in their mother tongue. Their curriculum includes Santali songs, music, tribal history, and folklore, while also ensuring literacy and numeracy (Marandi, 2020).

Targeted socio-economic support through direct financial assistance programs, conditional cash transfers, and scholarships is essential to offset opportunity costs for impoverished families. At the same time, linking educational initiatives with skill development programs and employment generation schemes are crucial to ensure education leads to dignified livelihoods. Infrastructure and legal barriers must be addressed through legal reforms, particularly in regions where Santal community is based, to facilitate land acquisition for educational facilities, while ensuring all tribal schools have essential amenities including electricity, clean water, accessible toilets, and digital infrastructure.

Effectiveness of various scholarship schemes run by the government, such as Pre-Matric and Post-Matric Scholarships, National Overseas Scholarships, and National Fellowships for ST students, which aim to reduce dropout rates and promote higher education, should be increased. More programs such as Adivasi Shiksha Rrinn Yojana (ASRY) (National Scheduled Tribes Finance and Development Corporation [NSTFDC], n.d.) that offer soft loans with interest subsidies for higher education should be implemented. Initiatives such as Development Action Plan for Scheduled Tribes (DAPST) (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, n.d.) and Tribal Research Institutes (TRIs) (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, n.d.) that contribute to overall welfare including education and support to tribal research should be made more effective.

Next, teacher training programs require reform to prioritize cultural competence, multilingual pedagogical approaches in Santali, and emotional intelligence, with incentives for teachers to reside within tribal communities and recruitment of local Santal individuals as educators to bridge linguistic and cultural gaps.

In addition, there are many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working for the well-being of Santali communities. The Badlao Foundation works at the grassroots level in Santali communities, Jharkhand, focusing on quality education and access to social security schemes, believing education is a fundamental right and a tool for social transformation (The Badlao Foundation, n.d.). They also have specific programs for empowering girls. The Samadhan Foundation, also operating in Santali communities, addresses education as one of its core issue areas, benefiting children, women, and adolescents (The Samadhan Foundation, n.d.). In order to make their efforts more effective, both the government and NGOs should make an effort to work together for education acknowledging each other's strength.

Finally, policy implementation must be strengthened through improved monitoring and evaluation frameworks to ensure constitutional provisions translate into ground realities, to eliminate discrimination against Santal and ST in general, and to assess regularly of existing programs like EMRS.

By adopting these comprehensive and context-specific strategies, stakeholders can move beyond merely providing access to schooling and instead cultivate an educational environment that truly empowers the Santal community, respects their unique cultural identity, and enables them to achieve their full potential.

6. Conclusion

The educational landscape for the Santal community is characterized by a complex interplay of progress and persistent challenges. While efforts have led to near-universal primary enrollment, the system struggles significantly with retention and progression to higher education. This leakage in the educational pipeline is primarily driven by deep-seated socio-economic pressures, a critical language barrier stemming from non-mother tongue instruction, a curriculum that often lacks cultural relevance, inadequate infrastructure, and a shortage of culturally competent teachers. Furthermore, the gap between well-intentioned policies and their effective implementation, coupled with instances of discrimination, exacerbates these issues. The prevalence of educated unemployment further undermines the perceived value of formal schooling, creating a paradoxical disincentive for families to invest in their children's education.

Despite these formidable barriers, community-led initiatives and the efforts of various NGOs demonstrate promising models for culturally appropriate and effective educational interventions. These examples underscore the potential for positive change when education is rooted in local contexts, respects linguistic diversity, and actively engages the community.

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Rural-Urban Differences in Level of Safety, Security and Violence across Provinces in Nepal

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Abstract

This paper examines public perceptions of safety alongside reported experiences of crime and violence across Nepal's provinces. It is based on the national level survey data of Nepal Living Standard Survey (NLSS) IV (2022/23). Survey data indicate that 92.3 percent of respondents feel "completely safe" or "safe" when walking alone in their village or city, reflecting strong community ties, relatively low crime rates, and cultural norms that foster collective responsibility. However, 6.3 percent report feeling only "partially safe," with notable provincial differences-Gandaki and Bagmati record the highest "completely safe" scores, while Sudurpaschim reports the highest proportion of partial safety. Victimization data reveal low overall incident rates, with asset theft (1.8%) most common, followed by psychological violence (0.7%), attacks or robbery (0.4%), physical violence (0.3%), and sexual violence (0.2%). Provincial variations show Koshi and Karnali with higher theft rates, and Sudurpaschim leading in psychological and physical violence. The findings highlight that safety is multidimensional, encompassing both the absence of violent crime and protection from non-physical harm. Addressing these issues requires a combination of formal security measures and informal, community-based strategies to sustain and enhance both the reality and perception of safety. Findings show that over 90% of respondents feel completely safe or safe, with Gandaki and Bagmati reporting the highest complete safety levels. Crime incidents are generally low nationwide, with theft and psychological violence being the most common, while serious violent crimes are rare. The results indicate a generally secure environment, though targeted measures addressing specific concerns in provinces such as Sudurpaschim and Karnali could further enhance community safety.

Keywords

Province, Rural-urban location, Safety, Security, Violence, Nepal.

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Rural-Urban Differences in Level of Safety, Security and Violence across Provinces in Nepal

1. Introduction

In today's scientific and technological era, every society and nation strives to ensure that people can live better, more civilized, and safer lives. To achieve and sustain such safety, development efforts across communities aim not only to improve the quality of goods and services but also to create a secure living environment.

As Sindhi (2013) explains, "safe and supportive schools" are those that safeguard students' emotional, psychological, and physical well-being. Similarly, Squelch (2001:138) describes a safe school as one free from danger or potential harm-a place where teachers, learners, and staff can work, teach, and study without fear of ridicule, intimidation, harassment, humiliation, or violence. A secure school setting directly enhances learning, enabling students to grow into skilled and productive members of society.

For children's health and development, it is essential that they have access to clean drinking water, fresh air, safe and nutritious food, and a secure place to learn and play. Schools can also set an example for the wider community. A clean, well-maintained school with a positive atmosphere can strengthen the sense of belonging among students and staff, which in turn supports both health and academic achievement.

Building such an environment is a shared responsibility. Students, teachers, administrators, parents, counselors, nurses, and even kitchen staff all play a role. Schools must actively identify issues, analyze them, and make improvements. Yet, as Sindhi (2013) notes, solving one problem often brings new challenges, making this an ongoing process.

1·1 The Physical Environment

Physical environment is important for people to live safely and remain happy and satisfied. Sindhi (2013) highlights that the physical school environment includes not only the school building itself but also everything within it-such as infrastructure, furniture, and the land it occupies-as well as the surrounding environment, including air, water, and other materials children come into contact with, along with potential hazards. Children are constantly engaging with this environment, whether they realize it or not. However, the vital role of the physical setting in supporting learning often goes overlooked.

Many classrooms remain overcrowded, unattractive, and poorly adapted to children's needs. In many cases, the physical environment is treated merely as a shelter for educational activities rather than as an active component of learning. Across numerous schools, buildings are old, poorly maintained, and uninspiring, while playgrounds or outdoor learning spaces are absent. Such conditions inevitably weaken the quality of learning, even when the curriculum itself is strong.

Meeting basic infrastructure and resource requirements, along with adopting flexible planning to better support curricular goals, should be key priorities for school leaders. This attention to the physical environment benefits nearly every aspect of school life (Sindhi, 2013).

1·2 Social Environment

Social environment can be understood in many ways. Sindhi (2013) explains that learning happens within a network of social relationships, shaped by both formal and informal interactions between teachers and students. Schools serve as shared spaces where these communities of learners-students and teachers alike-come together. The playful moments and occasional quarrels with friends in the schoolyard, the relaxed conversations on benches during breaks, the collective experience of morning assemblies and special celebrations, focused study in the classroom, the nervous flipping of pages before a test, and the excursions taken with classmates and teachers-all of these experiences weave students into a close-knit learning community (Sindhi, 2013).

1·3 Psychological Environment

The material condition of people alone is not enough for the happy and satisfied life of people. Happiness and satisfaction is what people feel and experience from their surroundings. Sindhi (2013) describes a school's environment as the subtle yet vital thread linking the many activities that take place on campus. Though this thread is often invisible, its presence is felt by everyone. Just as safe, well-kept buildings and grounds are essential, so too are positive relationships and attitudes toward school. When a school is clean, secure, and well-maintained-and fosters a healthy psychosocial climate-it can strengthen students' and staff's sense of connection to the school. This connectedness not only supports well-being but also enhances students' academic success. The psychosocial environment reflects the collective attitudes, emotions, and values of the school community. It includes physical and emotional safety, respectful relationships, acknowledgment of individual needs and achievements, and encouragement for learning. Beyond the school's own culture, its environment can also be shaped by broader forces such as the economy, cultural and religious norms, geography, family socioeconomic status, and the influence of legal, political, and social institutions (Sindhi, 2013).

The emphasis in this paper is the role of school Principals to create a safe school environment. The school leadership is required to provide guidance to teachers and students so that they can work toward a safe school environment an environment in which students are free to learn and teachers are free to teach. Here the emphasis is on prevention as well as on intervention. School policies must do more than minimize unsafe, aggressive or violent behavior. The goal should be to develop students' character and sense of community (Sindhi, 2013).

1·4 Capacity Building Initiatives

Leadership is to this decade what standards-based reform was to the 1990's if you want large-scale sustainable reform (Fullan 2003a, b). The main mark of a successful leader is not his or her impact on the bottom line of student learning at the end of their tenure, but rather how many good leaders they leave behind who can go even further. A school principal is a leader who is expected to bring systemic reform in the school with the help of all the stakeholders (Sindhi, 2013).

Nepal Living Standard Survey (NLSS) IV (2024) shed light on the security experiences and incidence of various forms of violence across different demographics in Nepal. Focusing on general security perceptions, indicates that a majority of the population (91.9 percent) feels either “Completely safe” or “Safe”, with only a small percentage (0.1 percent) feeling “Completely insecure”. However, there is a gender difference, with females reporting a slightly higher feeling of insecurity compared to males. This trend persists across various geographic regions and poverty levels, though the sense of insecurity is more prevalent in rural areas and among the poor. NLSS explores the specific experiences of violence across age groups. While the overall incidence of reported violence remains relatively low, there are experiences of “Sexual violence”, which is notably higher among females compared to males. Additionally, females report a higher incidence of “Mental violence” than males. These findings highlight a heightened vulnerability of females to certain types of violence. Furthermore, individuals in the 30-39 age group report the highest incidence of all forms of violence. The experience of safe feeling and violences differ by rural-urban divide across provinces of Nepal which remains still unexplored in the context of Nepal.

2. Research Objectives

This paper aims to analyze how living in different provinces of Nepal relates to individuals’ physical and psychosocial feelings about their environment. It also seeks to assess the influence of socio-demographic factors-such as provincial status and geographic location-on people’s perceptions of safety and violence across various regions. Additionally, the research examines the connection between provincial residence and perceptions of safety, exploring how feelings of security may differ depending on where individuals live. Finally, the study intends to identify regional and cultural variations in experiences related to the school environment among people from different provinces of Nepal.

3. Methodology

The concept discussed in this paper seems qualitative in nature which indicates that it requires a qualitative research approach to explore the social environment in terms of perception on safety. Data were collected through a national level household survey to capture diverse perspectives on the psychosocial and physical aspects of safe feeling in any environment. Thematic analysis would have been good to identify key patterns and themes related to safety, relationships, culture, and external influences such as socioeconomic and cultural factors. Ethical considerations, including informed consent and confidentiality, were strictly observed throughout the research process to ensure the integrity and trustworthiness of the findings. However, this study is based on national level survey data to capture the provincial safe environment in the context of Nepal.

This study utilizes a quantitative research design based on national-level survey data collected across Nepal. The data source includes large-scale, standardized surveys that capture various indicators related to school environments, student well-being, academic achievement, and socio-demographic factors. Statistical analysis methods, such as descriptive statistics, correlation, and regression analysis, were applied to examine relationships between school environment variables and student outcomes. The use of nationally representative data ensures the generalizability of the findings to the broader population of Nepali people. Rigorous data cleaning and validation procedures were followed to maintain accuracy and reliability throughout the analysis.

4. Study Area

In the context of Nepal's diverse provinces, creating a safe and welcoming environment in schools requires understanding how physical and social features are perceived differently by various community members-students, teachers, and parents-across regions. Just as the urban school district in Maxwell's (2000) study emphasized the importance of both safety (keeping unauthorized individuals out) and a welcoming atmosphere, schools in Nepal's provinces must consider local cultural, social, and geographic factors when designing and maintaining their facilities. The distinct needs and perceptions of each group within provincial communities influence how physical school environments contribute to feelings of safety and belonging. Recognizing these differences is essential for policymakers and educators in Nepal to develop strategies that foster inclusive, secure, and supportive learning spaces across the country's varied provincial contexts.

Nepal is divided into seven provinces, each with unique geographic, cultural, and socio-economic characteristics. From the mountainous terrains of Province 1 and Karnali Province to the more urbanized and accessible areas in Bagmati Province, these regions differ significantly in terms of infrastructure, ethnic composition, and economic development. Province 2, for example, has a high concentration of Madhesi communities, while Gandaki Province is known for its diverse ethnic groups and tourism-driven economy. The variation across provinces influences not only access to educational resources but also the social environment within schools, shaping how students and educators experience their school settings. Understanding these provincial differences is crucial for tailoring educational policies and school facility planning to meet the distinct needs of each area.

5. Safety Environment and Security

Maxwell (2000) notes that researchers have explored how people's perceptions of physical environments relate to the characteristics assigned to the organizations occupying those spaces. Elements such as color, lighting, ambient temperature, spatial layout, indoor air quality, and the display of organizational symbols (like awards) have been linked to employee satisfaction, productivity, and feelings of achievement (Davis, 1984; Sundstrom, 1986). For instance, the arrangement of plants in a reception area affected visitors' impressions of the organization as warm and caring (Ornstein, 1992). The physical features of a location communicate meanings about the environment that shape perceptions not only of the facility itself but also of the psychological atmosphere within the organization operating there (Ornstein, 1986; Moos, 1979, as cited in Maxwell, 2000).

Lasiter and Duffy (2013) highlight a relatively recent approach to evaluating care quality and safety by focusing on patients' perceptions of their hospital experience and how these perceptions influence their responses to illness. Patients' views on the care they receive are now recognized as a distinct and important aspect of healthcare quality. Hospitalization in the U.S. can be especially intimidating for older adults, who face a complex, stressful, and often impersonal healthcare system. Beyond the institutional impersonality, patients may encounter indifferent healthcare providers during some of their most vulnerable moments. As noted, patients frequently wonder whether they are truly safe and who will support them when they need it most. These anxieties are heightened by the healthcare system's heavy emphasis on disease, procedures, and treatments rather than on the human experience of illness, hospitalization, and the need to feel secure in a challenging environment. Nurses hold a unique role in improving hospital experiences and achieving better outcomes for older adult patients (Lasiter and Duffy, 2013).

The fact that women have greater fear about public places than men is well documented. In 1972 an American national poll found that over half of the women and only 20% of the men surveyed reported that they were afraid to walk in their neighborhoods at night (Gordon *et al.*, 1980). In 1982 a survey of 61,000 residents in seven major Canadian urban centers revealed that this same fear was expressed by 56% of women and 18% of men. Among men, those who had been the victims of robbery (23%) were most likely to be afraid. Among the women, 72% of those who had previously experienced sexual assault and 70% of robbery victims registered the highest level of fear (Solicitor General Canada, 1985). A recent poll in Ottawa further confirmed the extent of the problem when it found that a third of women are afraid to walk at night in their own neigh borhoods, and almost 90% restrict their activities for self-protection (Ottawa Citizen, 1991)

Kim and Seidel (2012) examined how to create safer living environments for urban renters by investigating whether gated and fenced residential areas influence residents' actual and perceived safety. Their study also identified factors that enhance residents' feelings of safety in their neighborhoods. Data were gathered through site visits and surveys of residents in selected apartment communities, which were categorized into three types based on gate and fence control: fully gated communities with controlled access, perceived-gated communities with fences and gates but without full control, and non-gated communities lacking fences and controlled gates. The findings showed that residents in both gated and perceived-gated communities felt safer than those in non-gated ones. This underscores the role of territoriality in boosting perceived safety in apartment complexes. Interestingly, residents' safety perceptions in perceived-gated communities were statistically similar to those in fully gated communities, indicating that exclusive territorial separation from neighboring areas is not essential for ensuring residents' sense of security (Kim and Seidel, 2012).

Hynes, Skeels, and Duran (2025) highlight several important aspects of safety. They view safety not only as a fundamental part of the right to life outlined in the UNCRC but also as a crucial foundation for achieving other rights and positive outcomes. This includes both being safe and feeling safe for young people. Previous work by Richmond (1994) and others, such as Chase (2013), has explored how an individual's "primary ontological security" can be disrupted or lost when they are forced to leave their families, communities, or countries of origin. The experience of feeling "in transit" and the need to regain a sense of ontological security through everyday routines-which helps restore predictability, trust in others, and self-confidence-was clearly reflected in the accounts shared by young people.

Hynes, Skeels, and Duran (2025) emphasize that safety is critically important, reflecting on the difficult and traumatic experiences young people often endure. They highlight how many continue to carry feelings of panic and trauma upon arriving in new places. Their accounts reveal an ongoing quest for safety, encompassing physical, relational, and psychological dimensions. As discussed in earlier chapters, this pursuit of safety is deeply intertwined with political issues for these young people (Hynes, Skeels, and Duran, 2025).

Secondly, the authors address the need for protection-not just for survival, but also from abuse, harm, and future exploitation. Young people have a broad understanding of protection, which includes transnational factors and relationships that span the various places they live and move through.

Thirdly, they point out a significant lack of research on how experiences of human trafficking impact the physical, emotional, and social development of these young individuals. Acknowledging this gap, the study shifts focus toward what young people themselves believe they need to achieve healthy and meaningful development in their lives (Hynes, Skeels, and Duran, 2025).

'I am safe' and 'I feel safe'

Hynes, Skeels, and Duran (2025) emphasized that safety was a key concern for young people involved in both studies and was seen as essential for achieving their other rights and entitlements. However, as mentioned earlier in the chapter, these young people expressed feelings of insecurity, often describing experiences of 'living in different places' and being 'in transit' before arriving in the United Kingdom, where they then had to actively seek safety. The Creating Stable Futures Positive Outcomes Framework (CSF-POF) study revealed two distinct but related goals: young people wanted to both 'be safe' and 'feel safe' in their lives. Similarly, the a Modern Slavery Core Outcomes Set (MSCOS) study highlighted that young people and ICTG staff prioritized not only being safe but also avoiding harm, resulting in the outcome statement 'I am safe and protected from harm', which is discussed further in the protection section (Hynes, Skeels, and Duran, 2025).

The concept of "human security" emerged in international discussions during the 1990s as a way to address new or more widespread risks that could impact everyone. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) defined human security as encompassing both protection from ongoing threats like hunger, disease, and oppression, as well as safeguarding against sudden and disruptive changes to everyday life. Although the term "human security" was formally introduced by the UNDP in 1994, its roots can be found in earlier United Nations commissions focused on environmental issues, development, and global governance. Additionally, the Clinton administration incorporated the term frequently in foreign policy speeches during 1993 and 1994. Even before this, the 1975 Helsinki Accords had connected state security with the protection of individual human rights (Howard-Hassmann, 2012).

Holley and Steiner (2005) describe a "safe space" in the classroom as an environment where students feel confident to take risks, express their views openly, and engage in examining their own knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors. This notion of safety focuses less on physical security and more on protecting students from psychological or emotional harm. As Boostrom (1988: 399) points out, it involves guarding against the kinds of harm people may experience in society-or, within the classroom, from teachers and peers. In such a space, students are encouraged to express their individuality freely, even when their perspectives or identities differ sharply from those of the instructor, the academic community, or fellow students (Holley & Steiner, 2005).

Burdick-Will (2013) introduced new perspectives by noting that several alternative explanations could challenge the presumed causal link between school violent crime and student achievement. A major concern is the possibility that lower-achieving students are disproportionately enrolled in schools with higher rates of violence. Such selection effects are a persistent challenge when assessing the impact of school environments (see Lauen & Gaddis, 2013), but they are particularly relevant here because the students themselves may be involved in committing these crimes. Indeed, one of the few rigorous quantitative studies on the relationship between reported violent crime and academic performance-Grogger's (1997) analysis based on principals' reports of teacher-student conflict-suggests that selection bias could be a significant issue (as cited in Burdick-Will, 2013).

Burdick-Will (2013) explored the idea of safety in educational settings, noting that academic outcomes differ greatly among U.S. schools. Many low-performing schools-particularly in Chicago-face high levels of violent crime on campus. Such frequent exposure to violence may significantly influence the educational experiences of already disadvantaged students. However, measuring the impact of school violence on learning is challenging due to potential selection bias and the overlap with other school-level issues. Drawing on detailed crime reports from the Chicago Police Department, comprehensive administrative records from Chicago Public Schools, and school climate surveys conducted by the Consortium on Chicago School Research (2002-2010), the study used changes in violent crime rates within schools over time to assess their effect on achievement. School and neighborhood fixed-effects models revealed that violent crime rates negatively affect test scores but not grades. This suggests the impact is more likely linked to reduced learning caused by cognitive stress and classroom disruptions rather than to changes in perceived safety, overall school climate, or disciplinary practices.

Burdick-Will (2018) examines research indicating that exposure to neighborhood violence affects students' classroom behavior and engagement. Because schooling is inherently social, such effects can extend beyond the directly affected individuals, influencing their classmates' learning as well. Using detailed administrative data from five cohorts of Chicago Public School students (2002-2010), crime records from the Chicago Police Department, and school-level surveys by the University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research, the study evaluates the magnitude of this peer effect. Findings show a significant negative relationship between peers' exposure to neighborhood violent crime and individual academic achievement, even after controlling for other peer characteristics and student fixed effects. Survey data suggest that these impacts are linked to issues of trust, discipline, and safety in cohorts with higher proportions of students from violent neighborhoods.

Burdick-Will (2018) notes that neighborhood-effects research has traditionally focused on demographic differences-such as poverty rates-and highlighted how geographic and cultural isolation can socialize youth into subcultural, anti-academic norms while limiting access to the material and institutional resources necessary for academic success (see Johnson, 2012; Sampson, Morenoff, & Gannon-Rowley, 2002). More recent studies have shifted attention from poverty alone to examining how local exposure to violent crime influences educational outcomes. For instance, Sharkey (2010) found that neighborhood homicides are linked to short-term declines in standardized test performance, while Harding (2009) demonstrated that violent-crime rates account for much of the relationship between neighborhood socioeconomic disadvantage and high school graduation rates. Burdick-Will (2016) reported that early exposure to neighborhood violence is associated with slower test score growth through high school, and Schwartz *et al.* (2016) showed that repeated exposure to local violence produces increasingly large declines in test scores.

6. Rural-urban Differences in Safety, Security & Violence across Provinces of Nepal

Provincial safety, security, and violence in Nepal vary considerably across regions, reflecting differences in geography, governance capacity, socio-economic conditions, and local conflicts. While most provinces enjoy relative peace, challenges persist in the form of petty crimes, occasional political unrest, gender-based violence, and disputes over resources or borders. Weak law enforcement capacity, limited infrastructure in remote areas, and socio-political tensions can undermine security, particularly in rural and marginalized communities. Strengthening provincial policing, community engagement, and judicial systems is essential to ensure safety and address both the causes and consequences of violence. The feelings among peoples living different provinces of Nepal is presented in Table-1 on next page.

Table-1: Safe Feeling while Walking Alone in the Village/City across Provinces (10 Years and Above)

Province	Rural-Urban	Experiences of Safe Feeling Among Individuals (%)					Total
		Completely safe	Safe	Partially safe	Insecure	Completely insecure	
Koshi	Other urban	31.8	57.3	8.5	2.3	0.0	100.0
	Rural	27.7	63.3	6.7	2.0	0.3	100.0
	Total	**30.4**	**59.4**	**7.9**	**2.2**	**0.1**	**100.0**
Madhesh	Other urban	18.8	75.9	4.1	1.2		100.0
	Rural	19.5	73.6	5.6	1.2		100.0
	Total	**19.0**	**75.3**	**4.5**	**1.2**		**100.0**
Bagmati	Kathm-andu	30.2	62.0	6.9	0.8		100.0
	Other urban	30.6	60.4	8.2	0.7	0.2	100.0
	Rural	31.3	60.8	6.8	1.1		100.0
	Total	**30.5**	**61.3**	**7.3**	**0.8**	**0.0**	**100.0**
Gandaki	Other urban	34.9	58.0	6.6	0.4		100.0
	Rural	38.1	54.7	6.0	1.2		100.0
	Total	**35.9**	**57.0**	**6.4**	**0.7**		**100.0**
Lumbini	Other urban	18.8	73.5	6.7	0.3	0.7	100.0
	Rural	13.9	77.8	7.5	0.8		100.0
	Total	**16.8**	**75.2**	**7.0**	**0.5**	**0.4**	**100.0**
Karnali	Other urban	20.5	72.6	4.9	1.9	0.0	100.0
	Rural	17.2	77.2	3.5	2.1	0.1	100.0
	Total	**19.0**	**74.7**	**4.3**	**2.0**	**0.1**	**100.0**

Sudur-paschim	Other urban	19.1	71.4	7.6	1.7	0.1	100.0
	Rural	15.9	65.9	14.2	3.7	0.3	100.0
	Total	**18.0**	**69.5**	**9.9**	**2.4**	**0.2**	**100.0**
	Kathm-andu	30.2	62.0	6.9	0.8		100.0
	Other urban	24.2	67.9	6.5	1.2	0.2	100.0
	Rural	22.3	69.0	7.1	1.5	0.1	100.0
Total		**24.4**	**67.5**	**6.7**	**1.2**	**0.1**	**100.0**

Source: Computed from NLSS IV (2022/23) Data Set (The results in the table are weighted)

The data reveal that perceptions of safety across Nepal are generally high, with 92.3 percent of respondents reporting that they feel either "completely safe" or "safe" when walking alone in their village or city. Only 1.3 percent of respondents feel insecure or completely insecure, suggesting that, at a national level, public safety is not perceived as a significant threat. This overall sense of security can be understood through a sociological lens as the product of strong community ties, low crime rates in many rural and semi-urban areas, and cultural norms that promote collective responsibility and informal community monitoring. Nevertheless, the presence of 6.3 percent who feel only "partially safe" points to underlying vulnerabilities, which may be linked to harassment, theft, inadequate infrastructure, or social divisions.

Provincial variations are notable. Gandaki (35.8%) and Bagmati (30.8%) report the highest proportions of individuals feeling "completely safe", likely reflecting better infrastructure, stronger governance, and targeted safety measures, particularly in tourism-dependent regions. By contrast, provinces such as Madhesh, Lumbini, and Karnali report high levels of "safe" responses (above 75%) but lower "completely safe" scores, suggesting a more cautious sense of security. This could stem from social tensions, day-night differences in safety, or perceived risks from localized disputes. Sudurpaschim stands out with the highest "partially safe" rate (10.6%), indicating greater public concern, potentially linked to geographic isolation, weaker policing, and cross-border vulnerabilities, as well as entrenched gender norms that limit women's mobility.

The small but present levels of insecurity in provinces such as Sudurpaschim (2.4%) and Koshi (2.3%) further underscore that safety concerns are not entirely absent. Importantly, insecurity in the Nepali context is not always linked to criminal activity alone-it may also arise from environmental hazards, poor lighting, inadequate public facilities, or experiences of harassment. Gender is an important implicit factor, as women in patriarchal societies often face restrictions on movement and heightened concerns about public safety, even in objectively secure environments.

From a social capital perspective, areas with strong bonding social capital-characterized by close community relationships-may maintain a sense of safety without substantial formal policing. However, where bridging social capital is weaker, and trust between different social, ethnic, or caste groups is low, the likelihood of reporting "complete" safety declines. Overall, while the perception of safety is encouragingly high, provincial disparities highlight the importance of localized safety strategies that strengthen infrastructure, build social trust, and ensure inclusivity in public spaces.

Across Nepal's provinces, the majority of individuals reported feeling either "completely safe" or "safe," with notable variations by region and settlement type. Gandaki Province recorded the highest proportion of respondents feeling "completely safe" (35.9%), particularly in rural areas (38.1%), followed by Bagmati (30.5%) and Koshi (30.4%). In contrast, Madhesh (19.0%), Lumbini (16.8%), Karnali (19.0%), and Sudurpaschim (18.0%) showed lower levels of complete safety. Rural areas in Gandaki, Bagmati, and Koshi tended to report slightly higher "completely safe" feelings than their urban counterparts, while the reverse was true in Madhesh and Sudurpaschim. Feelings of insecurity were generally low nationwide (around 1-2%), though Sudurpaschim's rural population had the highest proportion of "partially safe" or "insecure" responses (14.2% and 3.7%, respectively). Overall, 91.9% of people across Nepal expressed feeling safe to some extent (either "completely safe" or "safe"), indicating a generally high sense of security despite regional and rural-urban disparities.

The Chi-square test results indicate a highly significant association between the province and how safe individuals feel when walking alone in their village or city (Pearson Chi-Square = 4,629,569.505, df = 24, $p < 0.001$). The likelihood ratio and linear-by-linear association tests also confirm this significance, with p-values less than 0.001. These results suggest that perceptions of safety vary significantly across provinces. Additionally, the test assumptions were met, as no cells had an expected count less than 5, ensuring the validity of the Chi-square analysis.

Another important aspect of safety involves theft, robbery, and violence, all of which are closely linked to the overall safety environment. Understanding people's experiences is essential for explaining incidents of insecurity in any setting. The Nepal Living Standards Survey also captures such experiences. Table 2 presents data on incidents including asset theft, attacks or robbery, physical violence, psychological violence, and sexual violence.

Table-2: Experiences of Stolen, Robbery and Violence

Province	Rural-Urban	Cash or Asset Stolen	Attack or Robbery	Physical violence	Psychological violence	Sexual violence
Koshi	Other urban	2.8	.4	.3	1.3	.1
	Rural	1.6	.3	.3	.8	.1
	Total	**2.4**	**.4**	**.3**	**1.1**	**.1**
Madhesh	Other urban	1.9	.6	.2	.7	.2
	Rural	1.6	.3	.4	.6	.2
	Total	**1.9**	**.5**	**.3**	**.7**	**.2**
Bagmati	Kathmandu	2.5	.2	.2	.4	.1
	Other urban	1.8	.5	.6	1.4	.5
	Rural	1.3	.3	.3	.8	.3
	Total	**2.1**	**.3**	**.4**	**.8**	**.3**
Gandaki	Other urban	1.0	.2	.1	.4	.0
	Rural	.7	.4	.2	.5	.3
	Total	**.9**	**.3**	**.2**	**.4**	**.1**
Lumbini	Other urban	2.5	.6	.5	.9	.3
	Rural	1.3	.2	.2	.6	.0
	Total	**2.1**	**.4**	**.4**	**.8**	**.2**
Karnali	Other urban	1.5	.2	.3	.8	.0
	Rural	3.3	.6	.5	1.0	.3
	Total	**2.3**	**.4**	**.4**	**.9**	**.2**

Sudur-paschim	Other urban	2.2	.7	.6	1.9	.4
	Rural	1.6	.7	.7	1.1	.2
	Total	**2.0**	**.7**	**.6**	**1.6**	**.3**
	Kathmandu	2.5	.2	.2	.4	.1
	Other urban	2.1	.5	.4	1.0	.2
	Rural	1.5	.3	.3	.7	.2
Total		**2.0**	**.4**	**.3**	**.9**	**.2**

Source: Computed from NLSS IV (2022/23) Data Set (The results in the table are weighted)

Nationally, reported incidents of crime and violence remain low, with asset theft (1.8%) being the most common experience, followed by psychological violence (0.7%), attacks or robbery (0.4%), physical violence (0.3%), and sexual violence (0.2%). These low rates suggest a relatively secure social environment, yet they also highlight subtle forms of harm-particularly psychological violence-that may not receive the same attention as physical crimes but can have lasting effects on well-being.

Provincial variations are modest but meaningful. Koshi (2.4%) and Karnali (2.3%) record the highest levels of asset theft, which may reflect weaker property security systems or greater exposure to opportunistic crime. Sudurpaschim shows the highest level of psychological violence (1.3%) and also leads in physical violence (0.5%), suggesting deeper social tensions that could stem from poverty, geographic isolation, or entrenched local conflicts. Gandaki reports the lowest rates across nearly all categories, aligning with its relatively high perception of safety in other measures, possibly due to stronger social cohesion and lower population density.

Incidences of crime and violence reported in the past year were relatively low nationwide, with theft being the most common. Nationally, 2.0% of individuals reported cash or asset theft, followed by psychological violence (0.9%), physical violence (0.3%), attack or robbery (0.4%), and sexual violence (0.2%). Provincial differences were notable: theft was highest in Karnali's rural areas (3.3%) and Sudurpaschim's urban areas (2.2%), while Gandaki had the lowest theft rates (0.9% overall). Psychological violence peaked in Sudurpaschim (1.6%), especially in urban areas (1.9%), whereas sexual violence, though rare, was most frequently reported in Bagmati's other urban areas (0.5%) and Karnali's rural areas (0.3%).

Rural-urban patterns varied, with rural Karnali showing higher theft and physical violence rates than its urban counterpart, while urban Sudurpaschim experienced higher psychological violence. Overall, serious violent crimes such as sexual violence, physical assault, and robbery were uncommon, but the prevalence of theft and psychological violence suggests these remain the main security concerns in Nepal.

