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# Contemporary SOCIAL SCIENCES

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Index Copernicus ICV : 62.45; InfoBase Index : 2.5

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Volume 34, Number 4 (October-December), 2025

**Research Foundation International, New Delhi**
Affiliated to United Nations Organization (UNO)
(Autonomous, Regd. Recognized Charitable Organization of
Social Scientists, Authors, Journalists & Social Activists)

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

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# Decoding the Finance-Entrepreneurship Nexus: The Case of Women Entrepreneurs in South India

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## Abstract

*Entrepreneurship stands as an accomplished sustainable development tool to generate economic prosperity out of new business opportunities. As per the latest Female Entrepreneurship Index Report, published by the Global Entrepreneurship and Development Institute (GEDI) in 2015, India stands at 70th position amongst 77 countries worldwide. Generating a vigorous social network of backing for women entrepreneurs is fundamental to limit the gender divide in entrepreneurship. As such, proper financial literacy and rational utilization of financial capital are fundamentally regarded as the key drivers of female entrepreneurship, thereby contributing towards the greater goals of women empowerment. The present paper examines the distinct characteristics of women owned business enterprises in India in the context of Women and Men in India Report 2021 published by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India based on the data from Sixth Economic Census Report. Comprehensive interstate comparisons are made regarding the status of women proprietary establishments in South India based on nature of operation, utilization of major sources of finance, agricultural and non-agricultural activities etc. More rational policy interventions for correcting the demand side blockages are vital for expanding the share of women entrepreneurs from India in the global market.*

## Keywords

Women entrepreneurship, Financial capital, Financial literacy, Sustainable development, Innovation, Capacity building and Inclusive growth.

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# 1

# Decoding the Finance-Entrepreneurship Nexus: The Case of Women Entrepreneurs in South India

## 1. Introduction

Enhancing the women entrepreneurship in productive sectors is considered as an integral component of the action agenda of sustainable development framework around the globe. There exists a dynamic association between the innovation and technology assisted entrepreneurship and the economic growth of a region. (Schumpeter, 1911). In the modern context, women who effectively lead a business enterprise utilizing the available resources to generate profit out of it mitigating the risk factors involved in the process are termed as women entrepreneurs. In effect, every woman entrepreneur is an efficient resource manager and choice makers (Coughlin, 2002).

The present paper portrays an overview of the prevailing trends and pattern in women entrepreneurship domain in India with special focus on the scenario of South Indian states. It also tries to unveil the interconnectedness between the trilogy of financial literacy, access and usage of finance and women entrepreneurial development. Identifying the specific hurdles facing by the female owned enterprises is also pre-conditional for framing better policy interventions globally and regionally.

## 2. Review of Literature

Women as business persons is essentially proceeding the cause of sustainable development (Mahajan, R., & Bandyopadhyay, K. R. (2021). Development of entrepreneurial skills among rural and urban women hold direct linkages with not only economic empowerment through improved income but also bring in positive changes in differed domains of socio-political and cultural empowerment of women population. Timely provisions for judicious and adequate financial assistance will boost up the employment of hidden entrepreneurial skills among women and equip them to materialize innovative business models which in turn surges the economic productivity of the nation (Das, M.,2000 and Deshpande, S., & Sethi, S.,2009). Various supportive mechanisms to generate a women entrepreneurship friendly environment, like proper access to credit, professional management training opportunities, technological consultancy services, creative investments in human capital and social capital immensely contribute to the more comprehensive process of women empowerment.

Women entrepreneurs in the developing economies are facing plentiful pragmatic challenges in establishing their own business enterprises in a successful way (Lenka and Agarwal 2017). Women entrepreneurs are an assorted section possessing heterogenous characteristics (Tiwari, N. (2017). Gender specific blockages suffered by the women entrepreneurs in accomplishing business progress in countries like India comprises of lack of asset ownership or possession of collateral securities to avail formal credit, technological backwardness, inadequate skill set, gender biased inheritance laws prevailing in many communities, familial and matrimonial constraints with regard to market access, mobility, security and information. Higher the utilization of the creative potential of the women entrepreneurs in a society higher will be the status of inclusive growth there.

## 3. Women Entrepreneurship: A Sustainable Development Strategy

Policy interventions envisioning resource mobilization and technical assistance to women entrepreneurs in their active domains is vital in achieving the sustainable development goals specially in the post pandemic era. Enhancement of female entrepreneurship initiatives boost up the degree of women participation in the economic activities of a nation and unleash the hitherto hidden potential of economic progress. Undeniably, female entrepreneurship is a key strategy for materializing the twin goals of sustainable development viz decent work and economic growth (SDG 8) and gender equality (SDG 5).

## 4. Present Scenario of Women Entrepreneurship in India

Women led business establishments are mostly concentrated in the southern region of India. Highest share of women entrepreneurs in India is found in the five states namely Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal and Maharashtra. As per the statistics provided in the Women and Men in India Report 2021 published by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India, the total proprietary establishments owned by male and female are 1406873 and 396118 respectively. Also, the percentage of female owned proprietary establishments accounted for only 22% at the national level.

**Table-1: Ownership wise Status of Enterprises in India**

| Men | Women | Individual | Women (%) | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 9342670 | 2452819 | 11834222 | 20.73 | | **Rural** |
| 707430 | 308948 | 1019286 | 30.31 | **Enterprises** | **Urban** |
| 10050100 | 2761767 | 12853508 | 21.49 | | **Total** |

**Source:** Women and Men in India Report 2021; Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India.

**Table-2: Ownership based Distribution of Enterprises in South Indian States**

| States | Men | Women |
|---|---|---|
| Andhra Pradesh | 100799 | 36780 |
| Karnataka | 47579 | 12475 |
| Kerala | 14153 | 14943 |
| Tamil Nadu | 104407 | 18186 |
| Telangana | 27368 | 12183 |
| **India** | **1406873** | **396118** |

**Source: Women and Men in India Report 2021**; Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India.

The table-1 reveals that only 21.49 is the percentage of women owned enterprises at the national level in India. Also, the percentage of women led enterprises is comparatively more in urban areas than rural areas. Among the South Indian states, Andhra Pradesh constitute the state with more number of female owned enterprises (36780). But the south Indian state with highest percentage of female owned enterprises to total enterprises is Kerala (51%).

**Figure-1: Percentage of Women Owned Proprietary Establishments in South Indian States**

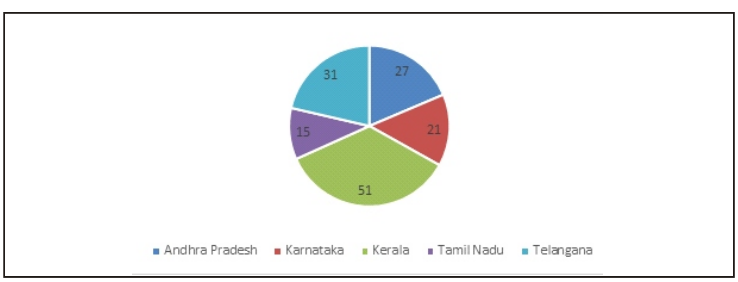


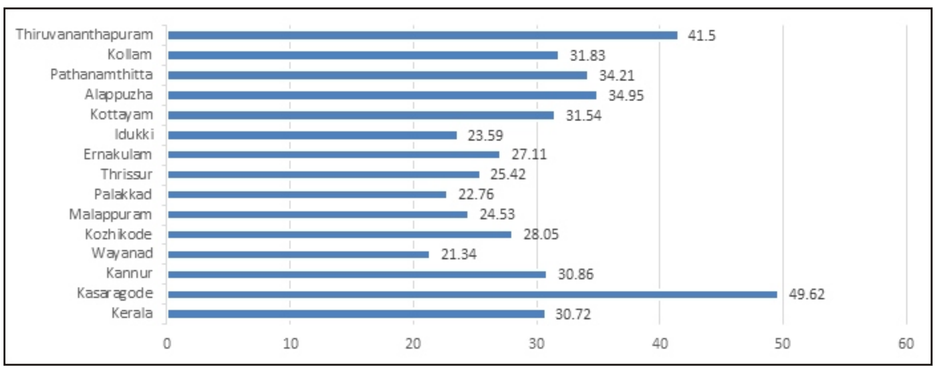
**Table-3: Status of Women Entrepreneurship based on Nature of Operation**

| States | Perennial | Seasonal | Casual | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Andhra Pradesh | 766306 | 82316 | 1290 | 849912 |
| Karnataka | 498295 | 40993 | 6518 | 545806 |
| Kerala | 825386 | 54589 | 33942 | 913917 |
| Tamil Nadu | 1026273 | 45422 | 15914 | 1087609 |
| Telangana | 328637 | 27643 | 206 | 356486 |
| India | 7166019 | 726435 | 158365 | 8050819 |

**Source:** Women and Men in India Report 2021; Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India.

As per the Gender Statistics report published by Government of Kerala, the state level percentage of women entrepreneurs in Kerala was recorded as 30.72% in 2017-18. The districts with highest and lowest percentage of female entrepreneurs in the state are Kasaragod with 49.62% and Wayanad with 21.34% respectively.

**Figure-2: District Wise Percentage of Women Entrepreneurs in Kerala**




**Source: Gender Statistics, Government of Kerala, 2017-18 Report**.

## 5. Financial Literacy: A Pre-requisite to Foster Women Entrepreneurship

Appropriate financial literacy is universally considered to be a critical factor determining the sustainability of female owned enterprises. Timely execution of the financial knowledge, financial attitude, financial planning and financial behaviour constituting the key components of financial literacy elevate the status of entrepreneurial growth. Women business leaders possessing a skillset of resource mobilization, scientific budgeting, financial accounting techniques, informed decision making, investment planning, risk diversification, loan management etc. can constructively contribute to the economic growth of the nation. However, 'the current status of financial literacy in India leaves much to be desired in order to reach an acceptable level, making individuals capable of making sound financial decisions for themselves as well as their households' (NABARD All India Rural Financial Inclusion Survey 2016-17). Wide-ranging assessment of responses on financial literacy in NABARD survey point towards the fact that only about 11% of the total respondents could fare in the category of possessing 'good financial literacy'. It is evident from table-4 that the critically low degree of financial literacy status of rural Indian women makes it hard for them to break the barriers of social and economic exclusion.

**Table-4: Population Group wise Assessment of Financial Literacy**

| Categories | %age of respondents with good financial literacy | %age of respondents who have used ATM at least once in last 3 months time |
|---|---|---|
| All respondents | 11.3 | 21 |
| Rural | 10.7 | 21 |
| Semi-urban | 14.9 | 19 |
| Agricultural | 10.6 | 23 |
| Non-agricultural | 12.1 | 19 |
| Male | 11.3 | 20 |
| Female | 11.2 | 22 |

**Source: NABARD All India Rural Financial Inclusion Survey 2016-17.**

## 6. Access and Usage of Financial Capital

The major demand side factors restricting the growth of female entrepreneurship in developing economies like India is the limited access to formal finance and poor utilization of financial products and services by women owing to considerably low level of financial literacy. Timely access to adequate financial capital help women to mitigate the risks associated with starting and sustaining the new business ventures. Whereas excessive dependence of women led SMEs on informal market financing can eventually worsen the debt risks of such business entities. The recent evidences from the Global Findex Report, 2021 published by the World Bank signifies the poor status of usage of basic financial products and services by the Indian population.

**Table-5: Financial Behaviour of Indian Population based on Global Findex Report 2021**

| Variable | %age |
|---|---|
| Owns a credit card (Adults % age 15+) | 5.0 |
| Owns a credit card (Female % age 15+) | 2.0 |
| Owns a debit card (Adults % age 15+) | 27.0 |
| Owns a debit card (Female % age 15+) | 19.0 |
| Used a debit card (Adults % age 15+) | 12.0 |
| Mobile phone/Internet to make payment, purchase or remittances (Adults % age 15+) | 12.0 |
| Saved any money(Adults % age 15+) | 24.0 |
| Saved any money(Female % age 15+) | 22.0 |
| Saved money at financial institution (Adults % age 15+) | 13.0 |
| Saved money at financial institution (Female % age 15+) | 12.0 |
| Borrowed any money (Adults % age 15+) | 45.0 |
| Borrowed any money (Female % age 15+) | 46.0 |
| Received Govt. transfer into a financial account | 6.0 |

**Source: The Global Findex Database, 2021published by the World Bank.**

**Table-6: Population Group Wise Deposit Pattern of Scheduled Commercial Banks in India**

| Group | Women to Total Individuals (%) | |
|---|---|---|
| | No. of Accounts | Amount |
| Rural | 34.71 | 26.00 |
| Semi-Urban | 32.82 | 22.46 |
| Urban | 33.58 | 21.20 |
| Metropolitan | 31.68 | 14.82 |
| **India** | **33.38** | **18.61** |

**Source: Women and Men in India Report 2021**; Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India.

## 7. Credit Delivery and Capacity building: Utilization Trends among Women Entrepreneurs

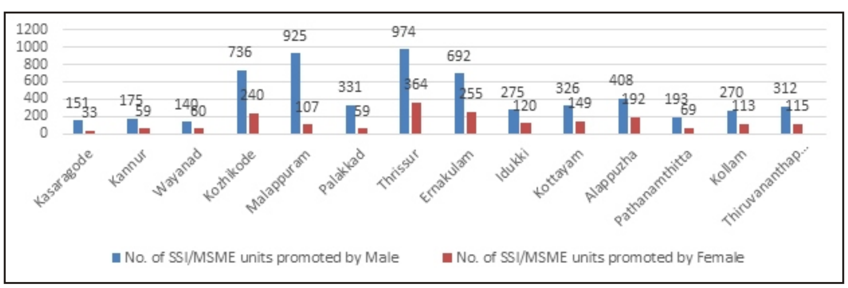
The total number of SSI/MSME units promoted by male and female in Kerala as per the Gender statistics report 2017-18 published by Government of Kerala are 5908 and 1935 respectively. Access to timely and adequate credit and periodical upgradation of skillset is fundamental to the success of entrepreneurial innovations in any field. It can be inferred from table-7 that the two major sources of finance utilizing by the women entrepreneurs in the southern states of India are self-financing strategy and the financial assistance delivered by any specific agencies. The state with high percentage of women entrepreneurs utilizing the state financial support is Karnataka (3.20%) and the least is Kerala (1.08%).

**Table-7: Utilization Trends of Major Sources of Finance by Women Entrepreneurs in South India (Number of enterprises are stated)**

| States | Own finance | Financial support from State | Loan from financial organizations | Informal credit/ Local financiers | SHG loans | Financial Aids/Transfers from other agencies | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Andhra Pradesh | 663439 | 20470 | 8562 | 8573 | 36434 | 112434 | 849912 |
| Karnataka | 464768 | 17513 | 7363 | 2956 | 8994 | 44212 | 545806 |
| Kerala | 864223 | 9939 | 13471 | 2780 | 6897 | 16607 | 913917 |
| Tamil Nadu | 881274 | 26046 | 4868 | 4766 | 4558 | 166097 | 1087609 |
| Telangana | 286081 | 7879 | 4239 | 2418 | 6544 | 49325 | 356486 |
| **India** | **6365447** | **270978** | **86789** | **67525** | **80660** | **1179420** | **8050819** |

**Source: Women and Men in India Report 2021**; Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India.

**Figure-3: District wise Details of Total SSI/MSME Units Registered in Kerala During 2017-18**




**Source: Gender Statistics, Government of Kerala, 2017-18 Report**.

It is also imperative to note that the capacity building or skill enhancement initiatives of governments should be succeeded with necessary resource mobilization, asset ownership or funding schemes too for the successful attainment of entrepreneurial targets. For instance, the statistics regarding the beneficiaries of the skill development training in handloom weaving and the number of handloom units actually started under the self-employment scheme presented in table-8 raises the concerns related with the persisting gender specific barriers in materializing the female entrepreneurship goals in the Kerala context.

**Table-8: Details of Skill Development Training and Handloom Units started under Self-Employment Scheme**

| State/ District | No of persons received skill development training in handloom weaving | | | Units started under Self Employment Scheme | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | No of Female Weavers | No of Male Weavers | Total No of Weavers | No of Female Weavers | No of Male Weavers | Total No of Weavers |
| Kerala | 185 | 0 | 185 | 7 | 6 | 13 |
| Kasaragod | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Kannur | 57 | 0 | 57 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Wayanad | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Kozhikode | 40 | 0 | 40 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Malappuram | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Palakkad | 48 | 0 | 48 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Thrissur | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| Ernakulam | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| Idukki | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Kottayam | 20 | 0 | 20 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Alappuzha | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Pathanamthitta | 20 | 0 | 20 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Kollam | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Thiruvanantha-puram | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 |

**Source: Gender Statistics, Government of Kerala, 2017-18 Report.**

## 8. Gender Barriers in Starting New Business Ventures

In the context of the prevailing gender divide visible in every economic domains, it is vital to analyze the factors detrimental to better entrepreneurship through a gender lens. Poor income status, lack of asset ownership, low degree of financial literacy, limited networking, constrained trouble in accessing start up credit, information asymmetry, low investment in social capital, deficient market linkages, gender stereo typed capacity building initiatives, restricted mobility, risk aversive mind set, socio-cultural roadblocks can be considered as the prime gender specific hurdles faced by women entrepreneurs while experimenting with innovative business endeavours. The creative potential of women entrepreneurs around the globe are constrained with gender stereotyping conditions around them (OECD, 2017). Lionshare of the women led business initiatives concentrate in minor and less dynamic fields and mainly belong to the non-capital intensive sectors possessing lower productivity and profitability compared to male led business units. Broad activity wise distribution of women owned establishments in India are indicated in figure-4 and figure-5. Livestock (23%) and Education (30%) sectors contribute more female owners in the agricultural and non-agricultural activities respectively.

**Figure-4: Agricultural Activities wise Distribution of Female Enterprises in India**

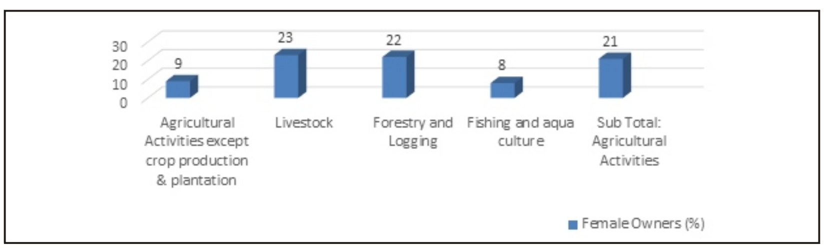
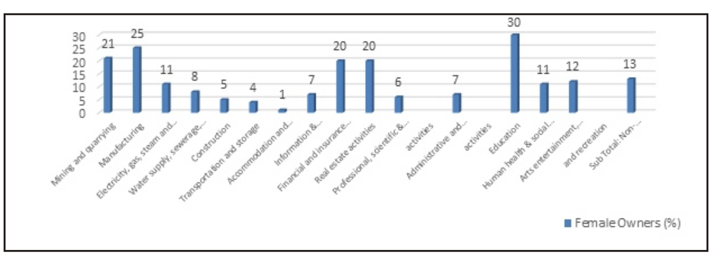



**Figure-5: Non-Agricultural Activities wise Distribution of Female Enterprises in India**




**Source: Women and Men in India Report 2021**; Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India.

## 9. Policy Recommendations

Rational policy interventions aiming for closing the prevailing gender gap, restructuring the societal attitude towards women, ensuring access to resources, upgrading of skill set are quintessential for the betterment of the current status of women entrepreneurship in developing economies. Some relevant policy suggestions in this regard are listed as follows:

- Design and execution of tailor-made business incubator and risk capital funding schemes addressing the specific challenges facing by female entrepreneurs.
- Incorporating entrepreneurship effectively into the academic framework highlighting the case studies of successful role models in distinct arenas of business.
- Imparting financial literacy and business management skills through rigorous training and workshops at higher education institutions.
- Consultancy services on a decentralized mode to cater to the managerial, technological and counselling needs of women entrepreneurs at Government level.
- Provisions of commercial loans through micro credit, timely venture capital funding for promising start ups, crowd funding techniques etc. can be reorganized for guaranteeing women better access to financial resources.
- Awareness and linkage should be given to women entrepreneurs in exploring the new avenues of digital marketing opportunities.
- More public investment in social capital for improving the entrepreneurial network of women.
- Flexible working arrangements and social protection measures in the working environment to attract more women participation

## 10. Conclusion

Women entrepreneurship is a leading light in the pathway towards a women empowered global economy. Women entrepreneurs being a heterogenous entity with distinct characteristics, public policy interventions to ensure access to formal finance, building entrepreneurial networks etc. should be customized to a greater extent. Mere public investments are not sufficient for materializing the goal of enhanced women entrepreneurship. It necessitates the requirement of a strong, dedicated gender sensitive execution system and a positively changed societal attitude towards women entering into business.

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# Rural-Urban Disparities on Adequacy and Consumption of Drinking Water and Electricity across Provinces of Nepal

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## Abstract

*This paper examines the adequacy and consumption of drinking water and electricity facilities across Nepal's seven provinces, highlighting significant regional disparities. Utilizing extensive national level survey data of Nepal Living Standard Survey (NLSS-IV-2022/23) carried out among 9,600 households with 46,870 individuals. The analysis reveals that while government-provided services constitute the primary source of these utilities, their quality varies markedly by province. Provinces such as Bagmati and Gandaki generally report better service conditions, whereas Karnali, Sudurpaschim, and Madhesh face considerable infrastructure challenges. Private facilities remain limited in coverage and unevenly distributed. Statistical tests confirm a strong association between provincial location and utility service quality, underscoring the influence of geographic and structural factors. These findings emphasize the need for regionally made policy interventions to improve equitable access and quality of essential utilities, thereby supporting Nepal's broader goals of sustainable development and inclusive prosperity. Finally, the findings show that government-provided utilities dominate, with higher coverage in urban areas, while private sources remain negligible. Overall, water quality is low, and electricity, though widely available, varies in reliability and "Good" coverage across provinces. Rural households, particularly in Karnali and Sudurpaschim, experience significant service gaps and limited awareness, underscoring the need for targeted infrastructure improvements and enhanced community engagement.*

## Keywords

Province, Rural-urban, Basic services, Drinking water, Electricity, Nepal.

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# 2

# Rural-Urban Disparities on Adequacy and Consumption of Drinking Water and Electricity across Provinces of Nepal

## 1. Introduction

Access to safe drinking water and reliable electricity are fundamental components of sustainable development and human well-being in the modern world. These essential utilities support health, education, economic productivity, and overall quality of life. In developing countries like Nepal, ensuring equitable access to such services remains a critical challenge due to geographic, socio-economic, and infrastructural disparities. The availability of and access to water and electricity involves a complex relationship between public institutions and private entities, with government infrastructure typically serving as the main source, while private facilities often supplement or fill gaps in service. Understanding the distribution, quality, and accessibility of these utilities across diverse regions is vital for informed policy-making and targeted investment. As Nepal continues its development trajectory, assessing regional disparities in drinking water and electricity infrastructure provides crucial insights to guide efforts toward inclusive growth and sustainable resource management.

Obuaku-Igwe (2015) mentioned that research has shown that the health of the general population of a nation depends in part on access to health care, the major determinants of which range from the availability of health services to the quality and effectiveness of professionals and the financial resources to access general and specialized care by patients. Consequently, it is not surprising that policy makers, practitioners and other stakeholders in the global health sector should be concerned about the growing disparities in health especially, despite the intervention efforts by governments. Researchers show that health inequalities are determined by a range of social factors such as; race, education, ethnicity, gender, geographical location and income amongst others, and these factors reflect on and affect other components of a health system, resulting in poor health outcomes, mortalities and financial losses. This is observed more in Low and Middle-Income Countries where life expectancy varies between 36 to 57 years compared to 80 years in high income countries. In South Africa, life expectancy at birth is 61 years (South Africa's life expectancy ranked 162 for females and 169 for males out of the 188 countries). Statistics reveal that health inequalities grew. This growth in health inequalities correspond to an increase in income inequalities. For example, income inequality in the country increased from 0.6 in 1994 to 0.679 in 2013. Of significance is the regional variation in health inequalities: for example, in the Western Cape Province where the white population in South Africa are mostly based, health inequalities and indeed income inequalities are stark (Obuaku-Igwe, 2015). This kind of inequalities appear in various aspects of access to resources and opportunities among individuals, households, groups and even among countries in the world.

Maliti (2019) write that measuring trends in inequality within and between countries, and the consequences of inequality on development outcomes are receiving considerable attention in academic literature and among development agencies. As methods of measuring inequality are advancing, it is well documented that inequality not only constrains potentials for future economic growth (Perotti, 1996; Nissanke and Thorbecke, 2006; Berg and Ostry, 2013), but also decelerates efforts on poverty reduction (Ravallion, 1997, 2005; Thorbecke and Charumilind, 2002; Nel, 2006). In the wake of such evidence, it is no surprise that 'reduce inequality within and among countries' emerged as one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to guide international development efforts in the next 15 years. In addition to vertical inequality (inequality between individuals) which has largely dominated the literature, horizontal inequality is receiving growing interest (inequality between subnational regions, locations and groups drawn along social identity lines, such as religion, ethnicity, and gender) (Stewart, 2000; Stewart, *et al*. 2010). The interest on horizontal inequality is on the rise for many reasons, for instance, the potential intersections between wealth inequality and conflicts (Lipsky, 1968; Gurr, 1970; Bush and Saltarelli, 2000 as cited in Maliti, 2019). The social and economic status of people play an important role in shaping access to resources and opportunities among individuals in any society.

Khan, Saboor, and Shah (2021) have mentioned that tremendous increase in occupational multidimensional inequality has become an emerging challenge across the developing globe. This research, one of many others, examine the inequality in unidimensional and multidimensional spectrum across different occupations at provincial level in Pakistan through HIES/PSLM survey data for the years 1998-1999 and 2013-2014. The estimation of unidimensional inequality based upon positive and normative measures (Gini-coefficient; and Atkinson measure and Generalized Entropy Index). Analysis of multidimensional inequality employs the methodology of Araar (The hybrid multidimensional index of inequality. CIRPEE. Working Paper 09-45, 2009), while using three core dimensions i.e. health, education and housing services. Results indicate the reduction in inequality among all occupations in unidimensional context over the time, with the exception of self-employed group, which have experienced higher consumption inequality. The figures of multidimensional inequality identify that daily wage labor has experienced higher inequality in multidimensional context, because of having smaller income that restrict them to enjoy the basic facilities of life as compare to higher income groups associated with other professions. At the provincial level, Punjab has lower multidimensional inequality across all professions, which was mainly attributed to the fact that wider population of such provinces belong to urban areas and having good access to basic facilities and other necessities of life. Contrarily, Baluchistan has higher multidimensional inequality, mainly due to over spread rural sector along with poor access to basic facilities like as health, education & housing services (Khan, Saboor, and Shah, 2021, in abstract). The inequality in access to basic services among individuals and households prevail in many parts of the world.

Jacob (2023) noted important points as those who have less, value drinking water and sanitation more, and those who have more, value them less. He visited the areas mentioned twice, the first time in the mid- 2000s when an earlier sanitation programme was underway, and the second time in the late 2010s when the Swachh Bharat Mission was being executed. There have been many analyses of the access that people from different religions have to access to drinking water and sanitation in India. National programmes like the National Rural Water Drinking Mission, rechristened the Jal Jeevan Mission, and Swachh Mission, aim at providing universal access to drinking water and sanitation, respectively. The programmes do not take caste and religion into account and are ostensibly biased towards provisioning the poor. But there is a paradox of poor access and high usage of facilities provided by these universal access programmes. A hypothesis based on limited available data and anecdotal evidence says that while Muslims have lower levels of sanitation access, they use toilets more than Hindus. The Indian situation regarding water and sanitation needs a somewhat nuanced understanding of access and usage. There are differences in the level of access that Hindus and Muslims have to these two basic services. There are greater differences in the way they use these services. This leads to the hypothesis that there is a religion-blind paradox in the ways in which 'universal access' missions to provision the two are executed, and the facilities provided are used (Jacob, 2023). However, the inequality of any kind changes over the period of time.

Islam and Mitra (2017) highlighted that the equality of opportunity framework is conceptually linked to the concept of upward mobility (Sen, 1980). Without removing differences in access to basic services, society cannot bring about upward mobility of disadvantaged groups. The intergenerational mobility literature that subsequently spawned from the model of Becker and Tomes (1986) also provides evidence to this notion. For sustained poverty reduction it is important to make different the access children have to certain basic services (such as education, health, etc.) from characteristics that they inherit from their parents. If family variables are inadequate to ensure a higher standard of living for offsprings in their adult life, then favorable neighborhood variables could be used to ensure that as research has shown that community variables can affect the future outcomes of an individual (Aaronson, 1998; Datcher, 1982; Durlauf, 1996; Islam, 2013, as cited in Islam, and Mitra, 2017). Identification of the variables and their measurement may differ across time and space.

Guillen-Royo, Velazco, and Camfield (2013) reported that although income or wealth have been the objective indicators most commonly used by economists, broader measures such as basic needs or capabilities are increasingly employed to assess societies' wellbeing; for example, the United Nations' Human Development Index. These are implicitly founded on normative theories of the 'good' such as the Capabilities approach by Sen (1985) and Nussbaum (2000) and the Theory of Human Need (THN) by Doyal and Gough (1991). Normative theories offer richer accounts of wellbeing than approaches focused only on income or wealth. They acknowledge its multidimensionality and identify 'a flourishing life' or a 'good life' as the ultimate societal goal. For example, the THN maintains that physical health and autonomy are necessary to participate in one's chosen form of life and avoid serious harm (Guillen-Royo, Velazco, and Camfield, 2013). The nature, availability and consumption of drinking water, sanitation and electricity differ by different dimensions of inequality including regions.

Ejechi and Ejechi (2008) have mentioned that it has been estimated that approximately half of the world live in cities (Montgomery, Stren, Cohen, & Reed, 2003). According to Bugliarello (2006) factors such as health, water and sanitary services among others, ensure the survival and prosperity of cities. One of the major challenges facing city or town planners everywhere and particularly in developing countries is how to ensure that safe drinking water reaches every part of the city. Safety of drinking water is of concern to consumers, water suppliers and public health authorities because of water-borne diseases. Huttly (1990) estimated the extent of water-borne diseases in the world. According to his report 1.4 billion cases of diarrhea in children occur annually with 4.9 million children dying. In the same vein, Hunter (1997) reported that about a third of intestinal diseases in the world might be water-borne (Ejechi and Ejechi, 2008). This highlights the importance of safe drinking water in human society.

Adams, Boateng, and Amoyaw (2016) studied on good sanitation and concluded that lack of access to potable water and good sanitation is still one of the most challenging public health concerns of the twenty-first century despite steady progress over recent decades. Almost a billion people globally lack access to safe water; over two billion live without adequate sanitation facilities. The challenge is even more daunting for Sub-Saharan Africa where coverage levels for both potable water and sanitation remain critically low. The urgent need to address the issue calls for adequate understanding of the socio-economic dimensions. Using the 2008 Ghana Demographic and Health Survey, the authors investigated the socio-economic and demographic factors associated with access to potable water and improved sanitation facilities. Their generalized linear models reveal that income, education, household size, and region are significant predictors of improved water and sanitation access. Their discussion and conclusion sections highlight the implications of the study results for water policy formulation and implementation in Ghana, and broadly for other developing countries (Adams, Boateng, and Amoyaw, 2016). In order to improve the status and consumption of safe drinking water, sanitation and electricity policy formulation based on research is essential.

Weststrate, Dijkstra, Eshuis, Gianoli, and Rusca (2019) have mentioned a main finding of the review is that the indicator of 'access to an improved water source' fails to take water quality into account. As a result, water sources defined as improved may contain contaminated water and vice versa. A water quality assessment in rural Cambodia, for example, showed that the water quality of rope pump wells, considered an 'improved' water source, often failed to meet health standards (Bennett, *et al*. 2010). Of the samples coming from 'unimproved' open wells, 18.3% were unsafe according to the Cambodian drinking water standards, compared to 31.7% of samples from the 'improved' rope pump wells. The indicator of 'improved source' covers a wide variety of water supply options, some better than others (Bartram, *et al*. 2014; Brown, *et al*. 2013).

