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Gayatri Bhattacharyya

IRAWATI KARVE: BLENDING INDOLOGICAL TRADITION WITH FEMINISM

Abstract

The paper provides a glimpse of the contributions of Irawati Karve, the first feminist anthropologist/sociologist of India to an authentic understanding of Indian women's status and function and the trials and tribulations attending the same. Her sensibility and sensitivity to females' problems and predicament is mirrored in her anthropological analyses in Kinship Organization in India and Hindu Society: An Interpretation. It goes beyond the circumference of the academic circle and becomes most sharply mirrored in Yuganta: The End of an Epoch, more particularly in her analysis of the character of Draupadi. Her anthropological imagination has reinterpreted, rather, recreated the characters of Draupadi and other female personages of the Mahabharata to bring onto clear relief the agonies and anxieties suffered by women in the male-dominated society and also their resoluteness in resisting it.

The initial part of this essay offers a brief account of the partial and reluctant understanding of Karve's contribution to social sciences. It is followed by a brief mention of Karve's sensitiveness to the bane of inequality and inequity engendered by intersectionality of caste, class and gender affecting the Indian women. The next section reveals Karve's originality in creatively foregrounding the challenges offered by the female characters of the epic to the patriarchally dominated Indian society. The tailpiece shows the relevance of Karve's critical traditionalism for effecting meaningful changes in gender-relationship in India today.

Keywords: *Feminism, Ecological Anthropology, Liminality, Intersectionality, Critical Traditionalism*

'After the essay on "Gandhari" was published', writes Irawati Karve in the Preface to her well known literary work, *Yuganta: The End of An Epoch* (the original Marathi version of which earned her Sahitya Akademi award in 1967), a young Indian friend asked me "Who on earth was this Gandhari"? The question made her sad – she felt that, 'I was useless in this age, merely an

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impediment because I lived in the past'. In a moment of weariness she even felt that she should stop writing altogether. 'Alternatively, I felt that I should give the whole story of the Mahabharata in the Introduction. But, after thinking them over, I abandoned both the alternatives. *I am a very obstinate person*. The Younger generation is constantly trying to convert me to their [modernist] point. I am forever meeting … [their] assault …' These essays'[in *Yuganta*], continues Karve, 'are in a way an attempt to make the younger generation understand *my point of view*. I shall consider it a victory if they read the *Mahabharata* to prove [my interpretation] wrong' (Karve 2013: 3; emphases and parentheses added).

The averment above expresses probably the quintessence of the life and work of Irawati Karve, the first feminist social scientist of India and suggests *her* point of view. In any attempt to understand and interpret the nature of the Indian society and civilization, it is futile to keep oneself hermetically sealed off from the millennia-old tradition that has nurtured it. Many think that the old traditions should be summarily discarded since they are thoroughly inapplicable to modern times. This is, thinks Karve, not true. 'Old traditions and thoughts never become totally inapplicable to new situations; and modern practices are never so new that they do not retain a grain of the old. *This is what anthropology tells us'* (Karve, Ibid. 190, emphasis added). Iconoclastic attitude towards the tradition is as untenable as unquestioning submission to it in India today. 'Neither should preconceived ideas lead a student into idol-worship nor into a frenzy of idol-breaking' (Idem.). The foregoing judgment originating in the anthropological acumen of Karve informs the *lalitnibandha* (artistic essays, in a sense, belles letters) constituting *Yuganta.* While highlighting the historical and social forces governing the lives of men and women belonging to the epic, she throws light on their common human frailties such as their greed, vainglory and jealousy, their instincts for retribution or revenge alongside their noble intentions and deeds and altruism wherever discernible. And the analytical narrative has throughout been marked by a critical feminist outlook. Ironically, the book allegedly hurt the sentiments of many admirers of the *Mahabharata*. Some have even resented giving award to the book which appeared to have subjected the superhumans in the epic, whom the Indians have venerated for ages, to devastating criticism (Kavadi, 1970: 27 as cited in Sunder 2007).

The significance of *Yuganta* for the feminist discourses in India becomes evident when the rebellious spirit of Draupadi as focused on in it is contraposed to her norm-conforming portrait presented in the document *Towards Equality* (GOI 1975) which became influential for feminist studies in India. The latter seats Draupadi in the row of 'Sita, Savitri, Ahalya, Gandhari, Mandodari, Damayanti', all of whom, according to the document, display the virtues of chastity and 'loyalty to their husbands' (GOI 1975). The document places reliance for the purpose presumably on the conversation between Draupadi and

Satyabhama, Sambad-Parvadhyaya of the *Mahabharata*, which was considered by Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, the celebrated Bengali novelist and essayist of the nineteenth century, to be an irrelevant interpolation to the original storyline of the epic (Chattopadhyay 2015: 373).