From a sociological perspective, these patterns underline that safety is multidimensional, encompassing not only the absence of violent crime but also protection from emotional harm and everyday theft. Addressing these issues requires both formal interventions—such as improved policing and infrastructure-and informal mechanisms, including strengthening community networks and promoting social trust.

7. Discussion

As mentioned in Economic and Political Weekly (2013), in both instances, in Delhi and Mumbai, the media drummed up demands for stronger punishment and better policing. Yet, the perception of safety by women is not linked only with minded conduct have disappeared. From small violations to the law and policing, although these are important components. Effective laws implemented with rigour can certainly act as a deterrent and encourage the victims of crime to turn to the law with the confidence that there will be justice. The converse also true, that the abuse of effective laws and poor policing encourages lawlessness. Yet, there are crimes committed in countries with more effective policing than in India. So clearly, better law enforcement alone cannot make women feel safe.

As highlighted by Economic and Political Weekly (2013), public perceptions of safety, particularly for women, cannot be secured solely through stronger laws and better policing. While rigorous law enforcement can deter crime and instill confidence in victims to seek justice, its misuse or poor implementation fosters lawlessness, and even in countries with highly effective policing, crimes persist. This indicates that safety is shaped by a broader set of social and cultural factors beyond legal measures. In Nepal, survey findings reveal a generally high sense of security, with 92.3 percent of respondents feeling “completely safe” or “safe” when walking alone in their locality. This confidence appears rooted in strong community bonds, low crime rates in many areas, and cultural norms that emphasize collective responsibility. However, variations across provinces highlight that perceptions of safety are nuanced and context-specific. Higher "completely safe" ratings in Gandaki (35.8%) and Bagmati (30.8%) may be linked to better infrastructure and governance, while provinces like Madhesh, Lumbini, and Karnali-despite high "safe" scores-reflect a degree of caution, possibly tied to localized disputes or differing risks between day and night. Sudurpaschim's relatively high "partially safe" figure (10.6%) suggests that geographic isolation, weaker policing, and gendered mobility constraints also influence perceptions. These findings reinforce that while effective laws are necessary, they must be supported by community trust, cultural cohesion, and equitable access to safety in order to create a lasting sense of security.

8. Conclusions

Survey results indicate that perceptions of safety in Nepal are generally high, with 92.3 percent of respondents feeling either "completely safe" or "safe" when walking alone in their village or city. This widespread sense of security can be attributed to strong community ties, relatively low crime rates in many regions, and cultural norms promoting collective responsibility. However, 6.3 percent of respondents report feeling only "partially safe", reflecting underlying concerns related to harassment, theft, inadequate infrastructure, or social tensions.

Provincial differences are evident. Gandaki (35.8%) and Bagmati (30.8%) report the highest "completely safe" scores, likely due to better infrastructure and governance. Provinces such as Madhesh, Lumbini, and Karnali show high "safe" ratings but fewer "completely safe" responses, suggesting cautious perceptions of safety, possibly linked to localized disputes or day-night differences in risk. Sudurpaschim records the highest "partially safe" proportion (10.6%), which may stem from geographic isolation, weaker policing, and gender-related mobility restrictions.

While insecurity levels are low nationwide, they are not absent, and perceptions are shaped by both environmental and social factors. From a sociological perspective, strengthening physical infrastructure, fostering trust across social groups, and creating inclusive public spaces are essential for sustaining and enhancing this sense of safety.

Survey findings reveal that public perceptions of safety in Nepal are generally high, with 92.3 percent of respondents feeling either "completely safe" or "safe" when walking alone in their village or city. This broad sense of security likely reflects strong community ties, relatively low crime rates in many areas, and cultural norms that promote collective responsibility and informal surveillance. Nevertheless, 6.3 percent report feeling only "partially safe", indicating the presence of underlying vulnerabilities, such as harassment, inadequate infrastructure, or social tensions. Provincial variations are evident: Gandaki (35.8%) and Bagmati (30.8%) record the highest "completely safe" scores, possibly due to better infrastructure and governance. In contrast, Sudurpaschim has the highest share of respondents feeling only "partially safe" (10.6%), which may be linked to geographic isolation, weaker policing, and gender-related mobility restrictions.

When compared to actual experiences of victimization, the data support the generally positive safety perceptions. Nationally, asset theft (1.8%) is the most reported incident, followed by psychological violence (0.7%), attacks or robbery (0.4%), physical violence (0.3%), and sexual violence (0.2%). Although these rates are low, they reveal that certain provinces face localized challenges. Koshi (2.4%) and Karnali (2.3%) record the highest theft rates, suggesting vulnerabilities in property security. Sudurpaschim stands out with the highest levels of psychological (1.3%) and physical (0.5%) violence, pointing to possible social tensions rooted in economic hardship, isolation, or entrenched interpersonal conflicts. Gandaki reports the lowest rates across nearly all categories, aligning with its higher levels of perceived safety.

In conclusion, the data indicate that a strong majority of people in Nepal feel safe in their communities, with over nine in ten reporting feeling either completely safe or safe. However, this general sense of security coexists with some variation across provinces and between rural and urban areas, particularly in levels of complete safety. Reported incidents of crime and violence are relatively rare, with theft and psychological violence being the most prevalent concerns, while severe crimes such as sexual violence, physical assault, and robbery remain uncommon. Provinces such as Gandaki and Bagmati exhibit higher feelings of safety and lower crime rates, whereas areas like Sudurpaschim and Karnali show more mixed results, including higher partial insecurity and localized spikes in certain offenses.

These findings suggest that while Nepal enjoys an overall favorable security climate, targeted interventions addressing theft and psychological violence, especially in specific regions, could further strengthen public safety and well-being.

From a sociological perspective, these patterns underscore that safety is multidimensional. While violent crime is rare, non-physical forms of harm-particularly psychological violence-can significantly influence well-being and community trust. Effective safety enhancement therefore requires both formal measures, such as improved policing and infrastructure, and informal mechanisms, including stronger community networks, inclusive public spaces, and trust-building across social groups. Strengthening both the reality and perception of safety will be essential for fostering social cohesion and sustaining public confidence in community life.

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Evaluating the Contribution of Corporate Governance in Formulating Enterprise Risk Management Strategies through a Comparative Sectoral Study

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Abstract

Risk management is an imperative part of corporate governance for the purpose of protecting organizational value and maintaining long-run sustainability. This research critically investigates how corporate governance mechanisms affect the effectiveness of enterprise risk management (ERM) in various industrial sectors such as Banking, Manufacturing, and FMCG. Adopting a quantitative comparative research design, secondary financial data and governance information of 30 companies were examined by applying descriptive statistics, regression, and correlation techniques. Findings indicate that strong governance habits-defined as bigger boards with a greater percentage of independent directors-are strongly linked to better risk management performance, indicated through lower financial risk metrics like debt-equity ratios. Expert input and prior research are also included in the study, which suggests the importance of risk-conscious, diversified boards to manage complicated and changing risk environments. These findings highlight the urgency to integrate risk management into corporate governance structures in order to promote organizational resilience, transparency, and stakeholder trust in a rapidly evolving global economy.

Keywords

Risk Management, Corporate Governance, Enterprise Risk Management (ERM), Board Size, Independent Directors, Financial Risk, Debt-Equity Ratio, Organizational Resilience, Corporate Governance Mechanisms, Industry Comparison.

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Evaluating the Contribution of Corporate Governance in Formulating Enterprise Risk Management Strategies through a Comparative Sectoral Study

1. Introduction

Risk management is a vital duty that ought to receive the most serious attention of an organization's board of directors to strengthen corporate governance. Albeit vital, risk oversight has in the past been overlooked, leading to some of the worst corporate failures. A case in point is the 2008 financial crisis caused by the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers. The risk management committee of the company convened just twice prior to its collapse and consisted of people who did not possess relevant expertise in sophisticated financial instruments such as credit default swaps and mortgage-backed securities (Grove & Patelli, 2013). This lack of governance experience was not unique; other giant institutions like American International Group (AIG) were also criticized for boards that were out of touch with risks associated with their business. This deficiency of risk management expertise in the boardroom spurred regulatory changes, such as the Dodd-Frank Act of 2010, which requires publicly traded firms to have risk management-proficient board members to enhance enterprise risk governance (Walker *et al.*, 2015).

Risk management is an essential function in organizations, and it identifies, evaluates, and reduces threats that may jeopardize strategic goals and business continuity. Risk management does not exist in a vacuum. It depends strongly on a strong corporate governance structure that creates clear structures, processes, and accountability mechanisms (Settembre-Blundo *et al.*, 2021). Corporate governance refers to the systems and principles that guide and regulate organizations, reconciling the interests of shareholders, management, employees, customers, and other groups. Ensuring transparency, ethical behavior, and good decision-making, governance structures provide the basis upon which effective risk oversight can be established. Without such a governance foundation, risk management activities become disjointed and inadequate to address more complex and interrelated risks (Kumar & sable, 2022).

Embedding risk management in corporate governance practices is vital for developing a risk-conscious culture and sense of responsibility across the organization (Mutsvene & Klingelhöfer, 2023). Boards of directors have a key role in establishing the tone by articulating risk appetite, assessing risk policies, and making adequate resources available to mitigate risks. This regulatory oversight also entails putting in place internal controls-such as segregation of duties and audits-that aid in the detection and prevention of probable failures prior to their amplification. In addition, involving stakeholders such as shareholders, employees, and customers in risk conversations adds depth to the organization's risk exposures and ties risk responses to stakeholder expectations. Such an integrated approach not only safeguards the firm but also allows it to take advantage of opportunities, thus generating long-term sustainable value (Gangaram, 2020).

In the current dynamic and fast-changing business world, the alignment of risk management with corporate governance is more important than ever before. The changing nature of risks-from sharp financial and operating to reputation and regulatory-means that companies have to be proactive, adaptive, and resilient. By integrating risk management into governance structures, organizations are able to promote accountability at every level, increase transparency, and enhance strategic decision-making. Such an integrated approach also generates trust with stakeholders and protects organizational reputation (Moridu, 2023). Ultimately, good corporate governance combined with effective risk management enhances an organization's resilience to shocks, the ability to take advantage of emerging opportunities, and to secure its long-term performance in a rapidly changing global economy.

2. Objective

The main objective of this article is to critically analyze the impact of corporate governance mechanisms on the development and effectiveness of enterprise risk management strategies in various industrial sectors, through a study of secondary financial and governance information in a bid to determine sector-specific governance practices that promote organizational risk resilience.

3. Review of Literature

Ellul (2015) reviews the research on the implications of governance structures and risk management functions on banks' risk-taking and performance, as well as the empirical literature investigating these correlations. A strong risk management function that is in sync with the right business model and culture can help financial institutions reduce their tail risk exposures and maximize their value in the long run, according to recent statistics.

If boards want to improve corporate governance by keeping tabs on key financial metrics and ratios, risk management is a must. Cash flow analysis, debt servicing, and bankruptcy forecasting tools like the Altman model are examples of analytical models that can help identify financial hardship and prevent failures (Grove & Clouse, 2017). The need of competent supervision in protecting organizational value is further underscored by models that detect earnings manipulation.

Specifically, Gitau's 2023 study looked at how flower farms in Kenya handled risk management and how corporate governance played a role. We reject the null hypothesis, which stated that managerial abilities do not substantially impact risk management, because the study found that management skills had a positive and significant effect on risk management.

A hyper-competitive market, multiple financial crises, and a slew of high-profile corporate scandals have all contributed to the rise in importance of corporate social responsibility (CSR). In order to increase their own worth, companies should think about what other people care about. Corporate social responsibility's effect on firm value is the focus of the study by Farooq *et al.*, 2025. In this study, we look at the connection between CSR and business value, specifically at the mediating role of enterprise risk management (ERM) and the moderating effect of corporate governance (CG). Corporate governance (CG) is favorably associated with company success, according to the results, and this link is strengthened when an effective governance framework is in place within the corporation.

4. Research Methodology

The research uses a comparative and quantitative study design that seeks to analyze the correlation between risk management outcomes and corporate governance variables across various industries. The method allows for a detached comparison of finance and governance data to determine key patterns and associations.

4·1 Data Sources

The study is based on secondary data gathered from openly available resources in the form of annual reports, audit committee reports, and disclosures of corporate governance. More data is obtained from reliable financial databases like Bloomberg, Reuters Eikon, and national stock exchange filings like NSE and BSE, and company websites. The thorough data set provides a strong basis for quantitative analysis.

4·2 Sampling

A stratified sampling method is employed to identify companies across different sectors like Banking, Manufacturing, and FMCG. The sample includes companies listed on major stock exchanges, providing a comparative analysis factor considering sectoral variations in governance practices and risk profiles.

4·3 Tools and Techniques

The research makes use of ratio analysis, such as important financial ratios such as Debt-Equity Ratio and Liquidity Ratios, to gauge risk exposure and financial well-being. Additionally, regression analysis is used to examine the association between governance variables-board size and board independence-and risk management results, hence offering empirical proof on how governance arrangements affect company risk.

5. Results

This section reports the findings of the study done in 30 companies from three prominent industries- "Banking, Manufacturing, and FMCG''. This study set out to determine whether there was a connection between enterprise risk management outcomes and the most important metrics for corporate governance. Specific metrics such as board size, independent director percentage, debt-equity ratio, current ratio, and return on assets (ROA) were the focus of the research. Analysis of correlation, regression, and descriptive statistics make up the bulk of the results.

5·1 Descriptive Analysis

The descriptive analysis gives an overview of the principal variables employed in the study. It provides information on the overall nature of the sampled firms based on their governance structure and financial risk indicators. This section sets a basis for understanding the distribution and spread of each variable, paving the way for the subsequent statistical analysis.

Table-1: Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Board Size	9.5	1.8	6	14
Independent Directors (%)	52.3%	11.2%	30%	70%
Debt-Equity Ratio	1.45	0.92	0.22	3.6
Current Ratio	1.32	0.51	0.68	2.7
Return on Assets (ROA) (%)	8.2%	3.5%	2.1%	15.8%

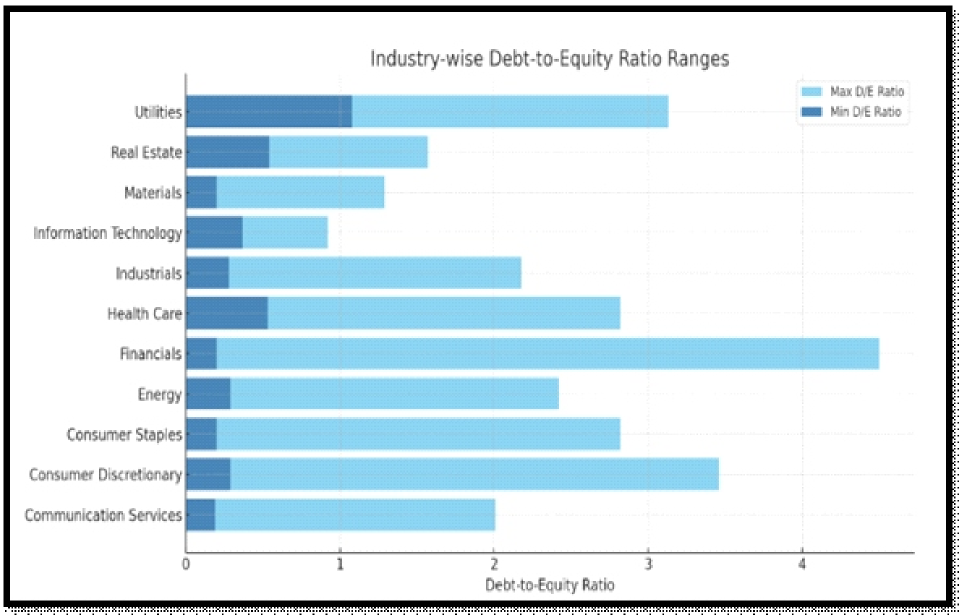

Figure-1: Industry-wise Average Debt-Equity Ratio

Source: https://eqvista.com/debt-to-equity-ratio-by-industry/

5·2 Regression Analysis

This section reports the findings of the regression analysis that was performed to establish the effect of corporate governance variables-*i.e.*, board size and independent directors as a percentage of total directors-on the debt-equity ratio, as an indicator of financial risk. The test is performed to verify the assumption that better governance is correlated with lower financial risk in companies.

Table-2: Results of Regression Analysis

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-Statistic	p-Value
Constant	2.857	0.436	6.55	0.000
Board Size	-0.089	0.034	-2.62	0.014
Independent Directors (%)	-0.027	0.011	-2.45	0.019
R-squared	0.38			
Adjusted R-squared	0.35			

A negative and significant correlation was noted between both board size and independent director proportion and the debt-equity ratio, suggesting that stronger governance is linked with lower financial risk.

5·3 Correlation Analysis

To further clarify the interactions among the variables, a correlation analysis was performed. Through this analysis, the direction and strength of association between financial performance/risk indicators and governance characteristics are identified. The results validate the assertion that well-structured governance underpins better risk management performance.

Table-3: Correlation Matrix

Variables	Board Size	Indep. Dir. %	Debt-Equity	Current Ratio	ROA
Board Size	1				
Independent Directors %	0.54	1			
Debt-Equity	-0.31	-0.45	1		
Current Ratio	0.22	0.30	-0.42	1	
ROA	0.35	0.48	-0.33	0.44	1

These results from correlation analysis substantiate the hypothesis that stronger corporate governance structures-particularly larger, more independent boards-lead to better risk management as reflected in lower debt-equity ratios and enhanced liquidity.

To complement the quantitative findings and add a real-world insight, industry views and expert opinions were included. These expert views provide insightful commentary on the contribution of corporate governance to improving enterprise risk management practices across industries. The views expressed by practitioners and regulators identify actual governance issues and best practices that confirm the empirical evidence in this study:

5·3·1 John Crawley on Governance and Risk Alignment

John Crawley, a global risk management expert, focuses on the fact that good corporate governance structures are vital to managing organizational goals and uncertainties. He underscores the need for boards to establish suitable risk appetites and to have in place risk management systems that enable business objectives to be achieved. "(https://gccbdi.org/newsletter-articles/exclusive-interview).

5·3·2 Anthony Carey on Board Resilience and Knowledge Gaps

Anthony Carey, a Mazars UK partner, shares insights on the importance of board-level resilience in managing risk. He observes that although numerous boards believed they were ready for crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, there is still a requirement to close knowledge gaps, especially in the case of climate change and cyber security threats. Carey encourages the diversification of board expertise and the inclusion of external advisors in order to improve the oversight of risk. (https://www.forvismazars.com/group/en/insights/latest-insights/expert-interview-leadership-in-risk-management).

5·3·3 Deloitte Experts on Banking Sector Governance

Irena Gecas-McCarthy and Richard Rosenthal of Deloitte point out the growing focus on corporate governance practices in banking. They emphasize the need for boards to strengthen their governance architecture by enabling agility, unifying strategy with risk management, and encouraging accountability to better deal with regulatory pressures and market complexities. (https://deloitte.wsj.com/riskandcompliance/banking-what-questions-are-your-boards-asking-management-f330875e).

5·3·4 Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) on Governance and Fraud Prevention

Indian Ministry of Corporate Affairs highlights the importance of sound corporate governance structures in avoiding fraud and ensuring market confidence. Their report stresses the importance of legal protection and regulatory structures ensuring transparency and honest business practices within a firm. (https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/company/corporate-trends/corporate-governance-crucial-for-curbing-fraud-says-mca-report-following-gensol-row/articleshow/121219343.cms).

These professional points of view add weight to the findings of the study that good corporate governance structures with well-informed and diversified boards are an essential part of sound risk management and organizational resilience within different industries.

According to the findings, a lower debt-equity ratio is indicative of good corporate governance, which is defined as a bigger board size and more director independence. Correlation tests also corroborated these findings with positive associations between governance measures and firm performance metrics. Expert opinions further emphasized the critical roles played by board resilience, knowledge diversity, and strategic alignment in effective enterprise risk management. In general, the findings emphasize that strong governance structures make significant contributions to better risk management across sectors.

6. Discussion

The results of this research paint a strong story about the determinative influence of corporate governance on effective enterprise risk management (ERM) strategy in the Banking, Manufacturing, and FMCG industries. The descriptive statistics are indicative of fairly sized boards (mean= 9.5 members) with a decent level of independence (mean independent directors=52.3%). Companies had different financial risk profiles, as evident in the 0.22 to 3.6 debt-equity ratios, and a robust mean return on assets (ROA) of 8.2%, reflecting operating profitability across industries.

The regression analysis indicates a statistically significant negative association between both board size and independent director percentage with the debt-equity ratio ($p < 0.05$). Particularly, the regression slope of board size (-0.089) and independent directors (-0.027) is such that as the board size increases and is more independent, companies engage in less financial risk. This echoes established governance theory that effective board supervision assists in reducing over-leveraging through the imposition of prudential borrowing practices. An R-squared of 0.38 means that around 38% of the financial risk variation (as captured by debt-equity ratio) is explained by these governance variables, which represents a moderate fit of the model.

These results are supported by the correlation matrix, which indicates negative correlations of debt-equity with board size (-0.31) and independent directors (-0.45), further implying that governance strength has an inverse relation to financial leverage. Further, positive correlations of ROA with board size (0.35), independent directors (0.48), and current ratio (0.44) imply that good governance not only minimizes risk but also maximizes operational performance and liquidity.

These findings are also corroborated by expert opinions. John Crawley highlights the importance of boards having risk management frameworks harmonize with business goals, which aligns with this research's findings correlating board composition with sound capital structuring. Anthony Carey emphasizes the importance of risk-resilient boards with varying competencies in order to handle upcoming threats-a point of especial significance in view of the broad disparity in risk exposure and governance quality across the sample companies. Deloitte's Irena Gecas-McCarthy and Richard Rosenthal amplify the need for joined-up governance in the banking industry, where the risks of inadequate risk management are especially great. Also, the Indian Ministry of Corporate Affairs highlights the linkage between governance and risk in fraud detection and market trust-replicating this research's emphasis on strong safeguards.

Combined, empirical evidence and expert opinion confirm that corporate governance-board structure and independence-has a determinative impact on managing financial risk and facilitating responsive, robust ERM practices across industries. Such findings form a useful platform from which to make policy suggestions for strengthening governance structures to improve the effectiveness of risk management.

7. Conclusion

The research irrefutably proves that effective corporate governance structures, specifically higher board sizes and greater ratios of independent directors, substantially improve enterprise risk management competence in various industrial industries. Effective governance systems foster increased monitoring, accountability, and strategy alignment, which individually lower financial risk as indicated by reduced debt-equity ratios and enhanced liquidity metrics. The incorporation of subject-matter expertise further substantiates that knowledgeable and diversified boards play a significant role in solving emerging risks and promoting organizational resilience. Hence, it is imperative for businesses to incorporate thoroughgoing governance practices into risk management frameworks to ensure the minimizing of threats, taking advantage of opportunities, and achieving sustainable long-term performance within the evolving and multifaceted business landscape.

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Lubhu: Cultural Heritage Tourism Exploration

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Abstract

Lubhu, a culturally rich Newa town located in Lalitpur Mahalaxmi Municipality of Nepal, holds significant potential for tourism development rooted in heritage and tradition. Despite its historical importance and living cultural practices-such as temple rituals, handloom weaving, and community-led festivals-Lubhu remains largely under-evaluated in Nepal's mainstream tourism discourse. This study aims to explore how Lubhu's cultural identity can be integrated into sustainable tourism development without compromising its original traditional values. Field observations, interviews with local residents, artisans, and ward officials were conducted to understand community perspectives on tourism and heritage conservation. It reveals strong community interest in safeguarding traditions while welcoming responsible visitors. By evaluating the relationship between culture and tourism, the study contributes to figure out how underrepresented heritage towns like Lubhu can benefit from tourism that respects local identity. The findings suggest that any tourism initiative must be community-centered and culturally sensitive to ensure the preservation of Lubhu's unique heritage while creating sustainable economic opportunities for local people.

Keywords

Culture, Heritage, Lubhu, Tourism.

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Lubhu: Cultural Heritage Tourism Exploration

1. Introduction

Lubhu, a historic town in the Lalitpur district of Nepal, is renowned for its rich tradition of hand-woven textiles (cloths), reflecting the cultural and economic fabric of the region. Situated in the Mahalaxmi Municipality, Lubhu has been a center for textile production, particularly known for its traditional weaving practices that have been passed down through generations (Dulal & Singh, 2024). It was the center of Dhaka cloths, a trainer went to Palpa and trained the people. Palpali Dhaka - a smooth linen for Nepali hat- is famous all over Nepal. The weaving industry in Lubhu is predominantly a home-based enterprise, with many families engaged in the craft, producing textiles that are integral to various cultural and religious ceremonies. These hand-woven fabrics are not only a source of livelihood but also a means of preserving and expressing the community's cultural identity (Dulal & Singh, 2024). The significance of hand-woven textiles in Nepal extends beyond Lubhu, as they play a crucial role in the country's cultural heritage and are emblematic of the diverse traditions found across different regions (Romanto Nepali, n.d.). Lubhu, a historic Newa settlement in the Kathmandu Valley, is renowned for its rich cultural heritage, including traditional architecture, festivals, and artisanal crafts (Shrestha, 2016). Despite its cultural significance, Lubhu remains underrepresented in Nepal's tourism sector. This study explores Lubhu's cultural heritage through the lens of tourism development, aiming to understand how heritage tourism can contribute to the preservation of local traditions and support sustainable economic growth. By examining community perspectives and heritage assets, the research seeks to highlight opportunities in promoting Lubhu as a cultural tourism destination. It is a field visit observation and interviews of local community about the art, culture, history, civilization, traditional rituals, and monuments of the town.

2. Problem Statement

Lubhu, a historic town in the southeastern region of the Kathmandu Valley, is known for its rich cultural heritage, indigenous textiles, festivals, traditional architecture, and deep-rooted Newa customs. However, in recent decades, rapid urbanization, modern construction practices, and shifting socio-economic values have posed significant threats to the preservation of Lubhu's tangible and intangible cultural heritage. The traditional Guthi system, which has long sustained community-led heritage conservation and ritual practices, is weakening due to demographic shifts and the decline in youth participation (Shrestha, 2015). Moreover, many of Lubhu's ancient temples, courtyards, and residential buildings are being replaced with concrete structures, leading to a loss of architectural identity and historical continuity (Mishra & Shrestha, 2020). The lack of proper documentation, insufficient policy implementation, and minimal awareness at the local level have further exacerbated the problem. While there is increasing recognition of the need to preserve cultural heritage for sustainable development, concrete strategies and localized interventions in Lubhu remain limited. This research seeks to document the basic cultural heritage, identify the underlying causes of heritage degradation in Lubhu and explore community-centered approaches that can support sustainable preservation practices rooted in cultural identity and historical continuity from tourism development perspective.

3. Objective

This study aims to explore and document the cultural heritage sites of Lubhu from the perspective of heritage tourism development. It seeks to evaluate how these sites can be leveraged to promote sustainable heritage tourism that supports the preservation of cultural traditions, strengthens community identity, and fosters economic benefits for local residents, while ensuring the safeguarding of Lubhu's unique historical and cultural legacy.

4. Research Question

How can the cultural heritage sites of Lubhu be effectively developed and managed through heritage tourism to promote sustainable preservation, strengthen local identity, and support the economic well-being of the community?

5. Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative approach to investigate the role of heritage tourism in the preservation and development of cultural heritage sites in Lubhu. A qualitative methodology is most appropriate for this study as it allows an in-depth understanding of local perspectives, social dynamics, and the cultural significance embedded within heritage sites (Creswell, 2014). The research focuses on capturing the experiences and insights of community members, cultural practitioners, and stakeholders involved in tourism and heritage management.

Data collection involved multiple methods. First, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants, including local artisans, community leaders, municipal officials, and representatives from cultural organizations. This approach enabled the gathering of detailed, nuanced information about Lubhu's cultural heritage and its relationship with tourism (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Second, participant observation was employed during significant cultural events and festivals to observe firsthand the interaction between heritage practices and visitors. This method provided contextual understanding of the living heritage and its role in community life (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011). Third, secondary data such as government reports, tourism plans, and previous academic studies were reviewed to frame the local findings within broader heritage tourism development trends. Data analysis followed thematic analysis procedures, as described by Braun and Clarke (2006), allowing the identification of key themes related to heritage conservation, tourism, community engagement, and development. Transcripts and field notes were analyzed to reveal patterns and relationships to underpin the opportunities of heritage tourism in Lubhu.

Ethical considerations were carefully addressed. Informed consent was obtained from all interviewees, and anonymity was maintained to protect participants' privacy. The research also respected local customs and cultural sensitivities throughout fieldwork, ensuring a collaborative and respectful approach.

6. Thematic Analysis from Theoretical Perspective

Thematic analysis of Lubhu's tourism attraction reveals five interlinked motifs. *First*, sacred topography frames the town as a 'ritual landscape', where the Mahalaxmi-Mahabhirav Jatra and allied processions reaffirm cosmological order and attract spectators seeking liminality (Turner, 1969). *Second*, performative authenticity is constructed through embodied rituals, enabling tourists to 'gaze' upon living heritage rather than static monuments (Urry &Larsen, 2011) Newari rituals and festivals. *Third*, textile crafts-manship-particularly hand loomed brocade-operates as creative capital, allowing hosts to diversify income while sustaining intangible skills (Richards, 1996) anyone can view the handlooms of 19^{th} century. *Fourth*, community stewardship mediates tensions between conservation and commodification; locally governed Guthis regulate festival expenditures and monument upkeep, reflecting Murphy's (1985) community based tourism model. *Finally*, place attachment underpins destination loyalty: residents' affective bonds foster high conservation sensitivity yet generate ambivalence toward visitor growth, echoing the heritage dissonance outlined by Timothy and Boyd (2003) however people and community is highly positive in tourism and hospitality.

Collectively, these themes situate Lubhu within broader cultural heritage tourism theory, illustrating how ritual performance, craft economy, and grassroots governance coalesce or merge to form an experiential attraction whose sustainability depends on balancing vernacular values with market visibility (Dulal &Singh, 2024; MacCannell, 1976). Moreover, the town's proximity to Kathmandu positions it within Butler's (1980) tourism area life cycle at an early involvement stage, presenting opportunities for managed growth. From the Sustainable Cultural Heritage Tourism development perspective, the study has specifically reveled Architecture, Culture, Demography, Economy, History, Livelihood, Location, Philosophy, main tourist Attractions and Special Information to the tourists and visitors are the pre-determined basic indicators of cultural heritage tourism destination development.

7. Theoretical Framework

Cultural heritage tourism is grounded in theoretical perspectives that highlight the importance of authenticity, local participation, and cultural significance. Butler (1980) outlined destination evolution through his Tourism Area Life Cycle model. Cooper *et al.* (2008) proposed the components of tourism development, 4 As Framework—Attraction, Accessibility, Accommodation, and Amenities. MacCannell (1976) introduced the idea of staged authenticity, where tourists seek what they perceive as real cultural experiences. Murphy (1985) promoted a community-based tourism model prioritizing resident involvement. Pine and Gilmore (1999) propose the experience economy, where value lies in emotionally engaging, co-created experiences between hosts and tourists. Richards (1996) emphasizes cultural capital in tourism, arguing that traditions, arts, and crafts serve not only as heritage assets but also as creative economic resources that differentiate destinations. Smith (2006) introduces the constructivist theory of heritage, viewing heritage as a dynamic cultural and political process shaped by memory, identity, and power rather than as static objects or sites. Timothy and Boyd (2003) examined the conflict between heritage conservation and commercialization. Turner's (1969) concept of liminality explains how ritual practices offer tourists meaningful, transitional experiences. Urry and Larsen (2011) developed the notion of the tourist gaze, focusing on how visitors visually engage with cultural settings.

Together, these theories highlight the shift from passive heritage consumption to participatory, identity-driven, and economically productive cultural heritage tourism. It helps assess a destination's readiness and sustainability by analyzing what draws tourists, how they arrive, where they stay, and supporting services provided.