A survey including 224 households in the Dan Nang province in Vietnam indicated that the quality of piped water was higher than the quality of other improved sources (Brown *et al*. 2013). The prevalence of diarrhea was lower among households with access to piped water. When water quality is included as an indicator, the population with sustainable access to safe water decreases drastically (Weststrate, Dijkstra, Eshuis, Gianoli, and Rusca, 2019). This is how the status and quality of drinking water and sanitation including electricity facility differ from one society to another and it changes across time and space.

As in other societies of the world inequality persists in Nepali society as well. Mishra (2010; 2070 VS), Pandey (2010), Gautam (2013) and Nakarmi (2021) have often discussed about class and ethnicity-based inequality in the context of Nepal. Mishra (2010; 2070 VS) and Pandey (2010) have emphasized on class-based inequality in terms of development and status of people's status in Nepal. Nakarmi (2021), focusing on structural aspect of access to resources and opportunities, highlights inter and intra-group inequality within Newar community which is in the line of inter and intra-ethnic inequality analysis made by Gautam (2013). Beyond that Gautam and Nakarmi (2025) have analyzed much about region—based inequality focusing on rural-urban and provincial disparities in the perception of safe and safety. The availability of safe drinking water, sanitation and electricity in Nepal is also not similar across time and space. It is important to explore the disparity in availability of and access to drinking water and electricity that can be observed across rural-urban location and provinces of Nepal which remains unexplored till now.

## 2. Problem Statement

Despite Nepal's ongoing efforts to improve basic utility services, significant disparities remain in the quality and accessibility of drinking water and electricity across its provinces. While government-provided infrastructure serves as the primary source of these essential utilities, variations in service quality and coverage are evident, particularly between more urbanized provinces and remote or underdeveloped regions. Private utility facilities are limited and unevenly distributed, further exacerbating inequities in access. These disparities pose challenges to achieving inclusive development and sustainable livelihoods, as access to clean water and reliable electricity are fundamental to health, economic opportunity, and overall well-being. This study addresses the critical need to systematically analyze these rural-urban and provincial differences that can support evidence-based policy for equitable infrastructure development throughout Nepal.

## 3. Research Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to assess the rural-urban differences in quality and accessibility of drinking water and electricity facilities across Nepal's seven provinces, with a focus on comparing government-provided services to private alternatives. It aims to identify and analyze regional disparities in infrastructure and service quality, exploring how geographic location influences utility access. By employing statistical methods to examine these variations, the study seeks to generate evidence-based insights that can inform targeted policy interventions, ultimately supporting more equitable and sustainable development across diverse provincial contexts.

## 4. Methods

This study utilized data collected from a large-scale national survey encompassing 9600 households and 46,870 individuals (over millions valid responses-weighted) across Nepal's seven provinces. The quality of drinking water and electricity facilities was classified into four categories: good, fair, bad, and not applicable (N/A).

Crosstabulation was employed to examine the distribution of these categories within each province for both government and private facilities.

To evaluate the statistical significance of observed provincial differences in facility quality, Chi-Square tests were conducted, including Pearson Chi-Square, Likelihood Ratio, and Linear-by-Linear Association tests. Assumptions of the Chi-Square tests were confirmed by ensuring no expected cell counts were below five. The analysis allowed for robust identification of regional disparities and patterns in utility infrastructure and service quality.

## 5. Study Area

The data set borrowed from NLSS-IV (2022/23) was conducted across all seven provinces of Nepal, encompassing a diverse range of geographic, socio-economic, and infrastructural contexts. These provinces-Koshi, Madhesh, Bagmati, Gandaki, Lumbini, Karnali, and Sudurpaschim-vary significantly in terms of urbanization, topography, and development levels. This variation provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing disparities in access to and quality of drinking water and electricity facilities. The data collection spanned both urban and rural areas, capturing the lived experiences of households regarding their utility services. This wide geographic coverage ensures that the findings reflect the multifaceted nature of infrastructure challenges and opportunities across Nepal's varied provincial landscapes.

## 6. Rural-Urban Disparities in access to Drinking Water and Electricity across Provinces of Nepal

Access to drinking water and electricity is fundamental for improving health, education, and economic opportunities, yet it remains uneven across many regions, particularly in rural and marginalized communities. Safe drinking water reduces the prevalence of waterborne diseases and ensures better public health, while reliable electricity enables households to meet daily needs, supports schools and health centers, and drives local economic activities. Together, these basic services enhance quality of life, reduce poverty, and contribute to sustainable development, but challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, geographic barriers, and socio-economic inequalities often limit equitable access. Expanding and maintaining affordable, safe, and sustainable systems for water and electricity is therefore critical for social inclusion and long-term prosperity.

**Table-1: Rural-Urban Disparities in Drinking Water Facility-Government across Provinces of Nepal**

| Province | Rural-Urban | Test values | Drinking Water (Government) (In percentage) | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Good | Fair | Bad | N/A | Total |
| Koshi | Other urban | $\chi^2$=757.02 | 13.9 | 29.1 | 7.3 | 49.8 | 100.0 |
| | Rural | df=3 | 12.1 | 29.4 | 7.2 | 51.3 | 100.0 |
| | **Total** | ***p*=0.000** | **13.3** | **29.2** | **7.2** | **50.3** | **100.0** |
| Madhesh | Other urban | $\chi^2$=49896.15 | 10.0 | 15.5 | 5.0 | 69.5 | 100.0 |
| | Rural | df=3 | 5.1 | 4.9 | 1.4 | 88.7 | 100.0 |
| | **Total** | **$\rho$=0.000** | **8.8** | **12.8** | **4.1** | **74.3** | **100.0** |
| Bagmati | Kath-mandu | $\chi^2$=121418.75 | 18.3 | 43.5 | 28.6 | 9.6 | 100.0 |
| | Other urban | df=3 | 31.8 | 44.3 | 8.9 | 15.0 | 100.0 |
| | Rural | | 27.3 | 39.6 | 12.0 | 21.1 | 100.0 |
| | **Total** | ***p*=0.000** | **23.9** | **43.1** | **19.7** | **13.3** | **100.0** |
| Gandaki | Other urban | $\chi^2$=3171.82 | 34.8 | 49.1 | 7.4 | 8.7 | 100.0 |
| | Rural | df=3 | 37.3 | 44.7 | 5.9 | 12.1 | 100.0 |
| | **Total** | *p*=0.000 | **35.6** | **47.7** | **6.9** | **9.8** | **100.0** |
| Lumbini | Other urban | $\chi^2$=23891.86 | 17.7 | 39.2 | 4.4 | 38.7 | 100.0 |
| | Rural | df=3 | 13.3 | 31.1 | 3.5 | 52.1 | 100.0 |
| | **Total** | ***p*=0.000** | **15.9** | **36.0** | **4.1** | **44.0** | **100.0** |
| Karnali | Other urban | $\chi^2$=15714.07 | 38.5 | 33.9 | 14.0 | 13.6 | 100.0 |
| | Rural | df=3 | 28.7 | 28.0 | 13.0 | 30.2 | 100.0 |
| | **Total** | ***p*=0.000** | **34.2** | **31.3** | **13.6** | **20.9** | **100.0** |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sudurpa-schim | Other urban | $\chi^2$ =12718.79 | 20.0 | 24.3 | 7.3 | 48.4 | 100.0 |
| | Rural | df=3 | 13.3 | 32.3 | 13.3 | 41.2 | 100.0 |
| | **Total** | ***p*=0.000** | **17.7** | **27.1** | **9.3** | **45.9** | **100.0** |
| | Kathm andu | $\chi^2$=653243.19 | 18.3 | 43.5 | 28.6 | 9.6 | 100.0 |
| | Other urban | df=3 | 19.9 | 31.6 | 6.7 | 41.7 | 100.0 |
| | Rural | *p*=0.000 | 17.3 | 29.1 | 6.9 | 46.7 | 100.0 |
| **Nepal** | | | **18.9** | **32.3** | **9.3** | **39.4** | **100.0** |

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

The distribution of drinking water facility and quality across provinces reveals notable regional disparities. Overall, only 18.9% of respondents reported having a good drinking water facility, while 32.3% rated it as fair, 9.3% as bad, and a substantial 39.4% indicated that the question was not applicable or data was unavailable.

Looking closely at individual provinces, Gandaki stands out with the highest proportion of households reporting good drinking water facilities at 35.6%, closely followed by Karnali at 34.2%. These provinces also have relatively low percentages of respondents rating their water facility as bad (6.9% and 13.6%, respectively) and the smallest shares of "not applicable" responses, indicating that most households there engage with drinking water infrastructure to some extent.

In contrast, Madhesh exhibits the lowest reported quality, with only 8.8% rating their facility as good and 4.1% as bad. However, a striking 74.3% of respondents in Madhesh selected "not applicable", suggesting either limited access to formal drinking water facilities or a different water usage pattern in the region.

Bagmati and Gandaki provinces show relatively balanced distributions with a significant portion in the fair category (43.1% and 47.7%, respectively), indicating moderate satisfaction or ongoing challenges with water access or quality. Meanwhile, provinces like Koshi, Lumbini, and Sudurpaschim reveal mixed experiences with drinking water, where a notable share of respondents also marked "not applicable" (ranging from 44.0% to 50.3%), implying possible gaps in infrastructure or survey coverage.

The analysis of government-provided drinking water across provinces shows substantial rural-urban disparities, with statistically significant differences in quality (all $\chi^2$ tests $\rho$ = 0.000). In Koshi and Lumbini, both urban and rural areas reported low “Good” water coverage (13-18%), with roughly half of households unable to classify water quality (N/A). Madhesh had the lowest proportion of “Good” water, particularly in rural areas (5.1%), with a majority marked N/A (88.7%). Bagmati and Gandaki provinces showed higher water quality in urban centers (up to 34.8%-43.5% “Good”), though Kathmandu itself had a high proportion rated “Fair” or “Bad”. Karnali exhibited relatively better urban access (38.5% “Good”) but still notable rural deficits. Sudurpaschim had moderate “Good” coverage (17.7%) with large N/A shares. Overall, across all provinces, only 18.9% of households reported “Good” water, 32.3% “Fair”, 9.3% “Bad”, and a substantial 39.4% could not assess the quality, highlighting pervasive gaps in both water quality and household awareness, with urban areas generally faring better than rural ones.

Overall, the data reflect varying degrees of access and quality of drinking water facilities across Nepal’s provinces. While some regions demonstrate better provision and satisfaction, others face challenges that may be linked to infrastructure deficits, geographic barriers, or socio-economic factors, underlining the need for targeted interventions to improve water access and quality across the country.

The Chi-Square analysis demonstrates a highly significant association between the province and the reported quality of drinking water facilities (Pearson Chi-Square= 1,769,921.77, df 18, $\rho$< 0.001). This strong statistical relationship indicates that the variations in water facility conditions are not due to random chance but are meaningfully related to the province in which respondents reside.

Supporting this, the Likelihood Ratio test also confirms this significance with a value of 1,853,429.13 (df 18, $\rho$< 0.001), reinforcing the robustness of the association. Additionally, the Linear-by-Linear Association test, which examines the trend between ordered categories, yields a significant result (147,536.40, df=1, $\rho$< 0.001), suggesting a consistent pattern in the data across provinces.

The analysis is based on a large sample size of 7,185,104 (9600 households) valid cases, which strengthens the reliability of these findings. Moreover, no expected cell counts were below five, indicating that the data meet the assumptions required for valid Chi-Square testing. In practical terms, these results statistically confirm that the quality and availability of drinking water facilities vary significantly across Nepal's provinces, highlighting regional disparities that warrant further investigation and policy attention. The opinion of people on the availability and quality of drinking water facility is shown in Table-2.

**Table-2: Rural-Urban Disparities in Drinking Water Facility-Private/ Non-government across Provinces of Nepal**

| Province | Rural-Urban | Test values | Drinking Water (Private/Non-Government) (In percentage) | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Good | Fair | Bad | N/A | Total |
| Koshi | Other urban | $\chi^2$=9013.63 | 7.0 | 25.4 | 4.7 | 62.9 | 100.0 |
| | Rural | df=3 | 9.5 | 30.6 | 2.6 | 57.3 | 100.0 |
| | **Total** | ***p*=0.000** | **7.9** | **27.2** | **4.0** | **61.0** | **100.0** |
| Madhesh | Other urban | $\chi^2$=10339.27 | 5.6 | 30.7 | 5.2 | 58.5 | 100.0 |
| | Rural | df=3 | 7.8 | 24.7 | 2.7 | 64.8 | 100.0 |
| | **Total** | **$\rho$=0.000** | **6.1** | **29.2** | **4.5** | **60.1** | **100.0** |
| Bagmati | Kath-mandu | $\chi^2$=13960.50 | 11.3 | 44.4 | 8.8 | 35.4 | 100.0 |
| | Other urban | df=3 | 10.6 | 41.1 | 6.2 | 42.2 | 100.0 |
| | Rural | | 9.5 | 37.1 | 7.6 | 45.9 | 100.0 |
| | **Total** | ***p*=0.000** | **10.8** | **42.1** | **7.8** | **39.3** | **100.0** |
| Gandaki | Other urban | $\chi^2$ =4649.49 | 8.6 | 27.5 | 3.1 | 60.8 | 100.0 |
| | Rural | df=3 | 10.4 | 33.0 | 1.4 | 55.2 | 100.0 |
| | **Total** | ***p***=0.000 | **9.2** | **29.2** | **2.6** | **59.0** | **100.0** |
| Lumbini | Other urban | $\chi^2$=29677.83 | 7.2 | 24.2 | 3.0 | 65.5 | 100.0 |
| | Rural | df=3 | 6.5 | 14.2 | 1.0 | 78.3 | 100.0 |
| | **Total** | ***p*=0.000** | **6.9** | **20.2** | **2.2** | **70.6** | **100.0** |
| Karnali | Other urban | $\chi^2$=12345.07 | 4.2 | 10.5 | 2.8 | 82.5 | 100.0 |
| | Rural | df=3 | 10.8 | 18.0 | 3.6 | 67.5 | 100.0 |
| | **Total** | ***p*=0.000** | **7.1** | **13.8** | **3.2** | **76.0** | **100.0** |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sudurpa-schim | Other urban | $\chi^2$=12233.32 | 8.7 | 10.5 | 1.4 | 79.4 | 100.0 |
| | Rural | df=3 | 1.5 | 9.4 | 1.9 | 87.2 | 100.0 |
| | **Total** | ***p*=0.000** | **6.2** | **10.1** | **1.5** | **82.1** | **100.0** |
| | Kathm andu | $\chi^2$=265351.05 | 11.3 | 44.4 | 8.8 | 35.4 | 100.0 |
| | Other urban | df=3 | 7.3 | 26.4 | 4.1 | 62.2 | 100.0 |
| | Rural | *p*=0.000 | 8.0 | 23.8 | 2.8 | 65.4 | 100.0 |
| **Nepal** | | | **8.0** | **27.8** | **4.2** | **60.0** | **100.0** |

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

The distribution of private drinking water facilities across Nepal's provinces reveals a more limited presence compared to overall drinking water facilities, with only 8.0% of respondents rating their private water facility as good, 27.8% as fair, and 4.2% as bad. A striking 60.0% of respondents selected "not applicable", indicating that a majority either do not have access to or do not rely on private drinking water sources.

Examining province-specific patterns, Bagmati shows the highest share of good private drinking water facilities at 10.8%, with a substantial 42.1% rating them as fair. In contrast, provinces such as Karnali (7.1% good) and Sudurpaschim (6.2% good) report much lower percentages of good private facilities and the highest proportions of "not applicable" responses-76.0% and 82.1% respectively-implying that private water sources are less common or less accessible in these regions.

Lumbini also reflects limited access to private facilities, with only 6.9% reporting good conditions and 70.6% indicating non-applicability. Koshi, Madhesh, and Gandaki provinces show similar patterns where around 60% of respondents do not rely on private drinking water, and fair ratings hover between 20% and 30%.

Overall, the data suggest that private drinking water facilities are not widespread across Nepal, with regional disparities reflecting varying availability and reliance. Bagmati appears relatively better served by private facilities, while Karnali and Sudurpaschim face the greatest gaps. This highlights a potential area for infrastructure development and investment, especially in provinces where private water sources are scarce.

The analysis of private or non-government drinking water across provinces reveals widespread low coverage of "Good" quality water, with significant rural-urban differences (all $\chi^2$ tests $\rho = 0.000$). Overall, only 8.0% of households reported "Good" water, 27.8% "Fair", 4.2% "Bad", and a striking 60.0% were unable to assess the quality (N/A). Koshi, Madhesh, and Lumbini provinces had slightly higher rural "Good" coverage than urban areas, though a majority of households still marked N/A (57-78%). Bagmati province, including Kathmandu, reported the highest proportion of "Good" and "Fair" private water (10-11% and 37-44%, respectively), but N/A remained substantial. Gandaki and Karnali showed modest urban-rural differences, with urban centers generally slightly lower in "Good" water but similar in "Fair". Sudurpaschim had the lowest rural access to "Good" private water (1.5%), with N/A dominating (87.2%). Across all provinces, urban households tended to report slightly better access to private water than rural counterparts, but overall awareness and quality remained limited, indicating that non-government sources are not widely recognized or consistently reliable.

The Chi-Square test results indicate a statistically significant relationship between province and the quality of private drinking water facilities (Pearson Chi-Square=548,812.30, df=18, $\rho<0.001$). This suggests that the variations in private water facility conditions across provinces are unlikely to be due to chance, underscoring meaningful regional differences.

The Likelihood Ratio test further supports this conclusion with a significant value of 567,145.35 (df=18, $\rho<0.001$). Additionally, the Linear-by-Linear Association test reveals a significant trend (115,827.32, df=1, $\rho<0.001$), indicating a consistent pattern in the ordered categories of private water facility quality across provinces.

With a large sample size of 7,185,104 (9600 households) valid cases, these findings are robust. The absence of cells with expected counts below five confirms that the assumptions for Chi-Square testing are satisfied, lending credibility to the results.

In summary, the data clearly demonstrate significant provincial disparities in access to and quality of private drinking water facilities, highlighting areas where private water infrastructure is relatively underdeveloped and pointing toward opportunities for targeted improvements.

Another basic infrastructure essential to human life is electricity. This facility has now become primary to all kind of other facilities used at individual, household and community level. The status of government electricity is presented in Table-3.

**Table-3: Rural-Urban Disparities in access to Government Electricity Facility across Provinces of Nepal**

| Province | Rural-Urban | Test values | Electricity Facility (Government) (In percentage) | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Good | Fair | Bad | N/A | Total |
| Koshi | Other urban | $\chi^2$=75315.23 | 38.3 | 54.7 | 3.6 | 3.3 | 100.0 |
| | Rural | df=3 | 29.0 | 48.4 | 5.7 | 16.9 | 100.0 |
| | **Total** | ***p*=0.000** | **35.2** | **52.6** | **4.3** | **7.9** | **100.0** |
| Madhesh | Other urban | $\chi^2$=10851.30 | 43.9 | 52.6 | 1.8 | 1.7 | 100.0 |
| | Rural | df=3 | 48.9 | 44.4 | 3.9 | 2.7 | 100.0 |
| | **Total** | **$\rho$=0.000** | **45.2** | **50.5** | **2.4** | **1.9** | **100.0** |
| Bagmati | Kath-mandu | $\chi^2$=107499.28 | 52.3 | 46.7 | 0.3 | 0.8 | 100.0 |
| | Other urban | df=3 | 51.6 | 46.4 | 0.6 | 1.3 | 100.0 |
| | Rural | | 39.0 | 47.8 | 6.2 | 7.0 | 100.0 |
| | **Total** | ***p*=0.000** | **49.7** | **46.8** | **1.4** | **2.1** | **100.0** |
| Gandaki | Other urban | $\chi^2$ =48937.14 | 47.8 | 49.1 | 1.0 | 2.1 | 100.0 |
| | Rural | df=3 | 38.1 | 44.2 | 1.7 | 16.0 | 100.0 |
| | **Total** | ***p***=0.000 | **44.7** | **47.5** | **1.2** | **6.5** | **100.0** |
| Lumbini | Other urban | $\chi^2$=12707.22 | 28.4 | 67.7 | 1.6 | 2.2 | 100.0 |
| | Rural | df=3 | 24.4 | 67.5 | 3.5 | 4.6 | 100.0 |
| | **Total** | ***p*=0.000** | **26.8** | **67.6** | **2.4** | **3.2** | **100.0** |
| Karnali | Other urban | $\chi^2$=28009.23 | 31.8 | 29.4 | 6.2 | 32.7 | 100.0 |
| | Rural | df=3 | 14.1 | 20.8 | 7.2 | 57.9 | 100.0 |
| | **Total** | ***p*=0.000** | **24.0** | **25.6** | **6.6** | **43.7** | **100.0** |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sudurpa-schim | Other urban | $\chi^2$=78115.89 | 37.3 | 42.0 | 6.8 | 13.8 | 100.0 |
| | Rural | df=3 | 17.2 | 27.7 | 9.7 | 45.4 | 100.0 |
| | **Total** | ***p*=0.000** | **30.4** | **37.1** | **7.8** | **24.7** | **100.0** |
| | Kathmandu | $\chi^2$=426533.72 | 52.3 | 46.7 | 0.3 | 0.8 | 100.0 |
| | Other urban | df=3 | 39.9 | 52.7 | 2.6 | 4.8 | 100.0 |
| | Rural | *p*=0.000 | 31.0 | 48.0 | 5.0 | 15.9 | 100.0 |
| **Nepal** | | | **38.7** | **50.6** | **3.0** | **7.6** | **100.0** |

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

The quality and availability of government-provided electricity facilities vary considerably across Nepal's provinces. Overall, 38.7% of respondents rated their government electricity facility as good, while a majority of 50.6% described it as fair, and only 3.0% considered it bad. About 7.6% of respondents indicated "not applicable", suggesting some households either do not access government electricity or the data was unavailable.

Among provinces, Bagmati leads with the highest share of good electricity facilities at 49.7%, closely followed by Madhesh (45.2%) and Gandaki (44.7%). These provinces also have relatively low shares of bad ratings, indicating a generally positive experience with government electricity supply.

Conversely, Karnali and Sudurpaschim exhibit lower proportions of good electricity facilities-24.0% and 30.4%, respectively-and higher percentages of bad ratings (6.6% in Karnali and 7.8% in Sudurpaschim). Karnali also shows a notably high "not applicable" rate at 43.7%, suggesting significant gaps in electricity access or infrastructure.

Lumbini stands out for having the highest share of respondents rating the electricity facility as fair (67.6%), which may reflect ongoing challenges in achieving consistently high-quality service despite widespread access.

Koshi's ratings show a majority in the fair category (52.6%) with a smaller but meaningful portion rating the service as good (35.2%) and a low "not applicable" rate (7.9%), indicating broad access with room for improvement.

The analysis of government-provided electricity facilities across provinces indicates generally high coverage with notable rural-urban differences, all statistically significant $\chi^2$, $\rho$= 0.000). Overall, 38.7% of households reported "Good" electricity, 50.6% "Fair", 3.0% "Bad", and 7.6% could not assess (N/A). Urban areas consistently reported higher proportions of "Good" electricity, particularly in Kathmandu and other urban centers of Bagmati, Madhesh, and Gandaki (43-52%), while rural areas in Karnali and Sudurpaschim lagged significantly, with "Good" coverage as low as 14.1-17.2% and high N/A values (32.7-57.9%). Lumbini province showed the highest reliance on "Fair" electricity (67-68%) in both rural and urban settings. Overall, government electricity access is widespread but with quality variations: urban households generally enjoy better electricity quality, whereas remote and less developed rural areas face lower "Good" coverage and higher uncertainty regarding the service.

Overall, the data suggest that while government electricity infrastructure reaches a majority of households across Nepal, quality and reliability vary regionally. Provinces like Bagmati, Madhesh, and Gandaki appear better served, whereas Karnali and Sudurpaschim may require focused efforts to enhance both access and service quality.

The Chi-Square test results reveal a highly significant association between the province and the quality of government electricity facilities (Pearson Chi-Square 1,413,931.12, df=18, $\rho$<0.001). This strong statistical evidence confirms that variations in electricity facility quality are meaningfully linked to the geographic location of respondents.

The Likelihood Ratio test supports this conclusion with a value of 1,056,801.35 (df=18, $\rho$<0.001), further confirming the robustness of the relationship. The Linear-by-Linear Association test, which assesses the trend across ordered categories, also shows a significant pattern (303,414.72, df=1, $\rho$<0.001).

With over seven million valid cases analyzed, the large sample size ensures the reliability of these findings. Additionally, no cells have expected counts below five, meeting the assumptions necessary for valid Chi-Square application.

In summary, these results statistically validate the observed provincial disparities in government electricity service quality, underscoring the need for targeted policies to address gaps, particularly in provinces like Karnali and Sudurpaschim where access and quality are comparatively lower. This kind of differences is found even in private electricity across rural-urban residence and provinces of Nepal (Table-4).

**Table-4: Rural-Urban Disparities in access to Private/Non-government Electricity Facility across Provinces of Nepal**

| Province | Rural-Urban | Test values | Electricity Facility (Private/Non-Government) (In percentage) | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Good | Fair | Bad | N/A | Total |
| Koshi | Other urban | $\chi^2$=16139.64 | 1.4 | 8.2 | 1.0 | 89.4 | 100.0 |
| | Rural | df=3 | 4.0 | 11.6 | 2.2 | 82.2 | 100.0 |
| | **Total** | ***p*=0.000** | **2.3** | **9.4** | **1.4** | **87.0** | **100.0** |
| Madhesh | Other urban | $\chi^2$=1389.71 | 0.1 | 4.0 | 0.6 | 95.4 | 100.0 |
| | Rural | df=3 | 0.4 | 4.1 | 0.6 | 94.9 | 100.0 |
| | **Total** | **$\rho$=0.000** | **0.2** | **4.0** | **0.6** | **95.3** | **100.0** |
| Bagmati | Kath-mandu | χ2=21177.20 | 3.9 | 13.2 | 0.2 | 82.7 | 100.0 |
| | Other urban | df=3 | 5.4 | 16.1 | 0.3 | 78.2 | 100.0 |
| | Rural | | 3.6 | 16.1 | 2.3 | 78.0 | 100.0 |
| | **Total** | ***p*=0.000** | **4.3** | **14.6** | **0.6** | **80.5** | **100.0** |
| Gandaki | Other urban | $\chi^2$ =27819.03 | 2.0 | 9.2 | 0.2 | 88.6 | 100.0 |
| | Rural | df=3 | 6.1 | 17.2 | 2.4 | 74.3 | 100.0 |
| | **Total** | ***p*=0.000** | **3.3** | **11.7** | **0.9** | **84.1** | **100.0** |
| Lumbini | Other urban | $\chi^2$=34274.17 | 4.1 | 12.6 | 0.2 | 83.1 | 100.0 |
| | Rural | df=3 | 1.5 | 4.9 | 0.9 | 92.7 | 100.0 |
| | **Total** | ***p*=0.000** | **3.1** | **9.5** | **0.5** | **86.9** | **100.0** |
| Karnali | Other urban | $\chi^2$=2238.16 | 4.7 | 4.0 | 2.1 | 89.3 | 100.0 |
| | Rural | df=3 | 7.3 | 5.8 | 2.8 | 84.1 | 100.0 |
| | **Total** | ***p*=0.000** | **5.8** | **4.8** | **2.4** | **87.0** | **100.0** |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sudurpa-schim | Other urban | $\chi^2$=1168.81 | 1.7 | 5.6 | 4.8 | 87.9 | 100.0 |
| | Rural | df=3 | 2.0 | 7.8 | 4.8 | 85.3 | 100.0 |
| | **Total** | ***p*=0.000** | **1.8** | **6.4** | **4.8** | **87.0** | **100.0** |
| | Kathmandu | $\chi^2$=45620.73 | 3.9 | 13.2 | 0.2 | 82.7 | 100.0 |
| | Other urban | df=3 | 2.3 | 8.6 | 1.0 | 88.1 | 100.0 |
| | Rural | *p*=0.000 | 3.1 | 9.1 | 1.9 | 85.9 | 100.0 |
| **Nepal** | | | **2.7** | **9.3** | **1.2** | **86.8** | **100.0** |

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

The availability and perceived quality of private electricity facilities across Nepal's provinces are markedly limited compared to government-provided electricity. Overall, only 2.7% of respondents rated their private electricity facility as good, 9.3% as fair, and 1.2% as bad. A significant majority of 86.8% selected "not applicable", indicating that most households either do not use or have access to private electricity sources.

Provincial patterns in availability and quality of electricity facility provided by private/non-government sectors reveal some variation. Karnali shows the highest proportion of good private electricity facilities at 5.8%, followed by Bagmati (4.3%) and Gandaki (3.3%). However, even in these provinces, the "not applicable" category remains predominant, exceeding 80%. Madhesh has the lowest reported presence of private electricity facilities, with only 0.2% rating them good and a very high 95.3% indicating non-applicability.

Sudurpaschim stands out for a comparatively higher percentage of bad private electricity ratings (4.8%), alongside a large "not applicable" share (87.0%), suggesting challenges in private electricity provision in this region.

The analysis of private or non-government electricity facilities across provinces shows very limited coverage, with strong rural-urban differences and statistically significant variation (all $\chi^2$ tests $\rho$=0.000). Overall, only 2.7% of households reported "Good" electricity, 9.3% "Fair", 1.2% "Bad", and a vast majority, 86.8%, could not assess the service (N/A). Urban areas generally had slightly higher "Good" coverage than rural areas, but the differences were small, except in Gandaki and Karnali where some rural households reported moderately better access. Madhesh showed the lowest private electricity use (0.2% "Good", 95.3% N/A), while Bagmati (including Kathmandu) had the highest reported "Good" access at 3.9-5.4%, though N/A remained dominant. Across all provinces, private electricity provision appears negligible, with most households either relying on government electricity or lacking awareness of private sources.

Overall, the data indicate that private electricity is a minor component of electricity access in Nepal, with usage and availability highly uneven across provinces. The dominance of the "not applicable" category highlights the reliance on government electricity services or potentially alternative energy sources, emphasizing the limited role of private electricity infrastructure at present.

The Chi-Square test results demonstrate a statistically significant association between province and the quality of private electricity facilities (Pearson Chi-Square=275,637.26, df=18, $\rho$<0.001). This indicates that differences in private electricity facility quality are meaningfully related to provincial location rather than occurring by chance.

The Likelihood Ratio test corroborates this finding with a similarly significant value of 274,938.03 (df=18, $\rho$<0.001). The Linear-by-Linear Association test also reveals a significant trend across the ordered categories of facility quality (4,660.90, df=1, $\rho$< 0.001).

The analysis is based on a large dataset of over seven million cases, lending strong reliability to these results. Moreover, the absence of cells with expected counts below five confirms that the test assumptions were met.

In summary, while private electricity facilities are generally limited in coverage, their quality and availability still show significant variation across provinces. These findings highlight the geographic disparities in private electricity access and underscore the importance of considering regional contexts in energy planning and infrastructure development.

## 7. Findings

The analysis of drinking water and electricity facilities reveals significant regional disparities across Nepal's provinces, highlighting important patterns in access, quality, and reliance on government versus private infrastructure.

### 7·1 Drinking Water Facilities

Overall, only about 19% of households report having good drinking water facilities, with approximately one-third rating them as fair, and a smaller portion (9%) describing conditions as bad. A large share of respondents (nearly 40%) selected "not applicable", suggesting limited access or differences in water source usage.

Provinces such as Gandaki and Karnali show relatively better conditions, with higher proportions of households reporting good water facilities and lower non-applicability rates. In contrast, Madhesh and some western provinces like Sudurpaschim and Koshi exhibit lower reported quality and higher "not applicable" responses, indicating potential infrastructure gaps or alternative water sourcing.