In his couple of essays on Draupadi in *Vividha Prabandha* (Part I, 1876), Bankimchandra straightway contrasts Draupadi's *tejasvita* (spiritedness) and *darpa* (self-assertiveness) with modesty, forbearance, softness of heart, loyalty to husband, i.e., the qualities revealed in the characters of Sita, Sakuntala, Damayanti or Ratnavali and the like. The effort of Draupadi to establish her identity as distinct from that of her husbands who stood vanquished and enslaved in the infamous and perilous dice-game and her remonstrance against the inaction of the elders in Dhritarashtra's council over the insult and injury hurled on her by the Dhartarastras earned Chattopadhya's admiration (Chattopadhyay 2015a: 634 – 644). In *Krishnacharitra* (1886) Bankimchandra admires Draupadi's awareness of kshâtradharma and her firmness and strategic steps in goading Krishna and the Pandavas to go in for a decisive battle with the Kauravas as recompense for the diminution of dignity suffered by her (Chattopadhyay 2015b: 444 – 445). Though, because the *liminality* experienced by him in the tension between the 'haste for transgression' of the extant social norms and the social and psychological compulsion to immediately return to the prevalent normative and jural system in his society prevented Chattopadhyay from a full-throated praise for the dissident voice of Draupadi (Kaviraj n.d. & 1999: 20 and Raychaudhuri 1998: 111 – 112).

It was Irawati Karve who decades after Bankimchandra sought to highlight the dignity of Draupadi qua a woman, rather, a human being, and her assertion of autonomy. Karve's inferences are countenanced by later feminists such as Jasbir Jain who argues, contrary to the suggestions in *Towards Equality*, that Draupadi's questioning of the traditional kinship structure that granted the husbands' property rights over the wives pushes femininity outside the prescribed model of *pativrata* (2011). In a similar vein, Sunder Rajan writes, 'The Draupadi who is insulted in court is undeniably an outraged figure'. Which fact, together with the various 'inauspicious' trials and tribulations undergone by her, does not 'elevate her to the status of model Hindu girls raised on stories of other heroines from the myths such as Sita and Savitri' (2012: 351).

The Limited appreciation of Karve in Indian Anthropology/Sociology

Karve's first book, concerned with kinship, was subjected to a trenchant critique by Dumont and Pocock (1957). Useem was in all praise for the same work (1957). But he too missed Karve's consideration of the females' experience and role in the system. Srinivas and Panini took note in 1973 of Karve's extensive fieldwork in different parts of the country and of her knowledge of Sanskrit which gave her access to data in scriptures, law books, and epics. Her *Kinship*

Organisation in India was noted 'as an ambitious book' (Srinivas 2004: 492). There is no reference to any other work of Karve, not to speak of *Yuganta.* Scholars like Cohn and Marriott (1958) interested in the integration of Indian civilization, referred to Karve's idea of the Cultural Process in India as expressed in *Man* (Cohn 1990 (1958): 79-85) without noticing Karve's reflection on the status of women in the society.

Ramkrishna Mukherjee placed Irawati Karve in 'the perennial current of Indian sociology [that] continued in 1950s – spilling over into the 1960s' though he did not consider her a modernizer (1979: 67). Mukherjee appreciatingly noted Karve's predilection for bibliographical research from Sanskrit texts and other related sources and also for her empirical field surveys. Though, in *Kinship Organisation in India* and *Hindu Society* her focus lay more on the 'how' question than on the 'why' question. The 'why' question received still lesser attention in her empirical studies. Mukherjee remains totally unware of any special attention of Karve to the status of women. He gives no reference to *Yuganta*.

Andre Beteille has placed Irawati Karve in the company of Benoy Kumar Sarkar, G.S. Ghurye, K. P. Chattopadhyay and K. M. Kapadia who were trained as Sanskritists. These scholars sought to use their acquaintance with classical literature in their inquiry into the contemporary forms of family, marriage, kinship, clan, caste, sect and religion. Beteille remains silent on any trace of feminism in Karve's work as well as on her *Yuganta* (2003: 44). Deferring for a while consideration of T. N. Madan's views on Karve's works, one may briefly examine the opinion of D. N. Dhanagare on the works of Karve. He was for some time a colleague of hers. Dhanagare mentioned the affinity of Karve with her teacher G. S. Ghurye in adopting an Indological approach in studying the Indian Civilisation and noted also Karve's studies in physical anthropology (Dhanagare 1993: 45). Like U. R. Ehrenfils, T. N. Madan, Leela Dube, Karve too studied kinship, family and marriage (Ibid. 56). In a later account Dhanagare records, of course, that 'Karve was far more open than Ghurye in acknowledging non-brahminical contributions to the diversities of Indian society' and culture though both of them subscribed to the theory of civilisational unity of India in preference to mosaic theory of the Indian society (Dhanagare2011:141). There is no mention of Karve's attention to women's problems or of her *Yuganta* in this account.