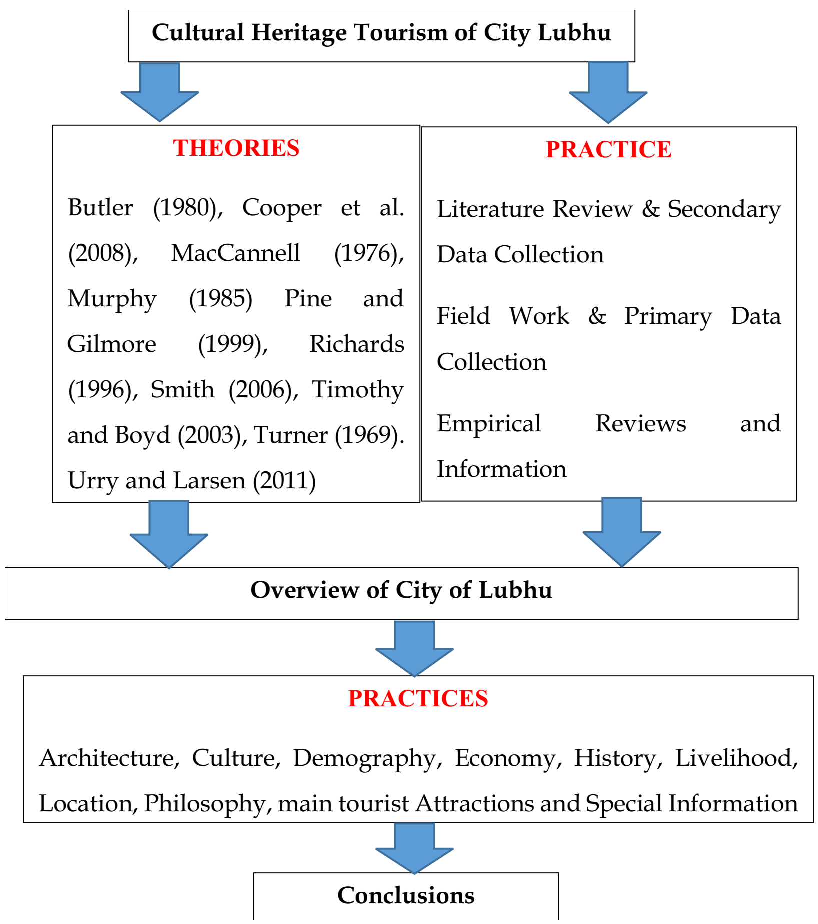
Theory and related Application Keywords of Cultural Heritage Tourism

Theories	Keywords	Applications
Butler (1980)	Tourism Area Life Cycle model	Environment, Migration
Cooper *et al.* (2008)	4 A's Framework - Attraction, Accessibility, Accommodation, and Amenities	Development
MacCannell (1976)	Staged authenticity, The real cultural experiences	Culture and Food
Murphy (1985)	Community-based tourism model prioritizing resident involvement	Livelihood, Philosophy
Pine & Gilmore (1999)	The economy, where value lies in engaging and co-created experiences between hosts and tourists	Economy and Accommodation
Richards (1996)	Cultural capital in tourism, traditions, arts, and crafts serve as heritage assets on creative economic resources that differentiate the destinations.	Main Attractions

Smith (2006)	The constructivist theory of heritage as a dynamic cultural and political process shaped by memory, identity, and power	Newar Identity
Timothy & Boyd (2003)	The conflict between heritage conservation and commercialization	History and Architecture
Turner (1969)	Rituals and festivals create liminal (transitional) spaces that foster a sense of communitas (shared social bonding), attracting tourists seeking transformation.	Jatras and Festivals Culture and Festival
Urry & Larsen (2011)	Tourism is shaped by visual consumption-tourists seek sights and experiences curated by cultural and media influences.	Attractions, Activities, Access.

Developed in 2025.

7·1 Analytical Framework



This multi-method qualitative design provides a comprehensive understanding of how heritage tourism can be harnessed in Lubhu to foster cultural preservation and economic development, while maintaining community identity and sustainability. The identified results as the indicators of heritage tourism are Architecture, Culture, Demography, Economy, History, Livelihood, Location, Philosophy, main tourist Attractions and Special Information, are analyzed below.

7·2 Indicators

Cultural heritage tourism indicators help assess a town's ability to attract and sustain tourism based on its historical, architectural, and cultural assets. Key indicators include the presence of preserved heritage sites, cultural festivals, traditional crafts, local museums, and community participation in conservation. Accessibility, interpretive signage, and infrastructure such as accommodation and guided tours also play critical roles. These indicators support sustainable tourism planning and enhance visitor experience while preserving local identity (Timothy & Boyd, 2003). Monitoring these elements is essential for balancing development and conservation, ensuring long-term economic and cultural benefits for the host community.

Cultural heritage tourism in towns can be assessed through a multidimensional framework encompassing cultural, economic, social, environmental, resilience, and governance indicators. A recent evidence based study across 21 European destinations validated 51 indicators-such as heritage preservation, economic benefits to local suppliers, social inclusion of residents, environmental conservation efforts, and crisis resilience capacity-that together provide a comprehensive tool for monitoring sustainable cultural tourism development (Tudorache *et al.*, 2024). Incorporating these metrics enables planners to align visitor experiences with local identity, adaptive governance, and long term preservation aims, ensuring responsible tourism growth in small towns (Tudorache, *et al.*, 2024).

From the analysis the following indicators are determined Accommodation, Amenity, Architecture, Attractions, Culture, Demography, Economy, Gastronomy, History, Livelihood, Location, Philosophy and Transportation. These indicators are analyzed and summarized below from the primary and secondary information.

8. History & Architecture

Lubhu, a historic town in Nepal's Lalitpur district, is renowned for its rich cultural heritage and traditional architecture. The town's name, Lubhu, meaning "golden plate" in Newa, is rooted in local folklore. Lubhu: a city like a golden plate, or a settlement with lots of golden paddy production, or a city settled by queen Ganga Maharani by selling her golden plate, or the city with golden roof (Subarnachhatrapur) whatsoever called it is a beautiful golden city popular in folklores. Neolithic stone tools have been discovered from Lubhu (Sharma, 1983: 1). Therefore, the history of human settlement in Lubhu can be traced till to the prehistoric period. Gobhrateshwar temple was established in 5100 BEC. Kirats used to trade on the route.

During the Lichchhavi period Lubhu was developed as a human settlement knowing with a part of Hansagrihadranga - a town. Likewise, there find another inscription of Abhaya Malla of early medieval (medieval Malla period is 12th-18th century) period from Motitar (Vajracharya & Malla, 1985: 25 &35). It is nearest village of Lubhu. This historical record also helps to trace out the historicity of Lubhu back to early medieval period.

Historical points of Lubhu

Dateline	Age	Description
6000 to 2000 BCE	Prehistoric Neolithic age	Weapons were found
5100 BEC	Trtayug Lord Ram	Shringi Rishi has established
800 BEC - 111 BC	Kirat period	Eastern Trading Route
400-750 CE	Lichchhavi Period	Hansagriha Dranga
1216-1255 CE	Abhaya Malla	Inscription in Imadol Mattar
1547 - 1613 CE	Vishwa, Tribhuvan, Trailokya	Ganga Maharani
1726 CE	Inscription	Mahalaxmi Temple

Source: Collected by the Researcher in 2025.

One legend tells of Queen Ganga Maharani, who sold her golden plate to aid her people during a devastating epidemic, leading to the town's name (Subedi, 2020). Another tale speaks of a devotee (Ganga Maharani) offering a golden plate to deities Mahalaxmi and Gobhateshwor Mahadev, further cementing the town's association with this precious metal (Subedi, 2020). During the period of epidemic sorrow God Bhairav himself laid under golden umbrella to protect the people from disease. Then after, gradually the place was called 'Subarna Chhatrapur' but was called 'Lubhu', which means the same in Newari. In medieval period, while the king of Lalitpur was came into here, he saw beautiful scene of mustered flowers that made him quite happiness and immediately expressed 'Lumbhukhani' means golden plant. Then, local people started to address the site as the name Lubhu (Dhaubanjar, 2079: 205)

Queen Ganga Maharani, also known as Ganga Devi or Ganga Rani, emerged as a significant political figure in 16th-century Nepalese history during the Malla dynasty. She was the queen consort of King Vishva Malla of Bhaktapur, who ruled from 1547 to 1560 CE. Following her husband's death, she assumed the role of regent and later co-ruler with her sons, Trailokya Malla (r. 1560-1613 CE) and Tribhuvana Malla, adopting the royal title Sri Sri Jaya Gangarani Devi Thakurini (Pokharel, 2023). Her leadership contributed to Bhaktapur's political consolidation and expansion, including the annexation of surrounding areas. Her last recorded inscription dates to 1601 CE, after which Trailokya Malla appears as the sole ruler. Although archaeological evidence suggests Lubhu's earlier habitation, local oral tradition associates the town's formal historical recognition with the reign of Queen Ganga Maharani in the 16th century (Pokharel, 2023).

Architecturally, Lubhu showcases traditional Newar design, characterized by intricately carved wooden windows, brick facades, and tiered pagoda-style temples. The Mahalakshmi-Mahabhairav Temple stands as a testament to this style, featuring a three-tiered pagoda structure adorned with detailed woodwork and guarded by stone lions (Subedi, 2020). Such structures not only serve religious purposes but also reflect the community's artistic prowess, ability and dedication to preserving their ancestral legacy. There was a palace of 365 windows of Ganga Maharani but it's not in existence at present. It needs an intensive research.

The town's layout and buildings exemplify the Newar community's emphasis on harmonious living, with communal courtyards and narrow alleys fostering close-knit relationships among residents. Despite modernization pressures, Lubhu has retained much of its traditional charm, offering a glimpse into Nepal's architectural and cultural past.

9. Culture and Philosophy

Lubhu, a historic town in Nepal's Lalitpur district, embodies a rich tapestry of cultural traditions and philosophical beliefs, deeply rooted in its Newar heritage. Central to Lubhu's cultural identity is the annual Mahalaxmi Jatra, a vibrant festival that showcases the community's devotion through elaborate processions, rituals, and traditional performances. This festival not only reinforces communal bonds but also serves as a living testament to the town's enduring spiritual and cultural values (Dulal & Singh, 2024). Mahalaxmi Jatra is the main festival of the region falls on March or April every year.

The philosophical underpinnings of Lubhu's culture are intricately linked to the Guthi system, an indigenous socio-religious institution prevalent among the Newar community. Guthis function as custodians of cultural heritage, overseeing the maintenance of temples, organization of festivals, and preservation of traditional arts. This communal approach to heritage conservation reflects a philosophy that emphasizes collective responsibility and inter-generational continuity (Pant & Pant, 2020). Guthi is the heart - central driver of Newar Community. Guthi leads entire social rituals and functions.

Moreover, Lubhu's renowned hand-woven textiles are not merely economic commodities but are imbued with cultural significance. The intricate patterns and motifs woven into these fabrics often symbolize religious narratives and local myths, serving as a medium through which cultural knowledge and philosophical beliefs are transmitted across generations. The act of weaving itself is considered a sacred practice, intertwining the spiritual and the material realms (Sharma & Karolia, 2023). In essence, Lubhu's culture and philosophy are characterized by a harmonious blend of communal practices, spiritual devotion, and artistic expression. This synergy not only sustains the town's rich heritage but also offers insights into the broader dynamics of cultural resilience and continuity in the face of modern challenges and attracts the visitors from all over the world.

10. Economy & Livelihood

Lubhu, situated in the Lalitpur district of Nepal, has long been recognized for its vibrant textile industry, which plays a pivotal role in the local economy and the livelihoods of its residents.

Traditionally, the town's economy was anchored in agriculture; however, over time, handloom weaving emerged as a significant economic activity, with many households engaging in the production of hand-woven textiles. This craft not only provided employment opportunities but also became an integral part of Lubhu's cultural identity (Dulal & Singh, 2024). Textile and paddy production were /are the historical identity of Lubhu.

The weaving industry in Lubhu is characterized by both traditional handlooms and modern electric looms, reflecting a blend of heritage and adaptation to contemporary demands. These textiles are not only consumed locally but also supplied to various parts of Nepal, including tourist hubs like Thamel, indicating their economic significance beyond the local context (Wikipedia, 2024). The prominence of textile production has led to the establishment of numerous small to large-scale factories within the town, with many families operating their own weaving units

However, the community faces challenges such as competition from mass-produced fabrics and a decline in traditional weaving practices. Despite these obstacles, the resilience of Lubhu's weaving community is evident in their continued commitment to preserving this craft. Efforts to sustain and promote hand woven textiles are crucial for maintaining the town's economic vitality and cultural heritage- a foundation of cultural tourism.

11. Gastronomy and Amenity

Lubhu, a historic Newar settlement southeast of Kathmandu Valley, Nepal, is renowned as a center for traditional handloom weaving. Its gastronomy is deeply rooted in Newari culinary traditions. Key features include the prominence of fermented foods like bodi (black gram beans), masyaura (sun-dried lentil or vegetable balls), and kinema (fermented soybean), essential for protein and preservation (Joshi & Singh, 2020). Wo (lentil pancakes), bara (savory lentil patties), chhoyala (spiced grilled meat, often buffalo), and yomari (steamed rice-flour dumplings with sweet fillings) represent core celebratory and daily fare, reflecting the agrarian and communal Newari lifestyle (Shakya, 2022). Meals often center on beaten rice (chiura) accompanied by diverse accompaniments (achar). Local alcoholic beverages like thwon (home-brewed rice beer) and aaila (a potent spirit) hold significant cultural and ritualistic importance (Tamang, 2021).

Regarding amenity, Lubhu offers fundamental services characteristic of a semi-urban Newar town. Accommodation options are primarily limited to basic homestays or local guesthouses, catering mainly to domestic visitors or researchers interested in the weaving heritage (Thapa, 2019). Formal dining establishments serving authentic Newari cuisine specifically within Lubhu are scarce; local eateries (bhojanalaya) provide everyday Nepali staples, while traditional Newari feasts (bhoj) are typically experienced during festivals or through community/home-based arrangements (Shakya, 2022). The primary amenity focus remains on its cultural heritage infrastructure: numerous traditional weaving workshops open for observation, local cooperatives promoting handloom products, and historic Newari architecture like temples (dyochen) and communal courtyards (bahal or chowk) that define its urban fabric (Tamang, 2021). Access is via local roads, with basic local shops providing daily necessities. The amenity value lies predominantly in its authentic cultural immersion rather than developed tourism facilities.

12. Transportation and Accommodation

Lubhu is located approximately 8 km southeast of Kathmandu city center in Lalitpur District (Thapa, 2019). Access is primarily via road networks connected to the Ring Road and Koteshwor-Bhaktapur Highway. Public transportation consists of frequent local microbuses (“tempos”) and buses operating from Kathmandu’s Old Bus Park (Ratna Park) and Lagankhel Bus Park in Patan, terminating at Lubhu Chowk (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2017; Nepal Tourism Board, n.d.). Route numbers vary, but services are regular during daylight hours. Private vehicles (taxis, ride-sharing) offer direct but more expensive access. Within Lubhu, navigation is predominantly on foot due to narrow, traditional lanes. Cycle rickshaws may be available for shorter distances between major points and weaving cooperatives (Tamang, 2021). Road conditions are very good.

Formal tourist accommodation (hotels, resorts) within Lubhu itself is extremely limited due to its primary identity as a residential and craft-production hub rather than a developed tourist destination (Shakya, 2022). Visitors typically stay in nearby Patan (Lalitpur) or Kathmandu, which offer diverse lodging options, and travel to Lubhu for day visits (Thapa, 2019). It is close to Patan durbar square around 5 Km.

However, community-based homestays are emerging as the primary accommodation option within Lubhu, facilitated by local weaving cooperatives and heritage initiatives. These homestays provide basic facilities (shared bathroom, simple meals) within traditional Newari homes, offering immersive cultural experiences and direct interaction with weaving families (Tamang, 2021). Amenities are modest; reliable hot water and Wi-Fi cannot be universally expected. Advance booking through cooperatives or community tourism networks is essential. The focus is on cultural exchange and observing the weaving heritage intimately, rather than luxury lodging (Shakya, 2022; Thapa, 2019). Thus Lubhu can be an authentic traditional cultural amenity.

13. Location and Demography

Lubhu is a traditional Newar settlement classified as a semi-urban area within the Mahalaxmi Municipality, Lalitpur District, in the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal (CBS, 2017). Its geographic coordinates are approximately 27°37'60" N latitude and 85°22'0" E longitude. Situated about 8 kilometers southeast of Kathmandu city center and 5 kilometers east of Patan Durbar Square, it lies on the valley floor near the foothills, historically positioned along ancient trade routes connecting the Kathmandu-Patan core with the eastern valley and beyond (Tamang, 2021; Thapa, 2019). It falls within the Bagmati River basin, contributing to its historical agricultural productivity. Lubhu’s proximity to the Kathmandu-Bhaktapur road corridor places it within the expanding urban fringe of the Kathmandu Metropolitan Region, subject to increasing development pressures while retaining distinct Newar cultural and architectural features (Shakya, 2022).

As per the 2011 National Population and Housing Census (the latest official data at this level), Lubhu (then a Village Development Committee) had a population of 9,100 individuals residing in 2,115 households (CBS, 2017). However, local estimates and subsequent municipal incorporation (Mahalaxmi Municipality formed 2014) suggest the current population likely exceeds 12,000 (Nepal Tourism Board, n.d.). The population is predominantly Newar, the indigenous inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley, known for their distinct language (Nepal Bhasa), culture, and social organization based on caste and kinship (guthi) systems (Tamang, 2021). There is also a significant and growing population of Tamang ethnic group migrants, primarily from surrounding hill districts, who have settled in Lubhu, often engaging in weaving and other labour (Shakya, 2022; Tamang, 2021). Smaller communities of other ethnic groups (e.g., Chhetri, Brahmin) are also present. The literacy rate was recorded at approximately 75% in 2011, higher than the national average but with variations by age and gender (CBS, 2017). Traditionally agrarian, Lubhu's occupational structure has shifted significantly towards handloom weaving and related commerce, alongside service sector jobs linked to Kathmandu, though agriculture remains important for some households (Thapa, 2019). Population density is high, characteristic of Kathmandu Valley settlements, with traditional compact Newar housing.

14. Main Attractions

Lubhu, a historic Newar settlement in the Mahalaxmi Municipality, Lalitpur District, epitomizes living cultural heritage through its vibrant festivals, temples, traditional weaving, and scenic surroundings (Subedi, 2020; Dulal & Singh, 2024) one of the best potential tourist destination.

- **Mahalaxmi Temple & Jatra:** At its core lies the three tiered Mahalaxmi Temple, a major religious site built in Newari pagoda style. Inscribed in Nepal Sambat 847, + 879 = 1726 CE, the temple has been central to community life since the Malla era (Mahalaxmi Municipality, 2025). The annual Mahalaxmi-Mahabhairav Jatra, held in Baishakh (April-May), lasts over a week and showcases sacred chariot processions, ritual dances, and traditional rites-emblematic of indigenous identity (Dulal & Singh, 2024; Subedi, 2020). Despite its tourist potential, the festival remains relatively under promoted beyond the local context (Dulal & Singh, 2024).
- **Govrateswor Mahadev Temple and Devisthan:** Situated nearby, the Govrateswor Mahadev Temple, mentioned in the Skanda Purana (written in12th to 16th Century BCE), holds ritual importance, especially during Shiva festivals (Subedi, 2020). Based on planetary positions described in Valmiki Ramayana - Research by Pushkar Bhatnagar, "Dating the Era of Lord Ram" that King Ram was born in January 10, 5114 BCE, in Ayodhya. The Mahadev temple was established by Shringi Rishi (Sage) in around 5100 BEC who was the main priest of King Dasharath for the ritual ceremony of Child bearing in

palace called Putresthi Yagya. The adjacent Devisthan enshrines Goddess Ma finer to Mahalaxmi, and during the Jatra, a symbolic mother daughter reunion occurs here as the chariot makes its climactic stop for divine blessings (Subedi, 2020).

- **Traditional Weaving Mills:** Lubhu's small scale weaving industry is a cultural treasure; many households still use handlooms to produce textiles for Nepal's broader garment industry. These weaving mills offer immersive experiences into centuries old skills-observers can see the entire process, from spinning to dyeing and weaving (Wikipedia, n.d.; Subedi, 2020).
- **Rural Heritage Tour & Cycling Routes:** Exploring narrow lanes dotted with wood and brick Newari homes, grain laid out in the sun, brick kilns, and vivid village life, Lubhu provides an authentic rural cultural tour. This heritage walk is often combined with cycling routes through villages and farmlands, offering a lens into quotidian Newari living (Subedi, 2020; Eco Treks, 2022).
- **Lankuri Bhanjyang and Hillside Views:** On Lubhu's periphery lies Lankuri Bhanjyang, a hilltop vantage offering sweeping views of Kathmandu Valley and the Himalayas. The area is developing as a recreational spot with trekking trails, picnic sites, cave shrines, view towers, and homestays, adding ecological and leisure dimensions to Lubhu's cultural tourism (Badal, 2018).

These attractions collectively contribute to Lubhu's reputation as the "Golden Plate" of Newar culture-where faith, craft, architecture, and landscape merge into a rich tourist tapestry.

15. Summarized Information

1. **Location & Accessibility:** Lubhu is a Newar town ~7 km east of Kathmandu in Lalitpur District, Bagmati Province. It's accessible via New Baneshwor-Thimi-Lubhu routes, offering an easy day trip from the valley's core as well.
2. **Textile Industry & Weaving Culture:** The town is renowned for its hand-woven and electric-loom textiles. Many households maintain looms in brick mills, producing traditional and industrial garments (Subedi, 2020).

3. **Mahalaxmi-Mahabhairav Temple:** This pagoda-style temple is central to Lubhu's identity. It hosts vibrant festivals including the Mahalaxmi-Mahabhairav Jatra, drawing community and faith-based experiences.
4. **Mahalaxmi-Mahabhairav Jatra:** Held in April-May, this week-long festival features chariot processions, sacred dances, and local rituals. Observing the Jatra comers tourists into authentic Newar seasonal celebrations. (Subedi, 2020; Dulal & Singh, 2024)
5. **Govrateswor Mahadev Temple & Devisthan:** The temples dedicated to Shiva and Goddess Mata form part of Lubhu's divine map-offer devotees and tourists a peek into Newar Hindu traditions and temple architecture.
6. **Village Heritage Walk:** Winding villages lanes reveal traditional Newar brick-and-wood homes, sun-drying grains, and everyday local life. It's an immersive cultural stroll off the typical tourist path.
7. **Weaving Mill Visits:** Visitors can tour weaving factories to observe yarn spinning, dyeing, and loom operation. Booking ahead may allow hands-on weaving sessions with local artisans.
8. **Cycling & Countryside Route:** Scenic cycling routes run through Lubhu's fields and kilns toward Chapakharka and Godavari, passing through Lakuribhanjyang hills-ideal for active tourists.
9. **Lakuribhanjyang Hill & Nature Spots:** A hill vantage offers valley glimpses and Himalayan panoramas. Nearby trails and small waterfalls (e.g., hidden cascades) enrich Lubhu's eco-tourism appeal (Eco Treks, 2022; Badal, 2018).
10. **Homestays & Local Cuisine:** Homestays near weaving mills extend hospitality, offering Newari cuisine (e.g., bara, yomari, chhoila) and genuine cultural immersion. Ideal for overnight stays combining crafts and community engagement.

16. Conclusion

Lubhu attracts through its vibrant textile heritage, religious rituals, and serene rural landscape. Whether following the loom patterns, cycling village trails, attending the Jatra, or savoring home-cooked Newari meals, tourists benefit from immersive, authentic experiences. For visits to weaving mills or homestays, pre-booking is recommended. Lubhu serves as a living testament to the enduring craftsmanship and rich cultural fabric of the Newar community, weaving together religious devotion, artisanal practice, and rural authenticity. The town's hand loomed textiles not only reflect traditional techniques passed through generations but also support a vibrant local economy rooted in family based weaving enterprises. Temples such as Mahalaxmi, Govrateswor Mahadev, and Devisthan stand as spiritual centers anchoring festivals like the Mahalaxmi-Mahabhairav Jatra, which offer immersive windows into Newar ritual and communal identity.

Simultaneously, winding village pathways, homestays, and nearby natural vistas such as Lakuribhanjyang hill create a multi sensory rural tourism experience. These elements collectively make Lubhu a compelling destination for travelers seeking depth, authenticity, and privacy beyond Kathmandu's urban attractions. Lubhu has to rebuild Palace of Ganga Maharani with 365 windows and Golden Roof Bhairav temple as Suwarnachhatrapur. Local government must maintain the inscription of every monuments. Ultimately, Lubhu's fusion of heritage, craftsmanship, faith, and natural beauty underscores its potential as a sustainable tourism destination. By preserving its weaving traditions, celebrating its festival culture, and managing growth mindfully, Lubhu can continue to thrive as both a living museum and a model for integrated cultural heritage tourism.

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Colonialism, Revival and Aesthetics: Understanding of Indian Art through Nihar Ranjan Ray

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Abstract

This paper explores the artistic approach of Nihar Ranjan Ray, a prominent Indian historian and art critic whose work significantly shaped the discourse on Indian aesthetics and art history. Ray, born in 1903 in Bengal, was deeply influenced by the cultural resurgence of the Bengal Renaissance and the efforts to revive Indian art traditions. His writings offer critical insights into the socio-political impact of British colonialism on Indian art, lamenting the imposition of Western aesthetic standards. Ray championed the Bengal School of Art, particularly the works of Abanindranath Tagore and Nandalal Bose, for their dedication to reviving India's ancient art forms. Beyond his praise for these revivalists, Ray also critiqued contemporary Indian society's disconnect from its cultural roots, arguing that genuine appreciation of Indian art requires a deep engagement with India's spiritual and cultural traditions. His analysis of Rabindranath Tagore's paintings highlighted the artist's personal struggles with mortality and his search for peace, further exemplifying Ray's belief in the emotive and spiritual power of art. The paper underscores Ray's enduring influence on Indian art criticism, positioning him as a key figure in the country's cultural and intellectual history.

Keywords

Colonialism, Revival, Aesthetics, Indian art, Cultural roots.

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Colonialism, Revival and Aesthetics: Understanding of Indian Art through Nihar Ranjan Ray

1. Introduction

Nihar Ranjan Ray1 was a pivotal figure in the world of Indian art history, renowned for his deep insights into Indian aesthetics, art history, and cultural revivalism. Born on January 14, 1903, in Kayetgram, Bengal Province (now in Bangladesh), Ray emerged as an influential historian, writer, and thinker who contributed significantly to the understanding of Indian art. His career spanned many roles, including being the General Secretary of the Asiatic Society of Calcutta and the first Director of the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla. Though a historian by training, Ray's writings on art, particularly during the Bengal Renaissance, positioned him as a modern thinker who helped frame the cultural and artistic consciousness of India. His thoughts on the revival of Indian art, heavily influenced by the Bengal School and the works of Abanindranath Tagore, form an essential part of Indian aesthetics. His scholarship not only celebrates Indian art but critiques the socio-political dynamics that affected its evolution during British rule and beyond.

2. Historical and Educational Background

Nihar Ranjan Ray's journey in the world of scholarship began in his early education at Mrityunjay School and Anand Mohan College, Mymensingh. He graduated from Calcutta University in 1926, earning accolades such as the Mrinalini Gold Medal for excellence in Indian history and political studies. His academic interests were diverse, including ancient Indian history, political history, and art history. He received a Diploma in Library Science from the University of Lachchhan in 1936 and was appointed as the librarian of Calcutta University. Ray later became the Bagesvari Professor of Fine Arts at Calcutta University[2] in 1946, cementing his place in academia. He remained actively involved in the academic and cultural discourse of the time, contributing to the intellectual awakening of India during the late colonial and early post-colonial periods.

Ray's involvement in the Quit India Movement of 1943-44, for which he was jailed, demonstrated his deep connection to the socio-political challenges of his time. His experiences of British colonialism profoundly influenced his views on the state of Indian art and culture. Ray's most important works include Bangalir Itihas (History of the Bengali People), Sanskrit Buddhism in Burma, and Thought and Image in Indian Art. For his contributions, Ray was awarded the Padma Bhushan in 1969, and his legacy as a scholar, writer, and thinker continues to influence Indian art history.

3. Major Contributions & Writing Highlights

3·1 Bangalir Itihas (Adi Parba)[3] - History of Bengalis: Early Period

This seminal work delves into the ancient period of Bengali history, laying out a comprehensive and scholarly narrative that marked a turning point in Bengali historiography.

First published in 1949, the book spans approximately 876 pages and has gone through multiple editions, such as the 1980 "Literacy Edition."

It is praised for its depth and clarity, uniquely weaving historical events, social practices, culture, religion, and causality into a cohesive narrative.

Roy's approach combines rigorous scholarship with literary elegance, making the text both authoritative and engaging.

3·2 Other Works

He authored more than 70 articles in English and 36 in Bengali, across genres such as essays, speeches, and literary criticism; additionally, he wrote 15 books in English and 7 in Bengali focusing on history and literature.

Roy's vast erudition spanned fields including arts, literature, religion, politics, and biography.

3·3 Artistry & Scholarship

Prior to his historical writings, Roy was celebrated as an art historian. His works "Maurya and Sunga Art", "Brahmanical Gods in Burma - Indian Art and Iconography", and "Sanskrit Buddhism in Burma" reflect his extensive research in art and iconography.

4. Significance & Legacy

Pioneer in Bengali Historiography: Roy is revered as "the first historian of ancient Bengal", whose balanced, insightful, and causally nuanced approach shaped the field.

Bridging Disciplines: His scholarly rigor seamlessly merged historical analysis, literary flair, and cultural inquiry-a rare blend that set high standards in both academic and literary circles.

Enduring Influence: Especially through Bangalir Itihas - Aadi Parba, Roy inspired generations of readers and future historians, significantly expanding the discourse around Bengali identity and historiography.

5. Ray's Views on Indian Art

Nihar Ranjan Ray's approach to Indian art was shaped by the Bengal Renaissance, a period of cultural resurgence that aimed to revive the country's ancient traditions and counter the colonial cultural onslaught. According to Ray, Indian art has always emphasized emotional and spiritual depth over intellectual detachment. He believed that art, in its highest form, connects individuals to divine beauty, offering a path to transcendence. For Ray, art was not merely about aesthetics or technique, but a reflection of the cultural and spiritual essence of society.

Ray lamented the influence of British colonialism on Indian art. He argued that the British sought to impose their values and aesthetic sensibilities on India, undermining traditional Indian art forms. As part of their colonial strategy, they established foreign art schools in India and encouraged the adoption of Western artistic practices, leading to a gradual decline in indigenous art forms. Ray's critique highlighted how this imposition contributed to a sense of inferiority among Indian artists, many of whom adopted Western methods to gain recognition and legitimacy in the eyes of their colonial rulers.

It was in response to this cultural erosion that figures like E.B. Havell and Abanindranath Tagore spearheaded a revivalist movement known as the Bengal School of Art. Ray celebrated the Bengal School for its commitment to reviving ancient Indian art traditions, particularly through the efforts of Abanindranath and his disciple Nandalal Bose. In his writings, Ray praised these two artists for creating a modern Indian school of painting that remained deeply rooted in the country's artistic heritage.

6. Ray's Critique of Contemporary Indian Society

Ray's thoughts on Indian art extended beyond artistic practice to include a critique of contemporary Indian society.[4] He believed that modern India, particularly during the colonial period, suffered from a cultural dislocation. The disconnect between traditional Indian culture and the values imposed by colonialism created a society that was unsure of its identity. Ray argued that Indian critics of the time lacked the tools and perspective to engage meaningfully with Indian art because they were steeped in colonial frameworks. In his view, true appreciation of Indian art required a deep understanding of the country's cultural and spiritual traditions, something that was missing in much of the contemporary discourse.

Ray's critique was not limited to colonial influence; he also expressed frustration with the Indian intelligentsia of his time. He believed that the excessive sentimentalism and superficial jargon used in the criticism of Indian art prevented genuine understanding. He argued that most critics failed to grasp the essence of Indian art because they were disconnected from the country's cultural roots. Ray's writings serve as a call to return to these roots, to rediscover the depth and richness of Indian aesthetics.

7. Nihar Ranjan Ray on Rabindranath Tagore

Nihar Ranjan Ray's scholarship also extended to an analysis of the life and work of Rabindranath Tagore. In his book A Commentary on the Life and Works of Rabindranath Tagore, Ray delved into Tagore's artistic output, particularly his paintings. Ray observed that Tagore's art reflected a unique side of his personality, one that was often hidden from public view. Tagore's paintings, characterized by boldness, innocence, and occasional arrogance, offered a glimpse into the inner world of the artist, one that was marked by his confrontation with themes of pain, death, and transcendence.

Ray argued that Tagore's artistic process was spontaneous and intuitive, often completed in a single sitting. His use of various materials-fountain pens, brushes, inks-reflected a sense of urgency and immediacy in his work. For Ray, Tagore's paintings were more than mere artistic expressions; they were deeply personal reflections of the poet's journey through life, his encounters with mortality, and his search for peace.

8. Conclusion

Nihar Ranjan Ray's contributions to Indian art history and aesthetics remain invaluable. His deep engagement with the Bengal School and his critique of the socio-political forces shaping Indian art offer a nuanced understanding of the country's artistic heritage. Ray's writings serve as a reminder that Indian art is not just a collection of beautiful objects, but a reflection of the country's spiritual and cultural identity. Through his work, Ray has provided a framework for understanding Indian art that transcends the limitations of colonial discourse, offering a vision of art as a means of cultural and spiritual revival. His critical insights continue to resonate with scholars, artists, and thinkers today, ensuring his place as one of the most important voices in Indian art history.

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Rural Livelihoods in Transition: Insights from the 2078 National Agricultural Census in Nepal

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Abstract

Nepal's rural landscape is undergoing a profound transformation, marked by a decline in traditional agricultural practices, a phenomenon known as deagrarianization. This study analyzes the drivers, patterns, and implications of this shift using data from the National Agricultural Census 2078. Key findings include a decline in cattle farming and an increase in goat and poultry farming, reflecting a diversification of livelihoods. The study further observes a reduction in agricultural land, the adoption of modern technologies, and the emergence of non-traditional agricultural activities like fish farming, mushroom cultivation, and beekeeping. Male out-migration has led to increased female participation in farming. The study highlights the complex interplay of economic, environmental, and social factors driving these changes. This research provides valuable insights into the evolving agricultural landscape of Nepal and its implications for rural development.

Keywords

Deagrarianization, Agricultural Transformation, Livelihood Diversification, Rural Nepal.

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Rural Livelihoods in Transition: Insights from the 2078 National Agricultural Census in Nepal

1. Introduction

Agriculture has long been the backbone of Nepal's economy, providing livelihoods for the majority of its rural population and contributing significantly to the country's GDP. However, in recent decades, Nepal's agricultural sector has undergone profound transformations, driven by globalization, urbanization, climate change, and shifting economic priorities. These changes have led to a process known as deagrarianization, where rural households increasingly move away from traditional agricultural practices and diversify their livelihoods into non-farm activities. This shift has significant implications for rural economies, food security, and the sustainability of agricultural systems.