When focusing on private drinking water facilities, the overall availability is much more limited: only 8% report good conditions, while a majority (60%) marked "not applicable". Bagmati stands out as relatively better served by private water sources, whereas Karnali, Sudurpaschim, and Madhesh show very low private facility presence. This suggests that private drinking water infrastructure is not widespread and varies greatly by region.

Statistical tests confirm significant provincial differences in both overall and private drinking water facilities, underscoring that geographic location strongly influences access and quality.

### 7·2 Electricity Facilities

Government-provided electricity reaches a larger share of households, with nearly 39% rating the service as good and over half describing it as fair. However, provinces such as Bagmati, Madhesh, and Gandaki tend to experience better government electricity service, whereas Karnali and Sudurpaschim lag behind, with higher rates of poor quality and non-applicability-pointing to gaps in access or infrastructure reliability.

Private electricity facilities are far less common, with fewer than 3% of respondents rating them good and nearly 87% indicating "not applicable". Karnali again shows the highest presence of private electricity, yet it still remains limited overall. The predominance of the non-applicable response highlights the dominant role of government electricity supply and the nascent or localized nature of private electricity sources.

Chi-Square analyses consistently show statistically significant associations between province and facility quality across all categories-government and private, drinking water and electricity-emphasizing that these differences are not random but rooted in structural and geographic factors.

## 8. Discussion

Access to basic facilities such as drinking water and electricity reflects both infrastructural development and broader issues of equity in resource distribution. The findings of this study highlight that only about one-fifth of households report having good drinking water facilities, while nearly 40% of respondents marked “not applicable”, suggesting either limited access or reliance on alternative water sources. Provincial disparities are striking: Gandaki and Karnali report relatively better facilities, while Madhesh and Sudurpaschim lag behind. This supports Islam and Mitra’s (2017) assertion that unequal access to basic services perpetuates inequality and undermines intergenerational upward mobility. When disadvantaged regions lack adequate water facilities, children’s health, education, and future prospects are constrained not by their individual potential but by structural inequalities.

Private drinking water facilities are even more limited, with only 8% of households reporting good conditions and a majority indicating “not applicable”. Regional variation is again evident: Bagmati demonstrates relatively better private supply, while provinces like Madhesh and Karnali show minimal availability. This echoes Adams, Boateng, and Amoyaw’s (2016) findings in Ghana, where socio-economic and demographic factors-including region-strongly determined access to potable water. In Nepal, too, geographic disparities seem to play a decisive role in shaping household-level water access, with private supply still confined to urban or semi-urban regions, leaving rural and marginalized provinces underserved.

The literature also emphasizes that assessing water access only through infrastructural presence can be misleading. Weststrate. (2019) caution that “improved sources” may not always provide safe water, as shown in Cambodia where rope pump wells often failed to meet health standards. The Nepalese case resonates with this concern, as the significant share of “fair” or “not applicable” responses may hide issues of water quality or seasonal reliability.

This aligns with Ejechi and Ejechi's (2008) reminder that ensuring safe drinking water is not only about infrastructure but also about preventing waterborne diseases, which remain a leading global health concern. Thus, policies focusing only on infrastructure expansion without quality assurance may fail to improve actual wellbeing.

Electricity facilities reveal a somewhat better picture, with nearly 39% rating government-provided service as good and over half as fair. Yet, sharp regional differences persist: Bagmati, Madhesh, and Gandaki experience relatively reliable electricity, while Karnali and Sudurpaschim lag, with higher proportions of poor quality and non-access. The limited role of private electricity-reported as good by fewer than 3% of households-further underlines reliance on the state. Although Karnali shows a relatively higher presence of private supply, overall coverage remains negligible. The findings echo Guillen-Royo, Velazco, and Camfield's (2013) argument that wellbeing is multidimensional: while income and wealth are important, services such as electricity access critically shape people's capabilities and opportunities. Without reliable electricity, educational achievement, health outcomes, and livelihood diversification are constrained, limiting the pursuit of what Sen (1985) describes as a "flourishing life".

Overall, the findings highlight significant provincial disparities in both drinking water and electricity facilities, corroborated by statistical evidence that geography strongly determines access and quality. These results reinforce the arguments of Islam and Mitra (2017) and Durlauf (1996), who stress the role of community and neighborhood variables in shaping future life chances. In Nepal, access to water and electricity is not simply an infrastructural issue but a structural determinant of inequality. As Adams . (2016) emphasize, socio-economic and regional factors must be integrated into policy to ensure that infrastructure development translates into equitable access. Unless provinces like Karnali, Madhesh, and Sudurpaschim receive targeted interventions, disparities in basic facilities will continue to reproduce inequality and hinder national prosperity.

## 9. Conclusions

The analysis of drinking water and electricity facilities across Nepal's provinces reveals significant regional disparities in both access and quality. While government-provided services cover a majority of households, their effectiveness varies notably, with provinces such as Karnali, Sudurpaschim, and Madhesh facing greater challenges in infrastructure and service delivery. Private facilities remain limited and unevenly distributed, indicating a reliance on public provision and highlighting opportunities for expanded private sector involvement.

Statistical evidence confirms that these variations are strongly linked to geographic and structural factors, emphasizing the need for targeted, province-specific interventions. To ensure equitable and sustainable development, policymakers must prioritize improving infrastructure quality and accessibility in underserved regions, fostering inclusive growth that addresses the diverse needs of Nepal's population.

The findings suggest that while government infrastructure for electricity and drinking water covers much of Nepal, the quality and reliability vary substantially by province. Private facilities, particularly for electricity and drinking water, remain limited in reach and unevenly distributed.

Across Nepal, access to essential utilities-drinking water and electricity-exhibits pronounced rural-urban and provincial disparities, with government provision far outpacing private or non-government sources. Provinces such as Bagmati, Gandaki, and Madhesh demonstrate relatively higher urban access to both water and electricity, whereas remote and less developed provinces like Karnali and Sudurpaschim face persistent deficits. Overall, the data highlight that while government infrastructure is the primary source of utilities, significant gaps remain in quality, coverage, and household awareness-particularly in rural areas-underscoring the need for targeted improvements in both service delivery and community engagement across provinces.

Targeted efforts are necessary to address disparities, especially in provinces like Karnali, Sudurpaschim, and Madhesh, where infrastructure gaps are more pronounced. Policymakers should consider regional needs to improve both access and service quality, potentially encouraging private sector participation where feasible to complement government efforts. Overall, this comprehensive provincial analysis provides a valuable basis for planning equitable and sustainable improvements in Nepal's essential utility services.

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# Indo-U.S. Political and Diplomatic Relations in the 21st Century: Strategic Convergence, Indo-Pacific Cooperation, and the Modi-Biden Era

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## Abstract

*The twenty-first century marks a profound transformation in India-United States relations, shifting from episodic engagement to a sustained, multifaceted partnership rooted in shared strategic and democratic values. The post-Cold War period witnessed a gradual dismantling of ideological barriers, culminating in the emergence of a rules-based partnership encompassing diplomacy, defence, trade, and technology. This paper examines the evolution of Indo-U.S. political and diplomatic relations in the contemporary era, with a particular focus on the Modi-Biden phase of engagement and the broader Indo-Pacific strategy. It explores how changing geopolitical dynamics, China's assertiveness, and a renewed emphasis on democratic resilience have redefined the nature of cooperation between the two nations. The study also highlights the institutionalization of mechanisms such as the QUAD, the 2+2 Dialogue, and I2U2, underscoring their impact on regional stability and multilateral governance. Finally, it argues that Indo-U.S. relations have evolved beyond transactional diplomacy to reflect a strategic convergence anchored in the pursuit of a stable, multipolar, and democratic world order.*

## Keywords

Indo-U.S. relations, Diplomacy, Strategic convergence, Indo-Pacific, QUAD, Modi-Biden, Global governance, Multilateralism, Foreign policy, International relations.

# 3

# Indo-U.S. Political and Diplomatic Relations in the 21st Century: Strategic Convergence, Indo-Pacific Cooperation, and the Modi-Biden Era

## 1. Introduction: Changing Dynamics of Indo-U.S. Relations in the 21st Century

The evolution of India-United States relations in the twenty-first century represents one of the most compelling diplomatic transformations in the post-Cold War order. Historically characterized by ambivalence and ideological distance, the relationship has undergone a structural shift defined by strategic alignment and mutual trust. The end of bipolarity in the 1990s created the geopolitical conditions for India and the United States to re-evaluate their foreign policy frameworks (Tellis, 2019). As global power balances shifted, both nations discovered a convergence of interests in areas such as counter-terrorism, technology, trade, defence, and maritime security.

By the early 2000s, Indo-U.S. relations had begun to transcend traditional transactional diplomacy, evolving into what analysts termed a "defining partnership of the 21st century" (Jaishankar, 2020). The relationship's durability rests on a combination of pragmatic statecraft, shared democratic ethos, and complementary strategic goals. For the United States, India's rise represents a vital counterweight to authoritarian expansionism and an anchor of stability in the Indo-Pacific. For India, closer ties with Washington provide access to advanced technology, capital, and diplomatic leverage within an evolving multipolar order.

### 1·1 A New Diplomatic Language

Unlike the Cold War era - when ideological constraints shaped engagement - contemporary diplomacy between India and the United States is guided by issue-based cooperation and policy complementarity. Initiatives such as the Next Steps in Strategic Partnership (NSSP) (2004), the Civil Nuclear Agreement (2008), and later institutional frameworks like the 2+2 Dialogue have cemented a durable infrastructure for political dialogue (Pant, 2021). Equally significant is the personal diplomacy that leaders have employed to shape bilateral engagement. From George W. Bush's outreach to Manmohan Singh to the high-visibility diplomacy of Narendra Modi and Donald Trump, personal rapport has often influenced policy momentum. In recent years, Prime Minister Modi's dynamic approach to foreign policy—characterized by the concept of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (the world as one family) and India's assertive multilateral engagement—has aligned well with Washington's re-calibrated Indo-Pacific vision (Mohan, 2021).

### 1·2 From Strategic Partnership to Strategic Convergence

The transformation of Indo-U.S. ties in the 21st century cannot be understood solely as a sequence of agreements but rather as a progressive convergence of world-views. The early 2000s established the foundational pillars of trust, while the later decades deepened collaboration in domains once considered sensitive - including defence logistics, cyber governance, critical technologies, and intelligence sharing. The United States' recognition of India as a "Major Defence Partner" in 2016 institutionalized this shift, marking India's entry into the elite circle of U.S. security partners (Singh, 2017). At the same time, India's global identity underwent a transformation. From being perceived as a regional player, India emerged as a strategic actor with ambitions to shape international discourse on trade, technology, and global governance. The United States, recognizing this transition, adapted its diplomatic outreach to position India as a pivotal partner in maintaining regional balance in Asia.

### 1·3 A Context of Global Realignment

The current phase of Indo-U.S. relations unfolds within a broader context of systemic change. The rise of China, the decline of uni-polarity, and the re-calibration of alliances have forced both nations to reassess their diplomatic postures. Washington's strategic pivot to Asia, later redefined as the Indo-Pacific Strategy, explicitly identified India as a cornerstone of its regional vision. Concurrently, New Delhi's Act East Policy and Neighbourhood First initiative demonstrated a similar strategic outlook, aiming to project India's influence across the Indo-Pacific littoral. This mutual recognition of convergent interests has produced what analysts describe as "converging democracies in a contested order" (Rajagopalan, 2022).

It has redefined the bilateral agenda from traditional development cooperation to one focused on global governance, supply-chain resilience, and technological sovereignty.

## 2. Methodology and Scope

This paper employs a qualitative, analytical approach, drawing from official documents, think-tank reports (Brookings, ORF, Carnegie), and scholarly works to trace the evolution of Indo-U.S. political and diplomatic relations in the 21st century. While historical reference is made for context, the focus remains primarily on the post-2014 period—especially under the Modi-Trump and Modi-Biden administrations—to illustrate the interplay of leadership, ideology, and strategic imperatives. The following section examines the transformation of diplomatic engagement between 2000 and 2014, laying the groundwork for the contemporary phase of Indo-U.S. diplomacy.

## 3. Literature Review: Theoretical and Analytical Perspectives on Indo-U.S. Diplomacy

The academic and policy literature on Indo-U.S. relations has undergone significant evolution over the past two decades. Scholars have moved from viewing the relationship through the prism of Cold War divergence to analyzing it as a dynamic, pragmatic partnership shaped by mutual interests and systemic change. Broadly, the literature may be classified into three interrelated perspectives - realist-strategic, liberal-institutionalist, and constructivist-normative approaches.

### 3·1 Realist-Strategic Interpretations

A dominant strand of scholarship frames the Indo-U.S. partnership as a strategic alignment driven by balance-of-power considerations. Writers such as Ashley Tellis (2019) and Harsh Pant (2021) argue that the convergence between New Delhi and Washington is rooted in shared apprehensions about China's rise and the broader instability of the Indo-Pacific.

Tellis (2019) emphasizes that strategic cooperation reflects a "balance-of-interests" arrangement rather than a formal alliance, allowing India to preserve autonomy while advancing collective deterrence. Similarly, Raja Mohan (2018) situates Indo-U.S. engagement within a pragmatic geopolitical context, viewing it as a "coalition of convenience" that bridges the gap between India's civilizational diplomacy and the U.S.'s security-oriented approach. This perspective underscores that strategic interdependence, rather than ideological alignment, has become the glue binding both nations in an era of multipolar competition.

### 3·2 Liberal-Institutionalist Perspectives

A parallel stream of analysis views the Indo-U.S. relationship through the lens of institutional cooperation, economic interdependence, and rule-based order. Scholars such as Deepa Ollapally (2020) and Tanvi Madan (2021) note that the two democracies have progressively embedded their diplomacy within shared institutional frameworks such as the QUAD, I2U2, and the G20. These arrangements reinforce not only their strategic alignment but also their commitment to multilateralism. Institutionalist analyses highlight the importance of policy networks—including the 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue, the U.S.-India Strategic Energy Partnership, and the Technology and Trade Council—in formalizing cooperation. Ollapally (2020) argues that these mechanisms demonstrate the maturation of Indo-U.S. diplomacy, which now rests on predictable, institutionalized exchanges rather than ad hoc political goodwill.

### 3·3 Constructivist-Normative Perspectives

A growing body of literature adopts a constructivist lens, emphasizing shared democratic values and identity-based diplomacy as central to Indo-U.S. engagement. Madan (2020) and Malone (2022) highlight that the partnership transcends material interests; it symbolizes the solidarity of the world's two largest democracies amid rising authoritarianism. From this viewpoint, the partnership embodies a normative project - advancing a rules-based Indo-Pacific, ensuring freedom of navigation, and promoting democratic digital governance. Scholars such as Malone (2022) and Chaudhuri (2021) also underline the importance of diaspora diplomacy and cultural inter-linkages, which humanize the relationship and create bottom-up legitimacy for bilateral cooperation.

### 3·4 Synthesis of Scholarly Trends

Taken together, the literature underscores three consistent themes. *First*, India and the United States have transitioned from estrangement to strategic alignment through an adaptive mix of realpolitik and value-based diplomacy. *Second*, their cooperation has institutionalized across diverse domains, from energy and technology to climate and maritime security. *Third*, leadership diplomacy—particularly during the Modi and Biden administrations—has personalized and accelerated this transformation. Thus, the Indo-U.S. relationship, as reflected in contemporary scholarship, represents both a structural and ideational convergence: a partnership forged by necessity, sustained by mutual benefit, and legitimized by shared democratic ideals.

## 4. The Transformation of Diplomatic Engagement (2000-2014)

### 4·1 From Estrangement to Engagement

In the early 2000s, both nations recognized the futility of earlier ideological rigidity. The administration of U.S. President George W. Bush redefined Washington's South Asia strategy, identifying India as a "natural partner" (Tellis, 2006). The Next Steps in Strategic Partnership (NSSP), launched in 2004, initiated cooperation in three sensitive domains—civilian nuclear technology, space exploration, and high-technology trade. On the Indian side, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's vision of India and the United States as "natural allies" marked a decisive diplomatic departure. Vajpayee's outreach established a precedent for issue-based engagement that subsequent governments would expand (Mohan, 2018).

### 4·2 The Civil Nuclear Agreement and Strategic Recognition

The 2005 U.S.-India Civil Nuclear Agreement under Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and President George W. Bush remains a landmark in Indo-U.S. diplomacy. It symbolized Washington's recognition of India as a responsible nuclear power outside the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) framework and opened the door to advanced technology and energy cooperation. This period also saw India's gradual inclusion in major dialogues such as the U.S.-India Energy Dialogue (2005) and the Defence Framework Agreement (2005). By 2008, following the NSG waiver, India had re-entered the global nuclear marketplace—a turning point that elevated bilateral trust and institutionalized political engagement (Pant, 2016).

### 4·3 The Obama-Manmohan Singh Phase (2009-2014)

Under the Obama administration, bilateral ties were consolidated through a focus on multilateralism, climate change, and democratic values. President Obama's visit to India in 2010 and his address to the Indian Parliament marked a symbolic high point, describing the partnership as one that would "define the 21st century". Diplomatically, the U.S.-India Strategic Dialogue (2010) institutionalized foreign policy coordination, while new initiatives in counter-terrorism and homeland security expanded the ambit of cooperation (Ollapally, 2020). Despite periodic disagreements—notably over trade barriers and intellectual property—the relationship matured into a stable, multi-domain engagement.

### 4·4 Institutionalization and Trust-Building

Between 2009 and 2014, the United States emerged as one of India's top trading partners and a crucial defence collaborator. The signing of the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) discussions began during this period, setting the stage for later operational cooperation. Equally important was the deepening of people-to-people engagement through education and innovation partnerships, such as the U.S.-India Higher Education Dialogue (2011). By the time Narendra Modi assumed office in 2014, the foundations for a "comprehensive global strategic partnership" had already been laid. The following decade would witness its transformation into a mature, issue-driven, and globally significant diplomatic relationship.

## 5. Modi Era Diplomacy and U.S. Engagement (2014-2020)

The election of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2014 marked the beginning of a new phase in Indo-U.S. diplomacy, characterized by visible dynamism, strategic clarity, and assertive foreign policy articulation. Modi's emphasis on "multi-alignment" rather than non-alignment signalled a departure from India's traditional cautious diplomacy. Under his leadership, India adopted a proactive approach to foreign engagement, aligning its interests more closely with global democratic powers, including the United States (Jaishankar, 2020).

### 5·1 Leadership Diplomacy and Strategic Symbolism

The Modi government's early outreach to Washington was marked by a series of high- profile summits that underscored India's strategic importance in U.S. foreign policy. Modi's first visit to the United States in 2014, following his decade-long visa ban, was both symbolic and substantive. His address at Madison Square Garden to the Indian diaspora projected India's global confidence and soft power. Subsequent meetings with President Barack Obama in 2015 and 2016 further consolidated political trust. Obama's participation as the chief guest at India's Republic Day celebrations in January 2015 symbolized mutual respect between the world's two largest democracies. During this visit, both leaders unveiled the "U.S.-India Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region", a policy document that laid the foundation for Indo-Pacific cooperation (Madan, 2021).

## 5·2 Economic and Technological Cooperation

Economic diplomacy flourished during the Modi-Obama and Modi-Trump periods. Bilateral trade crossed USD 140 billion by 2018, making the United States one of India's largest trading partners. Simultaneously, U.S. investment in India's technology, energy, and defence sectors expanded substantially (Brookings Institution, 2022). The U.S.-India Energy Dialogue was upgraded to a Strategic Energy Partnership (SEP) in 2018, broadening cooperation in clean energy, oil, and gas infrastructure. The launch of the U.S.-India Trade Policy Forum revived dialogue on intellectual property rights, market access, and investment norms, although friction persisted over tariff disputes and data localisation policies (Carnegie Endowment, 2021). Technological cooperation deepened through the U.S.-India Cyber Dialogue and joint initiatives on critical and emerging technologies, including 5G, artificial intelligence, and space research. These developments reflected a mutual recognition that technological sovereignty was becoming an essential component of strategic autonomy in the digital age.

## 5·3 Defence Partnership and Security Architecture

Under Modi, defence ties with the United States witnessed unprecedented growth. The designation of India as a Major Defence Partner in 2016 formalized its elevated status within the U.S. strategic ecosystem. The subsequent signing of the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) in 2018 and the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) in 2020 enhanced interoperability between the armed forces of both countries (ORF, 2022). These foundational agreements collectively symbolized a shift from transactional cooperation to integrated security engagement. They also reflected India's central role in the

U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy, aimed at counterbalancing China's regional assertiveness. The QUAD revival in 2017, involving India, the United States, Japan, and Australia, further exemplified India's diplomatic re-calibration.

### 5·4 Modi-Trump Diplomacy: A Pragmatic Partnership

The Donald Trump administration (2017-2021) adopted a transactional and personality-driven approach to diplomacy. Despite initial uncertainties, Modi adeptly navigated Trump's "America First" agenda through visible public diplomacy, such as the "Howdy Modi" event in Houston (2019) and the "Namaste Trump" rally in Ahmedabad (2020).

These high-visibility events showcased the growing importance of people-to-people ties and reflected the political chemistry between the two leaders. While trade disputes and differences over immigration persisted, defence and strategic cooperation continued to thrive, particularly in the Indo-Pacific domain. The Trump era, despite its unpredictability, solidified the notion that Indo-U.S. diplomacy had become "institution-proof" - resilient to leadership changes and anchored in shared strategic imperatives (Pant, 2021).

## 6. The Biden Administration and India's Global Role (2021-Present)

The election of President Joe Biden in 2021 marked another milestone in Indo-U.S. diplomatic evolution. Biden's approach, grounded in multilateralism, alliance restoration, and value-based diplomacy, offered continuity with transformation. The partnership has since deepened across climate policy, defence cooperation, and global governance, underscoring India's growing significance in U.S. foreign policy.

### 6·1 Reinvigorating Multilateralism and Climate Diplomacy

Under the Biden-Modi framework, climate and sustainable development have emerged as key pillars of engagement. The launch of the U.S.-India Climate and Clean Energy Agenda 2030 Partnership in 2021 aligned both nations' goals for carbon neutrality and clean technology innovation (White House, 2023). The collaboration on Green Hydrogen, renewable energy financing, and the Global Biofuels Alliance - launched under India's G20 presidency in 2023 - exemplifies this alignment. The partnership reinforces India's identity as a responsible global stakeholder and the U.S.'s role as a technological catalyst for sustainable development (NITI Aayog, 2023).

### 6·2 The QUAD's Strategic Maturity

The Biden administration elevated the QUAD from a consultative mechanism to a strategic policy platform. The first-ever Leaders' Summit in 2021 institutionalized regular engagements, followed by meetings in Tokyo (2022) and Sydney (2023). The QUAD's focus expanded from maritime security to critical technologies, vaccine diplomacy, cyber resilience, and infrastructure financing (Carnegie Endowment, 2023). India's participation in QUAD reflects its nuanced strategic posture - cooperating closely with the United States and its allies while preserving its independent voice in global affairs.

### 6·3 I2U2 and New Minilateralism

In 2022, the launch of I2U2 - comprising India, Israel, the United States, and the United Arab Emirates - marked a new phase of issue-based multilateralism. Focused on food security, clean energy, and technological innovation, I2U2 demonstrates India's growing diplomatic versatility (Brookings Institution, 2023). The initiative reflects the evolution of Indian foreign policy from reactive balancing to proactive global shaping, where partnerships are structured around practical cooperation rather than ideological blocs.

### 6·4 Technology and Defence Synergies

Recent years have witnessed a rapid expansion in defence-industrial and technological cooperation. The Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET), announced in 2023, focuses on joint development of semiconductors, artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and space technologies. These initiatives complement India's "Atmanirbhar Bharat" (self-reliant India) vision while advancing U.S. supply chain diversification (White House, 2023). The defence dimension continues to grow through increased joint exercises, co-production agreements, and maritime domain awareness initiatives under the Indo-Pacific Maritime Cooperation Framework (2023).

### 6·5 The Modi-Biden Equation and Global Governance

The diplomatic synergy between Modi and Biden is anchored in pragmatic trust and global responsibility. Biden's endorsement of India's G20 Presidency (2023) and support for its permanent membership in the UN Security Council reflect Washington's recognition of India's leadership in multilateral diplomacy. During the G20 Summit in New Delhi, both leaders reaffirmed commitments to democratic values, supply chain security, and equitable global development. These developments have elevated Indo-U.S. diplomacy from bilateral coordination to global co-leadership—positioning India as a central pillar in America's Indo-Pacific strategy and a pivotal voice in global governance.

## 7. Indo-U.S. Strategic Convergence in the Indo-Pacific

The Indo-Pacific region has become the central theatre of Indo-U.S. strategic cooperation in the 21$^{st}$ century. The redefinition of the Asia-Pacific into the "Indo-Pacific" marks a conceptual and diplomatic convergence between New Delhi and Washington - both seeking a free, open, and inclusive regional order.

### 7·1 The Indo-Pacific Vision: From Concept to Strategy

For India, the Indo-Pacific is a geographic and civilizational continuum extending from the eastern coast of Africa to the western Pacific. For the United States, it represents a strategic framework to ensure maritime freedom, supply chain resilience, and security architecture that prevents coercive domination by any single power (U.S. Department of State, 2022).

India's Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI), launched in 2019, complements the U.S. Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) strategy. Both share a commitment to the rule of law, regional connectivity, and sustainable development.

### 7·2 Maritime and Security Cooperation

Defence and maritime collaboration form the backbone of Indo-U.S. strategic engagement in the Indo-Pacific. Regular joint exercises such as MALABAR, involving India, the U.S., Japan, and Australia, have strengthened operational interoperability. The Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) and Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) have further institutionalized security cooperation, allowing real-time data sharing and mutual logistical access (Pant, 2021).

### 7·3 The Economic Dimension of the Indo-Pacific

Beyond security, the Indo-Pacific partnership also rests on economic connectivity. India and the U.S. collaborate on the

Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF), focusing on clean energy, resilient supply chains, and digital trade standards (White House, 2023). Although India has opted out of the trade pillar of the IPEF, its participation in the supply chain and energy components underscores a pragmatic approach to economic multilateralism.

## 8. Diplomatic Cooperation on Global Platforms

### 8·1 The G20 and Global Economic Governance

India's presidency of the G20 in 2023 marked a diplomatic milestone in Indo-U.S. relations. The United States strongly supported India's inclusive vision for global development, encapsulated in the theme "One Earth, One Family, One Future". Joint initiatives such as the Global Biofuels Alliance and Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII) were designed to provide sustainable alternatives to China's Belt and Road Initiative (NITI Aayog, 2023).

### 8·2 United Nations and Global Governance

India's long-standing quest for permanent membership in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) continues to receive strong American support. The Biden administration's reiteration of this stance reflects an evolving understanding of India's role as a responsible global power. Both countries have also cooperated closely on counter-terrorism resolutions and humanitarian responses under the UN framework (Brookings Institution, 2023).

### 8·3 Technology, Health, and Climate Diplomacy

Post-pandemic diplomacy has witnessed enhanced Indo-U.S. collaboration on health security, vaccine distribution, and climate adaptation. Through the QUAD Vaccine Partnership (2021) and Climate and Clean Energy Agenda 2030, the two nations have positioned themselves as co-leaders in global resilience-building (Carnegie Endowment, 2023).

## 9. Challenges in Contemporary Diplomacy

### 9·1 Trade and Economic Disputes

Trade frictions remain a recurring issue. The U.S. withdrawal of India's Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) benefits in 2019 and disagreements over digital taxation, e-commerce regulation, and visa restrictions have caused periodic strain (Madan, 2021). However, these tensions coexist with expanding investment flows and a shared commitment to economic resilience.

### 9·2 Divergent Foreign Policy Priorities

While both nations converge on the Indo-Pacific, divergences persist on issues such as Russia's war in Ukraine, sanctions policy, and regional alignments in West Asia. India's adherence to strategic autonomy occasionally contrasts with Washington's alliance-based approach (Jaishankar, 2020).

### 9·3 Human Rights and Digital Governance

The United States occasionally raises concerns regarding human rights, data privacy, and freedom of expression in India. Conversely, New Delhi remains cautious of perceived external interference in domestic affairs. These differences highlight the democratic paradox within the partnership - where shared values do not always translate into identical policy positions.

## 10. Future Prospects of Indo-U.S. Diplomacy

### 10·1 Towards a Comprehensive Global Partnership

The institutional architecture of the relationship—encompassing defence, technology, climate, and people-to-people ties—has reached a point of critical consolidation. Strengthening this framework will require aligning domestic reforms with international commitments.

### 10·2 Joint Leadership in Global Governance

Both nations are likely to play a co-leadership role in shaping 21$^{st}$-century global governance. India's growing presence in multilateral institutions and U.S. support for democratic resilience initiatives offer a strong basis for cooperation on global health, cyber-security, and digital equity (White House, 2023).

### 10·3 The Role of People and Soft Power

Indian diaspora diplomacy will continue to be a vital bridge in sustaining bilateral goodwill. Educational and cultural exchanges, combined with innovation partnerships, reinforce societal connections that underpin the strategic relationship (Mohan, 2022).

## 11. Conclusion

Indo-U.S. political and diplomatic relations in the 21$^{st}$ century reflect a remarkable evolution from estrangement to strategic convergence. Anchored in shared democratic values and overlapping strategic interests, the partnership has matured into a comprehensive framework that influences global governance, security, and development. The Modi-Biden era represents the consolidation of this transformation—an era where diplomacy extends beyond statecraft into shared innovation, sustainability, and leadership. While challenges persist, the resilience of the partnership lies in its adaptability and mutual recognition of global responsibilities. As India emerges as a global power and the United States re-calibrates its alliances for a multipolar order, Indo-U.S. relations are likely to remain the cornerstone of democratic collaboration in the Indo-Pacific and beyond.

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# Ethical Leadership in Modern India: Insights from Deendayal Upadhyaya's Integral Humanism

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## Abstract

*The paper discusses ethical leadership in contemporary India through the lens of Deendayal Upadhyaya's principle of Integral Humanism, a philosophy rooted in Indian cultural and spiritual traditions. It envisions human life where material progress is balanced by spiritual and moral development, guided by Dharma (moral duty). Upadhyaya critiques Western political ideologies like capitalism and socialism for their materialist and reductionist tendencies and proposes a balanced approach that respects individual dignity and social harmony. This framework emphasizes the need for ethical leadership that is culturally sensitive and promotes social justice and inclusive development. Given challenges such as corruption, inequality, and weak governance, leadership must pursue not only economic goals but also moral and ethical responsibilities. Integral Humanism offers an ethical foundation valuing truthfulness, responsibility, community empowerment, and respect for India's socio-cultural diversity. Advocating decentralization and self-reliance, it aligns with emerging grassroots governance models. By examining Upadhyaya's vision, the paper shows how ethical leadership inspired by Integral Humanism can bridge policy-practice gaps and foster compassionate, sustainable social welfare. Ultimately, Integral Humanism provides a culturally rooted, morally sound roadmap for India's pursuit of holistic and sustainable development.*

## Keywords

Dharma, Ethical leadership, Integral Humanism, Moral integrity, Value-based leadership, Welfare state.

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# Ethical Leadership in Modern India: Insights from Deendayal Upadhyaya's Integral Humanism

## 1. Introduction

Ethical leadership is one of the inalienable aspects of successful governance, and especially in such a multicultural and multifaceted society like India, where several cultural, social, and economical aspects interact and require a leadership model that is founded on powerful ethical values and mutual values. Ethical leadership, in contrast to economic or political structures, proposes to bring morality, welfare and sustainability in the governance processes, and thus social harmony and equitable development. This practice has been becoming more evident in the world with more democratic systems being faced with the challenge of increasing transparency, accountability, and trust in them.