Madan considers in his comment on the paper on biological comparison of eight endogamous groups of the same rank by Karve and Malhotra in the *Current Anthropology in 1968* to be bereft of any great value in sociological analysis. Madan fails to appreciate that the paper might have helped people overcome the obsession with the racial theory of caste and accept, instead, the contingent theories of the institution (Sebastian 2015: 45; Gadgil and Guha 2012: 83 – 84). Later Madan writes, 'By 1961, Karve ... who was perhaps the *most erudite social anthropologist of her generation* wrote a book entitled *Hindu*

Society – An Interpretation which was about jatis and varnas and very little else' (1994 : 75, the first emphasis added). Madan's judgement about Hindu Society is not all correct. He notes Karve's role in developing the then prevailing paradigm of Indian society as the configuration of linguistic regions, the institution of caste and family organization but wonders that 'so erudite a scholar, who herself wrote a book on the *Mahabharata* [viz. *Yuganta*]… does not seem to have been aware of … N.K. Sidhanta's [*The Heroic Age: A Comparative Study*]' (Madan 1994, fn. 12, parentheses added). Madan himself does not seem to be aware of Karve's nuanced construction of feminism in *Yuganta*. Also, he seems unaware of the importance of Yuganta for 'ecological anthropology' in India (Gadgil and Guha 2012: xvii – xviii; Guha 2024).

The case is somewhat different with women anthropologists. Veena Das, for instance, indicates *en passant* that Irawati Karve's work on kinship is an exception to the male-centric narrative of the female role in the familial context, which reflects more often than not the fantasies of their male informants about the humble and submissive wives, to which women often pay formal allegiance (Das 1987: 58). She sheds no farther light on Karve's writings relating to women's problems. She suggests, of course, that anthropological presentation of the affective life of women demands a methodological commitment to explore the variety of non-verbal communication in the precincts of the family or the kinship group rather than to restrict oneself to jural prescriptions alone. Karve's writings particularly in *Yuganta* betray the kind of commitment suggested by Das.

Patricia Uberoi (1993) waxes eloquent on Karve's contribution to kinship studies from a feminist viewpoint. One may also consider the views of Leela Dube (2010). Leela Dube acknowledges the intellectual stimulation she received from Karve. Though she finds 'lack of rigour in some of her work', she does mention Karve's 'pioneering discussion of the implications of the differences in marriage and kinship between north and south India' and her concept of 'central zone' in mapping the kinship patterns of India (Dube: 2000, 4041). Dube hastens to add that she did not 'exactly follow in her footsteps' though she admits that her discussions with Karve 'proved critical in framing … [her] inquiries into family and kinship and later in framing … [her] elaboration of the dynamics between gender and kinship' (Ibid: 4041). Maybe, an adequate elaboration of the relation between kinship and gender is lacking in Karve's writings, but her pioneering role in analyzing the relation between kinship and gender with focus on girls/women in the kinship system is an undeniable fact.

In 2004, Ravinder Kaur reiterates Dube's observation as she writes, 'In general patterns of kinship and marriage identified by Karve (1965) for the north and the south with the rest of the country sharing a mix of the two *still prevail'*(Kaur, 2004: 2596, emphasis added). In the South because of the prevalence of real and classificatory cross-cousin and uncle-niece marriage,

marriages have often taken place among close relatives. In the North, people (grooms) prefer to marry 'strangers' because of the operation of the rules of gotra (clan) and village exogamy as well as caste endogamy. The brides in the north are placed after marriage in situations which are sufficiently removed in terms of both social and physical distance from their natal milieu. In her examination of the relatively increasing incidence of inter-regional or across-region marriages in recent times thanks to variations in imbalance in sex-ratio in different regions and the consequent difficulty for one to obtain brides from one's own region and also because of the problem of dowry faced by the bride's side, Kaur finds the problem indicated above by Karve to have become more acceptable. The southern bride marrying a northerner would 'find herself in a hostile environment of people unrelated in language, region and culture' (Kaur 2004: 2601). For instance, the cultural divide between the Rajasthan grooms and the Andhra brides seems to Kaur almost insurmountable. And it is the brides who always remain at the receiving end because e of the wide prevalence of post-marital patri-virilocality in India.