The National Agricultural Census 2078 provides a comprehensive dataset to examine these transformations, offering insights into changes in land use, livestock populations, crop cultivation, and the adoption of modern agricultural technologies. The census reveals a decline in traditional farming practices, such as cattle rearing, alongside a rise in alternative agricultural activities, such as goat and poultry farming, fish farming, and beekeeping. These trends reflect broader patterns of rural livelihood diversification, as households adapt to economic, environmental, and social pressures.

This paper seeks to contextualize these changes within the framework of deagrarianization, exploring the drivers, consequences, and policy implications of Nepal's shifting agricultural landscape. By analyzing the data from the National Agricultural Census 2078, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how rural households are navigating the challenges and opportunities of a rapidly changing agricultural sector. The findings of this paper have important implications for policymakers, development practitioners, and researchers working to promote sustainable rural livelihoods in Nepal and beyond.

2. Methods

This study is based on a analysis of secondary data from the National Agricultural Census 2078, conducted by the Central Statistics Office of Nepal. The census provides a comprehensive and nationally representative dataset on various aspects of Nepal's agricultural sector, including land use, livestock populations, crop cultivation, and the adoption of agricultural technologies. The methodology for this paper is structured as follows:

3. Data Source

The primary data source for this study is the National Agricultural Census 2078, which was conducted across all 77 districts of Nepal. The census collected data from 4,131,000 agricultural households, covering a wide range of variables related to agricultural practices, livestock rearing, and household demographics. The census data is publicly available and provides a reliable basis for analyzing trends and patterns in Nepal's agricultural sector over the past decade.

4. Data Analysis

The analysis focuses on key indicators of deagrarianization, including:

- Changes in the number of households engaged in cattle, goat, and poultry farming.
- Shifts in livestock populations, particularly cows, bulls, goats, and chickens.
- Trends in agricultural land use, including the reduction in cultivated land and the expansion of non-traditional agricultural activities such as fish farming and beekeeping.
- The adoption of modern agricultural technologies, such as tractors, irrigation systems, and improved crop varieties.
- Gender dynamics in agriculture, including the proportion of male and female primary farmers.

Descriptive statistics are used to summarize the data, and trends are analyzed by comparing the 2078 census data with the previous census conducted in 2068. This comparative approach allows for an examination of changes over time and provides insights into the drivers and consequences of deagrarianization in Nepal.

5. Theoretical Framework

The study is guided by the concept of deagrarianization, which refers to the process by which rural economies and societies move away from agriculture as the primary source of livelihood. The analysis draws on theoretical perspectives from livelihood diversification theory (Ellis, 2000) and political economy approaches (Bernstein, 2010) to understand the economic, social, and environmental factors driving deagrarianization in Nepal. These frameworks help to contextualize the census data within broader global and national trends, such as globalization, urbanization, and climate change.

6. Limitations

While the National Agricultural Census 2078 provides a robust dataset for analyzing trends in Nepal's agricultural sector, there are some limitations to this study. First, the census data is cross-sectional, meaning it provides a snapshot of the agricultural sector at a specific point in time. Longitudinal data would be needed to fully understand the dynamics of deagrarianization over time. Second, the census does not provide detailed information on the socioeconomic characteristics of agricultural households, such as income levels, education, or access to credit. These factors are important for understanding the drivers of deagrarianization and should be explored in future research.

7. Contextualizing Deagrarianization in Rural Nepal

Deagrarianization, the process by which rural economies and societies shift away from agriculture as the primary source of livelihood, has emerged as a significant phenomenon in developing countries, including Nepal. Historically, Nepal has been an agrarian society, with agriculture contributing substantially to the national economy and employing the majority of the rural population. However, in recent decades, the country has witnessed a marked decline in the reliance on agriculture, driven by a combination of economic, social, political, and environmental factors. This literature review contextualizes deagrarianization in rural Nepal by examining its drivers, consequences, and the responses it has elicited, drawing on theoretical frameworks and empirical studies from Nepal and beyond.

Theoretical perspectives on deagrarianization provide a foundation for understanding this complex process. Bryceson (1996) defines deagrarianization as the economic and social reorientation of rural households away from farming, often accompanied by diversification into non-agricultural activities. This process is closely linked to broader global trends such as globalization, urbanization, and neoliberal economic policies (Bernstein, 2010; McMichael, 2006). In the context of Nepal, deagrarianization is not merely an economic shift but also a socio-cultural transformation, as rural households adapt to changing circumstances. Livelihood diversification theory, as articulated by Ellis (2000), offers a useful lens for understanding how rural households in Nepal are increasingly engaging in non-farm activities such as wage labour, remittance-based income, and small-scale entrepreneurship. Meanwhile, political economy approaches emphasize the role of structural forces, including global capitalism and state policies, in shaping agrarian change (Akram-Lodhi and Kay, 2009). These theoretical frameworks highlight the multi-dimensional nature of deagrarianization, which encompasses economic, social, and environmental dimensions.

The drivers of deagrarianization in Nepal are multifaceted and interconnected. Economic liberalization and globalization have played a significant role in undermining the viability of smallholder agriculture. Since the 1990s, Nepal's integration into the global economy has exposed its agricultural sector to competition from cheap imports, leading to declining profitability for local farmers (Adhikari, 2014). At the same time, remittances from migrant workers have become a critical source of income for rural households, reducing their dependence on agriculture. Seddon *et al.* (2002) note that labour migration, particularly to Gulf countries and India, has become a dominant livelihood strategy in many rural areas, with remittances now accounting for a significant portion of Nepal's GDP. Urbanization and rural-urban migration have further accelerated deagrarianization, as rural youth are drawn to cities like Kathmandu and Pokhara in search of better opportunities (Thapa *et al.*, 2019). Environmental challenges, including climate change, soil degradation, and water scarcity, have also contributed to the decline of agriculture. Gentle and Maraseni (2012) highlight how changing weather patterns and natural disasters, such as floods and landslides, have made farming increasingly risky and unviable in many parts of Nepal. Additionally, policy and institutional factors, such as weak agricultural support systems, land fragmentation, and limited access to credit and markets, have exacerbated the challenges faced by rural farmers (Karki, 2013; Sugden, 2013).

The consequences of deagrarianization in rural Nepal are profound and far-reaching. On the one hand, the diversification of livelihoods has provided rural households with new opportunities for income generation and risk management. Studies by Jaquet *et al.* (2016) and Sunam and McCarthy (2016) highlight how households have adapted to deagrarianization by engaging in non-farm activities, such as wage labour, small businesses, and remittance-based income. However, this shift has also led to increased economic inequality, as wealthier households are better able to capitalize on new opportunities, while poorer households struggle to adapt. The socio-cultural impacts of deagrarianization are equally significant. Traditional rural lifestyles and knowledge systems are being eroded, as younger generations move away from farming and adopt urbanized lifestyles (Bhattarai, 2015). Migration has also led to the feminization of agriculture, with women taking on greater responsibilities in farming while men seek work elsewhere (Gartaula *et al.*, 2012). This has placed additional burdens on women, who must balance agricultural work with domestic responsibilities. Environmental implications of deagrarianization are mixed. In some areas, the abandonment of farmland has led to forest encroachment and land degradation (Paudel *et al.*, 2020), while in others, the shift to non-farm livelihoods has reduced pressure on natural resources (Chhetri *et al.*, 2013).

Responses to deagrarianization in Nepal have been varied and context-specific. At the household level, livelihood diversification has emerged as a key strategy for coping with the decline of agriculture. Rural households have adopted a range of activities, including seasonal migration, off-farm employment, and small-scale entrepreneurship, to supplement their income (Scoones, 2009). At the policy level, the Nepalese government has introduced programs to support agriculture, such as subsidies, training, and infrastructure development (Karki, 2013). However, these efforts have often been insufficient to reverse the trend of deagrarianization, due to limited funding, poor implementation, and a lack of coordination between different stakeholders (Adhikari, 2014). Community-based initiatives have also played a role in sustaining rural livelihoods. For example, cooperatives, agro-tourism, and organic farming have been promoted as alternative livelihood options in some regions (Gurung, 2016). These initiatives highlight the potential for local innovation and collective action in addressing the challenges of deagrarianization.

Despite the growing body of literature on deagrarianization in Nepal, several gaps remain. First, there is limited research on the long-term impacts of deagrarianization on rural communities, particularly in remote and marginalized regions. Second, few studies explore the intersection of deagrarianization with issues of gender, ethnicity, and caste, which are critical to understanding the social dynamics of rural change in Nepal. Third, there is a need for more policy-oriented research to identify effective strategies for supporting rural livelihoods in the context of deagrarianization. Addressing these gaps will require interdisciplinary approaches that integrate economic, social, and environmental perspectives.

In conclusion, deagrarianization in rural Nepal is a complex and multi-faceted process shaped by global, national, and local forces. While it has created new opportunities for livelihood diversification, it has also posed significant challenges for rural communities, particularly in terms of economic inequality, cultural change, and environmental sustainability. Addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach that integrates economic, social, and environmental dimensions. By contextualizing deagrarianization within the broader framework of rural transformation, this review highlights the need for innovative and inclusive strategies to support sustainable rural livelihoods in Nepal.

8. Findings

The findings from the National Agricultural Census 2078 reveal significant transformations in Nepal's agricultural sector over the past decade, highlighting both progress and challenges. These changes reflect broader trends of deagrarianization, as rural households increasingly diversify their livelihoods away from traditional farming practices. Below, we discuss the key findings and their implications for Nepal's rural economy and agricultural landscape.

8·1 Decline in Cattle Farming

One of the most striking findings is the decline in cattle farming, particularly the rearing of cows and bulls. The number of households engaged in cow and bull husbandry has decreased by 573,000, from 2,281,000 in 2068 to 1,708,000 in 2078. This decline is accompanied by a significant reduction in the bovine population, which has fallen by 1,877,000, from 6,430,000 in 2068 to 4,559,000 in 2078. This trend can be attributed to several factors, including the rising costs of cattle maintenance, limited access to grazing land, and the increasing attractiveness of non-farm income sources such as remittances and wage labour. The decline in cattle farming has significant implications for rural livelihoods, as cattle have traditionally been a critical asset for smallholder farmers, providing draft power, manure, and milk. The reduction in bovine populations may also affect Nepal's dairy industry, which relies heavily on cattle for milk production.

8·2 Growth in Goat and Poultry Farming

In contrast to the decline in cattle farming, the census data reveals a significant increase in goat and poultry farming. The goat population has grown by 3,252,000, from 10,990,000 in 2068 to 14,242,000 in 2078, reflecting a 1.5-fold increase. This growth suggests that goats are becoming a more viable livelihood option for rural households, likely due to their lower maintenance costs and higher adaptability to marginal lands. Similarly, poultry farming has experienced a remarkable transformation, with the number of households engaged in poultry farming increasing to 1,799,000, and the total chicken population reaching 45,118,000. Notably, 55% of the poultry population now consists of high-quality breeds, such as layers and broilers, indicating a shift towards more commercialized and efficient poultry production. The concentration of poultry farming in the Bagmati region, particularly in Kathmandu, highlights the role of urban demand in driving this sector's growth.

8·3 Decline in Sheep Population and Agricultural Land

The census data also highlights a notable decline in the sheep population, which has decreased by 119,000, from 630,000 in 2068 to 478,000 in 2078. This decline may be linked to changing land use patterns and the reduced availability of grazing areas. Additionally, the total agricultural land area has decreased by 308,000 hectares, from 2,531,000 hectares in 2068 to 2,218,000 hectares in 2078. This reduction in agricultural land is likely driven by urbanization, land fragmentation, and the conversion of farmland for non-agricultural purposes. Despite this decline, the number of agricultural households has increased by 300,000, from 3,831,000 in 2068 to 4,131,000 in 2078, indicating that smaller landholdings are becoming more common. This trend raises concerns about the sustainability of smallholder farming, as fragmented landholdings may limit productivity and economies of scale.

8·4 Technological Advancements and Mechanization

The census data points to significant advancements in agricultural technology and mechanization. The use of tractors has increased, with 1,639,000 farming households now utilizing them, while the use of traditional iron plows has declined sharply, from 856,283 in 2068 to 59,825 in 2078. This shift reflects the growing adoption of modern farming techniques, which can enhance productivity and reduce labour costs. However, the uneven distribution of mechanization across regions may exacerbate inequalities, as wealthier households are more likely to afford such technologies. The increase in irrigation coverage, from 52% in 2068 to 54.5% in 2078, is another positive development, as it can improve crop yields and reduce vulnerability to climate variability. However, the fact that only 70% of farming households have access to irrigation suggests that significant gaps remain, particularly in remote and marginalized areas.

8·5 Diversification into Non-Agricultural Activities

The census data highlights a growing diversification of rural livelihoods into non-traditional agricultural activities, such as fish farming, mushroom cultivation, and beekeeping. The number of households engaged in fish farming has increased from 17,191 in 2068 to 42,800 in 2078, with the total pond area expanding from 2,519 hectares to 10,383 hectares. Similarly, 17,554 households are now involved in mushroom cultivation, and 196,854 households are engaged in beekeeping, managing a total of 510,414 beehives. These activities represent important opportunities for income generation and livelihood diversification, particularly for smallholder farmers facing constraints in traditional crop and livestock production. However, the success of these activities depends on access to markets, technical knowledge, and supportive policies.

8·6 Gender Dynamics of Change

The census data reveals important shifts in gender dynamics within the agricultural sector. While men still dominate as primary farmers, accounting for 67.6% of the total, women's participation has increased to 32.4%. This trend reflects the feminization of agriculture, as men migrate to urban areas or abroad in search of non-farm employment, leaving women to manage agricultural activities. Despite this increased responsibility, women often face barriers to accessing resources, credit, and extension services, which limits their productivity and income potential. Additionally, the proportion of farming households relying on agriculture as their primary source of income has declined from 83.1% in 2068 to 70.4% in 2078, indicating a growing reliance on non-farm income sources. While this diversification can reduce vulnerability, it also underscores the challenges faced by smallholder farmers in achieving sustainable livelihoods through agriculture alone.

9. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings from the National Agricultural Census 2078 reveal a profound transformation in Nepal's agricultural sector, characterized by a shift away from traditional farming practices and a diversification of rural livelihoods. These trends align closely with the theoretical framework of deagrarianization, which posits that rural economies and societies increasingly move away from agriculture as the primary source of livelihood due to economic, social, and environmental pressures (Bryceson, 1996; Bernstein, 2010). This discussion contextualizes the findings within the broader literature on deagrarianization, highlighting the drivers, consequences, and implications of these changes for rural Nepal.

The decline in cattle farming and bovine populations, as documented in the census, reflects the broader economic and environmental challenges facing smallholder farmers in Nepal. Economic liberalization and globalization have exposed Nepal's agricultural sector to competition from cheap imports, reducing the profitability of traditional farming practices (Adhikari, 2014). This aligns with the political economy approach to deagrarianization, which emphasizes the role of global capitalism and neoliberal policies in driving agrarian change (Bernstein, 2010; Akram-Lodhi and Kay, 2009). Additionally, the rise in remittance-based income has provided rural households with an alternative source of livelihood, reducing their reliance on agriculture (Seddon *et al.*, 2002). This trend is consistent with livelihood diversification theory, which argues that rural households diversify their income sources as a risk management strategy (Ellis, 2000).

Environmental factors, such as climate change and land degradation, have also contributed to the decline in traditional farming practices. The reduction in agricultural land and the shift towards non-traditional activities, such as goat and poultry farming, reflect the adaptive strategies employed by rural households to cope with environmental pressures (Gentle and Maraseni, 2012). This aligns with ecological modernization theory, which highlights the role of environmental challenges in shaping agrarian change (Scoones, 2009). The decline in sheep populations and the reduction in cultivated land further underscore the vulnerability of traditional farming systems to environmental and economic shocks.

The findings reveal both positive and negative consequences of deagrarianization for rural households in Nepal. On the positive side, the growth in goat and poultry farming and the diversification into non-traditional agricultural activities, such as fish farming and beekeeping, have provided new opportunities for income generation and livelihood diversification. These trends reflect the resilience and adaptability of rural households in the face of changing economic and environmental conditions. However, the decline in cattle farming and the reduction in agricultural land also raise concerns about the sustainability of rural livelihoods, particularly for smallholder farmers who lack access to alternative income sources.

The feminization of agriculture, as evidenced by the increasing proportion of female primary farmers, highlights the gendered dimensions of deagrarianization. While women are taking on greater responsibilities in agriculture, they often face barriers to accessing resources, credit, and extension services, which limits their productivity and income potential (Gartaula *et al.*, 2012). This trend underscores the need for gender-sensitive policies that address the specific challenges faced by women in agriculture.

The adoption of modern agricultural technologies, such as tractors and irrigation systems, represents a positive development in Nepal's agricultural sector. However, the uneven distribution of these technologies across regions and households may exacerbate inequalities, as wealthier households are more likely to afford such investments. This aligns with the political economy approach, which emphasizes the role of structural inequalities in shaping agrarian change (Bernstein, 2010). Efforts to promote inclusive and equitable access to agricultural technologies are essential for ensuring that the benefits of modernization are shared by all rural households.

The findings provide valuable insights into the changing dynamics of Nepal's agricultural sector. While the decline in traditional farming practices, such as cattle rearing, reflects broader trends of deagrarianization, the growth in goat and poultry farming, as well as the diversification into non-traditional activities, highlights the resilience and adaptability of rural households. However, these changes also underscore the need for inclusive and sustainable policies to address the challenges faced by smallholder farmers, particularly in the context of land fragmentation, climate change, and gender inequality. By leveraging the opportunities presented by technological advancements and diversification, Nepal can build a more resilient and productive agricultural sector that supports the livelihoods of its rural population.

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Analyzing the Synergy between Budget, Tourist Influx and Accommodation Services of a Himalayan State: An Application of Co-integration Technique

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Abstract

One of the service sector industries with the quickest rate of growth in the globe right now is tourism. Because it is a major contributor to GDP and employment creation in many economies. The Himachal Pradesh state government has developed policies and various programs to establish the state as a top travel destination. The government has allocated funds to meet our financial needs in order to carry out these programs and policies at the local level. In the current study, secondary sources were used to gather the time series data from 2001 to 2022. The long-term relationship and short-term repairs made to the non-disruptable equilibrium route have been examined using the vector error correction model and the Johansen integration model. The study's conclusions demonstrated that there is a long-term co-integration between government spending on the tourism department and visitor arrivals. But the association between visitor arrival and accommodation growth has not been found in the study. The policy recommendation has also been suggested so that the tourism industry can fetch more visitors and can help the state economy.

Keywords

Tourism budget, Tourist influx, Accommodation, Growth, Co-integartion.

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1. Introduction

Everyone is familiar with the concept of tourism because it is as old as humanity itself. Additionally, tourism is currently booming as an industry in a number of these countries because their economies depend on the number of visitors they receive year (Herman, 2021). At 963 million, the number of foreign tourists in 2022 was 111% higher than that in 2021. France is the nation that receives the most foreign visitors. Prior to COVID-19, 117.11 million people traveled to France. Due to their close proximity to neighboring nations, many European nations experience significant influxes of foreign visitors. A less costly place to travel is frequently more enticing and reachable. In 2019, the tourism sector as a whole accounted for 10.4% of global GDP. In addition, the tourist industry made up 3.3% of the world economy in 2019. This is the total amount of money spent on travel within a nation. There are a number of direct and indirect contributions that tourism makes to the economy in addition to its input and outflow (Nissan, 2011). Prior to the pandemic, tourism contributed 10.4% of the global GDP and created 333 million jobs worldwide, or almost one out of every ten jobs created abroad (Economic Impact Study, 2022). The foreign tourist sector accounted for the largest portion of Macau's GDP (50.2%) in 2019. The second-highest gainer in the travel sector is the Maldives. The travel and tourism sector is heavily invested in worldwide. With increased funding, a global branch of the service sector is emerging in the quickly growing tourist industry, which plays a significant role in the global economy. With more than 29 million workers as of 2019, China is the nation with the largest workforce in the world.

The tour and travel industry employs over twice as many women as any other industry, making up 54% of the workforce. The tourism industry employs a larger percentage of young people than other industries. In the US, UK, and Canada, youth employment rates are over 30%, more than twice as high as the whole economy (Global Economic Impact and Trends, 2021). In India, the tourism industry is expanding as a service sector, contributing 5.8% of the country's GDP. Even with the pause following the epidemic, the industry is still growing at a very quick pace. According to the World Travel and Tourism Council, 9.2% of India's GDP and 8.1% of all jobs were in the tourism industry in 2018. By 2028, the industry is expected to expand at an annual rate of 6.9% to 9.9% of GDP. At the COVID-19 conference, the WTTC projected that India's tourism sector will generate 32.1 million employment and 5.8% of the nation's GDP in 2021. The Indian economy developed quickly even after the 2020 recession, and by 2031, the sector is expected to have grown at an annual rate of 7.8% (WTTC Report, 2022). In 2019, 17.9 million foreign visitors made India the 22nd most visited country in the world. India's tourism sector has expanded over the last 20 years, and its share of both direct and indirect tourism income has been rising significantly.

The travel sector is the main driver of the state economy growth in the small Indian hill state of Himachal Pradesh. The tourism sector is crucial to the economic growth of Himachal Pradesh since it generates both direct and indirect employment for the state and helps to build infrastructure. The administration has periodically created policies to boost tourism in the state. One of the key objectives for policymakers continues to be the development of tourism. Since the founding of the modern State, the budget-one of the first instruments for controlling public administration-has been a contentious issue, especially when it comes to the optimal distribution of public funds in terms of goals, purposes, and guidance (Pires & Motta, 2006). Because of the increasing complexity of the State's role and actions, as well as its relationship with society, the budget has been revised to reflect new approaches for the political, management, administrative, accounting, and financial oversight of government operations (Rubin, 2016). In 2005, the government of Himachal Pradesh formulated a plan to make the state the top travel destination in the nation and overseas. The plan also aims to develop sustainable tourism through public-private partnerships that will benefit the local economy and the environment. The government has also introduced the *"Nai Raahein Nai Manzilein"* plan to investigate unexplored areas and hidden potentials that may help draw tourists from around the globe. The

Himachal Pradesh government updated its ecotourism development policy in 2016 to allow visitors to enjoy the state's abundant biodiversity, national heritage, and forest regions. Additionally, this strategy aimed to improve local communities' participation in natural heritage conservation and protection as well as their access to additional livelihood options. To encourage fair and sustainable growth in the travel sector, the state unveiled a new tourism strategy in 2019. One of the primary objectives of the strategy is to promote the concept of sustainable tourism in order to guarantee that tourists have a positive impact on the environment, society, and economy. The policy also encourages inclusive tourism, which will reduce poverty and benefit disadvantaged groups.

Additionally, lodging and the travel and tourism sector are tightly intertwined. Guest houses, hotels, and home stays all contribute to attracting more tourists. Similar to the Indian government's Ministry of Tourism's "Incredible India Bed and Breakfast scheme", the state government launched a homestay program in 2008 with the goal of offering easy and quality lodging, especially in remote locations. And it was intended to give visitors the chance to enjoy authentic Himachali food and observe Himachal culture. All of the government's initiatives and plans aim to make tourism a major contributor to Himachal Pradesh's economic development and to put grassroots government ideals into practice by providing funding through the annual budget. The purpose of this study is to determine the trend of the budgetary provisions made by the government to cover all of the costs associated with the schemes' execution. The study will also look for a long-term relationship between government spending, the overall number of visitors, and the expansion of lodging.

2. Literature Review

Studies indicate that, as the number of visitors to the nation and their foreign exchange earnings have steadily increased recently, there has been a noticeable increase in tourism-related research over the past two years, especially in the areas of sustainable tourism trends and patterns (Ruhanen *et al.*, 2015; Kumar, 2023). Positive skewness is also seen in Sri Lanka's foreign visitor arrival trends (Konarasinghe, 2016). Trends in the hotel and tourism sectors are driving economies around the world. Hotel industry development is one of the main factors driving the expansion of the tourism business, and growing trends in the tourism sector have an impact on hotel industry trends (Grzinic, 2008). The tourism and hospitality sectors are impacted by a number of recognized current and emerging trends (Kapiki, 2012). The aging of the population, which directly affects traveler demand, the need for excellent service, the introduction of new technologies that boost competitiveness, globalization, visitor safety and security, and the relationship between price and value are some of these themes. The modern generation's travel habits are positively impacted by technological advancements, particularly social networking sites (Antonio, 2025). Studies have demonstrated a robust relationship between tourism and economic expansion, employment creation, and infrastructure development (Bender, 2016; Dr. Silva, 2011; Goh, 2014).

The tourism industry has recovered since the 1980s recession ended and is predicted to keep expanding (Gonzalez & Moral, 1996). According to Ajala (2008) and Manzoor (2019), the tourist industry is currently seen as a developing one with a number of economic advantages, such as the generation of jobs, revenue, infrastructure, and new investment opportunities. Mishra and Rout (2016). A time of increasing tourism is accompanied with increases in infrastructure, jobs, and general development (Attri & Kaushal, 2019). Employment prospects in the industry may rise as a result of employee education and training (Saba *et al.*, 2023). Furthermore, the flow of tourists and the expansion of the sector are determined by the overall experience and degree of pleasure of those who visit that place (Ghasemivojoodi, 2017). And it has been shown that several tourist destinations require strengthening of aspects such as accommodations, infrastructure, catering management, etc. (Parmar, 2012).

With a variety of non-economic and economic repercussions, numerous research (Chou, 2013; Taibi & Lamri, 2020; Ribeiro & Wang, 2020; Selimi *et al.*, 2017) show that the growth of tourism and economic expansion are positively correlated (Schubert, 2010). Additionally, the causal approach shows the causative direction between tourism spending and economic growth (Chou, 2013; Akan *et al.*, 2007; Ribeiro and Wang, 2020) and the unidirectional relationship between GDP and FDI, FEE, and FTAs (Kaur & Sarin, 2016). The theories of tourism-led growth are also supported by the positive impact of visitor spending on economic expansion. A regression model has been used to establish the relationship between tourism receipts, economic growth, and other macroeconomic variables (Chiu & Yeh, 2017). Additionally, the growth of tourism acts as a new catalyst for marketing, value addition, and the creation of youthful jobs.

Furthermore, it increases the advantages in economies where tourism is most desired (Smeral, 2006). There was a strong positive association between tourism revenue and economic growth (Khalil, 2008). Apart from the tourism industry, other economic factors including tax revenue, foreign exchange, and state GDP are impacted by the expanding tourism trend (Jaswal, 2014; Nengroo, 2016). Among the factors impacting the influx of tourists are changes in demographics, improvements in lifestyle, and technical break-throughs (Goeldner, 1992). In recent years, technology and a number of travel firms have made it easy to learn about new places and make travel and tour planning easier. But even with all of these facilities, most of these places have shown seasonal fluctuations in visitor numbers (Guzman-Parra, 2015; Jangra & Kaushik, 2018). Governments and policymakers are creating strategies to promote tourism because it is a major industry in many economies.

Policies that encourage travel have been researched as a successful strategy for boosting travel (Rugchatjaroen and Senesathith, 2017). According to Zhang *et al.* (1998), the government has a role in the development of tourism as an operator, regulator, coordinator, and educator. Studies have also demonstrated that tourism policies have little effect on visitor arrivals (Karambakuwa *et al.*, 2011), and government-imposed tourism taxes intended to offset negative externalities have a detrimental effect on both inbound and demand for travel (Adedoyin *et al.*, 2021). The government's inconsistent tourism strategy and disparate pricing policies also had some negative effects on visitor arrivals (Gazopoulou, 2012). Using a panel regression model, (Jufri *et al.*, 2022; Todesco and Silva, 2021) investigated the effect of office budget on tourist arrival. Even so, the additional attractions and social media promotion may increase the number of visitors. Additionally, research revealed a substantial correlation between lodging, service quality, and visitor happiness (Biswas *et al.*, 2021). Good transport, lodging, and food have a big impact on tourists' arrival and likelihood of returning to the same place (Hui *et al.*, 2007). They also help spread the word about the place (Corte, 2015). Local cuisines, customs, attire, and lodging all influence how satisfied customers are and if they return to that location. One of the most crucial aspects of a tourist destination experience is lodging (Gangaram, 2015).

There are number of brainstorming studies on the tourism industry and its economic impacts along with the effect of lodging on the industry and vice versa. There are studies which shows lots of perspective of local people and the impact of tourism on theirs lives. But the current study is an effort to find out the long run relationship among the budgets and tourist arrival. It is its own kind of study in the area of Himachal Pradesh where tourism industry works as a main economic player. The paper will try to fill this gap with the following objectives:

3. Objective of the Present Study

The objective of the study is to find out the long run association between tourist arrival, tourism budget and accommodation growth in Himachal Pradesh.

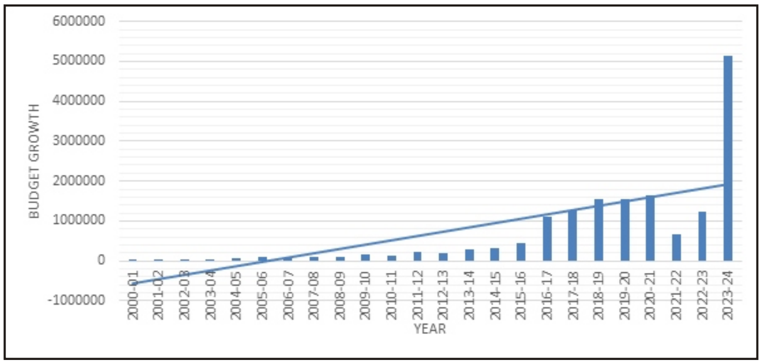
4. Research Methodology

The present study is based on the secondary data which is collected from the Ministry of tourism and civil aviation, Himachal Pradesh and the department of economic and statistical survey and department of revenue. The time period has been taken from the year 2001 to 2023 as some dynamic changes has been seen in past two decades. The time series analysis has been done with the help of annual growth rate, compound annual growth rate. To check the long run relationship among the variables the Johanson's co-integration technique has been applied. The short term speed of adjustment on the long run equilibrium path has been found with the Vector error correction technique. The stationarity of the time series has been checked with the Augmented Dickey-Fuller unit root test and variables has been integrated at same order I(I).

5. Result and Discussion

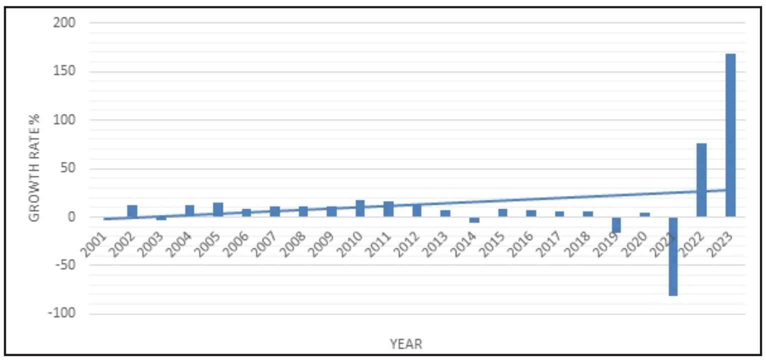
Figure-1 illustrates the development of budget provision from 2001 to 2023. It is clear from the graphics that, with the exception of a few years, budget provision increased regularly. The budget trend decreased in 2021 and 2022 as a result of the pandemic years. However, the tourism industry's budget was once again flourishing in 2023, following the pandemic. Overall, budgetary allocation is on the rise and in a healthy trend.

Figure-1: Budget provision from 2001 to 2023



Source: Tourism Department, HP.

Figure-2: Annual growth rate of total tourist arrival



Source: Tourism Department, HP.

In the meantime, figure-2 is depicting yearly growth rate of all tourist arrivals, both local and foreign, is trending upward. Some years, such 2013, 2018, and 2020, have negative growth rates when examining year-by-year yearly growth. However, following 2020, 2021 and 2022 are exhibiting the highest growth rates ever, at 75.44 percent and 167.87 percent, respectively.

5·1 Co-integration and Vector Error Correction Mechanism

The co-integration technique has been used to determine the long-term relationship between the variables, and the vector error correction mechanism has been used to verify the short-term correction between the vectors. The natural log of each variable has been used to integrate the data in the same order. The abbreviations for the logged variables used in the study are displayed in Table-1 on next page.

Table-1: Variable Summary

Sr. No.	Abbreviation of Variables	Description of Variables
1.	LNTTA	Log of total tourist arrival
2.	LNTMBG	Log of tourism Budget
3.	LNACCGR	Log of accommodation Growth

Source: Author's elaboration

5·2 Unit Root Test Results

The stationarity of time series data has been determined with the aid of the unit root test. The unit root has been checked using the Augmented Dickey-Fuller (1979) test. The study's variables-tourist arrival and tourism budget-are stationary at level, according to the results of the unit root test based on the ADF (1979) test, whereas the variable of accommodation expansion is not. All of the variables reached stationarity at the trend and intercept following the initial difference. The outcomes of the Augmented Dickey-Fuller unit root analysis are displayed in the following Table-2.

Table-2: ADF Results

Unit Root at Intercept and Trend	At Level	At First Difference
	Trend & Intercept	Trend & Intercept
LNTRBG	0.0000	0.0000
LNTTA	0.0089	0.0026
LNACCGR	0.9912	0.0131
Prob. based on MacKinnon (1996) one-sided p-values.		

Source: Author's calculation

The data's stationarity upon differencing was demonstrated by the enhanced Dickey-Fuller test. The long-term relationship between variables has been examined using the Johansen cointegration technique. The lag length is necessary in order to apply the aforementioned strategy. Additionally, the VAR model is needed for lag length.