Integral Humanism, the improvement of which was propounded by Deendayal Upadhyaya (1916-1968) a progressive political thinker and philosopher, is one of the most powerful native systems of ethical leadership in India. Integral Humanism was a concept expressed in the 1960s by Upadhyaya and proposed as an explicitly Indian socio-political philosophy to inform the task of nation-building of the post-independence Indian state, offering a radical alternative to western political ideologies, including capitalism and socialism (Upadhyaya, 2002). Based on the ancient Indian cultural values and Vedantic philosophy, Integral Humanism is the philosophy of the holistic combination of individual, society, nature, and the spiritual aspect, highlighting the interdependence of these aspects to the long-term human development (Das, 2025).

At the heart of the vision of Upadhyaya lies the statement that human life is not limited to a single dimension but rather a combination of the physical, mental, intellectual and spiritual aspects which are equally vital and interrelated aspects that the framework of governance and policies must respect (Singh, 2025). This is a shift away of Western paradigms that tend to separate economic development or political liberties of moral and spiritual principles.

The idea of Integral humanism allows envisioning the world in which economic well-being (Artha), wishes and passions (Kama), ethical obligations (Dharma), and spiritual emancipation (Moksha) are in equal balance by positioning the human being at the centre of all developmental endeavours (Bhukya, 2023). Dharma, which can be interpreted as the right duty, social justice and moral responsibility is the pillar of goal that determines the behaviour of people and the system of governance (Shukla, 2002).

The current applicability of Integral Humanism is transferred to moral leadership in the present-day governance issues in India. Social inequality, corruption, inefficiencies within the administration, and communal tensions remain some of the major threats to inclusive development and citizen confidence in the democratic institutions (Saini, 2017). The ethical statement of Integral Humanism, which is based on universal moral norms and cultural anchoring, provides opportunities to enhance the integrity of governance, decentralized empowerment, and fair social welfare. What is more, the focus on sustainable development of Integral Humanism can resonate with such global programs as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), where it is evident that the development of governance models that would manage to balance economic development and social equity and environmental conservation are required (Meena & Dhayal, 2025). Such convergence is captured in the changing policy environment in India, which is a combination of ancient knowledge and modern institutional reforms to tackle the intricate socio-economic issues.

The purpose of the paper is to clarify the main principles of the Deendayal Upadhyaya, the Integral Humanism, and examine how these principles can be applied to the ethical leadership in the modern Indian governance. Through delving into the basic philosophical ideas, ethical leadership qualities, and how they can be used in governance reforms, the research aims to close the gap existing in the academic literature and policy implications, and therefore help in achieving a more ethical, inclusive, and sustainable India.

## 2. Literature Review

There are basic ethical aspects of leadership that scholars have outlined, which are honesty, integrity, accountability, stakeholder engagement, and social responsibility . Empathy, moral courage, and ethical decision-making are further stressed as key to successful leadership to promote the welfare of the organization and society by the transformational and servant leadership paradigms (Greenleaf, 1977). Integral Humanism makes these frameworks more complete by entrenching leadership in the Indian philosophical concept of Dharma righteous duty, or moral order, which obligates leaders to go beyond being legal in their actions, and to promote social welfare and justice (Lodha, n.d.). The given philosophical approach takes a critical look at the Western political theories that unilaterally address the materialistic or collectivistic ideas, suggesting that one should have a more balanced approach that respects the individual dignity and promotes collective harmony (Sharma & Nain, 2018).

The historical and contemporary discussions of the works of Upadhyaya shed light on integration of Indian cultural values and government ideals in Integral Humanism (Sunita, 2023). The perennial impact of Dharma on Indian leadership ethics, social justice, community welfare, fairness and moral accountability are some of the aspects that are in the concept. These ideals are reminiscent of the ancient writings of the Bhagavad Gita, whereby Svadharma, or personal obligation, is in line with some larger principles of ethics, to guide ethical leadership (Dwivedi, 2025). Interestingly, modern academia highlights the use of Dharma as an active ethical system that can be applied to contemporary management and corporate social responsibility and promotes such virtues as justice, openness, and empathy (Jha, 2025).

The effectiveness of ethical leadership in increasing the level of trust, commitment, and ethical climates in the Indian organizations is supported by empirical research (Kumar, 2025). Still, the inclusion of indigenous philosophical models like When indigenous philosophies in the modern theories of leadership is a relatively unexplored field. Gupta (2024) criticizes extant leadership models in the view that they overlook the cultural background, and proposes a culturally grounded leadership theory that cannot fail to internalize the Indian ethos. This approach is in line with the restored possibilities of such governance as ethics, a phenomenon that brings together institutional performance with moral accountability via Dharma (Jha, 2025).

Scholars have also contemplated on the dynamic nature of the relationship between Dharma and Swadharma (personal duty) in the context of making ethical decisions in the field of governance (Prakash, 2024). This balance enables the leaders to balance universal moral laws and contextual necessities, and this enhances justice besides ensuring respect to individual autonomy and the diversity of societies. As an example, the concept of Nishkama Karma, meaning selfless action whereby there is no attachment to the consequences, which was introduced by the Indian philosophical doctrine, can be used as the basis of servant leadership as a duty-oriented, non-self-interested leadership theory (Abraham, 2019). Also, the models of corporate ethics like the VEDA Model predict that Dharma involves the consideration of the interests of all stakeholders and environmental protection, which is compatible with business goals and social welfare.

Although this intellectual legacy has existed, there remains a gap between these philosophical ideals and the modern-day implementation of the same in the political and organizational leadership in India. This paper tries to fill in that gap by synthesising the existing literature on ethics, leadership, and Indian philosophy, and consequently, to postulate a framework within which the ethics of Deendayal Upadhyaya, Integral Humanism, can be used to enhance and inform ethical leadership practices that are appropriate in the contemporary democratic governance.

## 3. Philosophical Foundations of Integral Humanism

Integral Humanism is a holistic and integrated conception of human being as expounded by Deendayal Upadhyaya and it is an integrated and holistic view of life which comprises physical, mental, intellectual and spiritual aspects of human life. It holds that there is need to protect this inherent nature by social, political and economic systems to promote balanced development of man and social well-being (Upadhyaya, 2002). The key to this philosophy is the notion of Dharma that cannot be related to the religious connotation. Dharma represents eternal, universal moral virtues such as truthfulness, non-violence, justice, compassion and selflessness, which guides individuals and leaders alike to responsible behavior with a commitment to societal peace and greater wellbeing (Lodha, n.d.).

Unlike Western system of individualism where the individual is a privileged and dominant factor over those of the group, the philosophy of Integral Humanism promotes a union of individual dignity and collective harmony (Kumar & Devi, 2021). It also stresses the fact that, a person is embedded in society and the universe and its true development is not based on material adequacy but rather ethical and spiritual quality. This balance rejects the excesses of capitalistic materialism and socialist collectivism and promotes a compromise also based on Indian cultural and philosophical traditions but which does not ignore the uniqueness of each society in terms of its own Chiti or collective consciousness (Das, 2025).

Upadhyaya resorts to classical Hindu construct of the four Purusharthas, or legitimate purposes of human life, which include Dharma (righteous duty), Artha (material prosperity), Kama (pleasures), and Moksha (liberation). Integral Humanism gives greater importance to Dharma as the guiding principle arguing that Artha and Kama should be sought through the prism of Dharma which would ensure the maintenance of societal balance and prevent the moral decadence. The final spiritual aim of moksha must be in accordance with ethical life and duties (Bharatiya Janata Party, 2015).

In Integral Humanism, Western ideologies have been criticized as too much emphasis on economic wealth or political collectivity and not much on the ethical and spiritual aspects of human life. Upadhyaya argues that governance should be a manifestation of "Dhararajya a government that practices righteousness, which is a state where justice, non-exploitation, and morality governance is not only present but also embraced with political liberty. This type of polity acknowledges the reliance between the political, economic, social, and spiritual domains, and hence the responsibility of leaders to promote good well-being, self-sufficiency, and social cohesion by means of ethical behaviour and decentralization (Das, 2025).

The meaning of Dharma in the interpretation presented by the author Upadhyaya separates it with the elements of restrictive religious persuasions. He emphasizes the concept of Dharma as the universal moral law that cuts across the religious boundaries, comprising of individual, social and national obligations. At personal level, it guides self-control, sympathy, humility and service to the society. On the collective level, it fosters unity, respects diversity, and advances economic democracy by empowering the most vulnerable members of the society (Pandey, 2024). The concept of Svadharma—personal duty in accordance with the well-being of the society is also present in Integral Humanism. This idea motivates both leaders and citizens to be conscientious in their duties basing on the ethical practices and social work. Adherence to the Dharma will help the leadership to be self-less, transparent, inclusive, and dedicated to sustainable development (Prajapati, 2025). The observance of Dharma guarantees that leadership is selfless, transparent, inclusive and dedicated to sustainable development (PMF IAS, 2025).

## 4. Ethical Leadership Principles in Upadhyaya's Thoughts

In his philosophy of integral Humanism, Deendayal Upadhyaya explains the system of ethical leadership that is strongly based on the Indian culture and morality metaphysics. His values are based on Dharma which includes universal moral obligations and social responsibilities that are not based on sectarian interests. These values emphasize five fundamental principles of ethical leadership moral integrity, Dharma-based governance, holistic development, respect of diversity and self reliance and empowerment. These are all elaborated below supported by scholarly evidence of their applicability and relevance in the present-day world.

### 4·1 Moral Integrity

Moral integrity is the core of the idea of ethical leadership created by Upadhyaya, the leaders should be characterized by unquestioning truthfulness, the integrity of morals, and genuineness. Moral integrity means that the practices of leaders are consistent with the claimed values and principles, and thus they are able to build trust and believability among the followers (Brown & Treviño, 2006). Upadhyaya states that the leaders must not just seek to use power in a practical way but inculcate moral principles in their system that define their personalities and choices (Parmila & Singh, 2021). The Indian notion of Satya (truth), which is the key part of Dharma, to tell the truth even in the hardest time is reflected in this virtue. This integrity acts as the anti-corruption and anti-opportunism factor that is common with political and business environments, hence highlighting the importance of ethical leadership as the basis of governance and interpersonal harmony (Kumar, 2025).

### 4·2 Dharma-Centered Governance

According to Integral Humanism, Dharma should be the basis of governance or a moral code which is based upon social justice, fairness, non-exploitation and righteousness but not limited to formal laws (Dubey, 2024). Upadhyaya envisaged a state, a Dharma Rajya, where the rulers will rule in accordance to the moral standards and do this with the interest of all classes and communities (Sunita, 2023). Dharma-based governance demands that the policy decisions should be considered in terms of ethical perspectives, so that economic or political benefits should not be achieved at the cost of the social justice and human dignity (Sharma, 2021). In the modern society, this principle can also be applied to inclusivity policies, which focuses on disadvantaged populations by providing equity and ethical management of resources (Singh, 2025).

### 4·3 Holistic Development

The concept of holistic development by Upadhyaya is a criticism of the reductionist concept of progress which focuses exclusively on economic growth. In lieu of this, it encourages a unified method to social, cultural, and spiritual well-being in addition to material prosperity (Das, 2025). Holistic development calls on leaders to put sustainable practices first, those practices fostering human values, community health, and environmental health (Lodha, n.d.). As an example, educational and health programs, cultural conservation, and livelihood assistance are important elements of this integrative vision. This ideal is in line with the international discourse on sustainable development and social corporate responsibilities that support the idea of ethical leadership as the key to a balanced development that will not undermine the interests of the next generations.

### 4·4 Respect for Diversity

Considering the pluralism of India, a concept known as Integral Humanism underlines the need of leaders to recognise and unite different social, cultural and religious identities (Dubey, 2024). Upadhyaya preached unity among diversities, and regarded heterogeneous traditions as the part of the strength of the nation as well as its disintegration. The ethical leaders should, thus, promote dialogue, tolerance, and inclusiveness in order to achieve social cohesion without subduing individual identities (PMF IAS, 2025). This principle also opposes the majoritarianism and exclusionary policies that weaken the integration of nations and the democratic ethics. In the present day, affirmative action programmes, interfaith endeavour, and community empowerment initiatives targeting constructive pluralism are used (Gupta, 2024).

### 4·5 Self-Dependence and Empowerment

Self-reliance is another unique virtue that guides leadership based on the Integral Humanism and stresses decentralized autonomy and empowerment of individuals and societies (Upadhyaya, 2002). Upadhyaya considered empowerment as one of the drivers of Atmanirbhar Bharat (self-reliant India) and believed that the leadership was to instill the capacity so that citizens could engage in the process of governance and economic life. Ethical leadership therefore involves the establishment of skill building, the decision making locally and social entrepreneurship and this has a negative impact on the having a dependency on centralized power structures (Lodha, n.d.). It is also upheld in Panchayati Raj institutions and new governance reforms that strengthen local governance and democratic participation.

## 4·6 Other Leadership Tenets in the thinking of Upadhyaya

### 4·6·1 Service-Oriented Leadership

Upadhyaya vision is based on service leadership (Seva). The leaders are servants of the society, and their interests are to the benefit of a group rather than their own benefit or political promotion (Pandey, 2024). This is in line with the traditional Indian philosophy of humility and sacrifice, whereby an ethical source of motivation is sought other than power and status.

### 4·6·2 Sustainability and Environmental Ethics

Integral Humanism incorporates the respect toward nature into spiritual and social responsibility, which imposes the ethical management of ecological systems. The leaders are also not only held responsible towards economic development but also to conserve the natural resources to be used by the future generations, as per the moral insights of non-violence (Ahimsa) and balance.

### 4·6·3 Transparency and Accountability

Ethical leadership requires that there be clear decision making and accountability procedures, the leaders must be accountable to the citizens and to ethical standards (Brown & Treviño, 2006). The focus on truth and justice of Integral Humanism makes corruption and transparency unreasonable, which defends the idea of moral governance, backed by a critical civil society.

Therefore, the ethical system of leadership offered by Deendayal Upadhyaya represents a distinctive unity of Indian philosophical knowledge and action-oriented governance, which creates the highly value-oriented, inclusive, and sustainable form of leadership. His ideologies have remained applicable in addressing the modern issues of inequality, lack of governance and cultural conflicts in

India. Adoption of these ethical principles can make leadership practice more fruitful, create greater legitimacy, and encourage a holistic growth in accordance with the rich cultural Indian heritage (Bharatiya Janata Party, 2015).

## 5. Application to Contemporary Indian Governance Based on Integral Humanism

The philosophy of Integral Humanism by Deendayal Upadhyaya provides a solid ethical guideline that remains extremely relevant to the modern issues of Indian administration such as corruption, inequality, and shortage in administration. The principles of the Integral Humanism have been empirically followed in the contemporary policy and governance reforms that pre-empt inclusive development, decentralized governance, moral responsibility and cultural rootedness. The discussion following specifies the implication of the principles of Integral Humanism in modern India with support of vivid examples and academic references.

### 5·1 Dharma-Centered Governance: Administration of Ethics and Transparency

Integral Humanism has a vision of governance based on Dharma, which is basically the moral duty and righteousness, hence obliging leaders and institutions to act in integrity, fairness and accountability (Singh, 2025). This moral stance denounces the paradigms of a materialistic or opportunistic government and requires attentiveness to the social justice and general wellness. Dharma focus has guided government action in strengthening transparency by, among other mechanisms, social audits, the Right to Information Act (RTI) and e-governance programs to improve citizen participation and oversight. Integral Humanism as an ethical leadership approach can support building trust in the government by emphasizing truthfulness and accountability to all the cohorts of the society, and marginalized groups in particular (Singh, 2022). The implementation of codes of ethics, anti-corruption efforts and citizen charters are some of the signs that there is a new recognition of Dharma-based government as critical to accountability.

### 5·2 Local Government Decentralization and Empowerment

Upadhyaya vision focuses on decentralization as a means by which people and communities gain the power to manage resources and come up with priorities, which are effective (Kumar & Devi, 2021). This principle is operationalized through the constitutional amendment of 1992 that strengthened the Panchayati Raj institutions by devolution of power to the local government bodies, hence promoting the grassroots democracy and self-reliance. The micro level of self-sufficiency that the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan initiative echoes, the drive to local entrepreneurship, micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), and rural job projects sound like the themes of Integral Humanism. Decentralized governance enhances culturally appropriate development solutions to development challenges, without standard policy prescriptions, and promoting community ownership of projects.

### 5·3 Inclusive Growth and Social Justice

The idea of Antyodaya (upliftment of the last person in society) of Integral Humanism forms the basis of inclusive development as one of the priorities of governance. The policies, programmes and schemes that tried to maximize the reduction of inequality and access to more healthcare, education, and financial inclusion are the ethical imperatives (Kumar & Devi, 2021). Social welfare programs specifically focused on the tribal and marginalized groupings show an interest in incorporating all segments of the society in the development process, thus nullifying past injustices. This emphasis on equity is in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which confirms the cross-cutting nature of Integral Humanism as regards global development agendas.

### 5·4 Holistic and Sustainable Development

Facing the inseparable character of the human existence, Upadhyaya argued that economic development should be balanced with cultural, moral and environmental sustenance. The efforts of organic farming, renewable energy, and environmental preservation are resonant with the teachings of Integral Humanism that advocates peaceful coexistence with the nature. Some of the main characteristics of the sustainable development models structured on the basis of this philosophy promote the long-term wellbeing over the short-term economic benefits, which promotes policy structures that balance industrial development and ecological conservation. he ethos of holistic development is also traced in the support of the government in reviving indigenous knowledge systems and traditional crafts (Pandey, 2024; Ray, 2024).

### 5·5 Ethical Leadership and Capacity Building

Integral Humanism emphasizes the development of ethical leadership values of self-lessness, moral courage and integrity and service orientation of the public officials (Parmila & Singh, 2021). These ideals are implemented in practice by using leadership development programmes that focus on these values, training of civil servants in ethics and efficient systems of public accountability. The ethical leadership provides the momentum of confidence in the population and the mobilization of the national effort to the nation-building process as envisaged in the mighty Ideal State (Ram Rajya) basing on righteousness and welfare (Singh, 2025).

### 5·6 Cultural Diversity and Unity Respect

The pluralistic nature of India is also accepted by Integral Humanism, which asks the leaders to encourage unity in the area without overlooking cultural diversity (Sharma & Nain, 2018). Practices that are inclusive of federalism, protection of linguistic rights and cultural heritage as a strength of diversity. It is a method that negates the divisive nature since it promotes inclusive discussion, social unity, and democratic involvement, which are vital aspects of ethical leadership.

### 5·7 In line with Global Sustainable Development Goals

The principles of Integral Humanism have been mapped to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by recent studies that point out areas of convergence that focus on economic self-reliance, social justice, environmental management, and open governance. Unity is growing in the national development policies of India, which hopes to have a complete development based on the indigenous ethical patterns. Partnerships between government bodies and civil society and the business realm are a reflection of the spirit of collaborative and ethical governance that Integral Humanism heavily preaches.

## 6. Conclusion

Integral Humanism by Deendayal Upadhyaya is the highly significant and culturally acclimatizing theory of ethical leadership in modern India. It is based on the Indian philosophical tradition of Dharma and it goes beyond the traditional models of governance by incorporating moral uprightness, spirituality, and social responsibility into the structure of the public administration. This holism defies reductionistic leanings of western ideologies and rebalances leadership towards equitable development, decentralization as well as sustainable wellbeing. India is facing long-term issues: corruption, inequality, governance shortage, and loss of social trust; now, Integral Humanism will provide an opportune ethical guide. Its focus on Dharma-based governance, diversity, and community empowerment is in line with constitutional values and development agendas of the world. In addition to that, the self-reliance principle, the service-driven leadership principle, and the principle of environmental stewardship is similar to the modern-day policy reforms such as Atmanirbhar Bharat and Panchayati Raj decentralization. With the ethical leadership entrenched as a part of the cultural and spiritual ethos in India, the ethical leadership not only reinvigorates the moral basis of governance, but also promotes the trust of the citizens and the legitimacy of the institutions. It urges leaders to be compassionate, foresighted and responsible attributes that one cannot do without in maneuvering around the intricate socio-political terrain of India. Finally, the approach to embrace the vision of Upadhyaya can trigger the paradigm shift into the ethically sound, culturally oriented, and inclusive developmental paradigm of governance, restoring the civilizational vow of harmony, justice, and holistic development of India. Upadhyaya's philosophy of Integral Humanism provides a rich ethical framework that remains deeply relevant for addressing India's governance challenges such as corruption, inequality, and administrative deficits. The core principles of Integral Humanism have found practical resonance in contemporary policy and governance reforms, emphasizing inclusive development, decentralized governance, moral responsibility, and cultural rootedness. The following points elaborate on how Integral Humanism's principles can be applied in modern India, with examples and scholarly backing.

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# Partition and Women: Voices of Courage and Survival

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## Abstract

*The partition of India in 1947 produced a colossal tragedy that changed the course of millions of lives. Vast numbers of people were displaced, as they tried to cross over to suddenly undefined borders. Even after more than 70 years of the event the memories of Independence in 1947 are eclipsed by those of partition. The earlier works on partition have focused on elite politics, and state policies where men were the primary agent. This paper made endeavours to look at a wider canvas. Partition of 1947 was not a mere 'Political' separation, but had a far-reaching socio-economic, psychological, and cultural impact on the lives of the migrants. The paper focused on middle-class women mainly centred around oral history, which is reconstructed through the 'memories' of the victims during the partition. The paper gives a deep insight into the lives of the women who were affected by the event of partition. The research methodology used is mainly interviews. In-depth interviews of 4 partitioned effected women were conducted who unravelled how their lives were regulated by patriarchal norms, and how they saw unexpected and drastic changes during and post-partition period and went through a huge trauma and unspeakable humiliation. Here, the question remains whether the event of partition enabled them to redefine themselves anew or was it just a short-term survival strategy within the larger structure of the society. Were they really able to question and challenge the old norms or did partition re-invented these norms in newer forms?*

## Keywords

Partition, Post-colonial, Interview method, Oral history, Women.

# 5

# Partition and Women: Voices of Courage and Survival

## 1. Introduction

A million people perished away in the communal riots that followed partition and many others died out of malnutrition and contagious diseases. The figure that around a million people died is now widely accepted. This is the generality of partition; it exists publicly in a history book, but we need to understand what exists privately, in stories told inside so many houses of India and Pakistan. The revisionist studies of partition have probed the question of how the common people, especially women and marginal groups experienced partition, and thus, attention has now shifted to the refugee experience and narration of violence. It has been argued that partition remains an active category in the life of India, especially in the life of women. For Ranabir Samaddar, partition is not really a reconstruction of the past, it is a recording of a continuous present. In that sense partition is an enduring fact, living in the present as much as in the past. Partition gave rise to new social arrangements, new consciousness, and new subjectivities as concluded by Gyanendra Pandey. Due to the patriarchal and feudal setup, women were always considered to be repositories of "honor", culture, and integrity of the community. Subsequently, their lives were forced to be structured around preserving that. Partition exposed this deep-seated misogyny in the most brutal fashion. Men raped and kidnapped women of other religions to avenge their families and communities. According to Urvashi Butalia, there was widespread sexual savagery, about 75,000 women were abducted and raped by men of different religions and indeed sometimes by men of their own religion. Recent works done on Women during Partition like Bhasin, Menon, Butalia, stress have been put on the need to recognize the violence of the communities towards their own people, women, and children. In most cases, in the conventional narratives, this violence has been seen as 'honor killing' and deaths as 'martyrdom' state memories.

## 2. Methodology

The study is qualitative in nature looking at the lived experiences of women partition survivors in understanding the gendered nature of official discourse on partition thereby relegating the experiences and stories of women to the domain of oral history. Through this study, we have tried to bring these voices to the fore. The study was conducted in Kolkata, West Bengal. It is important to note that the data has been collected from this side of the border, that is, India. It is a limitation of this study as well. However, the focus of the research has been primarily on women in the conflict situation and who faced the aftermath. Kolkata and nearby areas witnessed the events of partition very closely. Not only were the refugee and rehabilitation camps established here at the time of partition but people migrated here from erstwhile East Pakistan and from other border areas in search of employment and women from such families were part of this study.

Narrative interviewing was chosen as the main tool of data collection because it allowed respondents to provide narrative accounts of their lives and experiences the way they wanted to. The study used the interview method where data was collected using a structured interview schedule. This kind of interviewing is an attempt to empower the respondent, ensure their participation, and also to encourage them to find and speak in their own voices. This study focussed on the meanings attached to an individual (woman) experience and also, on the way those experiences are communicated to others. As a result, narratives provide an ideal medium for researching and understanding an individual living in a social context. The narratives do not simply provide evidence about individuals, but provide means to understand more about the broader culture shared by a community of individuals. Their narratives also give glimpses of the cultural framework within which individuals make sense of their lives.

Open-ended questions were framed that enabled to initiate the interview and also in putting the participants into a narrative frame of mind. These loosely framed questions gave the scope to the narrator as well as to the interviewer to engage in and build rapport. As qualitative researchers, we often work to achieve narratives as self-observation, in which participants move to a position of interest in remembering and telling their stories in a self-reflective manner.

## 3. Voices of Women

Things change their meanings depending on who is looking, from where, and in what context. Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin describes humans as being “the witness and the judge”—which means that we both see and assess or what educationist J. Krishnamurti says, *"Observer is the observed"*. It is this witnessing and judging that leads to different interpretations of the same event from different people. 4 interviewees were women and 1 man. There were mixed emotions while conducting these interviews. One can understand the ramifications of partition through the experience of these women. They were mostly homemakers and didn't have the education nor the patriarchal setup that allowed them to work. The situation was different after the partition, this left them no other options but to work. The crisis situation called for work to fulfil their survival needs of proper food and shelter. The violence led to a massacre; many lost their families. women started working in sectors e.g. needlework, bidi rollers, sex workers, nurse, etc. Those who had some qualifications managed to find a better job, while some others worked towards completing their education to enter the employment sector. Some of the women also recounted how certain families of other religions were kind enough to provide clothes as well as shelter to them in this insane situation. It was noticed that some of these women were able to educate themselves even after marriage or became the breadwinners, this was all because the situation demanded it. while the others could not continue their studies due to different circumstances. These brave women were able to leave their houses when they chose to live rather than die. Some of them were able to bring their belongings along with them while the others carried only their new hopes and memories. According to Gargi Chakravarty "Too much focus on physical abuse of women which is valid and relevant but equally important to discuss ways in which uprooted women have faced the enormous challenge of rebuilding and reshaping their lives in alien condition".

It shows how partition brought major class stratification in society. People already inhabiting present-day India were paranoid about migration, and the population started becoming dense. Especially in West Bengal, where the migration happened twice and still continuing. Economic hardships came with it, and migration made middle-class women work neck to neck with men. Somehow, most of the people interviewed come from the well-off section of society and weren't as much affected as we have read off. The stories do not need to be spine-chilling to be recorded, the fact that we get to have a first-hand account of migrants is a big achievement itself for this research.

In Bengal, class stratification became evident with the division of Bangal and Ghoti. Ghoti are the people already inhabiting the Indian part of the territory or Western region of Bengal and Bangals are who migrated from East Bengal. Migrants were looked down upon; their dietary habits were changing with migration. They were feeding themselves on weeds and leaves which were considered inedible for Ghotis. The first interview was of Alpana Devi, who talks how the refugee used to cry in the streets for the leftover cooked rice water (this water contains essential nutrients), another interview with Gouri Devi, who recalls how they used to be amazed, how the Bangals didn't have a maid and frowned about it.

The refugees have crawled upward in society. Arati Devi, during her interview narrates how her father helped a refugee child with education, who later became a civil servant. People have tried to help each other in those tough situations like how Mr Asok and his family were migrated from East Bengal with the help of a Muslim man. His interview was also taken to get a more diverse opinion of the partition and how this man was passionately talking about his home in Shirajganj.

The first interviewee Alpana Devi turned 100 years this June. It was fortunate enough to record her understanding of partition and the difficulties her family faced. Her father was part of the Anushilam Smaity in Dhaka and they had meetings in her house. The fact that she could recall so many things was astounding. Though many who arrived didn't have such influential backgrounds, such as Bhabani Devi her family migrated from Faridpur and they were many people. Her father died early and it was all her mother who had to look after all her 10 children. Fortunately, her father lent some money to a man and he was quite diligent enough to pay her back which helped her buy a house and do all the regular things for a household.

All these interviewed women had their own course of situation during the partition, which makes such primary narratives important for contemporary History. Conducting interviews with these women made us realize something very unique. To articulate that we would like to quote Urvashi Butalia. Urvashi Butalia in the chapter "Gender and Nation: Some Reflections from India" which was part of the 2004 book From Gender to Nation, explains: *"When women narrate the nation, they do so rather differently than men. In men's narratives of the nation, women are often seen as symbols of national and* *family honor. In women's narratives, the concerns are often different: the need to keep the family together, to contain grief, to put closures on unexplained deaths, to try and somehow contain the violence that such a situation inevitably unleashes."*

## 4. Inference

This paper was an attempt to work in the field of Oral History, highlighting its significance in the reconstruction of history from completely different perspective and context that has yet not been explored to its fullest. Though working with memories/personal narratives can be problematic, as the objectivity may be compromised. This study showed that a comprehensive history of an event can only be arrived at once when all its different dimensions are looked into. Despite the limitation in its scope, our study has raised certain pertinent questions and hence, it was an attempt to juxtapose official narratives with personal narratives and narratives of men with that of women, thus giving a holistic perspective.

Since none of them had been interviewed before, their level of enthusiasm to share their life stories were sky-high. At the same time, certain events emerged which made them go down the memory lane and relive the horrific moments. In their different journeys to India, they mention the wide array of problems faced like food shortage, diseases, riots, rape, loot, and so on. Some of the women also recounted how certain families of other religions were sane enough to provide clothes as well as shelter to them in this insane situation. We even notice how some of the women were able to educate themselves even after marriage or became the breadwinners, while the others could not continue their studies due to different circumstances. These brave women were able to leave their houses when they chose to live rather than die. Some of them were able to bring their belongings along with them while the others carried only their new hopes and memories.

At midnight of August 15th, 1947, Pandit Nehru made the historic speech in which he said—"*Long years ago we made a tryst with destiny, and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially. At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom*". One is forced to ask the question, did the tryst with destiny that our leaders had made long years ago include this crucial twist of history also? Was it a picture of a divided 'Hindustan' that had been the cherished vision of our freedom fighters?

After the partition, the newly formed governments were unequipped to deal with migrations at such a staggering magnitude. Massive violence and slaughter occurred on both sides of the border. The partition occurred with many visible effects like people losing a great part of their motherland, due to which they became refugees in a new country with no or minimal resources. The government tried to cater to many of these problems, but there were some hidden effects of the partition which went unattended by the government. The major effect is refugees' loss of identity. Both in Pakistan and India, the refugees were humiliated at the hands of the other residents, whether it was in their own native villages or on their way to a new place.

We come across different perspectives if we go through the official records of both countries, and ask the general public or the perspective of the women interviewed. Every perspective portrays a different aspect of the difficulties people had to face, particularly women. As mentioned before, it was important for women of a family to stay extra safe in such conditions to preserve the honor of the family. Some women choose to live rather than die, due to which their grand-children were able to hear the true stories of the partition, first-hand.