Nandini Sundar in her widely read essay on Irawati Karve does take note of sort of 'incipient feminism' in Karve's writings, especially in the latter's imagination of the inner voices of Kunti and Draupadi which are recorded in *Yuganta*. Though, Sundar forgets the case of Gandhari as re-imagined by Karve. Sundar's discussion of this aspect of Karve's writings is restricted to a few brief remarks only (2007: 372 & 397).

Subhadra Mitra Channa appreciates Karve's breaking out of the methodological bondage of a s'scientific approach' in offering a feminist reading of the epics of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* though Karve seems to her to have remained 'constricted by the Hindu Sanskritic and upper class viewpoint' (Channa 2007: 513). Nevertheless, writes Channa, the feminist in Karve strongly sympathises with 'Sita, Draupadi, Kunti, and Madri'. Karve writes in her *manum opus* on kinship in India: 'To the honour of the poets may it be said that the husband of each of these women was blamed, but *we fail to get a glimpse of the women's thought in all these circumstance*' (Karve 1965: 73, emphasis added). Gandhari is absent from the list of Channa. She corrects the omission in her appraisal of *Yuganta*. But Channa skips there the name of Draupadi. And, any evaluation of *Yuganta* sans Draupadi is akin to an appreciation of Hamlet without the Prince of Denmark. Indeed, the chapter on Draupadi 'in many ways forms the heart of the book (and is the longest chapter apart from the last)', observes John Brookington in his "Introduction" to *Yuganta* (2013 [2006]: xv). Some of Karve's most incisive views as well as some of the most tendentious may be found in this chapter.

The latest critical appreciation, to hand, of Irawati Karve and feminism in her writings along with that of other women sociologists/anthropologists is *Re-Imagining Sociology in India: Feminist Perspectives* (Chadha and Joseph 2018). The editors of the anthology take note of Karve's contribution to

anthropology and sociology in India and also of the signature of indigenous feminism in Karve's writings (Ibid. 5). Despite the disciplinary stress on the axes of tradition-modernity and modernization–development in the anthropological – sociological discourses of her time, Karve laid emphasis on women in them. The editors refer to the chapter written by Kamala Ganesh. Ganesh mentions the work of as many as eight feminine anthropologists/ sociologists including Karve (in the formative stage of the disciplines in India). Rayaprol pertinently points out that the overview by Ganesh is too sketchy to provide any adequate intellectual biographies of the scholars dealt with by her (2020: 113). Ganesh, however, notes the essential elements of feminism in Karve's writings lying not in her presentation of kinship as a conglomeration of abstract and neutral systems but in her portrayal of the same as the dynamic configurations having material consequence for the people, especially, the women living within them (Ganesh 2018: 53). The corpus of 'non-academic' writings of Karve reveals her feminine sensibility to the predicaments of women and their strength and resilience to encounter them. For instance, Ganesh mentions Karve's widely known essay, 'On the Road: A Maharashtrian Pilgrimage' (Karve 1962). It is a moving account of the long and arduous journey of the followers of the Varkari sect to the sacred town of Pandharpur with the palanquin of the saint–poet Dyaneswar and expresses *inter alia* Karve's indignation at the manifestation of caste and gender discrimination during the pilgrimage (Ganesh, Op. Cit.: 54). Karve's *Yuganta* provides, according to Ganesh, an 'unusual interpretation' of the characters, male and female, of the *Mahabharata*, challenging the male gaze and emphasizing the *agency* of human beings, particularly, of women – 'Draupadi, Kunti and Gandhari'. Ganesh fails, however, to project appropriately and adequately Karve's ingenuity in focusing on the rebellious women in Draupadi, Gandhari and Kunti as noticed below.

A Glance at Karve's exposure of Intersectionality of Socio-Culturally Disabled Women in Hindu Society

Though Karve's contribution to the understanding of kinship organization has been well-appreciated by women sociologists/anthropologists, her *Hindu Society: An Interpretation* deserves a fuller treatment than what it has received so far. A careful reading of the work, and other writings of Karve reveals how Karve illuminates the multilayered aspects of the Indian social reality especially in relation to women. Madan's critique of her *Hindu Society* that it discusses hardly anything but *jati* and *varna* (cf. supra) is not entirely true (cf. Brown 1961: vii). The same judgment is applicable to Channa's criticism of Karve for her allegedly exclusive attention to Sanskrit-cum-upper class viewpoint in *Yuganta*. For instance, Karve displays her originality in *Hindu Society* in foregrounding the dominance of patriarchy in the nexus between caste-system and patriarchy by focusing on the 'system' of the household's socially tolerated practices of the male members' sexual union with house-maids and concubines which have been part of the traditional caste system

and in declaring that the 'prostitutes always formed a recognized part of society' (1968: 17).