5·3 Lag Length Selection

The current study comprises more than two variables, and the Johansen (1990) cointegration technique has been used to determine how these variables integrate. Since choosing the lag length is necessary for using this technique, a VAR system with different lag lengths has been examined under the assumption that all of the variables are endogenous and that there are no exogenous variables. Given that the lag length varies from the minimum of unity to the highest lag length that is practical for the sample. The various Log-likelihood (LL), Akaike's information criterion (AIC), and Schwartz Bayesian criterion (SBC) values have been observed for all estimated models of lag durations.

Table-3: Choice criterion for lag length selection

Lag	LogL	LR	FPE	AIC	SC	HQ
0	9.4535	NA	0.0001	-0.6146	-0.4654	-0.5822
1	23.7928	23.2159*	6.6200*	-1.1231*	-0.5262*	-0.9935*

Based on VAR modeling, the lag length has been established at one. The lag length has been determined to be one using the Hannan-Quinn information (HQ), the Schwarz criterion (SC), and the Akaike information criteria (AIC). The Johansen cointegration technique will be tested in order to examine the long-term relationship between the variables that have been chosen. Additionally, one of the assumptions provided by the cointegration test specifications must be identified prior to using the cointegration technique.

However, the model typically chose assumption 3 when using the Johansen cointegration test. For example, CE and VAR have an intercept and no trend. In order to evaluate this assumption, the Johansen cointegration test was used with a lag duration chosen based on a specified criterion.

Table-4: Co-integration Results

Unrestricted Cointegration Rank Test (Trace)				
Hypothesized No. of CE(s)	**Eigenvalues**	**Trace Statistics**	**0.05 Critical Value**	**Prob.****
None*	0.762971	50.56154	29.79707	0.0001
At most 1*	0.535144	21.77007	15.49471	0.0050
At most 2*	0.275647	6.449532	3.841465	0.0111
Trace statistics indicates 3 cointegration eqn(s) at the 0.05 level				

*Denotes rejection of the hypothesis at the 0.05 level

**MacKinnon-Haug-Michelis (1999) P-values

Unrestricted Cointegration Rank Test (Trace)				
Hypothesized No. of CE(s)	**Eigenvalues**	**Max-Eigen Statistics**	**0.05 Critical Value**	**Prob.****
None*	0.762971	28.79147	21.13162	0.0034
At most 1*	0.535144	15.32054	14.26460	0.0339
At most 2*	0.275647	6.449532	3.841465	0.0111
Max-eigenvalue test indicates 3 cointegration eqn(s) at the 0.05 level				

*Denotes rejection of the hypothesis at the 0.05 level

**MacKinnon-Haug-Michelis (1999) P-values

The cointegration test's results indicate that the null hypothesis-that is, that there is no cointegration-is being rejected, supporting the alternative hypothesis that the LNTTA, LNTRBG, and LNACCGR variables cointegrate. Three cointegration equations at the five percent significance level can be deduced by examining the trace statistics and Max-Eigen statistics.

The cointegration equation, which illustrates the long-term relationship between the variables, can be derived from table 5. The equation can be expressed as follows:

$$1*LNTTA(-1) - 0.204798 + 2.9487*LNACCGR(-1) - 0.2354*LNTRBG(-1) = 0$$

While taking the LNTTA as dependent variable the equation can be written as:

$$1*LNTTA(-1) = +0.204798 - 2.9487*LNACCGR(-1) + 0.2354*LNTRBG(-1)$$

According to the equation, there is a positive long-term correlation between total tourist arrivals and tourism budget, with one unit change in the former resulting in a 0.23 unit change in the latter. The long-term correlation between the growth of lodging and the total number of visitors has not been regarded favorably. Additionally, it is possible to interpret the explanation of the negative long-term association between total tourist arrivals and accommodation expansion as the fact that tourists may choose a certain place based on the quality and service of the lodgings rather than just the quantity of rooms available.

Table-5: Estimation of vector error correction mechanism

Cointegrating Eq:	CointEq1	
LNTTA(-1)	1.00000	
LNTRBG(-1)	-0.235478 (0.12186) [-1.93230]	

LNACCGR(-1)	2.948727 (0.54108) [5.44967]		
C	-0.204798		
Error Correction:	**D(LNTTA)**	**D(LNTRBG)**	**D(LNACCGR)**
CointEq1	-3.100702 (0.47580) [-1.93230]	0.258956 (0.51157) [0.50620]	0.027138 (0.06117) [0.443661]
D(LNTTA(-1))	1.314030 (0.30046) [4.37335]	0.321604 (0.32305) [0.99553]	-0.043717 (0.03863) [-1.13179]
D(LNTRBG(-1))	-0.307475 (0.14392) [-2.13636]	-0.535918 (0.15474) [-3.46327]	-0.051372 (0.01850) [-2.77649]
D(LNACCGR(-1))	6.786888 (1.83478) [3.69903]	0.099777 (1.97270) [0.05058]	-0.264130 (0.23587) [-1.11980]
C	-0.003644 (0.07770) [-0.04690]	-0.026886 (0.08354) [-0.32183]	0.002671 (0.00999) [0.26737]

If the dependant variable considered as LNTTA i.e. total tourist arrival, then the equation can be formed as:

$$D(LNTTA) = -3.1007ECTt\text{-}1 + 1.3140D(LNTTAt\text{-}1) - 0.3074D(LNTRBGt\text{-}1) + 6.7868D(LNACCGRt\text{-}1) - 0.0036$$

ECTt-1's coefficient value is -3.100. This indicates that the current period's correction rate for the long-term relationship's deviance is 310 percent. The vector error correction coefficient indicates how quickly the model adjusts to any kind of disruption and returns to equilibrium. The model also suggests that there is a long-term link between LNTTA, LNTRBG, and LNACCGR, in which any divergence from the equilibrium path is corrected in the short term.

6. Conclusion and Policy Implications

The state has a long history of tourism since it has all the resources needed to suit the needs of tourists. Because of its varied natural surroundings, the state has a lot of potential for tourism. According to SWOT analysis, Himachal Pradesh's carrying capacity for tourist inflow is still in its infancy and can be increased with the right planning and services (Bhardwaj *et al.*, 2019). The region also has unrealized potential that needs to be exploited (Gupta, 2015). To establish Himachal Pradesh as a top travel destination, the government has created policies and started initiatives. In order to carry out all of these programs and initiatives at the grassroots level, funding is needed, which can be provided by the government of the state. The trend of total visitor and tourism budget is showing upward trend in the study. There are cointegrating equations in the chosen variables, which are further rectified by the short-term error correction with the aid of short-term shocks, according to the Johansen cointegration test, which is used to determine the long-term relationship between the variables. The government's policies and initiatives to draw tourists from around the globe should be one of the many additional elements that influence the growth of lodging and the number of visitors. The state government's budgetary allocation has been considered in this study as a variable via which grassroots government initiatives are implemented. Additionally, the government budget for the tourism sector is divided into several tiers, including budgets for staff salaries, program implementation, promotion-related activities, etc.

According to the study's findings, the state government's budgetary allocation has grown over time, and its effects have demonstrated a long-term correlation with the overall number of visitors. Meanwhile, there has been no discernible increase in visitor arrivals as a result of the expansion of lodging. According to the study, the government should allocate more funds to the tourism sector so that plans and policies can be put into place that will attract more tourists. The impact of this, which currently shows that a one-unit change in tourism budget can alter visitor arrivals by 0.23 units, can be increased in the future. In order for Himachal Pradesh to draw visitors from all over the world, the government should also set aside funds specifically for tourism-related initiatives including theme-based travel, tourism-related promotions, and the development of potential tourist destinations.

Conflict of Interests

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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Breaking Barriers: Dalit Women's Journey from Marginalization to Inclusion in Local Governance

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Abstract

The entitled article "Breaking Barriers: Dalit Women's Journey from Marginalization to Inclusion in Local Governance" casts light a brief anthropological analysis about the representation of Dalit women and their influence on local governance in Nepal. As per the new Constitution of Nepal 2072BS, where marginalized communities are privileged to represent in political platform through the quota system. This study is carried out among the Dalit women of Tulsipur Metropolitan City, Dang. For the data, different Dalit women who are representing in local government system are taken as primary respondents. The elected Dalit women's inclusion and representation have got the authority to make the vital decision on local level which can affect the life of common people. But unfortunately, they haven't exercised their full right. Most of them complain about the interference of ward president on their decision and work. The decision of Dalit women ward members are not implemented as a result they are losing their prestige. Besides that, elected Dalit women do not have the access on the program and the budget allocated for the empowerment of Dalit community. Social impact of utilizing government's quota system can be seen but not in reality but in rhetoric. However, they have started breaking the barriers traditionally imposed upon them for years.

Keywords

Women, Dalit, Dalit women, Politics, Gender, Representation, Marginalization, Inclusion, Local Governance.

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Breaking Barriers: Dalit Women's Journey from Marginalization to Inclusion in Local Governance

1. Prelude

The article, entitled "Breaking Barriers: Dalit Women's Journey from Marginalization to Inclusion in Local Governance" casts light about the situation of Dalit women representations on the local government of Nepal. This article also studies about the elected Dalit women ward member of Tulsipur Sub metropolitan of Dang district focusing on the situation of elected Dalit women, their role on decision-making and finally their impact on the whole Dalit community. After the first historical local election of Nepal held on two phases the second local election was conducted in 13 May 2022 after the promulgation of 2015 constitution. Included 6567 Dalit women on the local level. There was the historical representation of Dalit women on the local government due to the provision of quota system mentioned on the constitution of Nepal 2015. This paper is focused on the elected Dalit women representative of Tulsipur Sub metropolitan of Dang district, where they represent from marginal community to the inclusive local government.

The constitution of Nepal 2015 made the compulsory provision of including Dalit women on every ward which definitely has boosted the confidence level of Dalit women representatives but still the report of facing the untouchability by them come frequently on the newspaper. As for example in June 2, 2018, Mana Sarki (45), the elected Dalit woman ward representative of Naraharinath-9, Kalikot was killed by the so-called upper caste local people because of false accusation of having affair with the so-called uppercaste male.

According to the 2021 census, Tulsipur Sub-Metropolitan has a total population of 180,734. Within that, Dalit groups such as Kami (6.9%), Damai/Dholi (3.6%), Sarki (2.1%), Chamar (0.2%) and other 12.8%. The national statistics office has identified 27

Dalit castes in Nepal where 5 Hill Dalits and 22 terai Dalits. Among them bishwokarma from hill is 5%, pariyar/damai 1.9% and mijar/sarki 1.6%. in a smaller population badi is 11,47 and Gaine 6,971 (NSO 2021). Their literacy rate in total is 76.2%, while the average for Dalits lags behind at 67.4%. notably, terai Dalits (51.9%) endure far lower literacy compared to Hill Dalits (75.7%). Overall 36% falls under the Dalit community.

The article explores about the social impact of Dalit women representation on local government and impact on overall Dalit community. According to the preamble of Local Governance Act 2055 B.S it is expedient to, *"make provisions conducive to the enjoyment of the fruits of democracy through the utmost participation of the sovereign people in the process of governance by way of decentralization, institutionalize the process of development by enhancing the participation of all the people including the ethnic communities, indigenous people and down-trodden as well as socially and economically backward groups in bringing out social equality in mobilizing and allocating means for the development of their own region and in the balanced and equal distribution of the fruits of development, have institutional development of local bodies capable of bearing responsibility, by providing such responsibility and power at the local level as is necessary to formulate and carry out plans, and constitute local bodies for the development of the local self-governance system in a manner that they are able to make decisions on the matters affecting the day-to-date needs and lives of the people, by developing local leadership".*

The local election was held on 14th May and 14th June 2017 B.S after the two decades. It has been the milestone for Dalit community in terms of participation on state. The constitution of Nepal 2015 has guaranteed the right of Dalit under the Fundamental right under the clause 40. It has been clearly written that 'Dalit shall have the right to participate in all bodies of the State on the basis of the principle of proportional inclusion'. Beside that women right is also guaranteed under the Fundamental right under the clause 38. It is well written that *"women shall have the right to participate in all bodies of the State on the basis of the principle of proportional inclusion".* On the basis of the above mentioned provision of the constitution, government has made the local government inclusive where the two women are compulsory among them one Dalit woman on every ward of the notion. This provision has made the participation of 14352 (41%) woman along with Dalit woman representatives are 6567 (45%) (Election Commission, 2017).

2. Literature Review

Some of the Anthropological theories and political theories are reviewed and discussed in this section to highlight the theoretical linkages and explanations of the relationships between the dependent and independent variables.

2·1 Concept of Political Participation

According to Uhlaner (2001 cited in Lamprianou, 2013), there is no universally accepted definition of political participation. For Huntington and Nelson (1976) for instance, political participation is an activity by private citizens designed to influence government decision-making. Similarly, Nie and Verba, (1972 cited in Gaventa *et.al* 1999) defined it as "legal activities by individuals that are directly aimed at influencing the choice of governmental personnel and the actions they take." These two definitions focused on the objectives of the political participation which is influencing the selection of government officials and their decision-makings. Whereas Diemer (2012) and Riley *et al.* (2010), on the other hand, emphasized political participation as political engagement and outlined its means of participation.

Similarly, Riley *et al.* (2010, cited in Lamprianou, 2013) approached political participation as an engagement and asserted that it has traditionally been thought of as a set of rights and duties that involve formally organized civic and political activities (e.g., voting or joining a political party). Both approaches are necessary to conceptualize political participation in this research. For this study, political participation is conceptualized as an engagement through which individuals could participate in traditional forms of political participation to influence the choice of government officials and their decision-makings.

The Constitution of Nepal 2015 also gives space to the participation of Dalit women on the bodies of the government. Under Part 3 - Fundamental Rights and Duties and the section 40.1 says *Dalit shall have the right to participate in all bodies of the State on the basis of the principle of proportional inclusion. Special provision shall be made by law for the empowerment, representation and participation of the Dalit community in public services as well as other sectors of employment* (The Constitution of Nepal 2072 B.S). In addition, under the section 40.7 the facilities conferred by this Article to the Dalit community must be distributed in a just manner so that the Dalit women, men and Dalit in all communities can obtain such facilities proportionately.

2·2 Anthropological Theories on Women and Politics

In political anthropology, women's participation in governance is best understood through multiple theoretical lenses. Feminist political anthropology emphasizes that power and authority are inherently gendered, shaping how women experience inclusion in political structures (Ortner, 1996). The public-private dichotomy further explains how women entering formal politics challenge cultural boundaries that historically confined them to domestic roles (Rosaldo, 1974). Intersectionality demonstrates that women's political experiences are mediated not only by gender but also by caste, class, and ethnicity, which is evident in the struggles of Dalit women leaders in South Asia, including Nepal (Crenshaw, 1989; Tamang, 2009).

Bourdieu's (1991) concept of symbolic capital and Foucault's (1991) notion of governmentality show that even when women occupy formal positions, their authority is often limited by patriarchal structures and disciplinary practices. Yet, practice theory reminds us that women exercise agency by negotiating, resisting, and reshaping governance systems from within, contributing to more inclusive forms of political culture (Ortner, 2006). Political anthropology highlights how governance is shaped by both state structures and cultural practices, and in Nepal, women's entry into politics has often been mediated by patriarchal norms and elite interests. Yet, Dalit and marginalized women demonstrate agency by negotiating these constraints, expanding the political field, and challenging dominant narratives of leadership and authority. Such dynamics illustrate the anthropological insight that governance is a lived process, constantly reshaped by the everyday struggles of those historically excluded from power (Tamang, 2009).

2·3 Dalit Women and Decision-making

Historically, Dalit communities are patriarchal, women and girls live at the edge of society. Families are run by strong patriarchal values, which often limit Dalit women's freedom of choice or self-expression in household decision-making. The data shows that women accept their subordinate position within the household and do not believe they have a right to participate in family decision-making, or to freely express themselves.

Dalit women have less freedom of decision-making because of patriarchal values, economic dependent and illiteracy. They are the good followers of the decision made by their husband (Durga Sob, 2017).

Decision-making is also influenced by caste. We find variation in different communities in the society. *Women's decision-making power is relatively low in Dalit community in comparison of non-dalit women. The reason behind is the violence towards Dalit women, low economy, caste and gender-based discrimination* (Durga sob, Margadarshan 2017). It has been found that stronger the Hindu value, the weaker is power in both time use and decision patterns. In other, women decide what to do and who is to go where (Acharya and Bennett, 1981).

Among communities such as the Sherpa and the Gurung the kinship patterns use more flexible in comparison of non-dalit women. In these societies, women are accorded more decision-making power, have more access to resources and property, and are more likely to conduct business on their families behalf (UNICEF, 1996) it will be helpful to see how is the role.

2·5 Political Situation of Women

Following the restoration of democracy in 1990, all political parties have formed women's organizations aligned to them. But these women organizations have limited roles in the political decision-making process within the parties. Despite their rhetoric no women organization had been able to put gender issues in the real political agenda (Prasad and Sahay, 2000).

Inheritance rights to daughters figured prominently in the election manifests of the communist of Nepal United Marxist-Leninist in the 1991 election following the restoration of democracy. But was subsequently dropped from their manifests when it felt it had a winning chance to form the government in 1994 when mid-term polls were announced. Women candidate of political choose to stay silent in their election campaign. Raising gender issues in the political campaign is considered counterproductive (Pyakurel and Thakuri, 1998).

The above literatures are very informative and successful in providing information about the general status of women in Nepal. It will of course help to study socio-economic background of women also. Hence this study seeks to add to knowledge on the area of gender and local governance particularly in the Tulsipur Sub metropolitan of Dang District, Nepal.

3. Methodology

This article is written based on exploratory cum descriptive research design. The exploratory research designs were assessing the perception of society and its people on Dalit women representation and their participation local governance. On the other hand, descriptive research design describes the representation of Dalit women and their influence in local governance. Different Dalit women representatives from different ward were taken as 10 respondents of Dalit women ward member 3 were key informants and 10 were participated in focused group discussion.

4. Data Analysis and Presentation

Representation of women has always been an issue to the women in the context of Nepal either it is from Dalit or from other community. Representation on the state is considered as the most powerful form of empowerment. For that various efforts, movements and laws are formulated to increase the participation of women on politics seen in the world for women empowerment. Dalits are still not entertained to participate in any kind of space due to caste issues.

They are sometimes made a irony and sometimes a victim. Most of the countries set the criteria of minimum level of women participation on parliament and the government. Such provision is mostly seen on developing nation which aim to increase the participation of women on politics. Being a patriarchal society, Nepal is breaking those barriers and moving to the inclusive government system. Though it is declared secular state but Hindu religion still is in dominant role where women exercise less right and freedom. But the Constitution of 2015 is considered as landmark for the marginalized community providing much right and freedom.

The constitution has spoken clearly about the three forms of government in Nepal i.e, Center, Province and Local. It has made mandatory to participate 2 women with 1 Dalit women on ward level. This is one of the historical achievements for women and Dalit. Nearly seven thousand Dalit women are elected as ward representative on 756 local government of the country. This constitutional provision has the great impact not only on political empowerment but also on their overall development.

4·1 Caste Structure of Respondents

Caste is the powerful social categories of Nepali society that labels people in terms of so-called high caste and low caste. The so-called low caste people are termed as Dalit and regarded as untouchable and forbidden in the public places. Within Dalit community also, there is the great diversity of caste.

Table-1: Caste Diversity of Dalit Women Representation of Tulsipur Sub Metropolitan

S. No.	Caste	Number	Percentage
1.	Kami	5	50.0
2.	Damai	3	30.0
3.	Sarki	2	20.0

Source: Field Survey, 2020.

4·2 Decision-making and Policy Influence in Local Governance

Decision-making has been one of the major tools to influence the people. The elected Dalit women representatives have got the authority to make the vital decision on local level which can affect the life of common people. But unfortunately, they haven't exercised their full right. Most of them complain about the interference of ward president on their decision and work.

The decision of Dalit women ward members are not implemented as a result they are losing their prestige. Besides that, elected Dalit women do not have the access on the program and the budget allocated for the empowerment of Dalit community. Ward president does not give the authority to use of budget allocated for Dalit community. As a result, they have to face a lot of criticism of being irresponsible towards Dalit community. On the other part other representative along with non-Dalit community also criticize of being useless despite getting the quota. Thus, decision-making largely affects the life of Dalit community but the voice of elected Dalit women representative is suppressed in the ward office.

The obligatory presence of Dalit women on local government has really influenced and motivated Dalit community. The participation of Dalit women on state mechanism has increased the participation of Dalit community on politics. Different age groups mostly Dalit youths have joined political parties according to their ideology and the opportunity given to the youths. So, gradually girls are joining the political parties in the hope to be the ward member and serve the community.

Politics has been the determining factor of the society. It has the great potential to empower the people by addressing various discrimination and malpractices of the society. Dalit community knowing the fact, literate as well as illiterate people have joined the politics in the hope to eradicate the so-called caste-based discrimination and untouchability. Political parties are also compelled to give space on their parties to dalit community due to the compulsory provision made by the constitution 2015. There is good competition within parties to make their parties inclusive. Ultimately the provision made by the constitution has highly influenced and motivated dalit community.

5. Major Findings

Major findings of this article may differ from other researches. Dalit women ward member have also faced caste-based discrimination and untouchability even after being elected as ward member even in their office. Dalit women ward members have not exercised their decision-making right in the ward office as ward chairperson interferes them. Ward chairperson hardly allocate the budget for the empowerment of Dalit community. Dalit women ward members are not provided the information about the meeting and other activities of the ward. Ward chairperson do not attend or ignore the program organized by Dalit organization as they send Dalit women ward member saying it is her department. Educated Dalit youth are joining the politics with the hope to end the caste-based discrimination and untouchability from the society. Dalit women ward members are also seen neglecting their own community. The family of Dalit women ward representatives have not supported them some somewhere. Dalit people also seem unsupportive towards the elected ward members.

6. Conclusion

Conclusions are drawn from the elected Dalit women ward representatives of Tulsipur sub metropolitan. Dalit women representatives are facing multiple forms of visible and invisible discrimination from ward president, other members and specially so-called upper caste people of their own area. Their participation is just in quota not in practice. They have been used as rubber stamp because no voices of Dalits are heard and no Dalit friendly programs. In the study area, they do not allocate enough budget for the upliftment of Dalit and influence of Dalit women toward the comitee and local body is minimum.

Caste based discrimination and untouchability is the major problem of Dalit community. The constitution of Nepal 2015 has provided much space to Dalit community on state mechanism. It has made obligatory to include one Dalit women member on ward committee of the local government. This research explores the situation of selected Dalit women representative of Tulsipur sub metropolitan on discrimination towards them, their decision-making right as well as impact on Dalit community.

The level of discrimination towards elected Dalit women is different than other women. Elected Dalit women face invisible form of discrimination whereas other women directly face caste-based discrimination and untouchability. Elected representatives face indirect form of discrimination like if any Dalit organization invite ward president as chief guest for the program they do not attend the program instead they send Dalit women as representative saying it is her department. Similarly, the plan and budget proposed by them are not included on the annual plan of the ward. They are made signature on the ward minute without providing the proper information. Similarly, Dalit women representing executive committee of local government are not provided enough time for speaking during the meeting. Thus, the instances prove that elected Dalit women face invisible form of discrimination.

Similarly, Dalit women have not been able to fully exercise their right to decision-making. Although major decision-making right of ward is fully exercised by the ward president but still there are some areas where Dalit women can exercise decision-making right. As for e.g. there is the heading of Dalit budget on almost every ward but Dalit women do not have the full right of using the budget. The ward president has the total control on it.

The representation of Dalit women on local government has highly influenced the whole Dalit community. The impact is seen mostly on educated Dalit youths primarily on girls and social activist women. They are gradually joining the politics. It has highly contributed on the empowerment of Dalit community. Despite that, Dalit women ward members are also getting some respect from the society which has motivated the whole community towards politics.

7. Summary

The representation of Dalit women in local government is a great milestone in the politics of Nepal. The Constitution of Nepal 2015 has made the representation of Dalit women mandatory as a result nearly 6567 Dalit women got the opportunity to be the ward member of the local government. Some of them are working as mayor, deputy mayor, deputy chair-person of rural municipality as well as member of executive committee of the local government as well as member of judiciary committee. This article studies about the selected Dalit women ward member of Tulsipur Sub metropolitan of Dang district focusing on the situation of elected Dalit women, their role on decision-making and finally their impact on the whole Dalit community.

The situation of elected Dalit women is different from each other. They differ in terms of political parties, education, caste, marital status, employment etc. Majority of them belonged to Nepali Congress party, most of them were under SLC. Similarly, out of 10 representatives 8 had their own business. The diversity in caste is also seen. The elected women belonging to Bishwakarma are 5, 3 were damai and 2 belonged to Sarki community.

Similarly, Dalit women find difficult to participate in decision-making process. The meaningful participation is only the showing teeth. The ward president fully exercises the decision-making right and uses them as rubber stamp. Many ward members complain of signing the minute without knowing the meeting of the ward. If they ignore then the ward president convinces them by promising to allocate the budget for Dalit community coming year. Despite that, they are unable to use the allocated the budget for the Dalit community freely as the ward president interferes there too. Thus, the ward members are treated as dummy by the ward chairperson.

Finally, the mandatory provision of elected Dalit women on local government has highly motivated Dalit community. The immediate impact is seen mainly on educated Dalit youth, women and social activist who are joining the politics with the hope to break the caste-based discrimination and untouchability. The long-term impact will be seen in the form of eradication of caste based discrimination and untouchability from the society. Social impact of utilizing government's quota system can be seen but not in reality but in rhetoric.

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Artificial Intelligence in Distance Education in India: Trends, Challenges, and Future Directions

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Abstract

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in education has emerged as a transformative force across the globe, reshaping teaching, learning, and administrative processes. In India, distance education plays a crucial role in providing access to quality and affordable education in almost all the disciplines to the learners and AI has the potential to play an important role in enhancing the quality and scalability, and improving the learning experience of the learners in distance education. In this article, efforts have been made to examine the current status of and trends in application of artificial intelligence in distance education system in India with special reference to Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) and National Institute of Open Learning (NIOS), and also it attempts to analyse the challenges and prospects for AI integration in Open and Distance education system in the country. The documents studied and analyzed for the purpose of this article include scholarly literature, policy documents and institutional reports, in addition to the global perspectives on this aspect. This article has highlighted the applications of AI for learning content creation, delivery of learner support services, assessment and evaluation, institutional administration, and alignment of the institutional policies with NEP 2020. It also addresses various ethical concerns, infrastructural constraints as well as socio-economic challenges in addition to the technological barrier i.e. digital divide. The article concludes with the outline of future trajectories and recommendations for an effective integration of AI in the distance education ecosystem of the country.

Keywords

Artificial Intelligence, Distance Education, NEP 2020, Open Universities, Learner Support, Future Prospects.

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Artificial Intelligence in Distance Education in India: Trends, Challenges, and Future Directions

1. AI in Distance Education: An Overview

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has emerged as one of the most transformative technological innovations of the 21^{st} century, with profound implications for multiple sectors, including education (Luckin *et al.*, 2016; Holmes *et al.*, 2019). Globally, AI is increasingly recognized for its ability to personalize learning, automate administrative processes, support real-time learner interactions, and enhance decision-making through data-driven insights (Zawacki-Richter *et al.*, 2019). In the domain of higher education, programme design and delivery is undergoing a major transformation with the introduction of AI technologies. There are a number of technologies that are being used for this purpose, namely, machine learning, natural language processing, recommender systems, and intelligent tutoring systems.

In a developing country like India, education is one of the priority sectors for ensuring socio-economic growth and development besides, acting as an instrument for personal and professional enrichment. A large country like India, possessing tremendous potential for growth and development with its large human capital, has a significantly well evolved education system, albeit, with its inherent challenges posed by the immense numbers and quality concerns. Distance education and its setup is making efforts to fill this much needed gap and mitigating the challenges posed by the overall ecosystem of the nation. The institutions are offering educational opportunities through open and distance learning systems to the segments of population in rural and remote areas, economically weaker sections of the society, to the people with special needs, professionals requiring skill enhancement and development, and the employed masses seeking lifelong learning opportunities. Distance education institutions in the country, namely Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), State Open Universities (SOU), and the National Institute of Open Schooling

(NIOS) are playing pivotal roles in this endeavor of reaching to the population far across the country so that no segment remains deprived of the educational opportunities and there is a balance between the people living in the urban areas and those in rural and remote areas. Nevertheless, there are still a lot of hindrances on the way to provision of quality, scalable, effective, and timely learner support, infrastructure, educational management, and outreach.

It is here that expectedly AI can provide the much-needed solution and support for mitigating these challenges by helping to develop online adaptive learning environments, technology enabled support for all the students including those with special needs, need-based assessment systems, and better and more effective educational administrative systems. This is synchronized with the what has been mentioned by the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 which has emphasized the role of technology in transforming Indian educational system by adapting and adopting AI, efficient database management system, and online digital platforms.

In the present paper, it is the endeavour of the authors to assess the prevailing situation of the use of AI in the field of distance education and also make comprehensive analysis of the future prospects of the integrating AI in this mode of delivery of education in the country, with the objective to make an assessment of the national and international dimensions of the use of AI in education; to explore how AI is being used in the various components of programme delivery in distance education such as provision of support services to the learners, programme design and development, student performance evaluation, and general education management; to focus on the initiatives taken by leading open and distance learning institutions of the country such as IGNOU, NIOS, and SOUs; to make a study of the various challenges faced by the institutions in integrating AI in their functions pertaining to general administration, policy formulation and execution, ethical factors, and identify future prospects and suggest measures for its effective adoption.

The current paper on integration of AI in distance education is being presented in following sections: (a) International perspectives of the use of AI in open and distance learning; (b) The initiatives taken in India for integrating AI in distance education; (c) Use of AI in various functional areas; (d) Challenges faced by the educational institutions; and (e) Important recommendations and future prospects.

2. International Perspectives of the Use of AI in Open and Distance Learning

The integration of AI into education is not happening only in India but it has become a widespread phenomenon globally. In the present era, AI has been widely used in the education sector in many countries as a part of the initiatives taken by them to use the latest technological developments in this sector. This is more prominent in the case of educational institutions with open and distance learning mode and technologically enabled learning environments.

The higher education institutions in various countries have been using online learning platforms for providing better educational opportunities and learner friendly support. The institutions are now integrating AI methods so as to improve the system further towards provision of enhanced and more improved learner support services which is resulting in better student centric target-oriented facilities. This has also resulted in the automation of all those functions which are repetitive facilitating in managing multitude of large operations. As for instance, the learning platforms like Coursera, edX, and Udacity have adopted AI tools for offering tailor made customised student specific courses, catering to the particular needs and interests of the target audience. Similarly, adaptive learning platforms are being developed by several universities with the objective of modifying learning resources depending on the performance of the students.

In China, AI is being put to use in higher education institutions in a number of ways such as for intelligent tutoring, using facial recognition for recording the attendance, and for the detection of plagiarism. The Ministry of Education in China has taken many initiatives to integrate AI at all the levels of education, in accordance with the Chinese Government national AI strategy. This stands true for European nations also where the European Commission has extended its support for AI-based educational projects under the Horizon 2020 program.

Worldwide open and distance learning institutions are integrating AI with their educational platforms, with the objective of improving scalability and learner support services. The Open University, UK, as for instance, has used AI in a very unique manner by adopting predictive analytics to identify learners at the risk of dropout, thus, enabling timely initiation of targeted interventions. Further, routine queries of the learners are being addressed by AI chatbots, thus reducing the dependence on human resources and relieving the burden on academic counsellors. Similarly, Penn State World Campus in the United States uses AI-driven student advising systems to guide them in the selection of courses and pathways.

These international practices and experiences are providing valuable insights to the institutions in India, wherein all the institutions including the distance education institutions are experiencing similar challenges of scale, diversity, and learner support. The general observation from global experiences has been that AI integration in distance education is indeed plausible and feasible with sufficient positive impact when it is supported by adequate infrastructure, faculty training, and policy frameworks but with challenges such as ethical concerns, data privacy, and algorithmic bias. In the Indian context, this requires adaptation of these transnational practices to its unique socio-economic conditions and infrastructural realities.

3. Distance Education in India: Context and Challenges

India's education system is the second-largest in the world, with nearly 43 million students enrolled in higher education (Ministry of Education, 2023). Distance education accounts for a significant proportion of this enrolment, particularly through IGNOU and a number of state open universities.

⏩ Role of Distance Education in India

Distance education has historically been instrumental in democratizing access to higher education in India. Along with state open universities and dual-mode institutions, IGNOU has enabled millions of learners, particularly from rural, marginalized, and working-class backgrounds, to pursue higher education (Varghese, 2020).

At the school level, NIOS is the institution that provides flexible educational pathways to a large number of students across the country who otherwise do not have access to education through conventional mode due to a number of challenges related to geographical, socio-economic, etc. Therefore, distance education is instrumental in fulfilling the country's goals of equity, inclusivity, and lifelong learning in alignment with the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

⏩ Key Challenges in Distance Education

Despite the success of distance education in the country in democratizing the education, there are a number of persistent and multifaceted challenges being faced by this system as discussed below:

Providing personalized and continuous learner support to millions of students across diverse socio-economic backgrounds and geographical locations, having varied learning requirements that may not be just academic but also emotional or motivational, is one of the foremost challenges (Varghese, 2020; Mishra, 2017).

Quality assurance in terms of relevance and accuracy of study material and maintenance of institutional credibility and recognition of Open and Distance Learning institutions with acceptance of its qualifications by employers and other educational institutions in the country and abroad is another major concern (Mishra, 2017).

The lack of peer group interaction, limited support from mentors, socio-economic pressures such as household or work responsibilities and lack of motivation while studying in isolation due to non-availability of academic environment necessary for keeping the learners engaged (Varghese, 2020).

In India, there is a stark digital divide particularly in the rural areas and for marginalized sections of society due to poor infrastructure in terms of internet connectivity, device availability and digital literacy that not only significantly impact learner engagement but also leads to educational inequities (World Bank, 2021) and thus one of the major challenges for distance education.