Even though it has been seventy-eight years post-partition, the feeling of hostility, and pain is still raw and palpable. Furthermore, the partition of one country into two has left the present generations wondering what if the countries were not partitioned. What if they had friends in Pakistan and that was not an issue? What if their grandparents wished to see their ancestral homes before leaving for heaven's abode? We cannot undo what has happened, nor can we answer these questions so easily. But it is our responsibility as accountable humans to make sure that these atrocities and brutalities are not forced upon more innocents in contemporary times

**Pictures of Interviewees on Partition**

**Mrs. Gouri Chatterjee**



**Mrs. Alpana Dutta Mitra**

**Mrs. Bhabani Devi**

**Mrs. Arati Bhanjachaudhuri**


**Sri Ashok Kumar Ray**

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# A Sociological Study of Gender Differences in Brand Fascination and Consumer Behaviour Among Students of Banaras Hindu University

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**Abstract**

*This quantitative study examines how consumer behaviour, specifically 'brand interest' (defined as the emotional attachment, frequency of usage, and symbolic meanings given to brands), is influenced by sociocultural, gender, and class characteristics among students of Banaras Hindu University (BHU). Based on Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital and Goffman's dramaturgical framework, the study investigates branded consumption as a social performance and a means of symbolic differentiation. Findings show no statistically significant differences between male and female students in terms of emotional attachment, frequency of usage, or symbolic meanings given to brands, which runs counter to traditional gendered consumption narratives. Instead, brand trust and family wealth show up as important predictors, highlighting the influence of socialization within the family and economic capital on consumer behaviour. The predominately media-centric assumptions are challenged by the minimal direct impact of peer groups and digital media influences on purchasing decisions. The findings emphasize brand interest as a socially embedded practice that reflects status negotiation and identity work within overlapping family, class, and gender dynamics. By presenting an intersectional perspective of consuming patterns in the Global South and demonstrating how branded commodities serve as instruments for social belonging, aspiration, and boundary-making in youth culture, this study advances feminist sociological scholarship.*

**Keywords**

Brand fascination, GENDer and consumption, Cultural capital, Dramaturgy, Intersectionality.

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# A Sociological Study of Gender Differences in Brand Fascination and Consumer Behaviour Among Students of Banaras Hindu University

## 1. Introduction

In today's consumer cultures, consumption is a crucial tool for the creation and exchange of social identities, cultural meanings, and group connections, going beyond its historical function of meeting material necessities (Featherstone, 1991). In particular, brands have developed into powerful symbols that mediate both individual and societal representations of lifestyle, social standing, and identity (Bourdieu, 1984; Holt, 2002). Customers who buy branded goods do more than buy valuable goods; they also participate in intricate processes of social differentiation and self-presentation, negotiating meanings that are influenced by broader cultural narratives and social structures (Bourdieu, 1984). Among young people who are negotiating significant life transitions and developing emerging adult identities, this symbolic aspect of consumption is particularly relevant (Arnett, 2000). They see brands as emotional connections, indicators of belonging, and instruments for controlling perceptions among their peers (Eckert, 2006; Marwick, 2015).

Global consumer culture is now more visible and influential among India's youth due to the country's rapid economic growth, growing internet penetration, and integration into international markets (Dholakia, 2006; Chakraborty & Banerjee, 2019). Alongside this exposure, there are persistent cultural traditions and social structures that continue to influence meanings and purchasing patterns (Beteille, 1991; Srinivas, 1996). Since they frequently straddle many social worlds-urban and rural, traditional and modern, local and global-college students are an essential demographic for comprehending the interaction between modernization, globalization, and tradition in this context (Arnett, 2000; Mukherjee, 2019). One of India's biggest and most diverse universities, Banaras Hindu University (BHU), is a prime example of this interaction. Because of the diverse caste, class, language, and geographic backgrounds of its student body, it offers an excellent opportunity to investigate the ways in which complex social characteristics like gender, peer relationships, and access to digital media impact brand-related consumer behaviour.

Gender continues to be a key axis that shapes social life and consumption, impacting not only preferences but also the social connotations associated with consuming behaviours and brands (Connell, 2009; McRobbie, 2004). According to sociological conceptions of gender, gender identities are socially produced and enacted via daily activities, such as consumption, rather than being fixed characteristics (West & Zimmerman, 1987; Goffman, 1959). This viewpoint is supported by empirical research in marketing and consumer psychology, which demonstrates that women typically exhibit greater emotional attachment and brand loyalty, frequently preferring interpersonal connection and using consumption as a means of self-expression (Bakewell & Mitchell, 2006; Mehta, 2020). On the other hand, men tend to place more emphasis on the symbolic capital, status, and functional value of brands, which reflects broader gendered norms on consumption and masculinity (Schmitt, 2012; Mehta, 2020). The knowledge of how larger gender relations and social settings impact brand interest is limited, nevertheless, because these psychological descriptions hardly ever embed these gendered patterns inside their social and cultural contexts.

By using a sociological lens to place brand interest within the peer networks and gendered socialization of college students at BHU, Varanasi, this study seeks to close this gap. Using a quantitative approach, the study looks at peer influence, perceived social status, frequency of use of branded products, and emotional attachment to brands. Sociographic factors like gender, age, family background, urban/rural origin, and exposure to digital media are also included. By highlighting consumption as a socially embedded practice that is influenced by cultural storytelling, social memberships, and daily interactions, it goes beyond frameworks that emphasize economic or psychological individualism (Bourdieu, 1984; Zelizer, 2010).

Furthermore, today's youth are digital natives who use social media platforms extensively. On these platforms, influencers and online brand communities are crucial in creating and sharing brand meanings (Marwick, 2015). By establishing new areas where gendered identities and consumer cultures interact and change, this digital context makes conventional consumption patterns even more challenging to understand. Therefore, it is essential for sociological research as well as real-world applications in higher education administration and young marketing tactics to comprehend how gender mediates brand appeal in this setting.

By integrating the social environment, gender, and emotional aspects of brand engagement in a developing economy, this study has the potential to advance the sociology of consumption significantly. It underscores the importance of understanding consuming as a socially and culturally created habit that reflects and reproduces larger power relations, including gender-based ones, rather than just as an individual preference. In the midst of the intricate interactions between tradition and modernity, local culture, and global consumerism, the results will offer crucial insights into how young Indian consumers use brands to negotiate identity and social belonging. This study's contribution to the field of sociology is significant, and its findings will be of interest to scholars, researchers, and students in sociology, marketing, and consumer behaviour.

## 2. Literature Review

The growing consumption of branded goods by college students in recent years has transcended the realm of marketing and is now a rich field for sociological research. Today's brands serve as cultural icons that convey identities, values, and associations in addition to being commercial commodities. Brands are practical tools of self-presentation and social mobility, especially in the Indian higher education system, where students are a transitory population juggling modernity, tradition, and aspiration. With a focus on how gender influences Indian college students' brand attraction and consumer behaviour, this literature review critically examines previous empirical and theoretical contributions. This review focuses on two important frameworks-Bourdieu's idea of cultural capital and Goffman's theory of symbolic interactionism-to offer a sociologically sound explanation. These frameworks aid in the interpretation of the structural factors and social meanings of brand consumption.

According to the symbolic interactionist paradigm developed by Goffman in 1959, social life is viewed as a sequence of performances in which people adopt roles in order to express their desired identities. With this dramaturgical setting, brands serve as "props" to aid with impression control. In addition to being practical decisions, one's laptop, phone, and clothes all contribute to a socially constructed narrative that validates their identity within their peer group. In order to explain the gendered subtleties of branding among students, symbolic interactionism is especially pertinent. Whereas males typically choose brands that represent strength, independence, or competence, women typically interact with brands that conform to standards of beauty, relationality, and emotional expressiveness. Thus, a brand's symbolic value is not neutral; instead, it is closely linked to how gendered identities are performed in regular social encounters.

This micro-sociological viewpoint is complemented by Bourdieu's (1984) theory of cultural capital, which contends that preferences and tastes are socially acquired and represent a person's class. According to Bourdieu, consuming is a domain of social differentiation in which people use cultural resources to set themselves apart and fit in with the social groupings they want to be part of. Particularly for those from semi-urban or rural backgrounds, brand choices among Indian college students frequently indicate metropolitan modernism, cosmopolitanism, or upward mobility. Insofar as these purchasing patterns represent disparities in access to social and financial capital, they are gendered. Women might spend money on brands that improve their appearance and social standing, whereas males would concentrate on brands that communicate usefulness and prestige in male peer groups.

One of the main factors influencing how consumers behave is gender socialization. People are indoctrinated with rules, expectations, and actions that are considered suitable for their gender from an early age. These socialization processes affect how students interact with companies and continue until young adulthood. According to Mehta's (2020) research on Indian millennials, female students had greater degrees of fashion interest, novelty consciousness, and brand-emotional connection. On the other hand, male students had a more utilitarian attitude, prioritizing brand reliability, usefulness, and value for money. These behaviours are a reflection of larger trends in gendered consumer roles, where males are educated to be practical and status-driven, and women are frequently positioned as emotional and appearance-conscious consumers.

The affective aspects of branding are further discussed by Workman and Lee (2012), who points out that women are more likely to display brand name sensitivity and consume in relation to vanity because of their increased private self-consciousness. Goffman's theory that identity is constantly controlled through routine performances is supported by these data. For female students, wearing a branded purse or piece of clothing is part of a larger aesthetic performance that aims to win approval from family, friends, and social media. In their study on Indian youth, Rajput and Khanna (2014) support this finding by finding that while men based their preferences more on product qualities and price, women were more influenced by store design, peer acceptance, and the symbolic value attached to brands.

Brand curiosity also includes an emotional attachment to brands, which also shows gendered tendencies. According to Guha (2023), female college students in Kolkata who were influenced by social media trends, peer recommendations, or visual attractiveness were more likely to make impulsive purchases and indicate higher levels of emotional response. Women were more prone to make emotionally charged purchases. In contrast, males were more restrained and deliberate, according to Ekambareswarar *et al*. (2022), who found comparable gendered tendencies among postgraduate students in Bengaluru. Bourdieu's idea of embodied cultural capital-the internalization of gendered and classed tendencies that impact aesthetic judgment and consumer behaviour-can be understood as manifested in these behavioural variations.

Brand interest is a reflection of deeper cultural and social systems and is not just based on emotional or psychological considerations. Higher education settings in India are a prime example of Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital, which holds that consumption serves as a social status indicator. Students from wealthy households tend to favour luxury brands as a way to reinforce their elite identity, as noted by Regatipally (2025). The brand turns into a badge of membership for these students in elite peer groups. Students from middle-class families, on the other hand, are typically more pragmatic, striking a balance between financial restraints and symbolic appeal.

Additionally, these patterns are gendered. Reddy (2022) notes that whilst male students place more emphasis on utility, durability, and brand repute, female students are more likely to favour design, peer acceptability, and brand ethics. This split reflects gendered expectations for consumption as well as economic disparities.

The emergence of digital media has further changed how people market themselves according to their gender. Female students are substantially more active in online brand communities, according to Kaur, Grewal, and Sidhu (2023), and they frequently use social media to investigate, assess, and communicate their brand preferences. Platforms like Instagram and Pinterest offer visual spaces where branded consumption turns into a performance, allowing users-women in particular-to curate and showcase lifestyles that are consistent with aspirational femininity. Women are more receptive to influencer marketing, particularly when the influencers' narratives align with their identity ambitions, according to Sreekanth *et al*. (2024). In contrast, male students tend to use digital media more for practical purposes, depending more on technical specs and reviews than on aesthetics or narrative.

One of the most important cultural artefacts in the creation and maintenance of gendered consumption scripts is advertising. Women consumers responded particularly well to emotionally charged commercials with celebrities or societal tales, according to Zain-ul-Abideen and Saleem (2011). Women were more affected by ads that appealed to emotions, beauty standards, and lifestyle goals, whereas men were more receptive to ads that highlighted value, performance, and durability (Tam and Zeb, 2009). These gendered marketing tactics influence how students view and engage with brands by reinforcing larger social norms. In this context, Goffman's examination of commercials as coded performances is still pertinent since they not only mirror social standards but also suggest idealized gender roles that viewers might aspire to.

Brand loyalty and post-purchase views also vary by gender. In their 2020 study on luxury watch consumption in Chandigarh, Jhamb *et al*. found that long-term brand views were influenced by four aspects of brand experience: emotive, behavioural, intellectual, and sensory. Despite not being gender-specific, their research provides valuable insights into how effective engagement-which is more prevalent among female consumers-can result in enduring brand loyalty. According to Sasmita and Mohd Suki (2015), women have stronger emotional bonds with brands, which boosts brand loyalty. Esch and colleagues (2006) contend that brand loyalty is an emotional bond that is developed through a series of favourable encounters rather than just a behavioural result. Male pupils, on the other hand, typically demonstrate loyalty by dependability, peer approval, and consistency in performance. These distinctions draw attention to the two ways that brand loyalty grows: for women, it is via emotional attachment, whereas for males, it is through practical dependability.

The examined literature clearly shows that gender plays a significant role in mediating brand attraction and consumer behaviour among college students, with notable trends in emotional involvement, symbolic value attribution, and post-purchase sentiments. These patterns might be interpreted as socially created and structurally ingrained using strong frameworks from Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital and Goffman's symbolic interactionism. Male students choose brands more strategically, performance-oriented, and logically than female students, who frequently view branding as a way to emotional fulfilment, social integration, and identity affirmation. Peer cultures, digital media, and advertising narratives all contribute to these patterns, which are further supported by the broader framework of class dynamics and gendered socialization. Comprehending these subtleties is essential to creating a more comprehensive and sociologically based grasp of young Indian consumers' culture.

## 3. Research Objectives

1. To evaluate the extent of brand fascination among male and female students of college age studying in BHU and the Varanasi district.
2. To explore gender differences in emotional attachment, usage patterns, and symbolic meaning ascribed to branded products.
3. To determine the impact of sociocultural elements such as parental education and socio-economic standing alongside one's area of residence, whether urban or rural, on brand fascination among college students.
4. To assess the impact that the use of digital media and peer associates have on brand choices for both male and female pupils.

## 4. Research Hypotheses

$H_1$: A marked difference exists amongst male and female college students studying in BHU and Varanasi district with regards to the level of brand fascination.

$H_2$: Gender differences exist amongst students with regard to their emotional attachment to brands, brand usage, and the meanings they ascribe to brands

$H_3$: Sociocultural factors like parents' education, family's income, and students' region of residence (urban vs. rural) have a notable impact on students' brand fascination.

$H_4$: Brand preference of male and female college students is greatly influenced by digital media, peer influence, or both

## 5. Research Methodology

The research employed a descriptive cross-sectional approach, utilizing primary data gathered from students of Banaras Hindu University (BHU) and its related institutions. The aim was to investigate gender variations in brand interest and the impact of sociocultural and digital factors on brand preferences.

Data were gathered via a structured online questionnaire sent through Google Forms. The instrument had closed-ended questions aimed at eliciting demographic data, emotional attachment to brands, frequency of branded product consumption, symbolic meanings attributed to brands, and the influence of factors such as peer pressure, familial background, and exposure to digital media.

The sample size of 202 was calculated using Slovin's algorithm to ensure statistical reliability. A stratified sampling method was employed to guarantee proportional representation of essential demographic groupings. Variables were quantitatively encoded to enhance analysis. Gender was classified as 1 (male) and 2 (female); domicile as 1 (urban), 2 (rural), and 3 (semi-urban); and institutional type as 1 (BHU) and 2 (associated). Response categories, including frequency (Always to Never) and attitudinal agreement (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree), were classified using five-point ordinal scales. Brand categories and influencing variables were categorized in a similar manner (e.g., cosmetics = 6, food = 0; price = 1, peers = 5).

The data were transferred to Microsoft Excel for cleansing and subsequently prepared for statistical analysis with JAMOVI software. Analytical methods comprised descriptive statistics, independent samples t-tests, and multiple regression models to evaluate the impact of gender and sociocultural factors on brand behavior.

The study complied with ethical norms, securing informed consent from all subjects. Participation was optional, and all replies were kept anonymous and confidential.

## 6. Analysis and Discussion

**Table-1: Independent Samples T-Test**

| | | Statistic | df | | Effect Size | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| How often do you buy branded products? | Student's t | 0.0725 | 199 | 0.942 | Cohen's d | 0.0104 |

Note. $H_a$ $\mu_{Female} \neq \mu_{Male}$

**Table-2: Group Descriptives**

| | Group | N | Mean | Median | SD | SE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| How often do you buy branded products? | Female | 85 | 2.66 | 2.00 | 1.14 | 0.124 |
| | Male | 116 | 2.65 | 2.00 | 1.22 | 0.113 |

A t-test for independent samples was conducted to examine gender differences in the frequency of branded product purchases among college students from BHU and the its affiliated colleges. The results indicated no statistically significant difference between male ($M = 2.65, SD = 1.22$) and female students ($M = 2.66, SD = 1.14$), $t(199) = 0.0725$, $= 0.94$. The effect size was minimal (Cohen's d = 0.0104), suggesting that gender does not have a significant impact on the frequency of students acquiring branded products. As a result, the null hypothesis was supported, indicating that male and female students exhibit similar brand-buying behavior in terms of frequency.

**Table-3: Independent Samples T-Test**

| | | Statistic | df | | Effect Size | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I am emotionally attached to certain brands | Student's t | 0.0725 | 199 | 0.942 | Cohen's d | 0.0104 |
| | Welch's t | -0.4785 | 179 | 0.633 | Cohen's d | -0.0684 |
| | Mann-Whitney U | 4785 | | 0.714 | Rank biserial correlation | 0.0294 |
| How often do you buy branded products? | Student's t | 0.0725 | 199 | 0.942 | Cohen's d | 0.0104 |
| | Welch's t | 0.0733 | 187 | 0.942 | Cohen's d | 0.0104 |
| | Mann-Whitney U | 4833 | | 0.805 | Rank biserial correlation | -0.0197 |
| Branded products represent my Branded products represent my personality. | Student's t | -0.4896 | 199 | 0.625 | Cohen's d | -0.0699 |
| | Welch's t | -0.4883 | 179 | 0.626 | Cohen's d | -0.0698 |
| | Mann-Whitney U | 4701 | | 0.561 | Rank biserial correlation | 0.0466 |

Note. $H_a$ $\mu_{Female} \neq \mu_{Male}$

**Table-4: Group Descriptives**

| | Group | N | Mean | Median | SD | SE |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I am emotionally attached to certain brands | 2 | 85 | 2.99 | 3.00 | 1.19 | 0.129 |
| | 1 | 116 | 3.07 | 3.00 | 1.17 | 0.109 |
| How often do you buy branded products? | 2 | 85 | 2.66 | 2.00 | 1.14 | 0.124 |
| | 1 | 116 | 2.65 | 2.00 | 1.22 | 0.113 |
| Branded products represent my Branded products represent my personality. | 2 | 85 | 3.01 | 3.00 | 1.20 | 0.130 |
| | 1 | 116 | 3.09 | 3.00 | 1.18 | 0.110 |

This investigation sought to determine if notable gender disparities are present among college students regarding their emotional connections to brands, the regularity of brand utilization, and the symbolic interpretations they attribute to branded items. Independent samples t-tests were performed to evaluate this hypothesis, focusing on three essential Likert scale items: emotional attachment to brands, frequency of purchasing branded products, and the level of agreement with the statement that branded products reflect one's personality.

The findings indicated that there were no statistically significant differences based on gender across any of the three measures. The analysis revealed that emotional attachment to brands resulted in a p-value of 0.632, the frequency of purchasing branded products had a p-value of 0.942, and symbolic identification with brands exhibited a p-value of 0.625. In every instance, the -value surpassed the standard significance threshold of 0.05, suggesting that the null hypothesis (indicating no difference) remained unchallenged. Furthermore, the effect sizes (Cohen's d) for all three variables were found to be negligible (ranging from -0.0699 to 0.0104), indicating that any gender differences observed were minimal and probably not significant in practical terms.

The results indicate that there is no significant difference between male and female students in BHU and the its affiliated colleges regarding their emotional connections to brands, their purchasing frequency, or their use of brands as identity symbols. This observation suggests a potential alignment in consumer behavior between genders, likely shaped by comparable digital media experiences, common social settings, and heightened brand recognition within modern youth culture. This study presents evidence of a more cohesive pattern of brand interaction among college students, regardless of gender, despite previous literature emphasizing gender as a crucial factor in branding behavior.

**Table-5: Linear Regression**

| Model Fit Measures | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Model** | **R** | **$R^2$** |
| 1 | 0.430 | 0.185 |

**Note:** Models estimated using sample size of N=201

**Table-6: Model Coefficients**

| Predictor | Estimate | SE | t | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| How often do you buy branded products? | | | | |
| Intercept | 1.10833 | 0.4460 | 2.4851 | 0.014 |
| Gender | 0.09373 | 0.1643 | 0.5703 | 0.569 |
| What influences your brand choices the most? | 0.00469 | 0.0514 | 0.0913 | 0.927 |
| Influencers and celebrities affect my brand preferences. | 0.06719 | 0.0754 | 0.8909 | 0.374 |
| My family's opinion influences my brand choice | 0.15723 | 0.0786 | 2.0008 | 0.047 |
| I buy brands my friends use or recommend | 0.04910 | 0.0848 | 0.5788 | 0.563 |
| I am willing to pay more for a brand I trust. | 0.22625 | 0.0834 | 2.7141 | 0.007 |

The multiple linear regression model evaluated how sociocultural variables influence the frequency of branded product usage, serving as an indicator of brand fascination among college students. The overall model produced a $R^2$ of 0.185, suggesting that around 18.5% of the variance in branded product usage is accounted for by the predictors incorporated in the model—specifically, gender, course of study, institution, area of residence, family monthly income, and type of branded product purchased. This indicates a modest yet significant explanatory capacity, implying that the model encompasses certain pertinent sociocultural factors.

Family monthly income was identified as a statistically significant predictor ($\beta = -0.2849, \quad < .001$). The negative estimate indicates that with an increase in family income, there is a slight decrease in the frequency of purchasing branded products, which may seem counterintuitive at first glance. Nonetheless, this may suggest that individuals from economically disadvantaged backgrounds attribute greater aspirational or symbolic significance to branded items, possibly utilizing them as indicators of social standing. On the other hand, students hailing from affluent backgrounds might perceive branded products as more commonplace or functional, rather than as symbols of status.

Additional factors like gender, course of study, type of institution, and area of residence (urban/rural) did not exhibit significant effects (all $\quad > 0.05$), suggesting that these sociocultural dimensions do not independently forecast brand fascination in a statistically significant manner within this sample.

Interestingly, the specific types of branded products typically acquired did not have a significant impact on the frequency of brand fascination, indicating that preferences for product categories may not be a key factor in the regularity with which students interact with branded items.

The results offer some validation for Hypothesis 3. The overall regression model explains a modest amount of variance in brand fascination, with only family income demonstrating a statistically significant effect. This indicates that economic background, rather than other sociocultural factors such as gender or location, significantly influences students' interaction with branded products.

The findings highlight the complex dynamics of class-influenced consumer behaviour in young people, suggesting that brand attraction is often fueled by aspirational desires in lower- to middle-income students, rather than merely by factors of access or availability. Future studies could gain from incorporating qualitative insights to delve deeper into the symbolic significance associated with branded consumption across various socio-economic levels

**Table-7: Linear Regression**

| Model Fit Measures | | |
|---|---|---|
| Model | R | $R^2$ |
| 1 | 0.336 | 0.113 |

**Note:** Models estimated using sample size of N=201

**Table-8: Model Coefficients**

| Predictor | Estimate | SE | t | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| How often do you buy branded products? | | | | |
| Intercept | 1.10833 | 0.4460 | 2.4851 | 0.014 |
| Gender | 0.09373 | 0.1643 | 0.5703 | 0.569 |
| What influences your brand choices the most? | 0.00469 | 0.0514 | 0.0913 | 0.927 |
| Influencers and celebrities affect my brand preferences. | 0.06719 | 0.0754 | 0.8909 | 0.374 |
| My family's opinion influences my brand choice | 0.15723 | 0.0786 | 2.0008 | 0.047 |
| I buy brands my friends use or recommend | 0.04910 | 0.0848 | 0.5788 | 0.563 |
| I am willing to pay more for a brand I trust. | 0.22625 | 0.0834 | 2.7141 | 0.007 |

The hypothesis was evaluated through a linear regression model, utilizing the frequency of purchasing branded products as the dependent variable, serving as a proxy for brand preference. Predictors comprised gender, the influence of digital media (including influencers and celebrities), peer influence, family influence, trust in brands, and a general item assessing the primary factors influencing brand choices.

The model produced a $R^2$ value of 0.113, suggesting that around 11.3% of the variance in students' branded product usage is accounted for by the predictors included in the model. This indicates a modest model fit, yet it offers valuable insights into the social and media-related factors influencing brand preference among college students.

Only two predictors reached statistical significance at the conventional alpha level of 0.05. Family influence significantly affects brand selection ($\beta$ = 0.157, = 0.047): This suggests that students indicating familial influence are more inclined to purchase branded products. This challenges the prevailing assumption that youth brand preferences are primarily influenced by peers or media, underscoring the continued significance of familial influence in youth consumer behavior.

A willingness to pay a premium for a trusted brand was identified as the strongest predictor in the model ($\beta$ = 0.226, = 0.007). This underscores the significance of brand trust as a primary factor influencing purchasing behaviour, aligning with established research on brand loyalty and consumer decision-making.

Influence from digital media, including influencers and celebrities, as well as peer recommendations, did not demonstrate a statistically significant impact ( > 0.05). The findings indicate that social media and peer influence may not directly affect the frequency of brand usage, despite their common perception as significant factors in youth culture. While such influences may shape awareness or attitudes, they might not necessarily result in actual purchase behavior.

Furthermore, gender did not emerge as a significant predictor ( = 0.569), indicating that brand preference behaviors do not substantially vary between male and female students when other factors are accounted for.

The findings provide limited support for Hypothesis 4. The overall model accounts for a small yet significant portion of the variance in brand preference; however, the hypothesis positing that digital media and peer influence substantially affect brand preference was not corroborated by statistically significant findings.

The findings indicate that family influence and brand trust are stronger predictors of branded product usage among college students in this sample. This underscores the enduring significance of familial values and brand reputation, even amidst the prevalence of digital marketing and youth-centric culture.

These findings indicate that, from a sociological perspective, students are influenced by various external factors; however, fundamental social structures, such as family, and ingrained consumer values, such as trust, appear to play a more significant and consistent role in determining actual consumption behavior. Future research may investigate interaction effects or utilize qualitative interviews to elucidate the nuances regarding the diminished predictive power of media and peer influence in this context.

## 7. Conclusion

This research examined the gender-specific and sociocultural factors influencing brand-related behaviours among college students at Banaras Hindu University and its affiliated institutions. The empirical investigation revealed no statistically significant gender disparities in emotional attachment to brands, symbolic identification with branded products, or the frequency of brand-related purchases. The data indicate a convergence in consumption behaviours across male and female students, possibly influenced by analogous social networks, digital media exposure, and overarching adolescent cultural trends. Nevertheless, profound sociological insights are essential to elucidate the class-based patterns that surfaced, including the importance of family income in forecasting brand utilization.

According to Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital (1984), the findings demonstrate that students from varying economic backgrounds interact with brands in socially distinct manners. Students from lower-income families utilize branded things as tools for obtaining symbolic capital, enabling them to associate with aspirational lives and demonstrate upward social mobility. This consumption is not solely economic but also cultural, indicating attempts to conform to prevailing preferences and status symbols. Conversely, students from affluent backgrounds-who already own significant economic and cultural capital-may perceive branded purchases as customary or utilitarian, aligning with their ingrained class attitudes or habitus. Consequently, brand choice and purchasing behaviour function within a hierarchical social framework where economic background profoundly influences students' consumption inclinations.

Furthermore, Erving Goffman's dramaturgical framework (1959) provides an additional perspective for comprehending these consumer behaviours. The utilization of branded products by students may be viewed as a calculated tactic for impression control in their daily social interactions. In this "front stage" of social life-whether in peer environments or on social media platforms-brands function as symbolic artefacts that assist individuals in constructing and exhibiting socially desirable identities. The absence of gender disparities noted in this study reinforces the idea that male and female students exhibit comparable behaviours in public encounters, illustrating a uniform young consumer culture where branding aids in self-presentation, acceptability, and social conformity.

Collectively, these theoretical frameworks underscore that brand-related behaviours among students are not solely the product of personal preferences or digital impact. Instead, they are integrated within larger social frameworks, including class and familial heritage, and are expressed through culturally encoded performances. The results contest prevailing beliefs about the supremacy of peers and digital media in influencing young consumption, highlighting the persistent impact of familial and class-oriented cultural structures.

Subsequent research ought to integrate qualitative methodologies, like comprehensive interviews or focus group discussions, to investigate how students perceive the symbolic significances of brands across various socioeconomic backgrounds. Furthermore, examining the interaction effects among family wealth, digital exposure, and cultural values can enhance our comprehension of the formation of consumer identities within modern adolescent culture.

## 8. Future Scope and Limitations

This study has a number of drawbacks that need to be noted. The findings' generalisability is first and foremost constrained by the small number of respondents. Because the data collection was timed to coincide with students' academic exams, many students were unable or unwilling to participate, which led to a small and possibly non-representative sample. Furthermore, outreach and the diversity of student participants across different fields and colleges may have been limited due to the short duration of the data collection.

A further drawback is the use of self-reported measures, which may not fully reflect real customer behaviour due to social desirability bias. Furthermore, although the study made an effort to investigate the sociocultural and psychological elements that impact brand interest, it omitted certain potentially significant variables, such as exposure to advertising content, cultural background, and firsthand brand encounters.

To improve representativeness, future studies could use larger and more diverse samples gathered from several universities in various geographical areas. The symbolic and emotional implications associated with branded products could be further explored by including qualitative methods like focus groups or interviews. The way that consumer behaviour and brand preferences change over time in response to shifting social and economic circumstances may also be revealed by longitudinal studies.

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# Outlining the Preliminaries and Unveiling the Political Dimension of Lucknow Congress

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**Abstract**

*Swaraj is my birthright and I shall have it. The maker of the above spontaneous slogan Tilak was undoubtedly the first Indian leader who inculcated in the people of India the fiber of firmness and strength. He fervently believed in the concept of Swaraj and dedicated his entire life for the attainment of the same. The second decade of the 20th century was entirely different as the outbreak of Revolt of 1857 eventuated in the formation of the Indian National Congress, a pan-India organization which witnessed the robustness of the Moderates post its formation. For the attainment of his objective Tilak moved heavens and earth in order to enter Congress as it was a requisite for the achievement of his objective. The research paper takes into account the foundation work for convening the Lucknow Congress of 1916 under the dynamic leadership of Tilak. The paper also throws light on the structure of the Congress before 1916 and examine the alterations introduced to bring the Extremists into the mainstream of the Congress. The research paper is based on the primary sources consulted from National Archives of India, Prime Minister Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi. The files, correspondences and records of General Administrative Department of U.P. State Archives, Lucknow has also been taken into account.*

**Keywords**

Home rule, Lucknow Congress, Swaraj, self-government, Tilak.

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## Outlining the Preliminaries and Unveiling the Political Dimension of Lucknow Congress

*Swaraj is my birthright and I shall have it.* The maker of the above spontaneous slogan Shri Bal Gangadhar Tilak was undoubtedly the first Indian leader who inculcated in the people of India the fiber of firmness, fortitude, fearlessness and bravery. Tilak zealously began his struggle against the British Imperialism. He always detested *'foreigners'* as *'rulers'* on pious Indian soil and considered the British rule as a malediction on India. For the attainment of the same, Tilak revived the old religious festivals the *Ganpati Festival* in 1883[1] and *Shivaji Festival* in 1895[2] and also engendered the feeling of oneness and self-respect. He was cognizant of the power of press and therefore he published two papers[3]—*The Maharatta* in English and The *Kesari* in Maharatti.