Although there has been a focus on the development of professional competencies and capacity building of the teachers/ faculty members, they are not yet adequately trained to use digital technology, online pedagogies and AI enabled learning systems for creating a learner centered and engaging environment. Therefore, there is a need to overcome this challenge and prepare the faculty to adapt to AI-enabled learning systems as the success of any education system including distance education depends on the skills and competencies of teachers (Holmes *et al.*, 2019).

Therefore, there is a need to not only bridge the digital divide in the country but also establish a robust institutional framework for addressing the issues of access, quality and credibility of distance education institutions. This system needs to be transformed for providing a personalized and engaging environment by the technologically equipped faculty.

4. Applications of AI in Indian Distance Education

The potential of Artificial Intelligence in distance education can be best understood by examining its applications across key functional areas: content development, learner support services, assessment and evaluation, and institutional administration.

⏩ Use of AI in Content Development and Delivery

There is a gradual transformation in the way the educational content is being developed and delivered with the use of AI. So far, the distance education institutions used to depend on printed study material for content delivery and at times, audio-visual media was being used to supplement the study material for the learners. This is now gradually changing with the onset of AI which is realigning the content design and delivery in distance education institutions, making it more personalized, interactive, and learner friendly.

- **Adaptive Learning Technologies**

Adaptive learning technology has the potential to bring forth one of the most impactful innovations in education through machine learning algorithms that can analyze the student data and adjust the learning experience as per the learners' needs. In the distance education system where there are diverse kinds of learners in terms of their pace and style of study as well as their learning behaviour and prior knowledge, AI-driven adaptive learning technology by using the learners' data in real time can dynamically adjust the difficulty level of the instructional content and customizing the learner experience as per their level (Holmes *et al.*, 2019). In the ODL system, the learners generally study in isolation as they are geographically dispersed and therefore, adaptive learning becomes particularly suitable for the distance learners. Continuous tracking of their performance and enhanced academic support by means of offering personalized pathways may keep them motivated for achieving better outcomes and result in lesser dropouts. Few ed-tech companies such as Vedantu and Byju's have already made inroads in embedding adaptive learning at the school level education.

- **Natural Language Processing (NLP) in Content Creation**

For a multilingual country like India, Natural Language Processing which is a subfield of AI can play a transformative role by bridging the language related barrier in education by automatically rendering the course material into regional languages (Joshi *et al.*, 2020). NLP facilitates machines in understanding, interpreting and generating human language and also summarizing the lengthy material and translating it across different languages. Integration of NLP tools into ODL platforms by the premier institutions such as IGNOU and NIOS working at the national and international level can ensure the availability of course content in the native languages of the learners, thereby enhancing inclusivity in alignment with the National Education Policy - 2020 (Government of India, 2020).

- **Virtual Labs and Simulations**

In the distance education system, conduct of practicals is one of the major challenges in disciplines like health sciences, natural sciences and other such subjects with hands-on training components. In order to bridge this gap, the Ministry of Education, Government of India has launched the Virtual Labs project that offers online access to laboratories across various disciplines where real world lab environments are replicated and students can conduct the experiments virtually in a digital space. Integration of artificial intelligence into these labs could enable personalized learning. Such virtual labs and simulations supported by AI algorithms can provide personalized intelligent hints and real-time feedback to the learners as well adaptive challenges tailored to the learners' progress (Ministry of Education, 2021) and offer the learners opportunities for experiential learning without the constraints of physical infrastructure.

- **Content Recommendation Systems**

One of the promising applications of AI in ODL is the use of recommendation systems/engines which work on the same principles as that of e-commerce or streaming platforms such as Amazon, Netflix, etc. where it can be used for analyzing the learner's progress, preferences and engagement history and suggesting relevant courses, readings, video lectures or supplementary material based on the learner's interest and requirements. These systems can further help the learners in guiding them through their academic journeys particularly for navigating the vast digital libraries or repositories that may not only help them to discover the learning material more easily and efficiently but also encourage them to exploratory learning. Institutions like IGNOU and NIOS which host digital repositories of study material (eGyankosh and DEEP, respectively) can make the learning experience more engaging and reduce cognitive overload by supporting the learners in charting their own educational journeys and promoting self-paced and self-directed learning amongst them.

⏩ AI in Learner Support Services

In the distance education system where there is a limited face to face classroom interaction between teachers and learners, learner support is recognized as the cornerstone that plays a crucial role in ensuring academic and administrative support, and sustaining motivation and retention. Learner support mechanisms in the form of study centres and academic counsellors are resource intensive for which it is difficult to cater to the large number of distance learners. In this context, artificial intelligence offers promising and innovative solutions that have the potential to enhance the quality and extent of reach of student support services to distance learning stakeholders.

- **Chatbots and Virtual Assistants**

AI-driven chatbots and virtual assistants are the tools that can respond to the common learner queries such as deadlines related to admission, registration, assignment and exam form submission, etc. and provide real-time support to the learners. These are being deployed by the ODL institutions such as IGNOU for providing 24x7 assistance to the learners that not only renders timely support and consistent responses to the learners but also reduces the workload on the staff. It is believed that such chatbots and virtual assistants can improve the learner satisfaction by streamlining the administrative processes and reducing the institutional bottlenecks.

- **Predictive Analytics for At-Risk Learners**

There is a high dropout rate amongst distance education learners in India mainly due to academic isolation, lack of timely support, socio-economic reasons, etc. However, if the learners' behaviour is analyzed such as their login frequency, participation in discussion forums, assignment submission patterns, etc. and efforts made to identify the learners at risk through predictive analytics, timely interventions such as personalized feedback, one to one counselling, or targeted messages may be sent to the identified learners so that they may be retained in the educational system. Predictive models have been implemented by the UK Open University for reducing the drop out rates by identification of at-risk students (Ferguson *et al.*, 2016) and such systems may also be adopted in Indian ODL institutions, where the dropout rates of distance learners are alarmingly high (Varghese, 2020). In this direction, AI can play an important role through predictive analytics and provide inputs with regard to the learning behaviour of at-risk students and help in tackling the challenge of high dropout rates in the ODL system, thereby revolutionizing the learner retention strategies.

- **Personalized Learning Pathways**

The distance learners with diverse backgrounds vary widely in terms of their individual goals, prior knowledge and life circumstances, that necessitates implementation of such strategies wherein there is a mapping of individual learner profiles, goals and experiences with their learning pathways through personalization. The distance learners with diverse backgrounds vary widely in terms of their individual goals, prior knowledge and life circumstances, that necessitates implementation of such strategies wherein there is a mapping of individual learner profiles, goals and experiences with their learning pathways through personalization. It may be achieved by integrating the AI tools into the ODL system wherein it can analyze the requirements of learners and recommend them the courses as per their aspirations and also guide them to opt for academic or vocational subjects as per their aptitude and interest. This way, it can help the learners choose their educational pathways while maintaining balance with their other commitments such as professional, social, etc.

- **Accessibility and Inclusion**

Although it is mandatory for the Indian educational system to ensure accessibility, inclusivity and equitable learning opportunities to all, there are a number of barriers in the learning environment being faced by the students with disabilities and marginalized sections of society. These barriers may be in the form of inaccessible educational content, limited physical infrastructure, etc. In order to support the learners with visual, auditory, or cognitive disabilities and make education inclusive, tools such as speech recognition, text-to-speech conversion and image recognition may be integrated in the learning environment. For example, Microsoft Seeing app uses artificial intelligence for narrating the world to people with visual impairments, helping them to navigate the world. There is a need for integration of such AI-enabled accessibility features into the ODL system so that the learning needs of learners with disabilities may be fulfilled and equitable learning opportunities may be provided to them.

⏩ AI in Student Performance Assessment and Evaluation

In the distance education system, which has a growing scale of student enrolment, integration of artificial intelligence may bring significant value in learner evaluation while overcoming the limitation of speed and consistency. At the same time, it also ensures credibility of the evaluation system.

- **Automation in Grading System**

Both objective as well as subjective types of examinations can be graded automatically by integrating AI. It can not only reduce the time required for assessment and evaluation but also make the process more efficient and minimize human errors. Integration of advanced tools of NLP can facilitate language intensive tasks completion in a timely manner.

Automation in grading systems is employed by GRE testing with ETS's e-rater system that automatically evaluates essays and results are generated faster. Such a system can remove the bottlenecks in assessment and result declaration, which are caused due to very high enrolments in the ODL institutions.

- **Formative Assessment and Feedback**

Competency based and continuous assessment have been emphasized in NEP-2020 as sustained progress in the learning of students is more important rather than grading. In distance education, feedback systems may be strengthened by automatically adjusting the level of difficulty based on the learner's performance that can be facilitated through AI integration. Instant and adaptive feedback may be provided to the learners in real-time manner. It may further turn the assessment into a learning experience by not just adjusting the difficulty level and providing feedback but also suggesting resources for knowledge enhancement.

- **Proctoring and Academic Integrity**

For maintaining the fairness and integrity of the online assessment system, AI based advanced monitoring tools or proctoring solutions may be deployed such as facial recognition, keystroke analysis, eye-tracking, etc., which allow monitoring of examinees in real-time manner. Platforms like Mettl, Talview have been adopted by some institutions for conducting the online examinations in a secure manner while upholding the credibility of the evaluation process. However, ethical concerns have been raised with regard to data privacy and surveillance of the examinees.

- **Competency-Based Assessment**

In competency-based assessment, practical skills of the students, its application and demonstration against certain predefined skill sets instead of theoretical knowledge are evaluated. It is mainly used for vocational and technical programmes. Artificial intelligence can play a role in this assessment method by mapping the learner outcomes against defined skill frameworks. It can also identify the gaps and areas where improvement is needed.

5. Institutional Initiatives in India

Artificial Intelligence in distance education is not just a technological shift but also an institutional and policy-driven transformation. In order to provide access of higher education to hitherto untouched section of the society, Universities offer distance and private modes of education. In India, ODL has been spearheaded by major national institutions such as the Indira Gandhi National Open University, National Institute of Open Schooling, and a network of State Open Universities. As per AISHE Report 2021-22, 4.56 million students are enrolled through distance mode in higher Education at different levels through Universities in the country. Over the past decade, these institutions have taken initial steps towards integrating digital technologies, and the next frontier is AI.

IGNOU

Established in 1985, IGNOU is the world's largest open university, with over 3.09 million learners on roll and there was an enrolment of 1.39 million learners in the year 2024 (IGNOU, 2025). Its mandate includes democratizing access to higher education not only in India but overseas as well. It is actively involved in developing innovative instructional methods, and serving as a laboratory for new educational technologies and has attained significant milestone by ranking amongst the top ten "Institutes of National Importance and

Central Universities" for promoting entrepreneurship and innovation.

IGNOU has already invested in digital repositories such as eGyankosh, interactive platforms like SWAYAM MOOCs, and student support through Samarth ERP. It makes extensive use of the Samarth Portal for digitalization of various processes such as admission, re-registration, recruitment, alumni database, payroll and leave of the employees, etc. As a part of the national policy implementation for ICT integration in education, the University manages six SWAYAM PRABHA channels and is the National Coordinator for Massive Open Online Courses of Certificate and Diploma levels for SWAYAM, Government of India's initiative for bridging the digital divide. It also offers educational services through television (GyanDarshan channel), radio broadcasting and interactive radio counselling through Gyan Vani and FM radio stations (IGNOU, 2024). It is providing academic counselling to the undergraduate programme in 15 regional languages through Swayam Prabha channel (IGNOU Vice Chancellor's Report, 2025). The University offers more than 40 programmes of various levels in online mode through its Centre for Online Education and provides technology enabled learning experiences and support services to the students through its learning management system. Through its mobile application IGNOU e-Content, it provides self-learning material in digitized form.

Though limited, IGNOU has experimented with AI in specific projects such as AI chatbot on telegram for handling frequently asked questions of the learners (IGNOU, 2021). In May, 2025, it has signed Memorandum of Understanding with Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Bombay to collaborate on Project Udaan, which is an advanced AI-driven translation platform. This collaboration aims at making IGNOU's educational resources available in multiple regional languages, expanding access to the learners (IGNOU Digi News, 2025).

In addition to the above, potential areas for integration of AI include:

- AI chatbots to manage learner queries across multiple regional languages.
- Predictive analytics to reduce dropout rates.

- Automated assessment tools to handle millions of assignments annually.

However, the key challenge in IGNOU is scaling the integration of AI across IGNOU's diverse student base. Also, other major challenges for IGNOU include bridging the digital divide as many IGNOU learners come from rural and marginalized backgrounds with limited internet access. Successful AI integration requires training faculty in data literacy and AI pedagogy, therefore, faculty preparedness is yet another challenge. In addition, it is important to address the ethical concerns ensuring that privacy and data security issues must be addressed before deploying AI at scale.

NIOS

National Institute of Open Schooling, the largest Open Schooling System in the world caters to a cumulative strength of 2.35 million learners enrolled during last five years and more than 0.59 million enrolment during 2023-24, offering flexible schooling from secondary to senior secondary level. It serves learners from disadvantaged groups, school dropouts, differently abled learners, and adult learners including others.

Independent learning at learners' own pace in open schooling system necessitates engaging multimedia learning resources including interactive lectures in the form of videos, podcasts, interactive modules and simulations. For the learners not having access to the internet, the lessons need to be delivered through radio and television. For the said purpose, a number of initiatives have been taken by NIOS. NIOS Mukta Vidya Vani & Radio Vahini is the radio platform which provides educational audio programmes on various topics for learners of various levels and the platform enables two-way communication for the listeners having internet connectivity. Through PM e-Vidya DTH channels number 17, 18, 19 and 20, live interactive video programmes for the learners are broadcasted by NIOS from its high-definition studio. The learners can watch these programmes through the YouTube channel of NIOS.

NIOS has Digital Education & e-Resource Platform (DEEP) that hosts a plethora of learning resources including study material for 75 subjects, e-books, magazines, journals, reference books, encyclopedias and directories. It envisions adding video lectures, access points for educational TV Channels and text to speech facility. Through the Virtual Open Schooling (VOS) system of NIOS, the learners get an opportunity to study the courses online and get certification. For providing information and facilitating direct interaction among learners and teachers, VOS has learning management system.

NIOS faces the unique challenge of providing individualized support to young learners from diverse backgrounds in which AI can provide solutions through:

- Adaptive testing to identify learners' strengths and weaknesses,
- AI-based counselling systems to guide learners towards vocational or academic streams, and
- Language translation tools for accessibility in multiple regional languages.

AI can help NIOS fulfil its mandate of inclusivity by integrating assistive technologies. For example:

- Speech-to-text tools for learners with hearing impairments.
- Text-to-speech tools for visually impaired learners.
- Simplified adaptive content for learners with cognitive challenges.

Therefore, AI integration can make the process more interactive and learner-responsive as AI engine could recommend specific TV lectures to learners struggling with particular topics.

State Open Universities

There are a total of 17 State Open Universities (SOUs) so far in India, each catering to regional needs of the state where they are established. Following table gives a complete list of Open Universities of India.

Table-1: List of Open Universities in India

S. No.	State	Name of the Open University	Type of University
1.	Delhi	Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU)	Central Open
2.	Uttar Pradesh	U.P Rajarshi Tandon Open University	State Open
3.	Tamil Nadu	Tamil Nadu Open University	State Open
4.	Assam	Krishna Kanta Handiqui Open University	State Open

5.	Madhya Pradesh	Madhya Pradesh Bhoj Open University	State Open
6.	Chhattisgarh	Pt. Sundarlal Sharma Open University	State Open
7.	Maharashtra	Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University	State Open
8.	Uttarakhand	Uttarakhand Open University	State Open
9.	Bihar	Nalanda Open University	State Open
10.	Rajasthan	Vardhman Mahaveer Open University	State Open
11.	West Bengal	Netaji Subhas Open University	State Open
12.	Odisha	Odisha State Open University	State Open
13.	Telangana	Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar Open University, Hyderabad	State Open
14.	Karnataka	Karnataka State Open University	State Open
15.	Gujarat	Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Open University, Ahmedabad	State Open
16.	Punjab	Jagat Guru Nanak Dev Punjab State Open University	State Open
17.	Kerala	Sree Narayana Guru Open University	State Open
18.	Jharkhand	Jharkhand State Open University	State Open

Source: UGC, 2025.

SOUs often collaborate with regional EdTech startups, which are more agile in AI innovation. This ecosystem can allow for faster experimentation in AI-driven learner support and assessment. However, there are certain constraints i.e. funding limitations restricting large-scale AI adoption, infrastructure disparities across states affecting uniform implementation and policy alignment with UGC-DEB and NEP 2020 guidelines.

These institutions demonstrate that India has a strong foundation for AI integration in distance education. However, success will depend on strategic alignment between institutional readiness, policy support, and technological infrastructure.

6. Governmental and Policy Initiatives in India

The Government of India has emphasized the importance of AI across multiple domains, including education. Key policy initiatives that indirectly support AI in distance education are being discussed below:

- **National Education Policy (NEP) - 2020**

The NEP explicitly calls for the integration of technology in all levels of education and highlights AI as a tool for enhancing learning, assessment, and teacher development (Government of India, 2020). For ODL institutions, NEP provides a mandate to experiment with AI-based learner support and multilingual education.

- **National Digital Education Architecture (NDEAR)**

Launched in 2021, NDEAR aims to create a unified digital infrastructure for school education. Its modular framework allows for AI-enabled applications such as adaptive learning platforms and predictive analytics. Although primarily focused on schools, it sets the foundation for AI adoption in NIOS and state-level ODL initiatives.

- **National Programme on Artificial Intelligence**

National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence (2018) by NITI Aayog identified education as one of the priority sectors for AI intervention. Pilot projects are underway in teacher training and digital assessment.

- **SWAYAM and AI-Enhanced MOOCs**

SWAYAM, India's national MOOC platform, hosts thousands of courses developed by premier institutions. Currently, recommendation systems are rudimentary, but AI can be integrated to provide adaptive pathways, personalized course suggestions, and intelligent grading.

- **First AI-augmented multidisciplinary University**

In alignment with the India's broader AI mission, India's first private AI-augmented multidisciplinary university has been inaugurated in Unnao district of Uttar Pradesh in July, 2025 taking major leap in the journey towards technological excellence (PTI, 2025).

In addition to the above, a number of initiatives are being taken by the Government of India, recent one being announcement in the Union budget 2025-26 for establishment of Centre of Excellence in

Artificial Intelligence for education so as to harness AI for transformative educational outcomes (Ministry of Finance, 2025).

7. Challenges and Ethical Concerns in AI Integration

While Artificial Intelligence offers transformative potential for distance education in India and globally, it also raises profound challenges. These challenges are of different kinds such as technological, institutional, social, ethical, etc. as shown in the Figure-1 below:

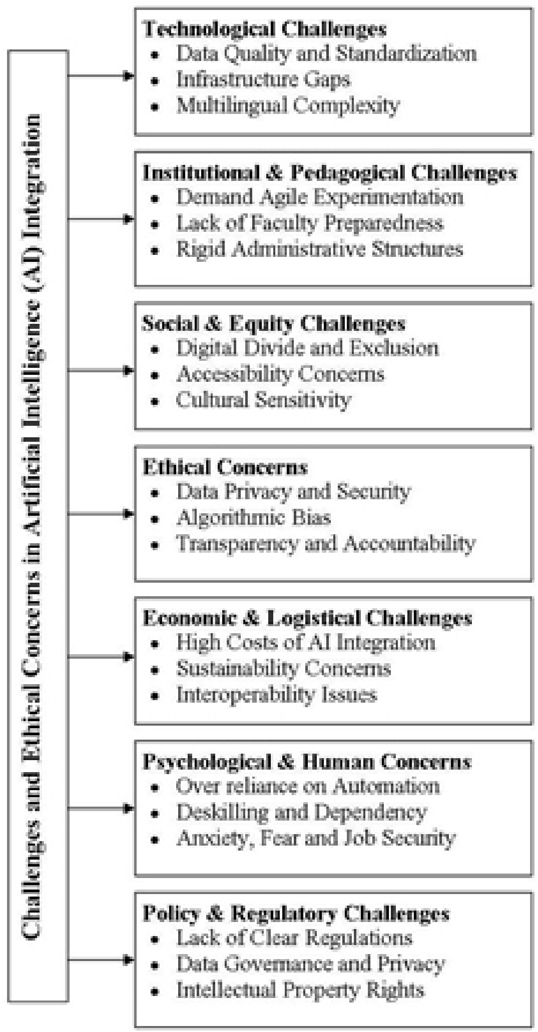

Figure-1: Challenges in AI Integration in Distance Education

Addressing these challenges is essential for ensuring that AI benefits learners equitably rather than exacerbating existing inequalities.

⏩ Technological Challenges

Despite having the transformative potential, integration of AI in distance education faces several technological challenges that hinder its effective adoption and scalability.

- **Infrastructure Gaps**

India's distance education ecosystem is heavily influenced by the digital divide. Many learners, particularly in rural and tribal areas, lack consistent access to high-speed internet, smartphones, or personal computers (World Bank, 2021). Without reliable infrastructure, AI-enabled tools-such as adaptive platforms, real-time analytics, or virtual classrooms-may remain inaccessible to the learners who need them most.

- **Data Quality and Standardization**

In the Indian ODL system, there is a lack of reliable, consistent and standardized datasets which are essential for the effectiveness of artificial intelligence, however these are fragmented and spread across multiple platforms such as SWAYAM, IGNOU and NIOS portals. Due to lack of standard datasets, it is difficult to develop unified learner profiles that are needed for predictive analytics and personalized support. Also, the poor data quality is a significant barrier as it may lead to inaccurate predictions due to flawed insights about learners leading to reduced credibility of AI enabled interventions and limited ability to enhance learner outcomes. There is a need for robust data governance frameworks for overcoming the challenge of data quality and standardization while enabling effective functioning of artificial intelligence systems.

- **Multilingual Complexity**

There are a large number of regional languages and dialects in India which are yet to be incorporated in natural language processing. It not only reduces the inclusivity and equitable accessibility but also alienates the students of marginalized linguistic communities from their educational needs. Once these languages are incorporated, the educational needs of learners belonging to diverse linguistic backgrounds may be fulfilled (Joshi *et al.*, 2020).

⏩ Institutional and Pedagogical Challenges

Institutional and pedagogical challenges have an influence on its effectiveness and long-term sustainability of integration of AI in distance education as is being highlighted in this section.

Faculty, in general and distance educators, in particular need to be trained for integration of artificial intelligence in their teaching and other learner support services as they lack exposure to data driven pedagogies. Also, the curriculum which was earlier designed for catering to the educational needs of the students at mass scale needs to be restructured for individual needs of distance learners and also the assessment methods must be personalized in consonance with the requirement of technology generation. For the said purpose, AI can facilitate flexible frameworks as it can help in personalization of learner engagement, particularly the ODL learners with diverse profiles. In addition to faculty preparedness and curriculum re-structuring, another institutional challenge is that of integration of AI in ODL institutions with rigid administrative structures, however AI demands agile experimentation and improvements from time to time and therefore, there is a need to tackle these challenges (Patra, 2019).

- **Social and Equity Challenges**

Without careful planning, the benefits of AI can dis-proportionately favor already advantaged learners and widening educational inequalities amongst the haves and have nots.

- **Digital Divide and Exclusion**

AI may be favourable for the learners possessing required infrastructure, however the learners belonging to rural and remote areas, and economically and socially weaker sections of the society may be in a disadvantaged position as it is technology intensive and dependent upon digital access and internet connectivity. This may further lead to exclusion of vulnerable sections of society from the advantages of artificial intelligence driven education and instead of bridging the digital divide, enhancing the same (UNESCO, 2022).

- **Accessibility Concerns**

AI based assistive tools have been developed for the learners with disabilities such as speech to text, screen reader, etc, however these are not easily accessible to such learners due to various reasons (UNESCO, 2021) e.g. expensive, not suitable in Indian contexts, etc. and there is a need for policy measures so that accessible AI tools may be indigenously developed that are affordable and context specific.

- **Cultural Sensitivity**

While training AI systems, instead of country specific data, global datasets are taken into consideration that may result into culturally irrelevant and insensitive in Indian or local context and thus, it is important that AI tools shall be contextualized in a way that these are culturally responsive and relevant in local contexts.

⏩ Ethical Concerns

The core ethical question in AI integration is how to balance efficiency with humanity. While AI can scale support, analyse data, and personalize learning, human educators remain irreplaceable for emotional guidance, ethical decision-making and mentorship and role modelling. Thus, the future of AI in distance education must be seen not as replacing educators but as augmenting human capabilities (Luckin, 2019). Other major ethical concerns are being highlighted below.

- **Data Privacy and Security**

AI-driven distance education requires a huge amount of learners' data such as their performance records, behavioral data and also their biometric details in some cases and without robust data protection frameworks, learners risk breaches of privacy (OECD, 2021b). India's Digital Personal Data Protection Act (2023) provides some safeguards, but enforcement remains uncertain in the education sector.

- **Algorithmic Bias**

AI algorithms are only as fair as the data they are trained on. If datasets reflect systemic inequalities (e.g., gender bias, urban-rural imbalance), AI predictions and recommendations may reinforce those inequalities. For example, an AI career recommendation system might favour STEM pathways for male learners while ignoring social sciences for women, simply because of existing dataset biases (Bender *et al.*, 2021).

- **Transparency and Accountability**

AI systems in education often operate as black boxes, where learners and faculty cannot easily understand how decisions (e.g., grades, recommendations, risk alerts) are made. Lack of transparency erodes trust and raises questions of accountability when mistakes occur (Selwyn, 2019).

⏩ Economic and Logistical Challenges

Deployment of AI in distance education is also constrained by economic and logistical challenges, particularly where financial resources and infrastructure are limited.

- **High Costs of AI Integration**

AI adoption requires heavy investment in infrastructure, software, training, and maintenance. Many ODL institutions, especially SOUs, struggle with limited budgets. This creates dependence on private EdTech companies, raising risks of commercialization of education (UNESCO, 2021).

- **Sustainability Concerns**

AI projects often begin as pilots funded by grants or collaborations but struggle with long-term sustainability. Maintaining servers, updating models, and training staff require recurring investments. Institutions must plan beyond short-term funding cycles.

- **Interoperability Issues**

Different institutions often use different digital platforms that are not interoperable. Without common data standards and APIs, AI tools cannot work seamlessly across platforms like IGNOU, NIOS, and SOUs (Government of India, 2020).

⏩ **Psychological and Human Concerns**

There is a risk that learners may become overly dependent on AI tutors, reducing opportunities for peer-to-peer collaboration and critical thinking (Holmes *et al.*, 2021). Distance education already struggles with isolation and lack of social interaction. Over-automation of learner support (through chatbots and automated grading) may further reduce the sense of human connection that is vital for motivation and emotional well-being (Moore, 2018). While learners may feel intimidated by AI-driven assessments, faculty may feel anxious and job loss due to AI taking over education. (Selwyn, 2019).

⏩ **Policy and Regulatory Challenges**

Although NEP 2020 and the AI strategy of NITI Aayog mention AI in education, India does not have a dedicated framework for regulating AI in distance education. This creates uncertainty in areas of maintaining ethical standards, accountability, and interoperability. With AI generating educational content, intellectual property ownership issues arise. Should the rights belong to the faculty, the institution, or the AI provider? Current Indian laws do not provide clarity. The University Grants Commission currently assesses institutions based on traditional quality parameters. AI integration requires new benchmarks, for example, evaluating the fairness, transparency, and effectiveness of AI-driven learner support systems.

8. AI Integration in Distance Education: The Way Ahead

The integration of artificial intelligence in distance education is not just a technological trend but a paradigm shifts in how education is delivered, accessed, and experienced. To maximize the benefits and minimize risks, policymakers, institutions, and educators must adopt strategic, inclusive, and ethical frameworks. This section outlines future directions, frameworks, and recommendations for AI integration in India's distance education system.

The future of AI in distance education should be guided by three principles: accessibility, equity, and human-centred design. AI must not only enhance efficiency but also bridge gaps in access and learning opportunities.

Key elements of this vision include:

- **Universal access:** AI tools designed for multilingual, low-bandwidth, and mobile-friendly platforms.
- **Equity focus:** Special provisions for marginalized learners (tribal communities, learners with disabilities, women in rural areas).
- **Transparency:** Systems that explain their decisions clearly to learners and faculty.
- **Augmentation, not replacement:** AI should support educators, not replace them.

Some of the developments that can be perceived to be seen in near future are as follows:

- AI-driven platforms that continuously adapt learning pathways to each learner's pace, style, and preferences will be seen in the times to come (Holmes *et al.*, 2021).
- By combining NLP, deep learning, and cognitive models, AI tutors will have natural conversations with the students and guide them through complex problem-solving, and at the same time provide instant clarification (Graesser, 2020).
- AI, combined with Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality will enable immersive simulations for science, medicine, and vocational training which will benefit distance learners who lack access to physical labs (Singh & Sharma, 2022).

- AI-driven formative assessments will be conducted where learners' progress will be monitored continuously through small tasks, quizzes, and activities which will reduce stress for the students and provide them with real-time feedback (Luckin, 2019).

In order to cope up with the technological advancements taking place at a very fast pace, it is important for the institutions to invest in continuous professional development of human resources. Training programs will equip them with skills needed for using AI-driven platforms, data literacy and analytics, ethical concerns in AI and redesigning courses for adaptive delivery (IGNOU, 2021). Curricula must be restructured to align with AI-enabled personalization. Modular, flexible, and competency-based structures will allow AI systems to suggest customized learning paths. Institutions must design AI as part of a blended support model:

- AI for administrative efficiency (queries, scheduling, reminders)
- AI for personalized tutoring
- Human counselors and mentors for socio-emotional support

Future distance education systems may also need public-private partnerships with EdTech companies for infrastructure, platforms, and content development.

It has already been discussed that India does not have a Comprehensive AI in Education policy. In order to complement NEP 2020 and define ethical standards for AI deployment while maintaining transparency and applicability of artificial intelligence systems, there is a need for setting guidelines for data privacy and security and establishing protocols for algorithmic audits through dedicated AI in Education policy.

Evaluation of AI adoption on the metrics of effectiveness in terms of improvement of learner outcomes, maintenance of fairness by detecting and mitigating the bias and accessibility is important. Ethical AI in Education certification for ensuring compliance with standards of fairness, privacy, and inclusivity may be implemented just like ISO certifications. Collaboration amongst different ODL institutions shall be promoted and open data standards must be mandated so that interoperability of AI platforms may be ensured.

Further, India may adopt a three-phase approach for integration of AI In distance education systems:

- In the first phase, there shall be focus on expanding digital infrastructure (rural broadband, mobile access), faculty training programs on AI and data literacy and pilot AI projects in select ODL institutions.
- In the next phase of expansion, large-scale deployment of adaptive learning systems, integration of AI-driven learner analytics in ODL institutions and establishment of National AI in Education Data Repository may be done.
- The last phase may be that of transformation for a fully personalized, multilingual, AI-driven ODL ecosystem with seamless integration of AR/VR for immersive learning.

Given the above, policy and governance frameworks need to be established that covers all aspects pertaining to implementation of artificial intelligence in education at all levels while maintaining ethical standards.

9. Conclusion

The future of AI in distance education is not about technology replacing teachers but about human-centred AI ecosystems that amplify the best qualities of educators while addressing systemic challenges of scale, diversity, and equity. It should serve as an enabler of access, personalization, and efficiency, while teachers or academic counselors continue to provide empathy, ethical guidance, and socio-emotional support. If adopted thoughtfully, AI can transform India's distance education system into a globally relevant model of inclusive, learner-centred, and technology-enabled education. However, the path forward demands a balanced approach, where enthusiasm for innovation is tempered with caution, inclusivity, and ethical responsibility.

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Digital Competence in Pre-Service Teachers: A Comparative Study

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Abstract

In the 21st century, digital competence has become an essential skill for educators, particularly in the context of teacher education. Pre-service teachers are expected to be proficient in integrating digital tools and technologies into pedagogical practices. This study aims to analyze the level of digital competence among B.Ed. trainees in Lakhimpur- Kheri district, Uttar Pradesh, with a comparative focus on trainees from government and self-financed colleges. A survey method was employed, using Digital Competence Assessment Questionnaire constructed by Shipra Srivastava and Kiran Lata Dangwal based on four dimensions viz. Technological/Operational/Instrumentor, Information Processing and Management, Pedagogical/ Knowledge Construction and Digital Citizenship. A sample of 102 B.Ed. trainees was selected through stratified random sampling from both government and self-financed institutions across the district. The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics to identify differences in digital competence levels across institutional types and demographic variables. The findings reveal significant disparities in digital competence between trainees of government and self-financed colleges. While most trainees demonstrated basic ICT literacy, the pre service teachers from Government College have scored better than that of Self Finance College. The study highlights the urgent need for targeted digital literacy programs within B.Ed. curricula, especially in rural and under-resourced colleges. This research contributes to the understanding of digital preparedness among future educators and underscores the need for policy reforms to bridge the digital divide in teacher education across districts like Lakhimpur Kheri.

Keywords

Digital competence, B.Ed. students, Government college, Self-finance college.

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Digital Competence in Pre-Service Teachers: A Comparative Study

1. Introduction

Today's age is age of technology. Each and every field is in grip of technology. It is as much challenging as much beneficial for us. In this technological era to be efficient and skilled in any profession is not only satisfactory but everyone needs to be digitally competent too. After the Pandemic Covid-19, there is a tremendous transformation in field of education whether it is school education or higher education. To cope up with this new normal situation we need to be upskilled and make ourselves digitally competent. The concept of digital competence can be defined as a set of abilities to use technology to optimize our daily lives effectively (Ferrari, 2017). It is understood as, "the confident, critical and responsible use of the technologies from the society of information for work, entertainment and education" (European Commission, 2018). There are eight key competences have been identified for life long learning and digital competence is one of them (European Commission, 2006). United States Department (1996) defined digital competence as, "having computer skills and abilities to use computers and other technology to improve learning, productivity and performance.

Digital competence has been frequently investigated and discussed by academic scholars and in policy documents. Now when the teaching and learning environment has indeed changed, the use of ICT has penetrated into the study process and is closely linked to the academic performance of teachers and students alike. In today's society, new generations are required to have an advanced level of digital competence, as they are in continuous transformation, the learning habits of students have changed, their needs and circumstances are no longer the same as ten years ago, that is why it is essential that schools can learn how to provide an educational, didactic and safe response to the needs of students. To achieve this, it requires a teacher with an updated training and possessing a degree of digital competence to undertake the teaching- learning process of students and to promote the acquisition of key competencies in students.

The accelerated growth of digital technologies has revolutionized the educational landscape to its very foundation. Now, digital literacy is not only a plus point but a compulsory necessity for teachers at all levels. As aspiring teachers, B.Ed. trainees need to be proficient in the skills required to work and manage digital tools within teaching-learning contexts. In the Indian scenario, especially among the semi-urban and rural areas such as Lakhimpur Kheri district of Uttar Pradesh, inclusion of digital literacy in teacher training is a task and a requirement.

Lakhimpur Kheri is one of the largest districts in Uttar Pradesh and is home to a variety of teacher education institutions, both government and self-financed (private) B.Ed. colleges. Even so, differences in resources, infrastructure, faculty orientation, and student exposure to technology frequently result in gaps in digital skill acquisition. With growing pressure towards digital learning platforms, online testing, and virtual classrooms, the readiness of pre-service teachers in such districts becomes an issue of paramount concern.

The purpose of this study is to carry out a district-level assessment of digital competence among Lakhimpur Kheri B.Ed. trainees. The research aims to determine the prevailing status of digital skills, detect gaps, and recommend improvement measures through comparative analysis of government and self-financed college trainees. The study is designed across different dimensions of digital competence.

The significance of this study is its potential to influence teacher education policies and institutional practices. By dealing with digital competence at the ground level of teacher education, this research helps in constructing a digitally empowered teaching force that can respond to the changing educational environment in India.

2. Objectives

The main objective of this study is to compare digital competence of B.Ed. students of Government Colleges and Self Finance Colleges of Lakhimpur-Kheri district area of Uttar Pradesh..

3. Hypothesis

There will be no significant difference in digital competence of B.Ed students of Government colleges and Self Finance Colleges of Lakhimpur- kheri district.

4. Research Methodology

This study is descriptive in nature. Survey method has been used in the study.

4·1 Population and Sample

All pre service teachers who are enrolled in B.Ed. Course in Government colleges and Self-finance colleges of Lakhimpur-kheri district were the population of the study. Sampling has been completed in two phases—in phase one government and one self finance college has been selected through random sampling method. In phase two through random sampling 102 pre service teachers have been selected as sample of the study.

4·2 Tool of the Study

In this study, investigators have used a tool to assess digital competence which was constructed by Shipra Srivastava and Kiran Lata Dangwal. It consists of 60 items (questions), divided into 4 dimensions viz. Technological/operational/Instrumental, Information Processing and Management, Pedagogical/ knowledge construction and Digital citizenship.

4·3 Procedure

After sampling, selected pre service teachers were provided tool of digital competence to fill accurately along with personal information. Their scores have been recorded through manual.

4·4 Statistical Analysis

Mean, Standard deviation and t-test has been used to analyze the data of the study.

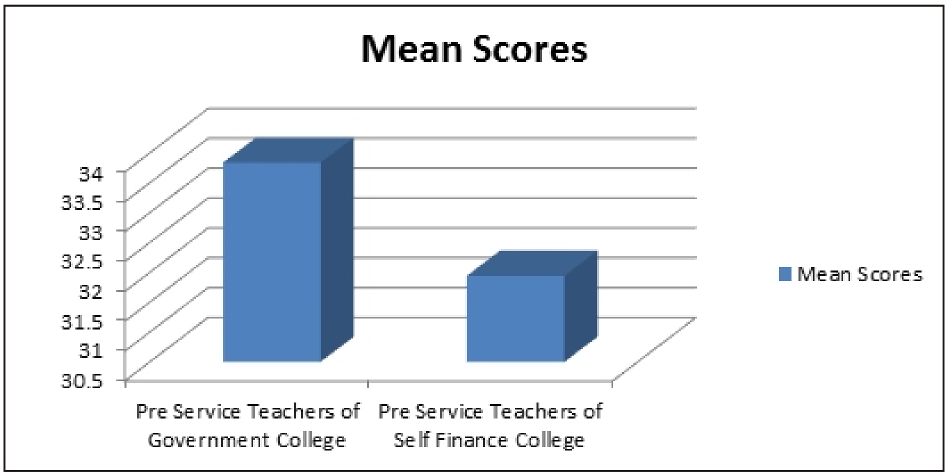
5. Results and Discussion

Results of the study are presented in the following table:

Table-1: Comparison of Digital Competence of B.Ed Students of Government and Self Finance Colleges of Lakhimpur-Kheri district

Groups	Number	Mean	SD	t-value	Significance Level
Pre Service Teachers of Government College	50	33.836	5.080	2.03	0.05
Pre Service Teachers of Self Finance College	52	31.942	4.244		

Preceding table indicates the mean score and SD score for Government and Self finance colleges of B.Ed. students in Digital competence. Mean score and SD value of Government college were 33.837 and 5.0803 respectively. Same Value for the Self finance college were 31.942 and 4.2445 respectively. t-value in the table is 2.03 which is significant to 0.05level.Thus the hypothesis i.e there is no significant difference in digital competence of B.Ed. students of Government and Self- finance colleges of Lakhimpur- kheri district has been rejected. This can be represented graphically as below:



The statistical result indicates difference in levels of digital competency between government and self-financed college pre-service teachers in Lakhimpur Kheri district. Students from government colleges performed better compared to students from self-financed colleges, as reflected in a greater mean value (33.836 vs. 31.942) and a statistically significant t-value of 2.03 ($p < 0.05$).

This result is in contrast to some prior presumptions and even to patterns observed in some urban studies, where private/self-funded institutions tend to have improved digital integration. In this rural setting, the outcome could be due to the government colleges' exposure to state-supported ICT programs, structured training schemes, or stronger support systems for academics. It also implies that qualified teachers and curriculum compliance in government colleges could help in enhancing digital skill acquisition.

By contrast, self-financed colleges may have uneven quality in digital resources, infrastructures, and teacher training, leading to lower mean performance among their trainees. The relatively low standard deviation in the self-financed group (SD = 4.244) suggests higher uniformity in their scores, though at a lower mean level.

This evidence-backed understanding supports the imperative of focused ICT training and curriculum fortification in self-financed colleges. It also indicates that policy actions should not across-the-board assume private institutions are better prepared-particularly in semi-rural or rural areas like Lakhimpur Kheri.

6. Conclusion

The current study examined the digital competence of B.Ed. trainees in Lakhimpur Kheri district, drawing a comparison between students studying in government and self-financed colleges. The findings bring out the fact that despite pre-service teachers from both types of institutions having a basic level of digital competence, there are differences in their levels of proficiency.

Government college trainees showed a significant higher mean score in digital competence than their counterparts from self-financed colleges, with the difference being statistically significant at the 0.05 level. This result is indicative of the impact of institutional support, structured training, and access to government ICT schemes on the development of digital skills.

Yet, the overall competence levels are such that there remains scope for improvement in domain areas like digital content creation, cyber safety, and use of digital tools in pedagogy. The rural and semi-urban setting of Lakhimpur Kheri imposes further challenges like limited internet connectivity, poor digital infrastructure, and lack of trained staff, which further impede digital competence building.

Finally, the research highlights the urgent need to enhance digital education in B.Ed. courses so that prospective teachers can be equipped with a technologically integrated classroom. This will not only improve teaching-learning practices, but also prepare them to meet the demands of 21st-century learners. Narrowing the digital divide between institutions of varying categories is necessary to achieve equity and quality in teacher training. Emphasizing the importance of digital competence among pre-service teachers is now one of the starting points for ensuring the smooth process of the digitization of education (Tomczyk, 2024).

7. Educational Implications of the Study

The conclusions of this study have a number of key implications for teacher education, especially in rural and semi-urban settings such as Lakhimpur Kheri district. The most notable one is the clear distinction in digital competence among government and self-financed colleges' trainees. This highlights the imperative for revising the B.Ed. curriculum to include systematic digital competence modules. These modules must move beyond mere computer literacy to cover areas of digital pedagogy, online communication tools, content creation, and internet safety according to frameworks such as DigComp 2.1.

Additionally, colleges particularly self-funded institutions need to invest in the modernization of their digital infrastructure. Most do not have simple facilities such as adequately equipped computer laboratories, reliable internet connectivity, and interactive teaching aids. This needs to be addressed for ensuring level playing fields for learning across institutions. Another important area to focus on is faculty development. Teacher educators themselves should be digitally literate so that they can train the next generation of educators effectively. ICT training workshops and professional development activities conducted on a regular basis can keep faculty updated with current digital tools and pedagogy.

The research also points out the continuing digital divide existing between teacher education institutions in urban and rural areas. Spanning this gap will involve strategic intervention by the government in the form of funding, mobile ICT facilities, and access to the internet for learning. In addition, digital literacy must be acquired from school level, so that students pursuing B.Ed. courses already have basic ICT skills. Finally, digital literacy must be formally tested as part of teacher training programs in the form of practical exercises, digital portfolios, and project work. These steps will not only improve the readiness of pre-service teachers but also help develop a digitally empowered education system that caters to 21st-century learning demands.

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Inclusive Development and Social Inequality: Challenges in Achieving Viksit Bharat 2047

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Abstract

The vision of Viksit Bharat 2047 aspires to position India as a developed nation by its centenary of independence, but this goal remains contingent upon addressing persistent social inequalities. Despite significant economic growth, disparities rooted in caste, class, gender, region, and digital access continue to obstruct inclusive development. This paper critically examines the challenges of ensuring equitable growth while striving for developmental milestones. Drawing on theoretical perspectives such as Sen's capability approach, Marxist and Weberian analyses of inequality, and intersectionality, it highlights how exclusion manifests across economic, social, political, and cultural domains. The study further evaluates government initiatives-ranging from financial inclusion and skill development to healthcare and digital empowerment-while exposing structural barriers in policy implementation and deep-seated societal hierarchies. It argues that without bridging rural-urban divides, empowering women and marginalized communities, and ensuring digital equity, the aspiration of a truly inclusive Viksit Bharat will remain elusive. The paper concludes by proposing a multi-stakeholder pathway that combines equitable education, participatory governance, and sustainable development, emphasizing that only through inclusive growth can India achieve the transformative vision of development by 2047.

Keywords

Viksit Bharat, Social inequalities, Financial inclusion, Digital empowerment, Participatory governance.

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1. Introduction

The vision of Viksit Bharat 2047 reflects India's ambition to become a developed nation by its centenary of independence, emphasizing economic prosperity, social justice, environmental sustainability, and democratic governance. This vision requires not merely high economic growth but also equitable distribution of resources and opportunities. The idea of inclusive development thus emerges as the cornerstone for achieving a truly developed India (NITI Aayog, 2023).

India's developmental journey since independence has been marked by significant progress, yet persistent social inequalities continue to challenge its democratic and developmental aspirations. In the initial decades, the Indian state pursued planned development with an emphasis on industrialization and poverty alleviation. However, despite land reforms, affirmative action, and welfare programs, inequalities based on caste, class, gender, and region endured (Deshpande, 2011). The liberalization of the economy in 1991 accelerated GDP growth and integrated India into the global economy, but it also widened income and wealth gaps, exacerbating rural-urban and inter-state disparities (Pal & Ghosh, 2007).

Statistical data illustrates the scale of inequality in contemporary India. According to Oxfam (2023), the richest 1% of Indians own more than 40% of the nation's wealth, while the bottom 50% share just 3%. The Global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) 2022 indicates that although India has lifted millions out of poverty, nearly 16.4% of its population remains multidimensionally poor, with higher concentration in rural areas and marginalized communities (UNDP & OPHI, 2022). Gender disparities are also stark, with women's labour force participation rate hovering around 25%-among the lowest globally (World Bank, 2022). Similarly, caste-based inequalities persist, as Dalits and Adivasis face disproportionate levels of poverty, landlessness, and limited access to quality education and healthcare (Thorat & Newman, 2010).

These inequalities are not merely economic but deeply social and cultural. The persistence of caste hierarchies, patriarchal norms, and regional imbalances reinforces exclusion and limits the potential of marginalized groups to fully participate in India's growth story. Moreover, the digital divide is emerging as a new axis of inequality, as access to digital technologies and internet connectivity remains uneven across rural-urban and rich-poor divides (Mehrotra & Parida, 2021). This has serious implications for employment, education, and governance in an increasingly digitalized economy.

Therefore, inclusive development must be conceptualized not only as equitable economic growth but also as the dismantling of structural barriers that perpetuate inequality. The emphasis must be on expanding capabilities, ensuring social justice, and fostering participatory governance, in line with Amartya Sen's (1999) argument that development is the expansion of human freedoms. As the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) emphasize, development cannot be sustainable without inclusivity, equality, and justice (United Nations, 2015).

The rationale for this study, therefore, lies in the recognition that social inequality remains a formidable obstacle to India's developmental trajectory. If these inequities remain unaddressed, the aspiration of Viksit Bharat 2047 will remain incomplete. This paper seeks to explore the conceptual underpinnings of inclusive development, identify the structural and policy-related challenges of inequality in India, and suggest pathways toward building an equitable, inclusive, and sustainable future.

2. Theoretical Framework

The study of inclusive development and social inequality in India draws on a multidimensional theoretical framework combining insights from development economics, sociology, and political theory. Modernization theory (Rostow, 1960) explains India's developmental aspirations toward industrialization and global competitiveness, but it overlooks persistent structural inequalities (Frank, 1966). Marxist perspectives highlight how economic growth without redistribution exacerbates class disparities, particularly in informal and gig economies (Breman, 2013; Marx, 1867/1990), while Weberian analysis emphasizes the role of status, caste, and bureaucratic structures in shaping inequality (Weber, 1946; Jodhka, 2017). Sen's capability approach (1999) shifts the focus from GDP to human well-being, stressing education, healthcare, and social participation as key to inclusive development. Bourdieu's theory of economic, social, and cultural capital (1986) explains inter-generational reproduction of inequality, and Crenshaw's inter-sectionality framework (1989) highlights compounded dis-advantages faced by groups at the intersection of caste, gender, class, and disability. Finally, the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2015) provide a normative global framework for socially inclusive, environmentally sustainable, and participatory growth. Together, these perspectives offer a comprehensive lens to analyze the structural, social, and economic dimensions of inequality while guiding policies for achieving Viksit Bharat 2047.

3. Inclusive Development: Concept and Dimensions

Inclusive development is a paradigm that goes beyond conventional notions of economic growth to emphasize equitable opportunities, access to resources, and participation in decision-making for all segments of society. According to the World Bank (2009), inclusive growth is "growth that is broad-based across sectors, and inclusive of a large part of the labour force." Similarly, the United Nations (2015) stresses that development is incomplete if it leaves behind marginalized groups, reinforcing the principle of "leaving no one behind" in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). For India's Viksit Bharat 2047 vision, inclusivity is thus both a developmental necessity and a moral imperative.

Inclusive development can be understood along several interrelated dimensions:

3·1 Economic Inclusion

Economic inclusion implies providing equal access to productive employment, entrepreneurship, and financial systems. In India, where nearly 80% of the workforce is engaged in the informal sector (ILO, 2018), achieving inclusive growth requires policies that generate quality employment, extend social security, and reduce wage disparities. Schemes like Jan Dhan Yojana have expanded financial inclusion, yet inequalities persist in access to credit, particularly for women, Dalits, and Adivasis (Rangarajan Committee, 2008). For Viksit Bharat 2047, economic inclusion will mean fostering an enabling environment for equitable labour participation, rural development, and technological empowerment.

3·2 Social Inclusion

Social inclusion involves ensuring equitable access to education, healthcare, housing, and basic services. Despite progress in literacy and health indicators, inequalities remain stark. The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER, 2022) highlights wide disparities in learning outcomes between rural and urban schools. Similarly, healthcare remains inaccessible for many marginalized groups despite initiatives like Ayushman Bharat. Social inclusion also requires addressing structural inequalities such as caste-based discrimination, gender bias, and regional backwardness (Deshpande, 2011).

3·3 Political Inclusion

Political inclusion emphasizes participation in governance and decision-making processes. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments strengthened local self-governance, enabling women and marginalized groups to participate in Panchayati Raj institutions. However, entrenched power hierarchies and limited devolution of resources often restrict their effectiveness (Jayal, 2006). For Viksit Bharat, political inclusion requires deepening democratic institutions, strengthening participatory governance, and ensuring that marginalized voices are not tokenized but genuinely empowered in policy processes.

3·4 Cultural Inclusion

India's social fabric is characterized by linguistic, religious, and cultural diversity. Cultural inclusion entails recognition, respect, and protection of this diversity while combating exclusionary practices. Discrimination against Dalits, Adivasis, and religious minorities persists in many forms, from education to employment and everyday life (Thorat & Newman, 2010). Inclusive development must therefore go beyond material welfare to affirm cultural rights, dignity, and social justice as foundational pillars of a developed India.

3·5 Digital Inclusion

In the age of digital transformation, digital inclusion is critical for bridging inequalities. Access to affordable internet, digital literacy, and online opportunities has become essential for education, employment, and civic engagement. However, the digital divide remains significant, with rural households having only 37% internet penetration compared to 72% in urban areas (IAMAI, 2022). Women and marginalized communities face additional barriers due to affordability, skills, and social norms (Mehrotra & Parida, 2021). For Viksit Bharat 2047, digital inclusion is indispensable to prevent the deepening of new inequalities in a digital economy.

Inclusive development is thus a holistic framework that integrates economic, social, political, cultural, and digital dimensions. It ensures that growth is not merely measured by GDP but by human well-being, social justice, and democratic participation. For India, this approach is critical to overcoming entrenched inequalities and achieving the transformative vision of Viksit Bharat 2047.

4. Social Inequality in India: Current Challenges

India's trajectory of development has been marked by impressive achievements in economic growth, poverty reduction, and technological innovation, yet its progress has been persistently constrained by deep-rooted social inequalities. These inequalities are multidimensional—spanning caste, class, gender, region, religion, disability, and access to digital resources-and they operate in both visible and invisible forms. Despite constitutional guarantees of equality and extensive policy interventions, disparities continue to structure social and economic life. For the realization of Viksit Bharat 2047, addressing these entrenched inequalities is indispensable, as exclusion undermines not only the distributive justice of growth but also the democratic legitimacy of development. A closer examination of the major dimensions of inequality highlights the scale of the challenge.

Caste-based inequality remains one of the most enduring and complex forms of social exclusion in India. Historically institutionalized through the caste system, it continues to shape access to education, employment, and social mobility. According to the India Human Development Survey (IHDS, 2015), Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) lag behind other groups across nearly all indicators of development, including literacy, income, and health outcomes. For instance, the literacy rate for SCs stands at 66% and for STs at 59%, compared to 80% for upper castes (Census of India, 2011). Economic disparities are equally stark: National Sample Survey (NSSO, 2018) data reveal that the average monthly per capita consumption expenditure for SC households was ₹1,125, and for ST households ₹1,015, significantly lower than the ₹1,587 reported for upper-caste households. Employment patterns also reflect caste stratification. A disproportionate share of Dalits and Adivasis remain confined to low-wage, unskilled, and precarious jobs, with over 70% employed in the informal sector (ILO, 2018). Landlessness is another marker of exclusion, with only 9% of SC households owning more than two hectares of land compared to 30% of non-SC/ST households (NSSO, 2013). Social discrimination persists despite affirmative action policies, with studies documenting caste-based violence, untouchability practices, and discrimination in education and workplaces (Thorat & Newman, 2010). The persistence of caste-based exclusion highlights that mere economic growth cannot dismantle entrenched social hierarchies without targeted interventions in education, land reforms, and anti-discrimination enforcement.

Gender inequality constitutes another critical barrier to inclusive development. India ranks 127th out of 146 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index 2023 (World Economic Forum, 2023), reflecting disparities in economic participation, political representation, health, and education. Women's labour force participation remains alarmingly low, at around 24% in 2022, compared to a global average of 47% (World Bank, 2022). Even when employed, women are concentrated in informal, low-paying sectors and face a significant gender wage gap of 28% (ILO, 2018). The phenomenon of "time poverty", where women spend a disproportionate amount of time on unpaid domestic and care work, further limits their economic opportunities. Data from the National Sample Survey (2019) indicate that women spend nearly 5 hours per day on unpaid work, compared to just 1 hour for men. Educational attainment for women has improved significantly, with female literacy reaching 70.3% in Census 2011, yet dropout rates remain high among girls in secondary and higher education due to early marriage, household responsibilities, and lack of safety in schools. In terms of political inclusion, women constitute only 14% of Parliament and 10% of state legislatures, though they make up nearly 46% of elected representatives in Panchayati Raj institutions due to mandated reservations (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2022). Gender-based violence remains pervasive, with the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB, 2021) reporting over 428,000 cases of crimes against women, including domestic violence, sexual harassment, and trafficking. These structural and cultural barriers perpetuate gender inequality and undermine the potential contribution of half of India's population to development. For Viksit Bharat, gender equality is not merely a matter of rights but also an economic imperative, as increasing female workforce participation could add nearly $770 billion to India's GDP by 2025 (McKinsey Global Institute, 2018).

The rural-urban divide is another dimension of inequality that poses a serious challenge to inclusive growth. Nearly 65% of India's population still resides in rural areas, where access to infrastructure, quality education, healthcare, and employment opportunities remains limited (Census of India, 2011). Rural poverty rates remain significantly higher than urban ones: the Global MPI (2022) reported that 21% of rural Indians live in multidimensional poverty compared to just 6% in urban areas. Healthcare access highlights this divide-rural areas account for 70% of India's population but have only 40% of hospital beds and less than 30% of doctors (NITI Aayog, 2021). Education reflects similar gaps, as government schools in rural areas often suffer from inadequate infrastructure, teacher absenteeism, and poor learning outcomes, as documented by the ASER 2022 report. Employment patterns also reveal disparities, with rural workers predominantly engaged in agriculture or informal sectors, while urban areas provide more diversified and higher-paying jobs. Migration from rural to urban areas, driven by lack of opportunities, has led to the growth of slums and informal settlements in cities, where migrants often face insecure housing, lack of social security, and exclusion from urban services (Breman, 2013). Bridging this rural-urban gap requires significant investment in rural infrastructure, education, and livelihood diversification.

Regional disparities across states further deepen inequality. India's federal structure reveals sharp contrasts between developed states like Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Tamil Nadu and relatively backward states such as Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Jharkhand. Per capita income in states like Goa and Delhi is more than three times the national average, while states like Bihar report less than half of it (MOSPI, 2022). Human Development Index (HDI) values also vary widely, with Kerala consistently ranking highest due to its achievements in health and education, while states like Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh lag far behind (UNDP India, 2021). Regional inequality is also visible in infrastructure development, industrialization, and digital connectivity. Such disparities foster uneven development, leading to migration pressures, political tensions, and unequal opportunities for citizens depending on their place of birth. For Viksit Bharat 2047, reducing these regional gaps is critical to creating a balanced and cohesive developmental trajectory.

Digital inequality is emerging as a major challenge in the 21st century. While India is home to the world's second-largest internet user base, with over 800 million users, access remains highly unequal. The Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI, 2022) reported that urban internet penetration stands at 72%, while rural penetration is only 37%. Gender disparities are also evident, as only 33% of women own a smartphone compared to 67% of men (GSMA, 2022). This digital divide has profound implications for education, employment, governance, and access to welfare schemes, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic when online platforms became essential. Students in rural and marginalized communities faced significant disruptions in learning due to lack of internet access and devices, exacerbating educational inequalities (UNICEF, 2021). In the labour market, digital skills are increasingly a prerequisite, and those excluded from the digital economy risk being further marginalized. Addressing this divide requires expanding affordable digital infrastructure, promoting digital literacy, and ensuring inclusive policies for marginalized groups.

Inequalities faced by marginalized groups such as persons with disabilities (PwDs), religious minorities, and LGBTQ+ communities also demand attention. According to the 2011 Census, India has 26.8 million PwDs, many of whom face barriers in accessing education, employment, and public spaces. The employment rate among PwDs is only 36% compared to 60% for the general population (ILO, 2019). Religious minorities, particularly Muslims, face socio-economic disadvantages, with the Sachar Committee Report (2006) highlighting their low levels of education, employment, and representation in government jobs. More recent data show that only 15% of Muslim households have a graduate or higher-level education, compared to 25% for Hindu upper castes (IHDS, 2015). LGBTQ+ individuals face stigma, discrimination, and lack of legal protection in many areas, limiting their ability to fully participate in society despite recent advances in legal recognition.

These interlocking inequalities are further exacerbated by climate change and environmental vulnerabilities, which disproportionately affect the poor and marginalized. Extreme weather events, such as floods, droughts, and heatwaves, are more devastating for rural communities dependent on agriculture and for urban poor living in informal settlements. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2022) notes that India is one of the most climate-vulnerable countries, with millions at risk of livelihood loss and displacement. Climate inequality is thus an emerging dimension that must be integrated into discussions of inclusive development.

5. Policy Measures and Institutional Responses

India's developmental trajectory has been shaped by a series of constitutional commitments, legislative frameworks, and policy initiatives designed to reduce inequality and promote inclusive growth. From the early focus on poverty alleviation in the post-independence era to the contemporary emphasis on sustainable and equitable development under Viksit Bharat 2047, the state has undertaken significant institutional measures to address structural inequalities. Yet, challenges remain in terms of coverage, implementation, and impact. This section reviews key policy measures and institutional responses across major domains-economic, social, political, and digital inclusion.

5·1 Constitutional and Legal Frameworks

The Indian Constitution laid the foundation for inclusive development by enshrining equality as a core value. Fundamental Rights guarantee equality before the law (Article 14), prohibition of discrimination (Articles 15-16), and the abolition of untouchability (Article 17). The Directive Principles of State Policy (Articles 38 and 39) emphasize reducing inequalities in income, status, and opportunities, while promoting social justice. Affirmative action policies, particularly reservations in education, employment, and political representation for Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs), remain central to India's approach to addressing historical disadvantage (Jaffrelot, 2006).

In addition, landmark legislations such as the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, the Right to Education Act, 2009, and the National Food Security Act, 2013 have sought to institutionalize rights-based approaches to inclusive development.

5·2 Poverty Alleviation and Social Protection Schemes

India has implemented a wide range of welfare programs targeting poverty and inequality. The Mahatma Gandhi National

Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA, 2005) provides at least 100 days of wage employment annually to rural households, directly addressing income insecurity. Studies show that MGNREGA has helped reduce distress migration and improve food security (Dreze & Khera, 2017).

Similarly, the Public Distribution System (PDS) and the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) ensured food security for millions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Social protection has also expanded through schemes like the National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP), which provides pensions to the elderly, widows, and persons with disabilities. However, leakages, targeting errors, and underfunding continue to limit their effectiveness (Kapur & Nangia, 2015).

5·3 Education and Skill Development Policies

Education is central to inclusive development. The Right to Education Act (2009) mandated free and compulsory education for children aged 6-14 years. More recently, the National Education Policy (NEP 2020) aims to promote equity and inclusion by ensuring universal access, improving learning outcomes, and integrating vocational training. Special schemes such as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan target marginalized communities, particularly Dalits, Adivasis, and girls.

Skill development initiatives like the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) and Skill India Mission seek to equip youth with employable skills, bridging the gap between education and labour markets. However, disparities in quality of education and digital learning access remain critical obstacles, particularly in rural and marginalized communities (Tilak, 2020).

5·4 Health and Social Welfare Initiatives

Health policies have increasingly emphasized universal access and affordability. The Ayushman Bharat - Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY), launched in 2018, provides health insurance coverage of up to ₹5 lakh per family annually, targeting over 100 million vulnerable households. Public health campaigns such as Swachh Bharat Abhiyan and the National Health Mission have expanded access to sanitation, maternal healthcare, and child immunization.

Nevertheless, inequities persist. NFHS-5 (2019-21) data reveals large gaps in child nutrition, maternal health, and healthcare utilization between rich and poor households, rural and urban areas, and upper-caste and marginalized communities. For Viksit Bharat 2047, strengthening public health infrastructure, particularly in rural and underserved regions, is critical.

5·5 Political and Governance Reforms

Institutional responses to political inequality have centered on enhancing participation. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments (1992) created Panchayati Raj institutions and urban local bodies, reserving seats for women, SCs, and STs. These measures have facilitated grassroots democracy and political representation (Jayal, 2006). However, lack of financial devolution, bureaucratic dominance, and entrenched social hierarchies often restrict meaningful empowerment.

E-governance initiatives such as Digital India have attempted to enhance transparency, accountability, and service delivery. Yet, unequal digital access has limited participation for rural and marginalized groups, requiring targeted interventions.

5·6 Digital and Financial Inclusion

Bridging the digital divide is now a key policy priority. The Digital India Programme (2015) seeks to provide universal digital literacy, affordable internet access, and e-governance services. BharatNet, one of the world's largest rural broadband projects, aims to connect over 250,000 gram panchayats with high-speed internet.

On the financial front, the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) has opened over 500 million bank accounts, significantly enhancing financial inclusion for the poor and marginalized. Coupled with Aadhaar-based direct benefit transfers (DBT), these measures have reduced leakages in welfare schemes. However, barriers such as digital illiteracy, gender gaps, and infrastructural constraints remain (Mehrotra & Parida, 2021).

5·7 Challenges of Policy Implementation

Despite these efforts, significant challenges persist in realizing inclusive development. Leakages in welfare programs, bureaucratic inefficiencies, corruption, and inadequate targeting undermine effectiveness. Structural inequalities such as caste and gender hierarchies often distort program outcomes. Regional imbalances further complicate implementation, with lagging states such as Bihar, Jharkhand, and Uttar Pradesh struggling to catch up with more developed states like Kerala and Tamil Nadu (Deaton & Drèze, 2002).

Moreover, policies often focus on short-term poverty alleviation rather than long-term structural transformation. Without systemic reforms in land redistribution, labour rights, education quality, and healthcare accessibility, inequalities may persist despite targeted interventions.

India's policy measures and institutional responses demonstrate a strong normative and legislative commitment to inclusive development. Yet, persistent inequalities reveal gaps between policy intent and ground realities. For Viksit Bharat 2047, the challenge lies not in the absence of policies but in strengthening their implementation, addressing structural inequalities, and ensuring that development outcomes genuinely benefit the most marginalized.

6. Conclusion

The vision of Viksit Bharat 2047 embodies India's goal of achieving economic prosperity, social equity, and sustainable development. This paper highlights that persistent inequalities- rooted in caste, class, gender, region, and digital access-continue to limit the benefits of growth for marginalized populations. Addressing these disparities requires more than economic expansion; social, cultural, and institutional factors must be considered through targeted and context-sensitive policies. Achieving inclusive development demands a holistic strategy: strengthening social equity, promoting gender justice, bridging regional and digital divides, formalizing labour markets, expanding skills, and ensuring good governance. Environmental sustainability and climate resilience are equally crucial. By adopting a multidimensional, participatory approach, India can transform structural challenges into opportunities, creating a prosperous, equitable, and resilient society that fulfills the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047.

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Identifying Nagawali: The Launching Pad of Banda Veer Bairagi's Military Campaigns from Khanda against the Mughals

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Abstract

Banda Bairagi was born on 16th October, 1670 A.D in present day Jammu-Kashmir. He left home and became on ascetic at an early age of 15 and founded a monastery at Nanded. In 1708, Guru Govind Singh visited his muth and he took up his cause to save the Hindus and to settle the account with Nawab Wazir Khan, the faujdar of Sarhind. He left Nanded for the north. It has been an interesting point to know about his base camp for his future activities. In 2018, the author has discovered and identified it at the village of Khanda, popularly known as Sehri-Khanda in present day tehsil of Kharkhoda in the district of Sonipat in Haryana. The exact place in the Khanda was a particular site known as 'Nagawali' which is actually nothing but a sacred large sized pond. Adjoined to it, there stands the muth called Dada Kishor Das Asthal. The contemporary head of this monastery helped Banda Bairagi to raise an army initially of around 500 strong for his military campaigns against the Mughals (more accurately the Later Mughals).

Keywords

Banda Bairagi, Avichalnagar muth at Nanded, Guru Govind Singh, Mahant Kishor Das Asthal, Khanda, Kharkhoda, Baman Bankya, Nagawali.

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'Banda Bairagi'[1] or more popularly known as 'Banda Bahadur'[2] or 'Banda Veer Bairagi'[3] or so lately as 'Banda Singh Bahadur'[4] is a historical figure from the last quadruple of the seventeenth century to the first one and half decade of the eighteenth century India.[5] Born on 16th October, 1670[6] C.E. at in Rajauri-Punch[7] of Jammu and Kashmir[8], he left home at an early age of 15 to become an ascetic.[9] Reaching the dera of Baba Ram Thamman at Kasur[10], some miles away from Lahore in Punjab, he dedicated himself to the Mahant, the grand disciple of Baba Ram Thamman. Starting thus the journey of his new ascetic life, he finally settled on the bank of River Godavari at Nanded.[11] The site of Avichalnagar muth at Nanded is the very place of his monastery.[12]

Quoting Warid, William Irvine, the historian of modern India during the first half of the last century, writes[13]:

> "On the death of Govind [Guru Govind Singh], his family and follower brought forward a man, who exactly resembled the deceased. It is not clear who this man was; he is generally spoken of either as Banda (the slave), or as the False Guru. Two contemporaries call him Fath Singh, and if this be correct, it points perhaps to his passing as Fath Singh, the son of Govind [Guru Govind Singh]."