Tilak's avid and spirited feeling of patriotism very soon made him unfriendly to the British Government. The Government realized that if Tilak was not removed immediately from Indian politics, he would tangibly alter the whole situation of India and would soon oust them from India. Lord Sydenham, the Governor of Bombay, wrote to the Secretary of State Lord Morley, *"Tilak is not simply a journalist. He is one of the chief conspirators, perhaps the chief conspirator against the existence of British Government in India. His Ganpati Festivals, Shivaji Festivals, Paisa Fund and National Schools were all instituted for one purpose - the overthrow of British rule. If he had been allowed more time to mature his plans, it is quite possible that he might have succeeded in promoting a general strike which is one of the Russian methods advocated by the violent Party."*[4]

This fear of Tilak made the Bombay Government take the draconian step to put a cessation on Tilak's activities. The Bombay Government very soon found grounds to prosecute Tilak and oust him from the political scene for a long span of time. As a result, Tilak was arrested for his article 'The Country's Misfortun'e published in *Kesari* on May 12, 1908. He was sentenced to 6 years imprisonment on June 24, 1908 and was send to Mandalay Jail in Burma. After completing his six years, when Tilak was released from Mandalay jail on 16-17 June, 1914, he engrossed himself completely in putting all his sinews in reorganizing the Nationalist Party.[5]

For the attainment of the purpose it was a requisite for Tilak to make an entry into the Congress, as after the Surat imbroglio the congress creed, Constitution and the rules of conduct of its meetings were so formed by the Moderate leaders so as to exclude the Nationalists from the mainstream of the Congress but this was a very knotty and mystifying issue for Tilak as the changed Constitution had closed the doors of the Congress against the entry of Extremists. According to Article XX of the Congress Constitution, the right of electing delegates was limited to the organization and public bodies under the control of Moderates.[6]

The only path, which Tilak discerned that could bring the Nationalists in the fold of Indian National Congress was to amend Article XX of the Congress Constitution.[7] However, the demise of two great Moderate leaders of India, Gopal Krishna Gokhale in Feb 19, 1915 and that of Pherozeshah Mehta on November 5, 1915 facilitated the re-entry of Nationalists into the Congress. Tilak was now the pre-eminent leader of Western India and one of the most powerful figures in Indian politics.

The question of Congress compromise was discussed at the Bombay Congress session in 1915. The Constitution of the Congress was amended, granting automatic affiliation to political bodies in existence for 2 years on 31st December, 1915, fixing the maximum number of their delegates at 15. The amendment facilitated the re-union of the Congress with the Nationalists. The amendment of the Constitution of the Congress, enabled Tilak to capture the Congress in two years' time.[8] Tilak accepted the amendment whole heartedly and was now allowed to send delegates to the Congress. Though there was a strong opposition from Tilak's own Party to the acceptance of the compromise as some of the Nationalists thought that they were stronger than the Moderates both in terms of popular support, member and political thinking. But Tilak obviated all the hurdles in the path of compromise and made a remarkable re-entry into the Congress of 1916 at Lucknow.

Before the establishment of Home Rule League it was mandatory for Tilak to create a strong public opinion and to invigorate the Nationalist Party, which had lost its strength and direction during his absence. He therefore thought to revive the Bombay Provincial

Conference, which had been in abeyance for sometime and through it to revitalize his Party. Accordingly, 17th Bombay Provincial Conference met at Poona on May 8, 1915, under the Presidentship of Joseph Baptista, a staunch Nationalist and a leading member of the Bombay Bar. Immensely attended by 1000 number of delegates the Conference proved that the people had retained their old faith and confidence in Tilak's chairmaistic leadership and above all it proved that the masses were ready to work on the principal of self-help to attain the ideal of self-government. It was in this Conference that Tilak made his first political speech since his release from jail and gave the magic words *"Home Rule"* which echoed through the length and breadth of the country. *"Home Rule for India with provincial autonomy"* as its salient feature was the avowed objective of the Nationalists. Thus, the seed of Swaraj was sown and the people felt to harvest it. According to a contemporary police report *"the whole affair was triumph for Tilak."*[9]

Now, the stage was all set-up for the formation of the Home Rule League. A meeting of Nationalists of Bombay, Central Provinces and Berar was held at Tilak's house in Poona on December 23-24, 1915, where it was resolved that a Home Rule League for Maharashtra should be established. To prompt the idea, an effective step was taken in this regard and a Conference of Nationalists was held at Belgaun on 27-29 April 1916. The Conference represented the Extremists who had held themselves aloof from the congress after the Surat split in 1907. The Conference was attended by 1600 number of delegates under the Presidentship of G.S. Kharparde. S.M. Paranjpee, B.S. Moonjee, L.B. Bhopathar and A.B. Kolhatkar were among those who did not wished to rejoin the Congress, but the resolution accepting the terms of compromise moved by Tilak was unanimously passed.[10]

The most important resolution passed by the Conference was to adopt a scheme for granting Home Rule to India within a definite period. It was decided that the League, should, in the first instance be a pioneer organization for Bombay and Central Provinces and that the formation of an All-India League should be postponed until similar organization had been founded in the province. Joseph Baptista was selected as President, N.C. Kelkar Secretary and D.V.Gokhale as Assistant Secretary.[11]

A provisional committee of 17 members was appointed. It was decided that the League should first of all aim at obtaining 10,000 members. When this had been secured, the league would have a Home Rule Bill drafted by expert lawyers and entrusted to a member of Parliament who would move it in the House of Commons. Tilak's league was to work in central Provinces and Bombay Presidency. Six branches were established at the following centers. Central Maharashtra, Central Provinces, Berar, Bombay and Karnataka. To explain its purpose, the league published 6 books in Marathi and 2 in English with translations in *Gujarati* and *Kannada*.

Tilak in his leading article in *Mahratta* explained the reason for the necessity of the League. He wrote *"It was generally recognized that the time had positively come for an organization to be started for educating public opinion and agitating for Home Rule throughout the country. The Congress was the body, which would naturally possess the greatest authority for undertaking such a work with responsibility. The scheme of self-government, which the Congress is supposed to be intending to hatch, served as a plausible excuse for most of the Moderates to negative a definite proposal to establish a Home Rule League. But the Congress, it is generally recognized, is two unwidely to be easily moved to prepare a scheme for self-government, and actively work for its practical success. The spadework has got to be done by someone. It can afford to wait no longer. The league may be regarded as the pioneer movement, and is not intended in any sense to be an exclusive movement."*[12]

The year 1916 was the most eventful in Tilak's career. The first half of the year saw the foundation of the Indian Home Rule League and the second half saw the joint session of Moderates and Extremists after the Surat imbroglio of 1907. After a long spell of nine year's, the extremists under the staunch leadership of Tilak returned to the Congress in 1916 at Lucknow. The 31st session of Indian National Congress opened at the historic Kaiser Bagh (Royal Garden) of Lucknow on December 26, 1916 with 2300 delegates attending the session.

The resolution of *Self-Government for India* was passed by the Congress on 29th December. The resolution was proposed by Dr. S.N. Banerjee, seconded by. Annie Besant and was supported by Tilak. The XIII resolution regarding self-government for India stated "*That having regard to the fact that the great communities of India are the inheritors of ancient civilizations and have shown great capacity for Government and administration, and to the progress in education and public spirit made by them during a century of British rule, and further* *having regard to the fact that the present system of Government does not satisfy the legitimate aspirations of the people and has become unsuited to the existing conditions and requirements, this Congress is of opinion that the time has come when His Majesty the King Emperor should be pleased to issue a proclamation announcing that it is the aim and intention of British policy to confer self-government of India at an early date.*

*That this Congress demands that a definite step should be taken towards self-government by granting the reform contained in the scheme prepared by the All-India Congress Committee in concert with the Reform Committee appointed by the All-India Muslim League.*

*That in the re-construction of the Empire, India shall be lifted from the position of a dependency to that of an equal partner in the Empire with the self-governing Dominions."*

Tilak spoke on the resolution - *"The resolution which I wish to support embodies all those principles, it is the resolution on self-government. It may not be Swaraj in the widest sense but it is far better than Swadeshi and Boycott. It is infact, a synthesis of all the Congress resolutions, passed during the past 30 years - a synthesis that will help us all to proceed to work in a definite and responsible manner. We cannot now afford to spend our energy on all - 30 resolutions - public service resolutions, arms act, sundry others All that is included in this one resolution on self-government."* Tilak said *"I am glad to say, that I have lived these 10 years to see that we are going to put our voice and shoulder together to push on the claim of self-government. We have found luck in Lucknow. We are now united in everyway in the United Provinces."*[13]

Emphasizing the importance of Lucknow session, Tilak said *"The Lucknow session has become one of the most important sessions of the Congress. Two things of transcendental importance happened at Lucknow. One was that a definite demand for Swaraj was unanimously formulated. The other was that the Hindus and Muslims made the demand with a united voice."*

The proceedings of the Lucknow Congress were marked by great enthusiasm and satisfaction reigned supreme that a united demand has been formulated and presented to the Government. Tilak took a vital part in the Congress session and in moving the resolution of self-government for India. Acceptance of the ideal of self-government by the Congress and the Muslim League enabled the two political parties to converge together against the British. Thus, the myth that the two communities would not be united, was exploded by Tilak. The Lucknow Congress finally buried the hatchet between Hindus and Muslims and also between the moderates and extremists. The Hindu Muslim unity achieved by Tilak at the Lucknow Congress was the crowing event of his career. Tilak's round the clock endeavor and strenuous efforts gave birth to a definite demand of *Swarajya* or Home Rule on a truly nationwide scale.

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# The Role of Mobile Phones in Bridging the Digital Divide for Economic Empowerment of Rural Women in Nepal

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## Abstract

*This paper examines the relationship between digital divide and economic empowerment among rural women in Sindhupalchowk, Nepal. Drawing upon a mixed-methods approach involving surveys, in-depth interviews, and ethnographic observations with 25 rural women, the study analyzes how mobile phone usage contributes to women's access to information, financial services, and markets. Findings reveal that while mobile phones have improved women's financial autonomy and decision-making power within households, structural barriers such as patriarchal norms, low digital literacy, and infrastructural constraints continue to restrict their full potential. The study argues that technological access alone does not ensure empowerment; rather, empowerment emerges when women gain agency, resources, and social support to utilize technology meaningfully. The paper concludes by emphasizing the need for gender-sensitive digital literacy programs and inclusive policies to promote equitable digital participation and sustainable empowerment in rural Nepal.*

## Keywords

Digital Divide, Economic empowerment, Gender inequality, Mobile phone, Rural women.

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## 1. Introduction

The increasing penetration of mobile phone technology has the potential to address the long-standing issues of socio-economic inequality in rural Nepal, particularly for women. In regions like Sindhupalchowk, rural women often face barriers to economic opportunities due to a variety of factors, including limited access to education, financial services, and markets, compounded by deeply entrenched gender norms. This study explores how mobile phones, a tool that is becoming increasingly accessible, can bridge the digital divide and promote the economic empowerment of rural women in this area.

The digital divide, which refers to the disparity in access to and usage of digital technologies between different social groups, is particularly pronounced in rural Nepal. Women in these areas are often excluded from digital engagement due to socio-cultural factors, economic constraints, and limited educational opportunities. These barriers prevent them from leveraging mobile technology to access financial resources, market information, and agricultural advice, all of which are crucial for improving their economic standing.

Mobile phones, with their ability to connect users to information and resources, offer a unique opportunity to overcome these barriers. For rural women, mobile phones can facilitate access to banking services, enhance agricultural productivity through mobile-based advisory services, and create new avenues for entrepreneurship by connecting them to broader markets. Despite these potential benefits, the full impact of mobile phones on women's empowerment is still hindered by patriarchal norms, low digital literacy, and inadequate infrastructure.

This research investigates the role of mobile phones in promoting economic empowerment by examining the ways in which they help rural women overcome socio-economic and gendered barriers. It aims to contribute to the ongoing conversation about digital inclusion, offering insights into the transformative potential of mobile technology for marginalized women in rural Nepal. Ultimately, this study seeks to highlight the broader implications of mobile technology in achieving gender-equitable development.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study revolves around the concepts of the digital divide and economic empowerment, exploring how mobile phones can act as tools for bridging the gap in economic opportunities for rural women in Sindhupalchowk, Nepal. The framework integrates key theoretical approaches, including the Capability Approach (Sen), Kabeer's Economic Empowerment Framework, and sociological theories of the digital divide, while also considering gendered access to technology and its implications for women's economic opportunities.

The digital divide refers to the gap between those who have access to modern information and communication technologies (ICTs) and those who do not, with access being influenced by factors such as geography, socio-economic status, and gender (Van Dijk, 2006). In rural Nepal, this divide is particularly pronounced for women, as socio-cultural norms and economic constraints further hinder their access to mobile phones and other digital technologies. While mobile technology has become increasingly accessible, the divide remains an obstacle to equitable participation in the digital economy.

Economic empowerment is the ability of individuals, particularly marginalized groups like rural women, to make decisions, control resources, and participate in economic activities that enhance their quality of life (Kabeer, 2005). It encompasses not only financial independence but also access to opportunities and resources that allow individuals to exercise their agency and contribute to their families and communities (Sen, 1999). For rural women in Nepal, mobile phones present a unique opportunity to gain greater economic autonomy by facilitating access to financial services, market information, and entrepreneurship.

This study draws on Sen's Capability Approach, which frames development as the expansion of individual freedoms and capabilities (Sen, 1999). From this perspective, mobile technology can enhance the capabilities of rural women by providing access to information and resources. However, as Sen and others note, technology's empowerment potential is contingent on surrounding social conditions (Robeyns, 2005).

Kabeer's Economic Empowerment Framework further illuminates this process by highlighting the interplay of resources, agency, and achievements (Kabeer, 2005). Here, mobile phones are conceptualized as a resource that can bolster women's agency in making strategic life choices, particularly in financial and market domains. The ultimate achievements of empowerment, such as increased income and decision-making power, are thus partly mediated through the meaningful use of this technological resource.

Sociological theories on the digital divide provide a broader understanding of the structural factors that perpetuate unequal access to technology. The digital divide is not just a technological issue but a reflection of social inequalities, particularly those based on gender, class, and geography (DiMaggio & Hargittai, 2001). For rural women, the divide is compounded by patriarchal social structures that limit their access to technology. As Castells (1996) argues, the digital divide reflects the concentration of technological power in the hands of elites, leaving marginalized groups, such as rural women, with limited opportunities to benefit from technological advancements. In Nepal, these gendered disparities in mobile phone ownership and usage create barriers to women's economic inclusion.

Gendered access to technology is a critical factor in understanding the digital divide in rural Nepal. Women in these communities often face restrictions on their use of mobile phones, which are typically controlled by male family members (Shrestha & Karki, 2021). In patriarchal societies, technology is often viewed as a resource that empowers men, while women's access to such resources is limited due to traditional gender roles (Miller *et al*., 2014). These gendered dynamics restrict women's ability to use mobile phones for economic activities such as mobile banking, agricultural advice, and e-commerce, which are essential for enhancing their economic independence.

The socio-cultural norms that govern women's mobility and decision-making power within households further exacerbate this issue. In rural areas, women are primarily responsible for domestic and reproductive tasks, and their participation in economic activities outside the home is often limited. As a result, women's access to and use of mobile phones is restricted, despite the potential of these devices to improve their economic outcomes (Acharya, 2003). Moreover, even when women have access to mobile phones, they may lack the skills to fully utilize them for financial management, market access, or entrepreneurial activities due to limited digital literacy (Rahman, 2014).

However, when women are able to access and use mobile phones effectively, they experience significant improvements in their economic opportunities. Studies have shown that women's access to mobile banking, for example, enables them to save, transfer money, and access credit, reducing their dependency on male family members (Aker & Mbiti, 2010). Mobile phones also facilitate communication with agricultural advisors and buyers, allowing women to improve productivity and engage in income-generating activities (World Bank, 2018). Despite the persistent gendered barriers, mobile technology holds the potential to empower women economically by providing them with the tools to overcome traditional restrictions and participate more fully in the economy.

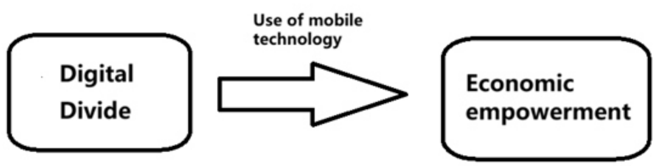


Fig.-1: Digital divide and its Economic empowerment

## 3. Literature Review

The literature review draws from global and regional perspectives on the digital divide, focusing on the impact of mobile technology on women's economic empowerment in developing countries, with a particular emphasis on Nepal. The review also discusses the status of digital inclusion in Nepal, specifically among rural women, as this is crucial for understanding the broader socio-economic challenges faced by this demographic.

The digital divide is a persistent issue that affects access to information, communication, and economic opportunities worldwide. In many developing countries, including those in Asia and Africa, the digital divide is particularly pronounced between urban and rural areas, as well as between men and women. According to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU, 2020), women in low-income countries are 23% less likely than men to use mobile Internet services. This gender gap is even more significant in rural regions, where socio-cultural norms and economic constraints limit women's access to digital tools (GSMA, 2022).

Scholars emphasize that the digital divide encompasses not only physical access but also disparities in digital literacy and the capacity to use technology for development (Van Dijk, 2006). Mobile phones hold significant potential to improve access to financial services, healthcare, and education for marginalized groups (Aker & Mbiti, 2010). However, these benefits are unevenly distributed, with rural women facing compounded barriers including cultural restrictions and infrastructural deficits.

This gap is particularly pronounced in South Asia, where patriarchal norms limit women's mobility and decision-making power, directly impacting their phone ownership and usage (Hafkin & Huyer, 2007; GSMA, 2023). Globally, evidence from contexts like Sub-Saharan Africa and India indicates that mobile technology can enhance women's economic empowerment by improving access to financial services, markets, and income-generating opportunities (Morawczynski, 2017; Agarwal, 2018).

In rural areas of developing countries, mobile phones also play a critical role in enhancing agricultural productivity. For example, mobile-based agricultural advisory services have proven effective in providing rural women with up-to-date information on weather patterns, market prices, and farming techniques, leading to improved crop yields and income (World Bank, 2018). These services are particularly valuable in regions where traditional agricultural extension services are inaccessible due to infrastructure challenges or cultural restrictions on women's mobility.

Despite these successes, challenges remain in ensuring that mobile technology reaches and benefits all women equally. Research has pointed out that while mobile phones can serve as a tool for economic empowerment, their impact is often constrained by factors such as limited digital literacy, high data costs, and unreliable network coverage, particularly in remote rural areas (Duflo, 2012). These barriers are compounded by socio-cultural norms that prevent women from fully utilizing mobile technology, especially when they lack the autonomy to control their mobile phones or the financial resources to afford mobile data plans (Gillwald & Moyo, 2015).

Nepal, like many other developing countries, faces significant challenges in achieving digital inclusion, particularly for rural women. The country's rural areas remain underdeveloped in terms of digital infrastructure, and socio-cultural barriers to women's access to technology further exacerbate the digital divide. According to the

Nepal Telecommunications Authority (2024), mobile phone ownership among women in rural Nepal is significantly lower than among men, with only about 65% of women having access to mobile phones compared to 81% of men. This disparity is even more pronounced in more remote areas, where traditional gender roles restrict women's access to mobile devices and digital resources (Shrestha & Karki, 2021).

In Nepal, mobile technology demonstrates clear potential for empowering rural women through mobile banking and entrepreneurial activities (Aker & Mbiti, 2010; Adhikari *et al*., 2022). Yet, structural barriers like poor infrastructure, high costs, and low digital literacy persist (Sharma & Thapa, 2021). Although government initiatives like the Digital Nepal Framework aim to bridge this gap, their effectiveness is often hampered by cultural resistance, funding constraints, and a lack of gender-sensitive design (Nepal Ministry of Communications, 2021; Practical Action Nepal, 2020).

While mobile technology holds significant potential for improving the socio-economic status of rural women in Nepal, its impact is still limited by infrastructural and socio-cultural barriers. To fully realize the benefits of digital inclusion, targeted interventions are needed that address both the structural inequalities that women face and the practical barriers to mobile technology use. This study seeks to contribute to the growing body of research on digital inclusion and women's empowerment by examining how mobile phones can serve as tools for economic empowerment among rural women in Sindhupalchowk, Nepal.

## 4. Research Methodology

This study employs a mixed-method approach to investigate the role of mobile phones in bridging the digital divide and promoting economic empowerment for rural women in Sindhupalchowk, Nepal. The mixed-methods design combines both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques, including surveys, in-depth interviews, and ethnographic observations. This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of how mobile phones are used by rural women in the study area and the challenges they face in utilizing this technology for economic purposes.

A mixed-method approach was selected for this study to capture both the numerical data that reflects the broader trends of mobile phone usage among rural women and the personal, context-specific experiences of the participants. The survey component of the study provides a broad quantitative overview of the prevalence of mobile phone usage, its frequency, and the general patterns of access to mobile technologies. Surveys are particularly useful for gathering data from a larger sample of rural women, offering insights into the socio-demographic factors that influence mobile phone access and usage, such as age, education, economic status, and household composition (Creswell, 2014).

In-depth interviews were conducted to explore the personal experiences and perceptions of rural women regarding the economic impact of mobile phone usage. A total of 25 rural women from Sindhupalchowk were interviewed, selected through purposive sampling to ensure diversity in age (20-50), education level, and economic status. The semi-structured interviews covered topics such as mobile phone usage for financial transactions, access to agricultural knowledge, and market connections. Example responses include: *"I can transfer my child's school fees through my phone without travelling four hours to the bank"*, and *"My husband does not allow me to use a smartphone, fearing it will lead me astray"*. These testimonies provided rich qualitative data that were complemented by survey findings. These interviews are semi-structured, allowing for flexibility in capturing detailed responses while maintaining consistency across participants. The goal of these interviews is to understand how mobile phones are used in everyday life for economic activities such as managing finances, accessing agricultural information, and engaging in entrepreneurial ventures. The interviews also address the barriers women face, including cultural restrictions, digital illiteracy, and limited control over mobile phone usage within households (Bloor & Wood, 2006). These qualitative insights complement the quantitative data by providing a deeper understanding of the socio-cultural context and the personal experiences of rural women.

Ethnographic observations were conducted to further contextualize the findings and provide a holistic view of how mobile phones are integrated into the daily lives of rural women. Through direct observation of women's interactions with mobile phones in both domestic and community settings, the study captures non-verbal aspects of mobile phone usage and the social dynamics that influence its use. Observations also help identify implicit social norms, such as those related to gender, that shape how technology is accessed and used (Geertz, 1973).

## 4·1 Description of the Study Area (Sindhupalchowk, Nepal)

Sindhupalchowk, located in the central hilly region of Nepal, serves as the study area for this research. It is a rural district characterized by diverse topography, with both mountainous and plain areas, and is home to a predominantly agricultural population. The district has faced significant socio-economic challenges, including poverty, limited access to infrastructure, and high levels of unemployment. As of the most recent data, Sindhupalchowk has one of the highest poverty rates in Nepal, with a significant portion of the population living below the poverty line (Nepal Central Bureau of Statistics, 2023).

Women in Sindhupalchowk, like many rural women across Nepal, face socio-cultural and economic barriers that limit their access to resources and opportunities. These barriers include patriarchal norms, low literacy rates, and limited mobility, which restrict women's participation in economic activities outside the household. Despite these challenges, mobile phone usage is becoming increasingly common in the region, providing an opportunity to explore how technology is shaping women's economic roles.

The choice of Sindhupalchowk as the study area is significant for several reasons. First, it represents a typical rural context where mobile technology has the potential to address the digital divide and empower women economically. Second, the region has witnessed increasing mobile phone penetration, with mobile networks expanding into even the more remote areas. Finally, the district offers a microcosmic view of the broader socio-cultural and economic challenges faced by rural women in Nepal, making it an ideal setting for this research.

The data collection process involved two main components: interviews with rural women and interviews with key informants from local organizations and government bodies.

Interviews with rural women focused on understanding their experiences with mobile phones and the role these devices play in their economic activities. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure representation from various demographic groups, including women from different age groups, educational backgrounds, and economic statuses. In total, 25 women were interviewed, with a mix of those who owned mobile phones and those who had limited or no access. The interviews were conducted in the local language (Nepali), ensuring that cultural nuances were captured and that the participants felt comfortable sharing their experiences.

Key informant interviews were conducted with local community leaders, representatives from non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and government officials involved in rural development and technology initiatives. These interviews provided additional context on the broader socio-economic and infrastructural challenges in the region and insights into ongoing efforts to promote digital inclusion. By speaking with informants who have direct experience with technology interventions and women's empowerment programs, the study was able to gain a comprehensive understanding of the barriers and opportunities for mobile phone use among rural women.

The data from surveys, interviews, and observations were then analyzed using a combination of descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. Descriptive statistics helped identify patterns and trends in mobile phone usage, while thematic analysis allowed for a deeper exploration of the qualitative data, highlighting recurring themes related to women's economic empowerment and the challenges they face in utilizing mobile phones effectively.

### 4·2 Ethical Considerations

Throughout the data collection process, ethical guidelines were strictly followed to ensure the confidentiality and safety of participants. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and they were assured that their identities would remain confidential. Additionally, the study was designed to be culturally sensitive, recognizing the social norms and potential power dynamics that might influence women's willingness to share their experiences.

## 5. Findings and Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that mobile phones play a significant role in improving the economic opportunities and overall empowerment of rural women in Sindhupalchowk, Nepal. However, despite the potential benefits, the effective use of mobile phones remains hindered by various barriers, including patriarchal norms, digital literacy gaps, infrastructure challenges, and socio-economic constraints. This section discusses the key findings related to mobile phone usage, empowerment, and the barriers that rural women face, along with how mobile phones can help overcome these challenges.

**Table-1: Survey Responses on Women's Empowerment and Mobile Phone Usage** **(n = 25)**

| Survey Item | Yes/Agree (n) | No/Disagree (n) |
|---|---|---|
| Q1: Women's empowerment is necessary | 15 | 10 |
| Q2: Empowerment leads to social change | 21 | 4 |
| Q3: Economic empowerment is distinct from social empowerment | 16 | 9 |
| Q4: Education is essential for empowerment | 20 | 5 |
| Q5: NGOs play a role in empowerment | 18 | 7 |
| Q6: Men dominate household decision-making | 19 | 6 |
| Q7: Women have access to family income | 8 | 17 |
| Q8: Socio-cultural norms influence empowerment | 14 | 11 |
| Q9: Patriarchal society limits women's opportunities | 16 | 9 |
| Q10: Economic empowerment is overstated by media | 6 | 19 |
| Q11: Women use mobile phones regularly | 23 | 2 |
| Q12: Mobile phones provide practical benefits | 21 | 4 |
| Q13: Mobile phones support development | 19 | 6 |
| Q14: Women experience digital suppression or restrictions | 18 | 7 |
| Q15: Mobile phone impact is mostly positive | 20 | 5 |
| Q16: Private sector telecom performs better than government | 7 | 18 |
| Q17: Satisfaction with government digital efforts | 8 | 17 |

**Source:** Field survey, Sindhupalchowk, 2023.

Survey results indicated that 54% of respondents used mobile phones for financial transactions, including sending and receiving remittances. One participant explained: *"I can receive money from my son working abroad instantly, without paying high transfer fees"* (P5).

Such cases illustrate how mobile banking reduces both the time and cost of financial activities, enhancing women's economic autonomy.

A significant 68% of respondents reported using mobile phones to access agricultural information, such as weather forecasts and pest control advice. As Participant P9 noted: *"When I know in advance that heavy rain is coming, I can protect my crops"*. This shows how timely information via mobile technology can directly protect livelihoods.

A major finding of the study is that mobile phones have become a crucial tool for rural women in accessing financial services, agricultural knowledge, and market opportunities. Around 31% of participants had used their phones to connect with distant buyers. Participant shared: *"Through my phone, I contacted buyers from another district and sold my wool at a better price than in the local market".* This demonstrates the role of mobile phones in expanding market access beyond geographic limitations. Mobile banking services were widely used among participants, particularly for managing finances, saving money, and transferring funds. For many women, mobile phones have provided a way to bypass traditional banking systems, which are often geographically inaccessible, particularly in rural areas. Mobile banking applications such as eSewa and Prabhu Pay have enabled women to access financial services such as savings accounts, loans, and payments, thereby increasing their financial independence and reducing their reliance on male family members for financial transactions (Aker & Mbiti, 2010).

In addition to financial services, mobile phones have facilitated access to agricultural information and advisory services. Several participants reported using mobile-based services to receive information on weather patterns, crop management, and market prices. This information helps women make informed decisions about their farming practices, leading to improved productivity and reduced risk of crop loss. The use of mobile phones for agricultural advisory services was particularly significant in improving agricultural output, which is a primary source of income for many rural women in the region (World Bank, 2018). These services have empowered women by providing them with the knowledge needed to improve their livelihoods and contribute more effectively to their families' economic stability.

Moreover, mobile phones have opened up new market opportunities for rural women. Many participants reported using mobile phones to connect directly with buyers and suppliers, bypassing intermediaries and increasing their income. This has been especially important in rural areas where access to markets is limited due to geographical barriers. Mobile phones have enabled women to market their products to a wider customer base, both locally and nationally, thus increasing their economic participation and enhancing their entrepreneurial activities (Shrestha & Karki, 2021).

Mobile phones have contributed to the economic empowerment of rural women by increasing their income, improving their decision-making power within households, and fostering entrepreneurship. One of the most significant outcomes reported by participants was an increase in household income. With access to financial services, agricultural information, and market opportunities, many women experienced a notable improvement in their income levels. By directly engaging in market transactions and reducing their dependency on intermediaries, women were able to retain a larger share of their earnings. This financial independence has not only improved their personal economic well-being but has also allowed them to contribute more effectively to their families' financial needs.

In addition to increased income, mobile phones have also enhanced the decision-making power of women within their households. Several participants mentioned that mobile phone usage had led to a greater say in household financial decisions, as women were able to independently manage savings, make financial transactions, and access credit. This newfound autonomy in financial matters has translated into increased agency and influence in household decisions, especially in areas related to economic spending and investment (Kabeer, 2005). Many women reported that their husbands or male family members were more willing to consult them on financial matters, recognizing their ability to manage resources effectively.

Furthermore, mobile phones have enabled rural women to engage in entrepreneurial activities. By using mobile phones to connect with customers and suppliers, many women have been able to start small businesses or expand existing ones. The ability to engage in e-commerce, marketing products via social media or mobile applications, and access online platforms for business development has empowered women to become active entrepreneurs, improving their economic status and social mobility (Agarwal, 2018). This entrepreneurial spirit, supported by mobile technology, has led to greater economic independence and the potential for long-term growth.

Survey data revealed that 46% of women faced restrictions from male family members on their phone usage. As one of the participants expressed: *"My husband controls the phone, and I can only use it when he permits"*. In addition, 72% reported daily usage of less than one hour, often due to shared devices or household chores. These barriers limit the potential benefits of mobile technology.

While mobile phones have had a positive impact on rural women's economic empowerment, several barriers hinder their full utilization. Patriarchal norms are a significant obstacle to women's ability to access and use mobile phones effectively. In many households, mobile phone ownership and usage are controlled by male family members, who often view technology as a threat to traditional gender roles. Some women reported that their mobile phone access was restricted or monitored by their husbands or in-laws, limiting their ability to use mobile phones independently for financial or business purposes. These gendered restrictions highlight the broader socio-cultural constraints that women face in exercising control over their own resources (Miller *et al*., 2014).

Limited digital literacy further restricted effective use, as women reported uncertainty in navigating mobile banking or advisory services, a problem compounded by broader educational disparities (Rahman, 2014). Infrastructure challenges, including poor network coverage and high data costs, persistently hampered advanced activities like e-commerce and reliable information access, particularly in remote areas (Sharma & Thapa, 2021).

Lastly, socio-economic constraints, such as poverty and limited access to credit, also hinder women's ability to fully leverage mobile phones for economic empowerment. Although mobile phones provide access to financial services, many women in the study still face difficulties in accessing credit or saving money due to low household incomes. Without sufficient financial resources, women are unable to invest in business opportunities or improve their agricultural productivity, limiting their ability to escape poverty (Aker & Mbiti, 2010).

Despite the challenges, mobile phones have played a crucial role in helping rural women overcome some of these barriers. Mobile phones have provided a platform for women to access financial services independently, which has reduced their reliance on male family members for financial transactions. In some cases, mobile banking has allowed women to bypass patriarchal control over household finances, providing them with greater economic autonomy (World Bank, 2018).

Moreover, mobile phones have facilitated the acquisition of digital literacy through mobile-based training programs and educational apps. Many women reported using their phones to access mobile learning platforms that offer training in financial management, agricultural practices, and entrepreneurship. These digital literacy programs have helped women gain the skills necessary to use mobile phones effectively for economic purposes, thus enhancing their ability to participate in the digital economy.

In terms of infrastructure, efforts by the government and NGOs to improve network coverage and reduce data costs have been instrumental in increasing the accessibility of mobile phones for rural women. These initiatives, although still in their early stages, are helping to address some of the infrastructure challenges that limit the full potential of mobile phones (Nepal Ministry of Communications, 2021).

Mobile phones have the potential to empower rural women economically by increasing their income, improving decision-making power, and fostering entrepreneurship. However, overcoming the barriers of patriarchal norms, limited digital literacy, infrastructure challenges, and socio-economic constraints is crucial for ensuring that these benefits reach all women. Mobile phones can serve as powerful tools for empowerment, but targeted interventions are needed to address the socio-cultural, educational, and infrastructural barriers that prevent rural women from fully benefiting from mobile technology.

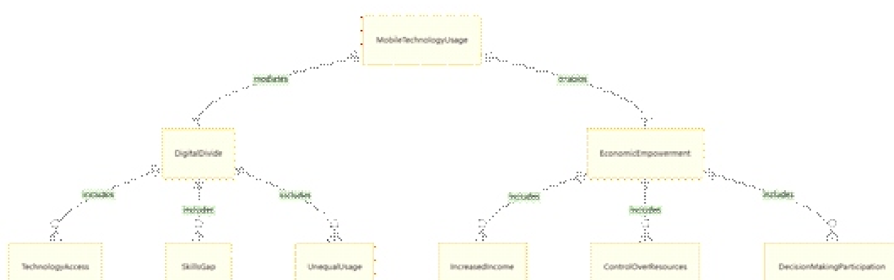


Fig.-2: Conceptual Framework

## 6. Conclusion

This study explored the role of mobile phones in bridging the digital divide and promoting the economic empowerment of rural women in Sindhupalchowk, Nepal. By examining the patterns of mobile phone usage, the challenges faced by women in utilizing these technologies, and the outcomes associated with mobile phone access, the study highlights both the transformative potential of mobile phones and the persistent barriers that limit their full use. The key findings, the potential of mobile technology, and the limitations of the study are discussed below. The findings underscore the necessity for integrated policies that address the identified barriers. Key recommendations include implementing gender-sensitive digital literacy programs, improving rural network infrastructure, and promoting affordable mobile data plans through public-private partnerships. Such targeted interventions are crucial to ensure that mobile technology fulfills its potential as a tool for sustainable economic empowerment for rural women in Nepal.

## 6·1 Summary of Key Findings

The study found that mobile phones are crucial tools for enhancing the economic opportunities of rural women in Sindhupalchowk. Rural women who had access to mobile phones were able to access financial services, agricultural knowledge, and market opportunities, which in turn improved their economic well-being. Mobile phones facilitated financial autonomy through mobile banking, enabling women to manage their finances, save, and engage in transactions without relying on male family members (Aker & Mbiti, 2010). Furthermore, mobile phones provided women with access to agricultural information, such as weather forecasts and market prices, which helped improve productivity and reduce risks (World Bank, 2018). These factors contributed to increased income, better decision-making power within households, and enhanced entrepreneurial activities.

Despite these positive outcomes, the study also identified several barriers to the effective use of mobile phones. Patriarchal norms, limited digital literacy, infrastructure challenges, and socio-economic constraints continue to restrict women's ability to use mobile phones to their full potential. In many households, mobile phone ownership and usage were controlled by male family members, limiting women's autonomy in managing finances or accessing mobile services independently. Moreover, limited digital literacy among rural women, coupled with poor network coverage and high data costs, posed significant challenges to effective mobile phone use (Rahman, 2014; Shrestha & Karki, 2021). These barriers hindered rural women's full participation in the digital economy and reduced the transformative potential of mobile phones in their lives.

The findings of this study underscore the potential of mobile technology to bridge the digital divide and empower rural women in Nepal. Mobile phones can serve as powerful tools for enhancing women's economic opportunities by providing access to financial services, agricultural knowledge, and markets. As seen in this study, mobile phones have already begun to improve financial autonomy by enabling women to engage in mobile banking and manage their finances independently. Additionally, mobile technology plays a key role in improving agricultural productivity, which is vital for rural women who depend on agriculture for their livelihoods (Agarwal, 2018).

Moreover, mobile phones offer new entrepreneurial opportunities by facilitating direct access to markets and customers, thus increasing income and economic independence. By overcoming geographical barriers, mobile phones enable rural women to engage in e-commerce and sell goods to a broader customer base, both locally and nationally. This shift has significant implications for women's autonomy and participation in the economy, suggesting that mobile technology could play a critical role in enhancing women's socio-economic standing in rural Nepal.

However, to fully realize the potential of mobile phones for economic empowerment, efforts must be made to overcome the barriers identified in this study. Gender-sensitive mobile technology initiatives, digital literacy programs, and improvements in infrastructure are essential to ensure that rural women can access and effectively use mobile technology to improve their economic status.

## 6·2 Limitations and Areas for Future Research

While this study provides valuable insights into the role of mobile phones in the economic empowerment of rural women in Nepal, there are several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the study was limited to a specific geographical area—Sindhupalchowk-meaning the findings may not be universally applicable to all rural regions in Nepal. Further research could explore the role of mobile technology in other rural areas of Nepal, with a focus on different ethnic and socio-economic groups, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities related to mobile phone usage.

Second, the relatively small sample size (25 women) limits the generalizability of the findings, suggesting a need for larger-scale and longitudinal research. Future studies should also explore the interplay between mobile phones, social capital, and community networks, and investigate non-economic dimensions of empowerment, such as political and social inclusion.

Finally, while this study focused on the economic impact of mobile phones, future research could examine other dimensions of empowerment, such as political participation, social inclusion, and health outcomes. Mobile phones have the potential to affect various aspects of women's lives, and exploring these additional dimensions could provide a more holistic view of the role of technology in empowering rural women.

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# Understanding the Concept-Note on District Gazetteers through Kuar Lachman Singh's *Memoir*

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**Abstract**

*This article seeks to understand the concept and significance of District Gazetteers through a critical reading of Kuar Lachman Singh's Memoir, treating it as a precursor to and parallel source for colonial and post-colonial gazetteer writing in India. District Gazetteers have traditionally functioned as comprehensive administrative documents, combining geography, history, economy, society, customs, and local knowledge to present an "official" account of a region. By engaging with Kuar Lachman Singh's memoir, the article highlights how indigenous narratives often anticipated many of these gazetteer concerns, though from a lived, experiential, and insider's perspective rather than a purely bureaucratic one. The memoir offers rich descriptions of local power structures, agrarian relations, caste dynamics, everyday social practices, and the moral world of rural society, thereby complementing and sometimes contesting the colonial gaze embedded in official gazetteers. This study argues that memoirs like that of Kuar Lachman Singh help recover vernacular voices and subjective experiences that remain marginal in standardized district records. By placing the memoir alongside the gazetteer tradition, the article underscores the need to read District Gazetteers not merely as neutral repositories of facts but as historically situated texts shaped by power, purpose, and perspective. Such a comparative approach enriches our understanding of regional history and knowledge production in colonial India.*

**Keywords**

District Gazetteers, British imperialism, Memoir, East India Company, Northern-Western Provinces, British India.

# 9

## Understanding the Concept-Note on District Gazetteers through Kuar Lachman Singh's *Memoir*

The idea of compilation of 'District Gazetteers'[1] was conceived in the beginning of Crown's rule during the colonial British imperialism.[2] It has its roots in its first phase but the term became popular after the works of Mr. Edwin Thomas Atkinson, an officer of Bengal Civil Services (BCS) during the last quadrapple of the nineteenth century. Before coming to Kuar Lachman Singh and his *Historical and Statistical Memoir of Zila Bulandshahar*, it is necessary to have an idea of establishment of the Company's rule in the region.

After the success of Lord Wellesley's plan regarding the Ganga-Yamuna Doab and Delhi in 1803 and getting the authority transferred from the Sindhia ruler of Gwalior to the Company,[3] the East India Company, tried to strengthen the control over the territories by capturing the geographical area on the basis of its military strength.[4] The Company had to fight a number of battles within each of the districts because the local leaders were not ready to accept the foreigner's rule neither over their dominions nor on their respective areas of influence.[5] The Holkar factor was also one of the major factors responsible for it.[6] Jaswant Rao Holkar, even after the Surjianjangaon treaty[7] between the Sindhias and Company, was trying to destroy Company's strength and establish his influence and control over the areas which had been even so far in history under the Maratha control headed by the the Peshwas of Pune and hence, a historian observes it as the resultant Maratha effect on the area under the study.

During the period of 1803-07 the armed resistance given by Nawab Dunde Khan Lalhani and his son Ranmast Khan,[8] the Adhabhariya Rajput heroes of Kamauna[9] (now a village in the district of Bulandshahar in U.P.) in 1807, is clearly witnessed. A continuous chain has been observed witnessing the struggle in the form of battles in whole of territories mentioned above. Saharanpur,[10] Shamli,[11] Jhabreda,[12] Kamauna,[13] Ganaura[14] and a number of the others were the places which had been proved the tough centres to take arms against the East India Company's forces. Prior to that, Aligarh,[15] Malagarh,[16] Shahdara,[17] Jeetgarh[18] were the main centres to resist the Company.

Madho Rao Phalkia[19] headed thousands of cavalry in which Jivan Mal, his brother Signimal Tyagi[20] from the Tyagi Riyasat family of Asaura[21] (now in Hapur) and their tribesmen of Khindaura, Dasna and other villages remained slain on the battlefield fought at Jeetgarh[22] in 1803.

Both the brothers where unmarried or without issues and their third brother Hulas Rai had no issue after whose death his issueless widow Rani Roop Kaur[23] adopted his husband's cousin's younger son named Debi Singh[24] in late sixtees of the 19th century C.E. Ganga Bisan Chaudhary of Khindaura, in the Battle of Delhi (actually fought at Jeetgarh) lost a number of his family members including both of his sons and two of his brothers; and many nephews along with close relatives and companions.

Ultimately after a continuous series of battles and armed resistance given by local Indian people at different places, the Memoir remained successful to establish its administrative control over the region of Delhi and Agra in the first decade of 19th century C.E.[25]

But the enmity toward the foreigners was not ended in the Indian native camp. And, it is evident that in the Bareilly(1816)[26] and Hathras(1817),[27] after a long gap of some more than one decade, the enmity aroused against the Company. The armed resistance at Hathras was presented by local Indian hero named Raja Dayaram[28] while at Bareilley the hero of 1816 was one Mufti Muhammad Evaz Khan.[29]

These were not the last armed resistances the East India Company had faced but still there was something more to be added in the list. That time the area covered by the Khubbarh Gujars was to be listed. Kalyan singh and Vijay Singh Gujar, and Kalu Gujar and few more were giving the challenges.[30]

It is a matter of a fact that untill the end of the third decade of 19th century or more correctly until the end of the first quarter of that century the Company had to face local Indian peoples' armed resistances.

But with the end of the third decade those seem to their end in 1833, an Act of the British Parliament was passed to constitute a new province or Presidency in Company's dominions with its capital at Agra. The provisions made in this Act responsible to create a new 'Agra Province'[31] made it possible to appoint the Governor. Thus, in 1834 Sir C.T. Metcalf assumed the charge of the first 'Governor of Agra Presidency'[32] on 14th November, 1834. He worked on this post till 30 March, 1835. He was succeeded by Mr. W. Blunt who assumed the charge on 20th March, 1835 and worked till 1st December, 1835.[33] Mr. A. Ross succeeded him on 1st December and worked till 1st June 1836.[34]

As a matter of fact, the Agra Presidency was one of the six Northern-Western Provinces of British India. It was the one of the eight separate administrative units into which the British India was divided in first half of the 19th century. It covered a total of 9479 square miles. 3660 square miles was covered by it which has a population about 45,00,000 at that time. Both the figures are of the time about 1835.

Having been come into its existence on 14th November, 1836, the Agra Presidency was established on 1st June, 1834; when the "Ceded and Conquered Provinces of Agra Presidency" was recognized as the North-Western Provinces of India. The "Ceded and Conquered Provinces" made under the Government of India Act 1833 had the geographical area which, now, is identified that of the portions of the following state presently:

- Uttar Pradesh,
- Uttarakhand,
- Rajasthan,
- Madhya Pradesh,
- Himachal Pradesh,
- Haryana, and
- Delhi.

In 1835, it was rescheduled and recognized by the another Act of the British Parliament under the Provisions made in Statute 5 and 6, (William IV, cap. 52) that resulted into its new name of the "North-Western Provinces of India" which, that time had to be administered by a Lieutenant-Governor.

The provisional establishment of the Lieutenant-Governor of the North-Western Provinces was made effective. It came into influence with effect from 1836 and soon the title was merged with the "Chief

Commissioner of Oudh." Thus, it was renamed and finally in 1877, it became as follows:

> *"Lieutenant Governor of North-Western Provinces and Chief Commissioner of Oudh."*

As a matter of historical fact, in the meantime, particularly on 23rd June 1868, a resolution was made regarding the history-writing of the N.W. Provinces. For originality sake, it is being reproduced as such as follows:[35]

No. 2799.

**RESOLUTION.**

**General Department.**

***Dated Allahabad, the 23rd June, 1868.***

***Resolution by the Hon'ble the Lieutenant-Governor of the North-Western Provinces, regarding the compilation of "Gazetteers," or Historical and Statistical Memoirs for the several Districts of the North-Western Provinces.***

Read—

Letters from the Government of India, Home Department, dated the 30th May, 1867, and 31st March, 1868, calling attention to the compilation of the "Central Provinces Gazetteer," and desiring that "steps may be taken to initiate a similar work for the North-Western Provinces."

Ordered, that the following Minute be recorded :—

In 1844 Mr. Thomason laid down a plan for the preparation of an historical and statistical report for every district in these Provinces. The orders are preserved in Appendix XXIV. of the "Directions to Collectors." The instructions are so full and practical, that in now reviving the plan with reference to the foregoing despatch, I cannot do better than extract them in full :—

"*1st.*—It is very desirable to collect together all the statistical information which has been acquired during the late settlement, to throw it into a convenient form, and publish it for general information. The object of the undertaking is strictly practical. It should form an official history of each district, and contain all that will enable the public officers of Government to understand the peculiarities of the district, and conduct its administration.

"*2nd.*—There should be a separate volume for each district as at present constituted.

"*3rd.*—Each volume should consist of three parts—the narrative, the tabular, and the geographical.

"*4th.*—The narrative portion should comprise in the first place a general account of the whole district—its position, features, capabilities, history before our acquisition of the country and since as far as can be known, when it assumed its present limits, what changes have occurred in the judicial, magisterial, or revenue jurisdictions. Lists of judges, collectors and magistrates, with dates of assuming charge; dates of introduction of special measures, *e. g.*, special commission under Regulation I., 1821, Maafee deputy collectors' commission under III., 1828; dates on which changes of system took effect, such as cessation of powers of provincial courts, conferment of criminal powers on sessions judges, &c.

" 5*th.*—Local division should be stated,—pergunnahs, tehseels, thannahs, moonsiffees. These may conveniently be tabulated in the body of the narrative, and should show the pergunnahs, &c., geographically arranged from N. W. to S. E., and the area, jumma, population of each.

" 6*th.*—From generals the account should proceed to details, pergunnah by pergunnah, arranged in the order in which they stand in the table.

" 7*th.*—The fiscal history of each pergunnah should be given—former assessments as contrasted with the present. A correct jumma wasilbakee, from the commencement of our rule to the present time, would be most curious, if it could be given. This should be according to the fuslee year up to 1840-41, and after that the commercial year. There should also be a note of all sums remitted as irrecoverable from first to last, with mention of the year for which and in which remitted.

" 8*th.*—The tenures should be described and classed as accurately as may be, and all peculiarities of the agricultural population shown,—their tribe or caste, early history, present state, rank, and character.

" 9*th.*—The chief towns should be mentioned—their size, products, rise, former state, present state, probable prospects.

" 10*th.*—Any remarkable suits or proceedings should be noticed,—the dissolution of old farms or talookas; the fall of old influential families, or the rise of new ones; effects of the special commission; general effect of revenue and judicial system, whenever observable, as transferring property from one class of men to another.

" 11*th.*—The fullest particulars should be given regarding the last settlement,—when commenced, by whom conducted, when completed, and on what principle: how it has subsequently worked. Settlement reports should be printed entire in an appendix.

" 12*th.*—Statistical information should be given regarding education, the number of schools and scholars, the subjects taught, and emoluments of teachers.

" 13*th.*—Means of improvement,—rivers capable of being turned to account for purposes of irrigation or navigation, markets which might be opened by new roads, tanks, reservoirs, bunds which might be formed, drainage where required.

"14*th*.—All the authorities on which the statements are based should be carefully given, whether books, official records, or personal observation.* "

The idea conveyed in the above orders was but imperfectly realized. Memoirs of the kind contemplated have been prepared and published only for the districts in the margin.

Goorgaon. Budaon. | Allygurh. Cawnpore. | Futtehpore. Goruckpore.

Another settlement has now come round, and the opportunity is suitable for fully carrying into effect the views sketched out by Mr. Thomason.

Ample materials are at hand, and the work can at once be taken up for the permanently-settled districts, and for those in which the new settlement has been concluded. Where the settlement is yet in progress, or in prospect, it will be better to defer commencement until the settlement has been completed, but it will not be necessary to wait until the settlement has been confirmed by Government.

For the districts in which reports were prepared under the orders of 1844, it will be necessary to embody information upon subsequent events, and generally to complete and improve the work.

For the rest, the compiler will have the reports of the former and present settlements, and such papers as the published narratives of events in 1857-58, census reports, papers regarding famines, the volume of "Selections from the Revenue Records of the North-Western Provinces in 1818," published by the Foreign Department in 1866, and such like.

The effects of the mutiny year and of subsequent proceedings upon property, and upon any classes of the community chiefly affected thereby for better or for worse, should be clearly brought out. All leading events materially touching the people, or the administration of any department, such as famines, floods, extensive hail-storms, epidemics, should be traced. Curious and important information might also be obtained as to the course of prices-current from very early times to the present.

* The tabular and geographical instructions have been omitted, and also those for the preparation of mouzawar lists. Some of the latter proved of much use after the destruction of records in 1857; but they are too bulky for the work.

It is a 14 point guide-line to be followed in writing of District Gazetteers. Mentioning about it in his work, Kuar Lachman Singh writes that "the idea conveyed in the above orders was but imperfectly realized. Memoirs of the kind contemplated have been prepared and published only for Goorgaon (Gurgaon), Budaon

(Badaun), Allygurh (Aligarh), Cawnpore (Kanpur), Futtehpore (Fatehpur) and Goruckpore (Gorakhpur)". Giving an idea, he remarks:[36]

Preface

> *"On receipt of Resolution, date 23rd June, 1868, of the Hon'ble, the Lieutenant-Governor Lieutenant-Governor of North-Western Provinces, regarding the compilation of a the Gazetteer or Historical and Statistical Memoirs of each district of these Provinces, Mr. C.A. Daniell, who then officiated as Magistrate and Collector of Bulandshahar, divided the work as regarded his district among his subordinate officers."*

The Kaur, at that time, was a subordinate officer to the officiating Magistrate and Collector Mr. C.A. Daniell. He further writes:[37]

> *"The portion of the work originally allotted to me the chapter on the Antiquities of the District."*

Being an obedient and faithful servant, he started his work and thus, he was the first involved in the work assigned. Having the impression of his dutifulness, Mr. Daniell added some other points to be compiled by the Kuar. On this addition, Kuar adds:[38]

> *"On receipt of a subsequent Circular (No. 6A., dated 8th July, 1868), I was desired to give an account of the places of pilgrimage with notes of the objects of adoration or pilgrimage, dates of fairs and their locality, and tribes and peculiar sects, with notes of their habits, & C."*

The Kuar was doing well but he was also feeling some set backs as the officers in Government service where transferred to other places. Though it was not a new phenomenon because it was purely a routine work for those serving in Government services, yet the Kuar seems to be some disappointed. His state of mind seems to be same as is mentioned above and is evident from his own words which are as follows:[39]

> *"Before the officers with whom I was associated in the work could commence their respective labours, they were removed to other appointments; but the circumstance of my remaining here enabled me to undertake and carry to completion that portion which it had been arranged I should undertake, and gave me the opportunity also of entering upon and finishing the other portions of the work."*

It seems that the team of the officers was really working on the work assigned to them representatively and a motivation was being felt by all the team members. Their transfers caused a disturbance greatly to the Kuar who was very much involved in the project with all his capacity. Even then, it was he, who tried his best to produce the *Historical and Statistical Memoir of Zila Bulandshahr*. Pointing out the difficulties, he remarks:[40]

> *"The difficulties I had to contend with were various. There were no official records prior to 1857 to refer to, neither had I access to any good library of reference; besides which my leisure hours were limited and the language in which I wrote was not my mother-tongue"*

Taking grant on the basis of language being English as non-mother-tongue, the Kuar wants a great excuse when he writes:[41]

> *"If the Memoir is therefore defective, I trust the reasons I have advanced will be a sufficient excuse."*

Regarding this, he further adds:[42]

> *"To elegance of style I make no pretension, and I trust my shortcomings in that respect will be overlooked."*

Though Kuar Lachman Singh did not leave any stone unturned while dealing while dealing with the local heroes and heroines of Indian Revolution of 1857, yet there seems a sense towards his countrymen in his inner subconsciousness. It is evident in a paragraph that follows:[43]

> *"I am aware that some portions of the compilation will not interest the English reader; yet I have allowed them to stand, in the hope that they may prove interesting to my countrymen, for whose use I hope to translate the Memoir into the Vernacular."*

As far as the Memoir is concerned, Kuar Lachman Singh (Raja Lachman Singh *alias* Chaudhary Lachman Singh) was among the first authors whether Indian or English or European to produce a Memoir. Its title is "*Historical and Statistical Memoir of Zila Bulandshahr*." It was published by the Order of the Hon'ble, Lieutenant-Governor of North-Western Provinces and was printed at North-Western Provinces' Government Press, Allahabad in 1874. Though at the end of the 'Preface', it bears "Bulandshahar, 3rd September, 1872."[44]

It is clear that Kuar Lachman Singh had compiled his work in 1872 and on the said date of 3rd September, 1872; he had submitted it to the press for publication. In whole of the then NWP, he seems to stand first among all the officers posted in the districts whether European or Indian to compile this great memoir- *The Historical and Statistical Memoir of Zila Bulandshahar*.

As far as the title of the work is concerned, the term of the 'District Gazetteer' firstly was used by H.R. Nevill, I.C.S. in 1903 when this officer had prepared the series of the *District Gazetteers*. The title of each of the *District Gazetteer* was fashioned by him in such an appropriate style and manner that the name of the district having column was the starting followed by 'A Gazetteer, being Volume Number (in Roman) of the District Gazetteers of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh'. For example, *The District Gazetteer of Meerut and Muzaffarnagar* have there titles as follows:

*Meerut : A Gazetteer being Volume IV of the District Gazetteers of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh.*

*Muzaffarnagar : A Gazetteer being Volume III of the District Gazetteers of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh.*

Similarly for Meerut:

In the 'Preface'[45] of the former Mr. H.R. Nevill mentions:

PREFACE.

The old Gazetteer of Muzaffarnagar was prepared by Mr. E. T. Atkinson, I.C.S., who was very largely assisted by Mr. A. Cadell, I.C.S., and in a minor degree by Mr. G. R. C. Williams, I.C.S. The present volume is an entire reconstruction of the old Gazetteer, from which it differs not only in its general arrangement, but also in the addition of a large amount of fresh material, chiefly obtained from the Settlement Report of Mr. J. O. Miller, I.C.S. The correction of the figures and statistics of Mr. Atkinson's work was carried out by Mr. A. A. Hussanally, I.C.S., while I am also largely indebted to Mr. L. H. Turner, I.C.S., for notes on the various towns and villages. Of the history the ancient and mediæval portion is from the pen of Mr. R. Burn, I.C.S., while the remainder has been practically untouched with the exception of the family history of the Barha Saiyids. Only a small proportion of the bulk of the old volume has been retained, as it has been found necessary, in the light of more modern information, to re-write that part of the work which is comprised in the first four Chapters and the Directory.

Naini Tal :
*September* 1903.

H. R. N.

As a matter of fact, the style of the Gazetteers above mentioned was not of the first work of its type. Actually, prior to H.R. Nevill ICS, the work was assigned to Mr. Edwin Thomas Atkinson, an officer of the Bengal Civil Services (BCS) cadre. Mr. E.T. Atkinson adopted the style of the title of the work assigned to him as given below:

Statistical, Descriptive and Historical Account of the North-Western Provinces of India, Volume Number (in Roman), Meerut Division, followed by the Part Number (in Roman).

For example, Atkinson's work on Meerut District bears the title as follows:

> *Statistical, Descriptive and Historical Account of the North-Western Provinces, Volume III, Meerut Division, Part II.*

Mr. Atkinson submitted his work to Govt. Press in 1875 which had been published in 1876.

Thus, Mr. E.T. Atkinson, Mr. H.R. Nevill and Mrs. Esha Basanti Joshi are the first three to compile the Gazetteers on Meerut. The latter's work has an easier style in title. For example, her work on Meerut can be looked upon as follows; *Uttar Pradesh District Gazetteers : Meerut*.

It is clearly visible that during the beginning of the third quadruple of the 19$^{th}$ century, the matter was titled in the name of N.W.P. while the revised form was published in the first decade of the 20$^{th}$ century bearing the names of 'The United Provinces of Agra and Oudh' replacing the old one of N.W.P.

After India's independence, once again, during the second decade of the later half of the 20th century Mrs. E.B. Joshi started publishing the more revised editions bearing the name of *'Uttar Pradesh'* replacing previous name of *'The United Provinces of Agra and Oudh'*. There was formed a thirteen member board to look after and enrich the project of *Uttar Pradesh District Gazetteers* having Prof. Radha Kamal Mukerjee, the then Director of the J.K. Institute of Sociology and Human Relations, Lucknow University, Lucknow as its 'Chairman'. Mrs. E.B. Joshi, IAS, the then Commission-cum-State Editor, Department of District Gazetteers, U.P., Lucknow was 'Secretary and Convener of the Board. It is on the next page:[46]

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14. *Ibid*.
15. *Ibid*.
16. Edwin T. Atkinson, *op.cit*., 64-65; Vighnesh Kumar and Alpna Poswal, *op.cit*.
17. *Ibid*.
18. *Ibid*.
19. *Ibid*.
20. Vighnesh Kumar, ***Ghaziabad Ke char Hazar Varsha*** (in Hindi), Meerut: Hastinapur Research Institute, 2006, 221-22.
21. **Ibid**., 211-13, 221-22.
22. There stands a Pillar-Inscription at the very place now in the campus of the Golf Course, Noida, U.P.
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32. *Ibid*.
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34. *Ibid*.
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37. *Ibid.*
38. *Ibid.*
39. *Ibid.*
40. *Ibid.*
41. *Ibid.*
42. *Ibid.*
43. *Ibid.*, iv.
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# Special Needs Education in India and Japan: Current Status and Challenges

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## Abstract

*This paper presents a comparative analysis of the current status, challenges, and innovative practices in special needs education in India and Japan. India's system, shaped by a relatively recent legal framework, promotes inclusive education while maintaining special schools. However, it faces persistent challenges, including low enrollment rates, inadequate teacher training, funding shortages, and entrenched social inequalities. Japan, with a longer history of structured special education, has transitioned to a "special needs education" model that offers diverse learning environments-special schools, special classes, resource rooms, and support in regular classrooms. While this framework has expanded access, it continues to face criticism for perpetuating segregation rather than fully realizing inclusive ideals. Financial constraints, the need for teacher retraining, and evolving public attitudes remain ongoing challenges. The study identifies shared obstacles in both countries, such as attitudinal barriers, insufficient teacher preparedness, and systemic inflexibility, while underscoring their distinct historical and policy trajectories. It concludes with recommendations to strengthen policy-practice coherence, enhance teacher development, expand infrastructure investment, and deepen stakeholder participation. Overall, the findings emphasize that inclusive education requires not only educational reform but also a broader societal transformation toward equity and cohesion.*

## Keywords

Inclusive education, Special needs education, India, Japan.

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# Special Needs Education in India and Japan: Current Status and Challenges

## 1. Introduction

Inclusive education is an educational philosophy that advocates for the full inclusion of all students, regardless of their abilities, backgrounds, or disabilities, in the same schools and classrooms. This approach aims to provide all children with tailored support to meet their individual educational needs and promote social participation (Mani, 2003). The global movement towards inclusive education has been significantly shaped by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), which mandates the right of all individuals to full and equal societal participation (United Nations, 2006).

This international trend has prompted countries to re-evaluate their special needs education systems, moving away from segregated models. While many nations have committed to the principles of inclusive education, their implementation varies widely due to unique historical, cultural, and socio-economic factors. Understanding these differences is crucial for developing effective strategies and fostering mutual learning among countries.

This paper will comparatively analyze the current status and challenges of special needs education in India and Japan, two major Asian economies with distinct contexts. This analysis will highlight diverse approaches to promoting inclusive education and identify common structural challenges that persist across different national settings.

## 2. Special Needs Education in India: Current Status and Challenges

### 2·1 Impact of National Education Policy (NEP) and CRPD Ratification

India's special needs education, under a new National Education Policy (NEP), 2020 aims to provide equitable and inclusive education. For children with disabilities, the policy outlines three approaches: special education in public and private special schools, inclusive education in mainstream schools, and home-based education (JICA, 2021). This multi-pronged approach is an attempt to respond to the realities of India's vast territory and diverse communities.

Following the ratification of the UN CRPD, India is reviewing its laws, policies, and programs to align them with the CRPD's provisions (JICA, 2021). This includes The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016, The Mental Healthcare Act 2017, and the National Trust for the Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities Act, 1999. This movement highlights the strong influence of international human rights standards on domestic education policy and clarifies India's stance on aligning its domestic laws with international norms.

NEP has been argued to further obscure the principles of social justice by arbitrarily categorizing constitutionally recognized marginalized groups into a single category and by establishing "Special Education Zones" for marginalized people (Batra, 2020).

### 2·1·1 Key Legislations

The key legislations supporting special needs education in India are the Rehabilitation Council of India Act (RCI Act 1992) and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016 (RPwD Act 2016). The RCI Act 1992 was enacted by the Parliament in 1992, created by the then Ministry of Welfare (later, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment) for human resource development programs for special needs in the field of child education. The RCI aims to regulate and ensure the quality of training for rehabilitation professionals. The RCI has so far developed over 50 courses and accredited over 100 organizations to provide education and rehabilitation resource development programs for children with disabilities in India. The RCI's human resource development plan is advanced to facilitate the education of all children with disabilities and supports the policy of inclusive education (Mani, 2003). This Act plays an indispensable role in fostering professional personnel and ensuring quality to support inclusive education.

The PWD Act 1995 is the predecessor of RPwD Act 2016. It covered seven disability conditions: blindness, low vision, leprosy-cured persons, hearing impairment, locomotor disability, mental illness, and intellectual disability, guaranteeing free and appropriate education for persons with disabilities up to 18 years of age (Mani, 2003). The Act emphasized the introduction of private education, functional literacy programs, provision of assistive devices, and education through open courses in schools and universities. It also stated that the government should establish appropriate teacher training facilities and conduct research and development on assistive devices. The PWD Act strongly promoted the idea of inclusive education wherever possible, legally guaranteeing the right to education for persons with disabilities and laying a crucial foundation for the transition to inclusive education. While the 1995 Act laid the foundation, the 2016 Act significantly expands on the rights and protections for persons with disabilities in India, including increasing the number of recognized disabilities from 7 to 21 (The Gazette of India Extraordinary, 2016).