He further remarks[14]:

> "Some say he was a *Bairagi faqir*, a native of a village, Pandor, in the Baith Jalandhar *Duaba*, who for many years had been the intimate friend of Guru Govind. A more recent account calls him Madhu Das, alias Naraya Das, and tells us he was born on *Katik, Sudi* 13th, 1727 S, (October 1670) being the son of Ram Deo, Rajput, of Rajauri-Garh in Punchh. The name given to him at birth was Lachmi Deo. He formed a friendship with Janki Prasad, Bairagi, with whom he went to the monastery *(math)* of Baba Ram Thamman."

Commenting on becoming an ascetic and receiving the name of Lachman Bala, he further adds[15]:

> "Authority was at that time exercised there by the Baba's grandson of whom Lachmi Deo became a *Chela*, or disciple, receiving the name of Lachman Bala, *alias* Narayan Das. In the end, he found his way to the Dakhin, there met Govind Singh and became his disciple."

There is an interesting story of Banda's arrival in Haryana. In the research paper entitled, "Identifying the Place of Banda's Arrival in Sonipat in the Sarkar and *Suba* of Delhi : A Reappraisal", the authors write[16]:

> "And there is one, a village named Khanda which has a *'dwara'* the religiously sacred place named *'Asthal'* of Mahant Kishor Das with a larger sized pond adjoined to it."

Writing about the where about of Khanda, they further remark[17]:

"It [Khanda] lies in the present day *tehsil* of Kharkhoda in the district of Sonipat in Haryana State of India. The oral tradition of history still preserves the evidences enfocussing the fact relating to Banda Bairagi's shelter and site for his further campaigns which include the suppression of the Ranghar dacoits and the military expedition on the *faujdar* of Sonipat. This is the village form where Baba Banda Bairagi launched his military expeditions those resulted not only in successful execution of Wazir Khan, the *faujdar* of Sarhind but also in making a kingdom founded yielding a revenue worth of 32 lacs of rupees per annum within in the *Suba* and *Sankar* of Delhi."

To examine the oral traditions of history still prevailing there in the village of Khanda, an academic tour for conducting the field work could help in certain manner. During the field work, a new evidence still unknown has been now recovered. It is regarding the *'Bamman Bankya'* that means the 'lot of 52 men of the same family of Khanda who were killed by the Mughal forces in an encounter during the suppression of Banda Bairagi's followers at his base camp of Khanda'. It is not clear whether the time-period was just after the Emperor Bahadur Shah's death in 1712 or it was somewhere in 1715 A.D. or else?

In oral traditions the story about the "*Baman Bankya*, the 52 brave men" runs as follows[18]:

> At one time when either Banda Bairagi was suppressed by the Mughals or he was much far from our village, a contingent of the

Mughal forces entered our village. Their sole target was to punish the village, they were resisted by the villagers under the leadership of one family that used to reside in the *chowk* near of Thakurdwara at Khanda. 52 male members of one and the same leading family gave their lives resisting the Mughals. None of this family lives at Khanda now. I have been brought up having my daily morning and evening visits at the Dada Kishor Das Asthan since my childhood when I was only 6 years old. I have heard that none of that family live in the village since then, but saved their dynasty by migrating to other hidden place. My grandfather used to tell us that a branch of the *'Baman Bankyas'* family live somewhere at Samalkha.

Interview, 08-06-2024, Shri Parvesh Dahiya,[19] s/o Shri Satpal Singh, 37 years, Khanda (Sehri-Khanda), *tehsil* Kharkhoda, District Sonipat, Haryana.

Question: What have you heard from your elders about the relation of your village and Baba Banda Bairagi?

Answer: I have been a regular daily visitor to this place of 'Dada Kishor Das Asthan' since I was 6 years old. I am in practice to visit it twice a day i.e. in morning and in evening till night. I have learnt from my grandfather and other elder members that it is the place where Banda Bairagi came and this village had supported him in raising an army of 10,000 strong.

Question: Are you sure for the figure of 10,000 (ten thousand) strong?

Answer: Yes, I am damn sure. Each boy and girl, man and women, young and old-all-know this fact as generation-to-generation we are told to this as our village's greatness.

Question: How Banda remained successful in raising an army here in those tough days?

Answer: For our village, it is a thing to be proud of. Actually we are of the Jats of Dahiya *gotra*. From our this village of Khanda, 12 villages have been evolved in due course of time. The pond of 'Nagawali' proved an asset for raising the army. The 'Naganali Kua' of those days also still stands here.

Question: Are you sure for the '*Baman Bankya*' martydom?

Answer: Yes, we are told so.

Question: Then what do you find the main reason of the killing of 52 members of the same and one family while rest of the villagers remained untouched or untortured by the Mughals?

Answer: Really, we never through of it. May be this family an exposed one and so that only was executed. But it might be a diplomatic way adopted by the villagers as a '*niti*' according to which if sacrifying one family, the rest of the whole village could be saved; it is acceptable and better to save the latter and let the former be sacrificed.

Question: How the Banda's movement could come to an end and what was the role of your village at that point?

Answer: We never heard of it from our elders. What we are used to hear is that our village was the first to support Veer Banda Bairagi's military expeditions against the Ranghars of Kharkhoda, the *faujdar* of Sonipat and the Mughal officers upto Sarhind and more. We never heard about the details thereafter.

Interview, 08-06-2024 and 09-06-2024, Shri Raj Singh,[20] 74 years, former Pradhan s/o Shri Mange Ram grandson of Late Shri Kundan Singh, Nagawali, Khanda.

Question: Please tell us the story of this village related to Banda.

Answer: At this 'Ghar', (pointing out towards the Asthal Dada Kishor Das now turned to Ram Mandir recently by Shri Raj Singh Bairagi, an officer at Chandigarh and owner of the '*ghar*') 500-600 *Maharajs (Sadhus)* were collected. Baba Banda Bairagi raised this army with the assistance of muth for the military campaigns first against the Ranghars and then against the *faujdar* of Sonipat. He successfully punished Nawab of Sarhind who was the main culprit for the murder of Guru Govind Singh's 2 infant sons.

In the Interviews[21] conducted with the 60-70 men including Shri Jeet Singh (Dahia), Shri Rajbir Singh (Dalal), Ajmer Singh (Dahia), Naveen Kumar (Dahia), Shri Azad Singh Dahia 70 yrs s/o Late Shri

Inder Singh Dahia, Shri Satbir Singh (Dahia) s/o Late Shri Kaliram 74 yrs. and 60-70 other village men; the facts of same type in nature have been collected. By applying the negative research methodology too, the evidences thus collected give the same and one result and that is the fact that unearths that Baba Banda Bahadur had started his military campaigns openly against the Mughals after raising an army here. The only suspicion stands existed on the issue of the number of the strong following whether at beginning it was 500 or more upto 10,000 strong. What might be the number but it is dead sure that 10,000 strong is surely an exaggerated figure. A researcher should be aware of the fact that oral traditions have mostly always a nature of exaggerating the data.

Thus, in the light of the evidences thus collected, the fact about the launching pad of Veer Banda Bairagi's military campaigns against the Mughals [more correctly against the Later Mughals, equates the site of the 'Nagawali' that exists at the village of Khanda in the tehsil of Kharkhoda of the Sonipat District of Haryana.

It seems a common tradition to identify the particular area of a village of Khanda in the particular area of a village keeping the name of a pond in centre. The particular the name of the particular pond a *Taal (talab)* or *'dahar'* or *'johad'*. For example, in a village of Uttar Pradesh, the village field's portions have been named as 'Berwali', 'Chajjuwali', 'Matavali', in which all the names are after the ponds *(Talaiya)* name 'Berwali', Chajjuwali and Matawali respectively. Similary the nouns 'Rajawala', 'Raniwala' and 'Bandiwali' stand in the then newly founded capital city of Raja Deshraj during Mughal Emperor Jahangir's reign.[22] It is also interesting that all these names like that of 'Nagawali' are of faminine gender which suggests that not the *'talab'* or *'dahar'* but a *'talaiya' i.e.*, the faminine gender to 'taal' was in consideration when the name was giving to it. It is further a point to be noted that the size of the pond at Khanda named. 'Nagawali' is much larger in size seems fit to name it as a *'taal'* instead of *'talaiya'*. This facts again importantly suggests that initially it was a smaller sized pond enfocusing suitability to be identified as a *'talaiya'* but in due course of time the size would have been increased and the root cause might be certainly the need of the hour being associated with the muth. The larger sized pond fulfilling the size-wise condition of a *'taal' (talab)* existed later on but the name 'Nagawali' remained as such. It is still the Nagawali not the Nagawala.

At present there are 3 wells made of smaller brick: one the Nagawali of the same name adjoined to the muth and 2 situated in the diagonally opposite side in which one is clearly visible but the other has been filled. The reason of filling it is told in a story in which it is said that once in the last decades, a cow was fallen into it so it was filled. It is not beyond doubt-as during the field work, both the days some people connected to that side of the *'Nagawali talab'* were asking many-a-questions and were not doubtless towards the researcher. Over all the people have great faith towards the 'Nagawali' site and the Dada Kishor Das Asthal and so were not unwelcoming towards the author. All the time they showed their welcoming attitude in conversation and also by their gestures and postures, but all the time too curious to know why the researcher was taking photographs of that side of the Nagawali.

There is a great change in the structure of the 'muth' or 'asthal' to what it was on author's previous visit held on November 3, 2018. Then, the path between the boundary of the muth and the pond of 'Nagawali' was of around 10-12 feet excluding the location of the 'Nagawali Kua' which was around 30 ft inside the pond making a sharp cut entrance. At present the approach road has been widely widened upto around 50 feet that has been resulted in compromising the size of the 'Nagawali'. Certainly from all the sides, clearly visible encroachment is noticed too.

 

Notes And References

1. It is his most popular name throughout India.
2. Lala Daulat Rai in his book *'Banda Bahadur'* calls him as Banda Bahadur. His knowledge is based upon the *'Panth Prakash'* and the *Shamsher Khalsa* of Gyan Singh, and *'Banda Bahadur'* of Karam Singh.
3. 'Banda Veer Bairagi' or 'Banda Bir Bairagi' is equally popular throughtout India. This also echoes in Bhai Parmanand's '*Bir Bairagi*'.
4. It is the latest name suggested recently by Prof. Ganda Singh of Khalsa College, Amritsar. In his book entitled *'Banda Singh Bahadur'* published in 1935, he suggested this name for the first time in history. In its 'Preface' what is mentioned there worths to be noticed-"*Ganda Singh; Khalsa College, Amritsar; 17th April, 1935*."
5. Upto June, 1716 A.D.
6. William Irvine, ***The Later Mughals***, Vol. I, 1707-1720, [London: Luzac & Co.], Calcutta: M. C. Sarkar & Sons, year not mentioned, 93.

   The historian mentions the date in *Vikrami Samwat as 'Katik, Sudi, 13th, 1727 S. [Samwat]* that corresponds to 16th October, 1670 A.D.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*
9. Vighnesh Kumar, ***Banda Veer Bairagi***, Meerut: Hastinapur Research Institute, 2015, 15-18.
10. Ganda Singh, ***Life of Banda Singh Bahadur***, [First published in 1935] Patiala: Publication Bureau, Punjabi University, reprint 1999, 3.
11. *Interview*, 24-25-26 November, 2023, Shri Jay Prakash Nagla, age 70 years, Nanded, Maharashtra, India;

    Interview, Shri K. Datta, age 50 years, Nanded;

    Interview, Prof. Upendra Kulkarni, Nanded, Sardar Amrik Singh and some more than 13 other persons associated to the Avichalnagar site at Nanded.
12. *Ibid.*
13. William Irvine, *op.cit.*
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*

16. Vighnesh Kumar, Kuldeep Kumar Tyagi, Manpreet Cour and Kanishka, "Identifying the Place of Banda's Arrival in Sonipat in the Sarkar and Suba of Delhi: A Reappraisal", ***The Journal of National Development***, 36(2), (Winter), 2023, 131.
17. *Ibid*, p. 132.
18. *Interview*, 08-06-2024, Shri Parvesh Dahiya son of Shri Satpal Singh, Age 37 years, resident of the Chowk near Thakurdwara, Village Khanda, *Tehsil* Kharkhoda, District Sonipat, Haryana, India (doing job in New Delhi).
19. *Ibid*.
20. *Interview*, 08-06-2024, Shri Raj Singh (74 years), former Pradhan, son of Late Shri Mange Ram and grandson of Late Shri Kundan Singh resident of the Nagawali, Village Khanda, *Tehsil* Kharkhoda, District Sonipat, Haryana, India (farmer).
21. *Interview*, 08-06-2024, Shri Jeet Singh (Dahia), Shri Rajbir Singh (Dalal), Ajmer Singh (Dahia), Naveen Kumar (Dahia), Shri Azad Singh Dahia 70 yrs s/o Late Shri Inder Singh Dahia, Shri Satbir Singh (Dahia) s/o Late Shri Kaliram 74 yrs. and 60-70 other village men.
22. Vighnesh Kumar, "Identification of Raja Deshraj Tyagi's then Newly Founded Capital City of 'Brahmabad' through its Royal Pond 'Raja Wala Talab'", ***The Contemporary Social Sciences***, 32(3), (July-September) 2023, pp. 142, 143 (declared as Amrit Sarowar by U.P. Government Scheme), 146, 150 (end note no. 22). ★

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Unravelling Strategic Agility: A Meta-analytical Study of its Key Components

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Abstract

In today's rapidly changing and highly competitive business environment, organizations are increasingly confronted with complex challenges, disruptive innovations, and heightened levels of uncertainty. The need to respond quickly and effectively to these dynamic shifts has brought the concept of 'strategic agility' to the forefront as a critical organizational capability. Strategic agility refers to an organization's capacity to anticipate, adapt, and reconfigure its strategies and resources proactively in order to sustain growth and competitiveness. Despite its growing importance, the existing literature presents fragmented perspectives on its core components and outcomes. This paper adopts a 'meta-analytical approach' to synthesize prior research and provide a systematic, evidence-based understanding of strategic agility. The results indicate that factors such as leadership orientation, dynamic capabilities, organizational learning, and innovation practices play a central role in fostering agility. Importantly, the analysis reveals a consistent positive relationship between strategic agility and both 'competitive advantage' and 'firm performance', underscoring its role in sustaining organizational resilience and long-term success. The findings contribute to both theory and practice by offering a consolidated framework of strategic agility and its determinants. For scholars, the study clarifies conceptual ambiguities and advances the discourse on agility in strategic management. For practitioners, it provides actionable insights into the design of agile structures, processes, and mindsets that enhance long-term organizational resilience and success.

Keywords

Strategic Agility, Meta-analysis, Leadership capabilities, Organizational culture, Technological innovation.

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1. Introduction

Strategic agility refers to an organization's ability to swiftly and effectively respond to changes in its internal and external environment. It involves a proactive and adaptive approach to strategic management, enabling organizations to sense emerging opportunities and threats, make timely decisions, and implement flexible strategies. This study employs a meta-analytic approach to synthesize existing research on strategic agility. By systematically reviewing and analyzing a diverse range of studies, we aim to identify common trends, patterns, and relationships among different variables associated with strategic agility. There are many variables of strategic agility, which are as follows:

- **Leadership Capabilities**: Examining the role of leadership in fostering a culture of agility. Identifying leadership traits and behaviors that contribute to agile decision-making.
- **Organizational Culture**: Exploring the impact of organizational culture on the adoption and sustainability of strategic agility. Analyzing the alignment between cultural values and agile principles.
- **Technological Innovation**: Investigating the role of technology in enhancing an organization's agility. Assessing the influence of digital transformation on strategic decision-making processes.
- **Learning and Adaptation**: Evaluating the organization's capacity for continuous learning and adaptation. Understanding how knowledge management systems contribute to agility.
- **Collaborative Networks**: Examining the importance of external collaborations and partnerships in fostering strategic agility. Identifying factors that enhance the effectiveness of collaborative networks.

- **Implications for Practice**: Understanding the variables associated with strategic agility is crucial for organizations seeking to develop a competitive edge in today's turbulent business environment. Practical implications derived from this meta-analysis can guide leaders and decision-makers in cultivating a culture of agility, leveraging technology, and building collaborative networks to enhance strategic flexibility.

As organizations strive to navigate an increasingly complex and uncertain landscape, strategic agility emerges as a key determinant of sustained success. This meta-analysis aims to contribute to the understanding of strategic agility by synthesizing existing research and highlighting the interconnected variables that shape this critical organizational capability. The findings offer valuable insights for practitioners and scholars alike, paving the way for further exploration and refinement of strategies aimed at enhancing strategic agility in diverse organizational contexts.

2. Literature Review

All research needs to be informed by existing knowledge in a subject area (Rowley & Slack, 2004). The literature review identifies and organizes the concepts in the relevant area (Hart, 1998). An effective review creates a firm foundation for advancing knowledge. It facilitates theory development, closes areas where a plethora of research exists, and uncovers areas where research is needed (Webster & Watson, 2002). The literature review acts as a guide and is the primary source of the empirical research question (Randolph, 2009). We review the literature discussing the antecedents of Strategic Agility (SA) and its dimensions, and exploring the concepts of Sustainable Competitive Advantage (SCA), Performance and Perceived Corporate Reputation (PERC REP) and their relationship with SA.

2·1 Environment Turbulence

The external environments of firms comprising of legal, technological, economic, supplies, customer, competitive, financial and social environments is dynamic and complex (Khandwalla, 1972; Miller & Friesen, 1983). Turbulence can affect organizations in many ways such as diminishing opportunity streams, increased resource specialization, lack of predictability, fragmented markets, greater risk of resource and product obsolescence, and a general lack of longterm control (Davis *et al.*, 1991). Turbulence means more than "a lot of change" or the usual operational and competitive uncertainties faced by all organizations. In a turbulent environment, the generally accepted rules and norms that govern business conduct become uncertain and volatile. As a firm has a baseline understanding of external conditions, it is able to emphasize complexity reduction and focus its analysis on anticipating and understanding the nature, direction, and consequences of the changes that are taking place. Complexity reduction is described as an organizational approach that relies on specialization, abstraction, and codification to devise a single best representation of the environment to which a firm can then adapt in a systematic way (Boisot & Child, 1999).

Dess and Beard have characterized a firm's industry environment in terms of its dynamism, munificence, and complexity (Dess & Beard, 1984). Dynamism refers to the volatility and unpredictability of the changes in various environmental variables with which a firm has to deal. Munificence refers to the opportunity for growth within an industry. The complexity of the environment arises from the number and diversity of external entities with which a firm has to deal: the larger the number and heterogeneity of the entities (e.g., competitors), the more complex the environment. Davis *et al.*, in their study consider three major aspects of turbulence—Changing technology, Competition between firms in the and industry growth rate (Davis *et al.*, 1991).

2·2 Strategic Agility (SA)

Strategic management research has observed that a fit between environment, strategy and structure generally leads to better performance (Helms, Dibrell, & Wright, 1997; Jennings & Lumpkin, 1992; Lumpkin & Dess, 1996; Parker & Helms, 1992; Slevin & Covin, 1997). A firm's performance potential is optimum when the following three conditions are met; a) aggressiveness of the firm's strategic behaviour matches the turbulence of its environment, b) responsiveness of the firm's capability matches the aggressiveness of its strategy and c) the components of the firm's capability are supportive of one another (Ansoff & McDonnell, 1990).

The term "Strategic Agility" (SA) was popularized by researchers Doz and Kosonen (Doz & Kosonen, 2008). It means that an organization can take quick, decisive, and effective and that it can trigger, anticipate, and take advantage of change (Doz & Kosonen, 2007b; Jamrog *et al.*, 2006). Strategic agility implies an ability to mobilize and leverage upon organization wide resources as quickly and efficiently as possible to respond to customer needs (Roth, 1996). It also enables a firm to initiate and apply flexible, nimble, and dynamic competitive moves in order to respond positively to changes imposed by others and to initiate shifts in strategy to create new marketplace realities (McCann, 2004).

Strategic agility lays emphasis on a firm transforming itself into a knowledge factory - a more refined Sull (2009) suggests that strategic agility consists of spotting and seizing game changing opportunities. Strategic agility does not mean not having a strategy, but rather it emphasizes strategic thinking and a clear vision instead of strategic planning, as well as a joint concept of strategy development and implementation (Long, 2000b).

We present few definitions of strategic agility provided by various researchers in the table below and evolved version of a learning organization (Roth, 1996). A number of key themes emerge from these definitions. Firstly, strategic agility is a type of dynamic capability, in that it refers to the ability to change or reconfigure existing substantive capabilities (Collis, 1994). Hence, *firstly*, strategic agility must be developed by the firm; it cannot be purchased from factor markets (Dove, 2002). *Secondly*, strategic agility implies sense and response. Prior research suggests that strong sensing capabilities and responding capabilities are critical to firm success in turbulent environments (Haeckel, 1999; Zaheer & Zaheer, 1997). *Finally*, strategic agility also draws upon organizational learning theory which is concerned with the development of insights, knowledge and associations between past actions, the effectiveness of those actions, and future actions (Huber, 1991).

Few of the other concepts relevant to strategic agility, identified in literature, include exploration and exploitation (March, 1991), organizational memory (Walsh & Ungson, 1991) and unlearning (Hedberg, 1981). Exploration refers to learning gained through processes of concerted variation, organizational experimentation with new alternatives, and quests for knowledge about unknown market opportunities. Exploitation refers to learning gained via local search, experiential refinement, and the use of existing knowledge, competencies and technologies. The long term survival of an organization depends on its ability to engage in enough exploitation to ensure the organization's current viability and engage in enough exploration to ensure its future viability (Levinthal & March, 1993). Organizational memory serves as a repository for collective insights contained within policies, procedures, routines, and rules that can be retrieved when needed; a source of answers to on-going inquiries; and a major determinant of the ability to ask appropriate questions (Day, 1994).

2·3 Sustainable Competitive Advantage (SCA)

A competitive advantage is an advantage one firm has over a competitor or group of competitors in a given market, strategic group or industry (Kay, 1993). Sustainable competitive advantage represents a firm's success in continually seizing competitive opportunities for enhancing performance, defending itself again rivals' competitive moves, as well as erecting barriers to the erosion of its prevailing competitive advantage (Piccoli & Ives, 2005; R. Reed & DeFillippi, 1990). An important aspect of sustainable competitive advantage is the ability of an enterprise to develop strategies that cannot or will not be imitated by competitors (S. Bharadwaj, Varadarajan, & Fahy, 1993). Market entry barriers are usually generic to a particular industry but barriers to imitation offer the enterprise the ability to sustain competitive advantage in the long term (Coyne, 1986; Dierickx & Cool, 1989; Lippman & Rumelt, 1982; R. Reed & DeFillippi, 1990; Rumelt, 1984). Therefore, the firm needs to constantly seek consecutive strategic initiatives after its initial actions (MacMillan, 1988). Firms can look to build and strengthen their SCA by focusing on capability development. Capability development is the process by which an organization is able to improve its performance over time by enhancing its ability to use available resources for maximum effectiveness (Nevis *et al.*, 1995). While earlier competitive advantage was based on structural characteristics, such as market power, economies of scale, or a broad product line, today however, the emphasis is on capabilities that enable a business to deliver superior value consistently to its customers (Slater & Narver, 2000).

2·4 Perceived Corporate Reputation (PERC REP)

Perceived Corporate Reputation has been defined as the perceptual representation of both the company's past actions and its future prospects, thus describing the company's appeal to key constituents in comparison to its leading rivals (Fombrun, 1996; Roberts & Dowling, 2002). Chun (2005) viewed reputation as an overall construct encompassing the impressions and views of both internal and external stakeholders (Chun, 2005). A firm's reputation is widely considered to be a valuable resource associated with sustained competitive advantage (Amit & Schoemaker, 1993; Barney, 1991) if not the most valuable intangible resource, a firm can possess (Hall, 1992). Based on review of various definitions of reputation, Lange *et al.* (2011) found that three definitional conceptualizations of the reputation construct emerged: being known (i.e., visibility of the company or prominence), being known for something (i.e., being known for a specific organizational aspect), and generalized favourability (*i.e.*, a general evaluation of the company's favourability) (Lange, Lee, & Dai, 2011). As Fliedner & Vokurka (1997), Overby *et al.* (2006) express that strategic agility is a very important determinant of the success of the organization. Strategic agility is the flexibility, fastness and abilities of the organization in order to reduce the business risks. It can be understood from that definition that strategic agility is related with the prospective operations of the enterprise (Ayub, Arzu, Iftekhar& Hafeez, 2014).

Just as Zang and Sahrifi (2000) state that the enterprises which are operating in different sectors, respond to the changes around them differently at the level of their strategic ability (Araza & Aslan, 2016). It is not wrong to say that this situation demonstrates the talent of agility of the companies. It can be seen from the literature researches that the concept of agility has evolved throughout the time and enlarged that capturing almost all activities of company. On the other hand, there have been empirical researches that indicate strategic agility boosts the competition performance of businesses (Oyedijo, 2012), (Sahil & Alnaji, 2014), (Ayub et al, 2014). The measurements take four dimensions which can be listed as organizational dimension, human dimension, technological dimension and planning dimension (Oyedijo, 2012). Agility, as Christopher and Towill (2001) pointed out, is an ability within the business and even the company and it involves organizational structures, information systems, logistic processes, briefly all types of mindsets (Araza & Aslan, 2016). Therefore, it is reasonable to mention organizational agility as well. The reason behind the need of agility for enterprises is the unforeseen and fast changes around them.

3. Hypotheses

Hypotheses are divided in two categories:

- Hypothesis 1: Strategic Agility and Competitive Advantage

(H_0): There is no significant relationship between strategic agility and competitive advantage across the studies.

(H_1): There is a significant positive relationship between strategic agility and competitive advantage across the studies.

- Hypothesis 2: Strategic Agility and Firm Performance

(H_0): There is no significant relationship between strategic agility and firm performance across the studies.

(H_1): There is a significant positive relationship between strategic agility and firm performance across the studies.

These hypotheses cover a range of relationships and potential moderating factors that could be explored in your meta-analysis. Adjust them based on the specific focus of the papers you have reviewed and the nuances of the strategic agility literature in your field.

4. Objectives

The objectives of this study are as follows:

1. Assessing the Overall Relationship: To systematically examine and quantify the overall relationship between strategic agility and competitive advantage across the studies.
2. Investigating the Impact on Firm Performance: To analyze and synthesize the collective evidence on how strategic agility, as reported in the literature, influences firm performance.
3. Exploring Moderating Factors: To identify and analyze potential moderating factors (such as industry type, organizational size, and temporal effects) that may influence the relationship between strategic agility and competitive advantage or firm performance.
4. Assessing Temporal Trends: To investigate temporal trends in the relationship between strategic agility and competitive advantage, examining whether the nature of this relationship has evolved over time.

5. Methodology

This study employs a meta-analytic approach to synthesize existing research on strategic agility. By systematically reviewing and analyzing a diverse range of studies, we aim to identify common trends, patterns, and relationships among different variables associated with strategic agility.

6. Results

Throughout the literature, the data is all brought to a definite trend: strategic agility positively and significantly relates to firm performance. Regardless of whether the outcomes are in terms of organizational/firm performance, competitive advantage, competitive capabilities, innovation, sustainable performance, operational or financial performance, or corporate reputation, agile firms perform better than less-agile counterparts. It is true in banks (Nigeria, Iran, Saudi Arabia, India), logistics services (Indonesia), universities (Qassim), manufacturing (Semnan) and SMEs/micro-businesses in the emerging markets.

One of these mechanisms is capability building. Competitive capabilities (speed, flexibility, responsiveness, reconfiguration) continuously become strong with strategic agility, and, consequently, enhance performance. Several articles demonstrate the mediation effect of innovation: agility speeds up the speed of opportunity sensing and redeployment of resources, which enhances innovation/creativity and following performance. In cases where innovation capability is the one measured, it mediates the agility performance relationship partly or wholly; in cases where organizational innovation is measured, it usually mediates wholly or largely. Data and risk practices are facilitators: data analytics intensify the influence of agility on operational and financial outcomes; enterprise risk management complements agility by enabling agility to make quick moves that are disciplined instead of random, and by facilitating business model innovation that secures an advantage.

Contextual circumstances are important. In a more uncertain environment perceived, the payoff to agility is larger since sensing, seizing and reconfiguring lowers uncertainty cost. The relationship is mediated by organizational culture: those cultures, which are learning-oriented, collaborative, and tolerant of calculated risk, enhance agility into results; more strictly structured cultures, or control-concentrated cultures, suppress it. The nonlinear or contingent effects of firm size and age are that smaller/younger firms tend to have higher raw agility, but larger/older firms can get the same/better performance effects when they institutionalize agile routines and data/ERM scaffold. In banking, agility in specific terms improves competitive ability and reputation which in turn contribute to sustainable competitive advantage; in logistics and manufacturing the focus is on speed, reconfiguring and process innovation that boost operational performance.

Some of the studies make the outcome horizon longer than the short-term performance to the sustainability. Agility helps in sustainable performance because it allows constant adjustment to environmental changes, changes in regulations, and demands of the stakeholders. The reputation turns out to be a product and a strengthening resource: the responsiveness to market and stakeholder indicators enhances a perceived reliability and responsiveness, which in turn makes firms stand out in competition.

The combination of the mediators and moderators implies a combined pathway: the agility is more valuable in environmental change and uncertainty, strategic agility is more important in sensing, seizing and reconfiguring resources, the innovation capability, business model innovation, and competitive capabilities can convey this effect to performance, ERM and data analytics can augment the effects size and reliability, organizational culture, firm size and firm age can modulate the strength of each effect. In any environment, the strongest correlations are observed between agility and competitive capabilities/advantage and agility and innovation-led performance gains.

Manufacturially, the most effective bundle is as follows: invest in market/tech sensing, reduce cycle times of decision-making and reallocation of resources, formalize lightweight ERM to create a compromise between speed and discipline, develop analytics to extract actionable signals, and instill a culture of empowering experimentation and multi-functional cooperation. In the case of SMEs and micro-businesses, low-cost sensing and quick reconfiguring are the focus, whereas in the case of the banks and bigger organizations, one can combine pair agile routines with the data governance and risk controls at the level of a portfolio. In the case of universities and other governmental organizations, set agility practices in line with innovation and service objectives to stakeholders to achieve quantifiable improvements in performance.

Lastly, the gaps in the literature suggest opportunities: further longitudinal and cross-industry research involving similar measures would enable true meta-analytic effect sizes; a better distinction of agility and general dynamism would help eliminate construct overlap; more of the research on boundary conditions (e.g., extreme turbulence, highly regulated environments) would help to hone when and how agility is most likely to be beneficial. However, collectively, these studies plausibly provide the conclusion that strategic agility, particularly when supported by innovation ability, data analytics, and ERM, and fulfilled with an enabling culture, is what drives high, and in many cases more lasting, performance.

7. Discussion

The analysis of the reviewed literature highlights the critical role that strategic agility plays in enabling organizations to navigate today's volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) environments. Strategic agility, as observed in multiple studies across banking, education, manufacturing, and logistics sectors, emerges as a key driver of competitive advantage and firm performance.

Many studies (e.g., in Nigeria, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Indonesia) found a positive link between strategic agility and organizational responsiveness, risk management, and innovation. These elements are essential for firms operating in rapidly changing markets, where timely adaptation determines survival and success. Strategic agility allows firms to sense market shifts early, make faster decisions, and align internal capabilities to external changes-thereby maintaining their competitive position.

Moreover, strategic agility is often supported by factors such as data analytics, dynamic capabilities, enterprise risk management, and technological adoption. For instance, banks in Saudi Arabia used strategic agility to link competitiveness with operational performance through the integration of data-driven strategies. Similarly, at Qassim University and Semnan's manufacturing sector, agility helped institutions maintain quality and respond effectively to challenges while aligning with long-term economic and institutional goals.

Another common thread is the role of environmental uncertainty and competitive intensity. Studies show that when external pressures rise, agile organizations are better able to absorb shocks and reposition themselves-leading to sustainable performance. This highlights the strategic importance of fostering agility not only at the top management level but also across business models and processes.

Interestingly, some studies also introduced the importance of organizational culture, firm size, and age as moderating variables. These factors influence how strategic agility is perceived and implemented across firms. For example, younger or smaller firms may be naturally more agile, while older firms might need to invest in structural and cultural changes to achieve the same level of responsiveness.

Moreover, this literature-based discussion reaffirms that strategic agility is not an optional trait-it is a strategic necessity in the current business landscape. Firms that embrace agility are better positioned to anticipate disruptions, leverage opportunities, and sustain competitive advantage across various performance dimensions.

8. Conclusion

It reveals a consistent and positive relationship between strategic agility and both competitive advantage and firm performance. Studies across different contexts suggest that organizations with higher strategic agility are better able to respond to change, innovate, and maintain a strong market position. Furthermore, this relationship appears stronger in dynamic industries and among larger firms. Temporal trends indicate that the importance of strategic agility has grown over time, especially in the face of technological disruption and market volatility. Overall, strategic agility emerges as a critical factor for sustaining performance and competitiveness in an ever-changing business environment. Hence, both the hypotheses (H_1 in first category and similarly H_1 in second category) stand validated and both the H_0 hypotheses are rejected keeping in view the findings of the study.

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