These laws form the legal basis for special needs education in India, establishing a division of labor where the RPwD Act provides the legal foundation for educational opportunities and inclusion, and the RCI Act is responsible for training the specialized personnel for this purpose.

## 2·2 Education System and Services Provided

### 2·2·1 Coexistence of Special Schools and Inclusive Education

In India, education in residential special schools is permitted for children with severe disabilities (Ishikawa & Matumoto, 2019). This suggests a recognition of the need for specialized environments to address individual needs. On the other hand, the policy is to primarily educate children with disabilities in mainstream schools, while also allowing education in special schools (Ishikawa & Matumoto, 2019). This approach demonstrates a pragmatic attempt to transition towards inclusive education while maintaining the role of existing special education infrastructure. Currently, there were approximately 3,000 special schools for various types of disabilities (Wijunamai, 2020), and it is stated that even as inclusive education expands, special schools for children with disabilities remain an accepted model for education in India and will continue to be so. This reflects the current situation where special schools still play a significant role.

## 2·3 Major Challenges

### 2·3·1 Disparities in Enrollment Rates and Access

In India, home-based learning is permitted depending on the type and severity of disability, resulting in a low enrollment rate of 49.7%

for children with disabilities (Ishikawa & Matumoto, 2019). This suggests that despite legal guarantees of the right to education, many children with disabilities are effectively excluded from the education system. There is also a gender disparity, with the enrollment rate for girls with disabilities being lower than for boys (45.3% for girls compared to 52.1% for boys) (Ishikawa & Matumoto, 2019). This indicates that intersecting discrimination based on gender and disability affects access to education.

India started Unique Disability ID(UDID), pan-India identification document and certificate for people with disabilities in 2016 (Government of India, 2016). However, in rural areas where UDID cards are not yet widely disseminated, providing inclusive community services accessible to all persons with disabilities without discrimination is a challenge. The lack of UDID card dissemination leads to delays in accurate identification of persons with disabilities and the provision of appropriate support based on that identification, consequently widening the gap in educational opportunities. Furthermore, improving education for people under the caste system, girls, and children with disabilities is a challenge, and it is believed that even if education is improved, it will not necessarily solve poverty and educational disparities caused by the caste system. This suggests that educational issues are deeply intertwined with structural social inequalities.

This implies the existence of deeper socio-structural challenges that cannot be resolved by legal frameworks alone. Therefore, the challenges in India's special needs education are not merely issues of the education system but are closely intertwined with profound problems such as social structure and economic disparities. Legal enforceability of policies alone is difficult to change the reality, and a comprehensive approach including societal awareness reform, infrastructure development, and poverty alleviation is essential.

### 2·3·2 Quality and Securing of Teacher Training

The lack of adequate teacher training for special needs education is a critical issue in India. Research consistently highlights that both special educators and mainstream teachers are often unprepared to effectively teach and support children with disabilities.

There is a significant gap between the number of children with disabilities needing specialized support and the number of qualified special educators (Gauthami, 2024). A United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) report noted that with a large number of children with disabilities, India only had a fraction of the special educators needed (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2019).

While the Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) sets standards for special education teacher training, many institutions do not fully adhere to these regulations. This results in a compromised quality of education for special educators themselves.

Most regular teachers have little to no training in special education. This is a major challenge for the implementation of inclusive education, a key goal of India's national policies. Teachers often feel they lack the skills and knowledge to address diverse learning needs and may be resistant to the additional responsibilities that inclusion brings. Furthermore, many special education training programs focus on a single disability (e.g., intellectual disability, hearing impairment). This leaves educators ill-equipped to handle the variety of disabilities they might encounter in a single classroom (UNESCO, 2019).

In addition, the lack of training often leads to negative attitudes and a lack of confidence among teachers. They may hold a "deficit-oriented" view of disabilities, which can hinder the successful inclusion of students with special needs into the classroom.

Even when teachers have some training, they often work in environments with inadequate resources, a lack of assistive technologies, and no support staff, making it nearly impossible to implement inclusive practices effectively (Uma, 2023).

The NEP 2020 and RPwD Act, 2016, emphasize inclusive education, but the lack of prepared teachers remains a major barrier to turning policy into practice.

### 2·3·3 Funding Shortages and Deterioration of Educational Infrastructure

Due to financial constraints, the shortage of educational materials and the deterioration of educational facilities are serious.4 This particularly hinders the provision of specialized teaching materials and equipment, and the development of barrier-free environments necessary for special needs education. India's education budget aims for 6% of GDP, but this goal has not yet been achieved (Khan, 2025). As a result, sufficient investment in educational infrastructure development and teacher training programs has not been possible. Financial constraints of local governments also hinder investment in education. Especially in poor and rural areas, local governments often have weak financial capacity and cannot allocate sufficient funds to education.

## 2·4 Innovative Practices and Success Stories

Innovations in grassroots movements are revolutionizing inclusive education, especially in resource-limited countries like India. Where top-down policies often fall short, these bottom-up approaches are showing how local initiatives can create sustainable, effective change by leveraging community strengths and innovative, low-cost models.

### 2·4·1 Local Innovations in Inclusive Education

A powerful example of this is a small group of parents of deaf children who organized to ensure their children's inclusion in mainstream education. Instead of waiting for government intervention, they took direct action: raising funds for interpreters, teaching sign language to classmates, and promoting their initiative in local schools. This proactive, parent-led approach successfully demonstrated that community cooperation can be the driving force behind inclusive education.

Similarly, Leonard Cheshire Disability's "Children's Clubs" in India offer another brilliant model (Inclusion International, 2009). These informal clubs bring together disabled and non-disabled children for activities like sports, art, and drama, fostering social interaction and breaking down barriers. A key innovation is their peer-to-peer education system, where one non-disabled child tutors two children with disabilities at home. This low-cost, sustainable model not only provides academic support but also builds confidence and community awareness, proving that effective education can be achieved with minimal resources. Since 2006, these clubs have supported hundreds of children, a testament to the power of this model.

### 2·4·2 The Power of Bottom-Up Approaches

While India's education system faces systemic challenges like teacher and funding shortages, and while acts like the RCI Act aim to promote inclusion from the top down, grassroots efforts are succeeding where formal policies struggle. These innovative approaches highlight the value of being locally tailored and community-driven. They demonstrate that peer-to-peer education and parental initiatives are not just supplemental but vital, sustainable models for a diverse and resource-constrained country like India.

### 2·4·3 Initiatives of the National Resource Centre for Inclusion (NRCI)

The National Resource Centre for Inclusion (NRCI) was an initiative established by the Spastics Society of India (now known as ADAPT) in 1999 to promote inclusive education by integrating disabled children from special schools into regular schools (Pestonji, 2017). It aims to enable children with disabilities to attend mainstream schools, transform schools and education, train teachers, expand the knowledge base of inclusive education, change public policies at the local, state, and national levels, and positively influence public attitudes. This comprehensive approach indicates that promoting inclusive education requires multi-layered interventions. This initiative has enabled children to attend mainstream schools in Dharavi, Mumbai, and other public and private schools. NRCI has spearheaded the formulation and adoption of the National Action Plan for Inclusive Education by the national government. Through its networking strategy, NRCI collaborated with NGOs, universities and colleges, corporate entities, print media, broadcast media, government departments, and international organizations. The participation of these diverse organizations enabled the project to advance reforms from the micro to macro levels. This demonstrates a successful model of comprehensive inclusive education promotion through international cooperation and multi-sectoral partnerships, suggesting that large-scale system change is possible when governments, NGOs, academic institutions, and businesses collaborate (Pestonji, 2017).

## 3. Special Needs Education in Japan: Current Status and Challenges

### 3·1 Policy and Legal Framework: Transition from "Special Education" to "Special Needs Education"

In 1948, school attendance became compulsory for blind, deaf, and special support children, but for severe disabilities, there was a history of exemption or postponement of school attendance, meaning they were not permitted to attend school (Tanaka & Sakuma, 2019). This indicates that while ensuring educational opportunities was prioritized, segregated education was the mainstream approach in Japan. Post-war special needs education began in 1952 with the establishment of the Special Education Section within the Elementary and Secondary Education Bureau of the Ministry of Education. Initially called "special education", it focused on establishing educational settings and providing meticulous education tailored to the type and degree of disability (Tanaka & Sakuma, 2019).

In 1993, the Ministry of Education issued the "Special Curriculum under the School Education Law". This was the official notification that institutionalized "*tsûkyû ni yoru shidô*" (guidance through attending resource rooms, often referred to as "Speech and Language Classrooms"), and from this time the transition toward special needs education began.

In 2001, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) began using the term "special needs education" instead of the traditional "special education", and from April 2007, "special needs education" was formally positioned in the School Education Act and officially implemented. This institutional reform led to further enhancement of support for infants, children, and students with disabilities in all schools (Tanaka & Sakuma, 2019). This involved expanding the scope of covered disabilities and recognizing the importance of support in regular classrooms.

### 3·1·1 Related Laws and CRPD Ratification

Japanese special needs education aims to support the independent efforts of infants, children, and students with disabilities towards self-reliance and social participation. It seeks to understand the individual educational needs of each child, enhance their abilities, and improve or overcome difficulties in daily life and learning by providing appropriate guidance and necessary support.

Many institutional reforms have been undertaken to respond to international trends and domestic needs. These include the "Full-scale Implementation of Special Needs Education" in April 2007 (amendment of the School Education Act, etc.), the "Enforcement of the Revised Basic Act for Persons with Disabilities" in August 2011, the Central Council for Education's report "Promotion of Special Needs Education for the Construction of an Inclusive Education System towards the Formation of a Cohesive Society" in July 2012, the "Ratification of the Convention on the

Rights of Persons with Disabilities" in January 2014, and the "Enforcement of the Act on the Elimination of Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities" in April 2016. These legal amendments promote the provision of reasonable accommodation and respect for the intentions of individuals and their guardians, while striving to improve and enhance educational content and methods, with consideration for children with disabilities to learn together as much as possible (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology [MEXT], n.d.-c).

In particular, the Act on the Elimination of Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities obligates the prohibition of discrimination and the provision of reasonable accommodation in educational settings, strengthening the legal foundation for promoting inclusive education.

## 3·2. Diverse Learning Environments and Support Systems

### 3·2·1 Special Needs Schools, Special Needs Classes, Resource Room Instruction, and Support in Regular Classes

Japan aims to realize the philosophy of an "inclusive education system" where children with and without disabilities can learn together as much as possible. Based on this philosophy, diverse learning environments are being developed to provide guidance that most accurately meets the educational needs of each child, with a view to their independence and social participation. Specifically, the following four types of learning environments are continuously provided:

- **Special Needs Schools:** These schools target individuals with visual impairments, hearing impairments, intellectual disabilities, physical disabilities, and those with chronic illnesses (including physically frail individuals). They provide education equivalent to kindergartens, elementary schools, junior high schools, and high schools, while also aiming to impart the knowledge and skills necessary to overcome learning or daily life difficulties caused by disabilities and promote self-reliance (MEXT, n.d.-d). The standard class size is 6 students (8 students for high school), allowing for meticulous, small-group instruction.
- **Special Needs Classes:** Established in elementary and junior high schools, these classes target individuals with intellectual disabilities, physical disabilities, chronic illnesses and physical

frailty, low vision, hearing impairments, speech impairments, autism, and emotional disturbances. They are set up to overcome learning or daily life difficulties caused by disabilities (MEXT, n.d.-d). The standard class size is 8 students, providing instruction tailored to individual circumstances.

- **Resource Room Instruction (*tsûkyû ni yoru shidô*):** This form of instruction is for students enrolled in regular classes in elementary, junior high, and high schools who can generally participate in regular class learning but require some special guidance. It provides special instruction tailored to their disability (MEXT, n.d.-d). Target disabilities include speech impairments, autism, emotional disturbances, learning disabilities (LD), attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), low vision, hearing impairments, physical disabilities, and chronic illnesses and physical frailt. Special instruction is provided in a dedicated setting (resource room instruction classroom) for 1 to 8 hours per week.
- **Regular Classes:** For students with disabilities enrolled in elementary, junior high, and high schools, instruction based on the regular curriculum is provided, with consideration for their individual disabilities. Approximately 6.5% of students in elementary and junior high schools are estimated to have developmental disabilities such as learning disabilities, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, and high-functioning autism (MEXT, n.d.-d).

### 3·2·2 Individualized Education Support Plans, Medical Care, School Attendance Promotion Expenses, and Facility/Equipment Development

Individualized Education Support Plans and Instruction Plans are required to be created for all students receiving resource room instruction and those enrolled in special needs classes. These are important tools for understanding the individual educational needs of each child, enhancing their abilities, and providing appropriate guidance and necessary support to improve or overcome difficulties in daily life and learning.

Regarding medical care, with advances in medicine and the enactment and enforcement of the. “Act on Support for Children in Need of Medical Care and their Families”, in 2021, there is an increasing trend of children with medical needs not only in special needs schools but also in local elementary and junior high schools. Therefore, efforts are being made to enhance the system for providing medical care in schools.

School Attendance Promotion Expenses is a system where the national and local governments subsidize education-related expenses (such as commuting costs, school lunch fees, textbook fees, school supply fees, school trip expenses, dormitory daily necessities, bedding costs, and return travel expenses from dormitories) borne by guardians when infants, children, and students with disabilities study in special needs schools or special needs classes in elementary and junior high schools. This system provides subsidies according to the family's economic situation, and even students learning in regular classes are eligible for subsidies if they fall under the degree of disability specified in Article 22-3 of the School Education Act Enforcement Ordinance.

Regarding facility and equipment development, MEXT provides national subsidies and local financial measures to enhance the development of facilities and equipment and other support in special needs education. This includes barrier-free school facilities (elevators, ramps, accessible toilets, etc.) and the development of equipment necessary for education adapted to disabilities (e.g., tactile copy equipment, FM hearing aids, Voice Output Communication Aid). Furthermore, local financial measures are also provided for the placement of special needs education support staff who assist with learning activities for infants, children, and students with disabilities in public kindergartens, elementary schools, junior high schools, and high schools (MEXT, n.d.-b).

## 3·3 Major Challenges

### 3·3·1 Consistency between the Philosophy of Inclusive Education and "Diverse Learning Environments"

On the one hand, MEXT claims that it understands that special needs education and the inclusive education system are moving in the same direction (Tsuruno, 2025). It positions that "towards the formation of a cohesive society, the philosophy of an inclusive education system based on the CRPD is important, and to build it, it is necessary to steadily promote special needs education", and asserts that "it is important to develop diverse and flexible mechanisms that can provide instruction tailored to individual educational needs", and thus, it is necessary to prepare "diverse learning environments with continuity". Japan has ratified the CRPD and advocates for the philosophy of inclusive education in 2014.

On the other hand, the 2022 "Concluding Observations on the Initial Report of Japan" by the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities expressed concern about the perpetuation of "segregated special education" for children with disabilities through medical assessments and the existence of special needs classes in mainstream schools (Tsuruno, 2025). It also called for the withdrawal of the government notice that stipulates that students in special needs classes should spend more than half of their weekly class hours in special needs classes as a general rule. This clearly indicates that Japan's "diverse learning environments" are subject to international criticism for contradicting the inclusive education philosophy of "learning together in the same place".

While "individualized optimal learning" is compatible with both special needs education and inclusive education, a challenge is the difficulty in seeing the connection between "collaborative learning" and inclusive education.

This situation suggests that while Japan accepts the philosophy of inclusive education, it is attempting to position inclusive education as an extension of the existing "special education" framework rather than completely dismantling it. This approach can be seen as a "realist" perspective, considering historical circumstances and the expertise of practitioners, but it creates a significant gap with the international "idealist" perspective. In particular, the government notice regarding class hours in special needs classes is seen as reinforcing this segregation tendency and is a barrier to true inclusion. Japan is trying to find a unique balance between the international trend of inclusive education and the current state of its domestic education system. Whether this "Japanese-style inclusive education" can truly achieve education where "no one is left behind" or if the divergence from international standards will continue depends on future policy decisions and practices. In particular, the challenge is how to strengthen "inclusion" rather than "segregation" while maintaining diverse learning environments. This challenge affects not only equal educational opportunities but also the broader goal of realizing a cohesive society.

### 3·3·2 Financial Burden and Difficulty in Forming National Consensus

Regarding the promotion of inclusive education, a pragmatic view states that "a national consensus, including on financial burden, should be sought to improve the broader framework and pursue a system of 'growing and learning together'" MEXT, n.d.-a). This suggests that within the current education system, financial constraints are a major challenge to realizing a system where all children learn in regular classes. Results of the call for opinions on the summary of issues raised by the Special Committee on the State of Special Needs Education in 2012 expressed concern that the phrase "while seeking national consensus, including on financial burden" might push the issue aside by implying that improving educational conditions is difficult (MEXT,n.d.-a). This reflects the current situation where securing financial resources is a bottleneck for promoting inclusive education.

### 3·3·3 Need for Teacher Professional Development and Awareness Reform

In line with the revision of the curriculum guidelines in 2017, compliance with the "Teacher Core Curriculum" for teacher training courses was required, and in particular, the establishment of new subjects related to special needs education became necessary. In this context, it became necessary to learn about identifying and supporting infants, children, and students who do not have disabilities but have special educational needs. This indicates the importance of all teachers having basic knowledge and skills related to special needs education.

The results of public comments on the State of Special Needs Education, 2012, indicate that many opinions emphasize the need for teacher awareness reform, curriculum reform, and fostering a strong sense of human rights for "learning together" (MEXT, n.d.-a). This suggests that teacher professionalism should not be limited to instructional techniques but should also include an understanding of respecting diversity and the philosophy of a cohesive society. There is an opinion that the expertise in special needs education is biased towards instructional content and methods, and that teaching methods and content for "learning together" should also be incorporated as part of that expertise (MEXT,n.d.-a).

While Japan emphasizes teacher professionalism, its focus has historically been on specialized knowledge within segregated educational environments. The shift to inclusive education demands a broader definition of professionalism for teachers, including human rights, diversity, and collaborative learning. This change poses the challenge of re-educating existing teachers and training new teachers based on a new paradigm. This involves overcoming resistance rooted in traditional practices and perceptions of disability, requiring not only technical skill improvement but also a fundamental transformation of values and attitudes (Toda, 2017).

## 3·4 Innovative Practices and Success Stories

### 3·4·1 Kanagawa Prefecture's "Inclusive Education Practice Promotion Schools" Initiative

Kanagawa Prefecture is designating "Inclusive Education Practice Promotion Schools" among its prefectural high schools to realize a cohesive society (Mannen, n.d.). This initiative began in 2016 as part of prefectural high school reform, aiming to expand opportunities for students with intellectual disabilities to receive high school education, and as of 2024, the number has reached 18 schools (Mannen, n.d.).

Various efforts are made to create an environment where all enrolled students can learn easily. Students with and without disabilities learn together in the same classroom of approximately 40 students and can participate in student council activities and club activities. Through individual counseling, students set goals tailored to their individual needs for learning, and in some classes, two teachers are assigned to support students while peer-to-peer teaching and problem-solving initiatives are encouraged. "Career education" classes are conducted to equip students with the skills necessary for society after graduation, particularly through intensive courses for students with intellectual disabilities, and during summer vacation, activities such as school and workplace visits and work experience learning are organized. In addition to daily school life, opportunities for mutual understanding are provided through activities such as para-sports experiences and lectures.

These initiatives serve as concrete examples of integrating students with intellectual disabilities into mainstream educational environments.

### 3·4·2 Practice of Individualized Optimal Learning

In Japanese educational settings, various practices are implemented to address individual learning difficulties. For example, when working with students who struggle with word finding, teachers fill in the words for them and provide model demonstrations using correct pronunciation and confirmation, striving to help students understand new vocabulary through interactive dialogue (Prefectural Comprehensive Education Center, 2008). Additionally, opportunities to present topics of interest, such as games, are provided during morning meetings to increase speaking opportunities.

For children with visual weaknesses, as a way to compensate with hearing, "repeating" is implemented, where teachers or guardians pre-read aloud and the child repeats. During reading aloud, the child is encouraged to trace the text with their finger to promote visual focus, and to reduce feelings of inadequacy, the teacher stands nearby and quietly offers advice. After reading aloud, the child's efforts and improvements are praised to foster confidence (Prefectural Comprehensive Education Center, 2008).

For children who struggle with writing, before learning, practice equipment that promotes core body awareness and a mirror are used for posture practice. Correct sitting posture and pencil grip are displayed with photos to encourage awareness. Rest breaks are provided during class to reduce fatigue, and commercial worksheets are used to practice the starting and ending strokes of characters. Matching games using favorite kanji characters are also used to reduce feelings of inadequacy and increase motivation.16 Consideration is also given to adding furigana (reading aids) to test questions and providing reading support.

These practices are concrete efforts to achieve "individualized optimal learning" tailored to each child's educational needs. They demonstrate that flexible instruction, adapted to the characteristics of disabilities and learning situations, contributes to children's motivation and ability improvement.

## 4. Comparative Analysis of India and Japan

### 4·1 Common Challenges and Differences

India and Japan share the common goal of responding to the international trend of inclusive education in special needs education, but there are significant differences in their approaches, the nature of the challenges they face, and their historical backgrounds.

### 4·1·1 Common Challenges

Common challenges in both countries include the quality and securing of teacher training, ensuring comprehensive accessibility (physical, informational, and attitudinal), and the discrepancy between the ideals of inclusive education and actual practice on the ground. Both countries face the financial burden of building truly inclusive education systems and the difficulty of forming a national consensus on this issue. In particular, the lack of teacher professionalism and issues with their treatment are bottlenecks for providing high-quality education in both countries.

Despite significant differences in their societal structures and education systems, India and Japan face similar fundamental challenges in implementing inclusive education. The core issues revolve around attitudinal barriers, teacher readiness, and systemic inflexibility.

- **Attitudinal and Social Barriers:** Both nations struggle with societal attitudes toward disability. In India, deep-seated social stigma and a lack of public awareness often led to the marginalization of students with disabilities. This is compounded by a persistent fear among parents of non-disabled children that inclusive classrooms will negatively impact their child's academic progress. Similarly, in Japan, a cultural emphasis on conformity and a highly standardized education system can make it difficult to embrace and accommodate individual differences. In both contexts, there is a lingering resistance from some parents of non-disabled children who fear that inclusive classrooms will negatively impact their child's academic progress. This shared challenge highlights the need for a broader societal shift in perception, moving away from a medical model of disability to a social model that focuses on adapting the environment to meet diverse needs.
- **Teacher Training and Professional Development:** A major, shared obstacle is the lack of adequate training for mainstream teachers. In both countries, teachers often feel unprepared to work with students who have diverse learning needs. They lack the specialized skills to adapt curriculum, use inclusive teaching methods, or manage a wide range of behaviors. This deficiency in professional development leads to feelings of

inadequacy and stress among educators, ultimately hindering the effective implementation of inclusive practices. While both countries have policies advocating for inclusion, the practical support and training for teachers on the ground are often insufficient.

- **Systemic and Infrastructural Barriers:** Both India and Japan face the challenge of transitioning from a historically segregated education system to an inclusive one. This is reflected in the continued existence of separate special education schools or classes, which, while offering specialized support, can perpetuate segregation and limit opportunities for social interaction. Additionally, both countries often struggle with a lack of appropriate infrastructure, such as accessible buildings, assistive technologies, and learning resources. These physical and systemic barriers make it difficult for students with disabilities to fully participate in mainstream education, reinforcing the cycle of exclusion.

### 4·1·2 Differences

- **Maturity of Legal Frameworks and Historical Background:** Japan has a long history of systematically developing special education institutions since the post-war period, evolving from a foundation of segregated education. Subsequently, it has gradually reformed its system by incorporating the international philosophy of inclusive education. In contrast, India's legal framework for special needs education is relatively new and heavily influenced by CRPD ratification. However, due to its vast territory and diverse socio-economic contexts, it faces significant challenges in nationwide implementation and penetration.
- **Structure of Education Systems:** Japan has established a multi-layered and systematic education system comprising special needs schools, special needs classes, resource room instruction, and support in regular classes. India aims for the coexistence of special needs schools and inclusive education in mainstream schools, but exhibits a more fragmented structure, with a significant role for non-formal education.
- **Enrollment Rates and Access Disparities:** India faces low enrollment rates for children with disabilities and severe access disparities stemming from gender, region, and the caste

system. Ensuring basic educational opportunities remains a major challenge. In contrast, Japan has largely secured school attendance opportunities for children with disabilities, but the challenge lies in how to achieve high-quality inclusion within the existing segregated education system.

- **Teacher Training Challenges:** In India, fundamental problems such as low teacher wage levels, delayed salary payments, and poor quality of training programs lead to teacher shortages and a decline in quality. In Japan, improving teacher professionalism is an ongoing challenge, but the focus has shifted to retraining existing teachers based on the philosophy of inclusive education and acquiring broader professional competencies.
- **Interpretation of Inclusive Education:** Japan interprets "diverse learning environments" as part of the inclusive education system, but this is internationally viewed as "segregation" and has been criticized. India aims for more direct inclusion but faces substantial barriers such as widespread poverty, inadequate infrastructure, and teacher shortages.

## 4·2 What India Can Learn from Japan in Inclusive Education

Despite the challenges Japan faces in fully implementing inclusive education, its systematic approach to special needs education offers valuable lessons for India's efforts to strengthen inclusive educational practices. Japan's decades of experience in developing structured support systems, legal frameworks, and institutional mechanisms provide a roadmap that India could adapt to address its current challenges in inclusive education.

### 4·2·1 Systematic Legal and Policy Frameworks

Japan's comprehensive legal structure for special needs education, developed incrementally since the post-war period, demonstrates the importance of creating coherent policy frameworks. Japan has established a multi-layered and systematic education system comprising special needs schools, special needs classes, resource room instruction, and support in regular classes (Dyliaeva, Rothman, & Ghotbi, 2024). India could benefit from Japan's approach of creating clear, interconnected policies that define roles, responsibilities, and pathways across different educational settings, helping to resolve the current lack of coherence between the 2009 RTE Act and the RPWD on the educational options for children with disabilities.

### 4·2·2 Multi-Layered Support Systems and Individual Education Plans

Japan's structured approach to providing differentiated support based on individual needs offers a practical model for India. Children with disabilities can receive instruction in special schools, special classes in mainstream schools, or in specially equipped regular classrooms (Dyliaeva, Rothman, & Ghotbi, 2024), with resource rooms providing supplemental instruction a few times a week for students with milder disabilities. This systematic continuum of support could help India address the current fragmentation in its educational provision and ensure that children with varying support needs receive appropriate interventions within inclusive settings.

Japan's emphasis on individualized education plans (IEPs) and systematic assessment procedures could help India move beyond the current challenges where it is a very big challenge to identify children with disabilities and where there is under-reporting of disability in educational data.

### 4·2·3 Professional Development and Teacher Training Systems

While Japan faces its own challenges in teacher preparedness, its systematic approach to professional development offers insights for India. Japan's structured teacher training programs and ongoing professional development initiatives could inform India's efforts to address the current situation where teachers in India do not rate themselves as competent to be inclusive and lack adequate training, infrastructure, and institutional or peer support for inclusive education.

Japan's model of integrating special education expertise into general education practice, through specialized training modules and collaborative support systems, offers valuable insights for India, where government special educators often face severe challenges, including contract-based employment, low pay, and working conditions they describe as hostile and exploitative.

### 4·2·4 Infrastructure Development and Resource Allocation

Japan's systematic approach to creating accessible school environments and providing assistive technologies offers a model for addressing India's significant infrastructure gaps. Given that less than 40% of school buildings have ramps and around 17% of schools have accessible toilets in India, Japan's methodical approach to ensuring barrier-free environments and adaptive technologies could provide practical guidance for infrastructure development.

### 4·2·5 Medical and Therapeutic Support Integration

Japan's integration of medical and therapeutic services within educational settings offers a valuable model for India. Japan's provision of medical care within schools could help India develop comprehensive support systems that address both educational and health-related needs of children with disabilities, complementing the educational interventions with necessary medical and therapeutic support.

### 4·2·6 Quality Assurance and Monitoring Systems

Japan's systematic approach to monitoring and evaluating special needs education services could inform India's efforts to ensure quality implementation of inclusive education policies. This is particularly relevant given India's current challenges with unclear guidelines around quality, curriculum, certification, or infrastructure in special schools and the need for better accountability mechanisms.

### 4·2·7 Gradual Implementation and Pilot Programs

Japan's incremental approach to educational reform, building on existing strengths while gradually introducing new practices, could inform India's implementation strategy. Rather than attempting wholesale transformation, India could adopt Japan's model of piloting inclusive practices in select regions, evaluating outcomes, and then scaling successful approaches-particularly valuable given India's vast territory and diverse socio-economic contexts.

By adapting these systematic approaches to its own context, India could strengthen its inclusive education system while building on its existing strengths in community-driven initiatives and flexible, grassroots approaches to addressing educational challenges.

## 5. Recommendations

Based on the above analysis, both India and Japan need to work on various aspect of education making inclusive education more effective. For the future of special needs education in India and Japan, several key reforms are essential. First, both countries must strengthen consistency between policy and practice. In Japan, this means re-examining the operation of "diverse learning environments," ensuring reasonable accommodation in regular classes, and redefining special needs classes as hubs for inclusion rather than segregation. In India, existing legal frameworks such as the PWD Act, RCI Act, and NEP need to be effectively disseminated to grassroots communities through measures like accelerating UDID card use, expanding non-formal education, and linking with poverty alleviation programs.

Teacher training reform is another urgent priority. Both countries must enhance teacher professionalism and expertise, but India should also address wage levels, salary delays, and modernize training programs to strengthen evidence-based practice and e-Education skills. Japan, meanwhile, needs to expand training opportunities to foster human rights awareness and capacity to respond to diverse needs. Adequate funding and efficient allocation are also critical. While both countries should strive to meet education budget targets and prioritize rural areas, severe disabilities, and infrastructure, Japan must further shift its approach by viewing inclusive education as a strategic investment in social cohesion.

Equally important are accessibility and awareness. Both countries should ensure barrier-free environments and promote the widespread use of accessible teaching materials, while also advancing societal attitudes that recognize disability as diversity rather than deficiency. International cooperation can further strengthen these efforts, with India's grassroots initiatives and Japan's institutional frameworks serving as complementary models, particularly through organizations such as JICA. Finally, greater participation of children with disabilities and their families in policy design, curriculum development, and evaluation is essential to ensure that inclusive education is truly responsive to their needs. Together, these reforms provide a roadmap for building inclusive systems in which all children can realize their potential and contribute to cohesive societies.

## 6. Conclusion

The analysis of the current state of special needs education in India and Japan reveals that both countries, while pursuing the ideal of inclusive education, face distinct yet deeply rooted challenges. India, despite having advanced legal frameworks through CRPD ratification and setting inclusive education as a national goal, continues to grapple with severe basic access and quality issues, such as low enrollment rates for children with disabilities, insufficient quality of teacher training, and funding shortages, due to its vast territory, regional disparities, and persistent socio-economic and cultural barriers. There is a significant gap between policy and practice on the ground, and the perception of disability as something to be "cured" remains deeply ingrained. However, parent-led grassroots activities and comprehensive multi-sectoral initiatives demonstrate the potential for promoting inclusive education even with limited resources.

Japan, on the other hand, has undergone a historical transition from "special education" to "special needs education," building diverse learning environments and a systematic support system. However, it faces the major challenge of reconciling its existing system of 'diverse learning environments' with the inclusive education philosophy of 'learning together in the same place', as highlighted by the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in its criticism of 'segregated education'. Financial burden, improving teacher professionalism and awareness, and ensuring physical and informational accessibility are also recognized as significant challenges.

Common to both countries is the understanding that achieving inclusive education is not merely an issue of the education system but a complex social transformation requiring societal awareness reform, financial commitment, and collaboration among diverse stakeholders.

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