Endogamy has been a mainstay of the caste system. If one exception to it is found in the practice of hypergamy, the other exception is the practices of concubinage, sex with house-maids and prostitution. The latter group of phenomena, while leading to sexual relations across caste, had got little effect on the family organization or the caste organization as such0 (Ibid: 17).

Karve informs that very young girls were 'bought as concubines who lived as secondary wives with the man who bought them'. The man was called the *malik* (master) by the concubine. 'The practice was', writes Karve in 1968, 'not uncommon some twenty-five years ago' (Ibid. 17). Landed gentry and men from aristocratic or ruling families had free access to the maids of their wives. 'The author has', writes Karve, 'seen a will, which made provision for such a "maid" and her progeny' (1968:17). She does not, of course, tell whether the maid and her progeny enjoyed equal rights in inheritance with her master's socially and jurally recognized wife and their children. Karve regrets that even 'at the end of the war in the *Mahabharata*, Krishna's grandson, Vajra, got Indraprastha, Arjuna's grandson, Parikshit, got Hastinapur but Yujutsu, the suta, Dhritarashtra's own son [begotten by a Vaishya woman who was her concubine] got nothing' (2013: 63, parenthesis added). Vidura, not blind like Dhritarashtra, nor impotent like Pandu and not subjected to any congenital defect, as the third son of Vichitravirya (*pater*, i.e., social father of Dhritarashtra, Pandu and Vidura) deserved the throne of Hastinapur but was denied it. Because, he was accorded the status of a *suta* as he was born in the womb of a non-kshatriya maid by Vyasa who was the biological father of Dhritarashtra and Pandu also. This denial of equal rights to the progeny of a non-kshatriya maid and the Kshatriya master forms the sad part of the story of Vidura and the Kuru family in *Yuganta*.

A noteworthy fact recorded by Karve in *Hindu Society* is that such maids and their progeny have become a separate caste in Rajputana. The males are called *Khavâs* and the females *Khavâsin*. Earlier in every princely Rajput marriage the bride was accompanied by elderly and young *khavasins* from her father's house, the former as advisers of the bride and the latter as concubines for the husband (1968: 170).

The prostitutes constituted an unfortunate lot. They were there *in* the society but hardly accorded social dignity. They were generally drawn from the lower castes. Various social workers have, reports Karve, noted that Mahar women made up a large section of the prostitutes in the city of Bombay. 'Mahar women were also used by the British army' (1968: 17). Karve pointed out, it seems the double jeopardy of dalit women because of what is termed today intersectionality of gender, caste and adverse pecuniary condition. A special class of 'protected' women was formed in several parts of India by singers and

dancers of high repute who 'were and are (Karve notes in 1968) concubines to and under the protection of rich patrons. The progeny of those formed parts of the mother's caste'.

A new vista for feminist research was, it appears, opened up by Karve by throwing light on the status of socially and juridically semi-recognised women and also of the women who were denied caste status of any sort and who suffered serious social and cultural disabilities.

Vidura, Dharma and Kunti

On turning attention to *Yuganta* one finds that the male characters in it, including Krishna, do not enjoy uncritical admiration from Karve since all of them appear to her to have displayed patriarchal mentality or attitude in varying degrees. Vidura is the only exception. Chapter Five of *Yuganta* ('Father and Son?') attracts the readers, first, by virtue of Karve's treatment of the hitherto relatively little discussed nature of the *Suta / Khatta* varna/caste to which Vidura was born. The *Sutas* were considered a product of miscegenation and remained deprived of the privileges and rights of Kshatriyas (supra). The second factor behind the readers' interest in this chapter lies in Karve's discovery of the role played by Vidura as the genitor (and hence the *pater*, *de facto*, though not *de jure*) of Dharma or Yudhisthira.

In order to establish the paternity of Vidura in relation to Dharma, Karve briefly discusses the performance of a rite by Vidura and Dharma at the approach of the former's last hours. She observes, 'In the *Upanishads*, there is a description, of what a man nearing death is to do … the dying man [would] transfer all his power, wealth and intelligence to his son. This last meeting between Dharma and Vidura seems to describe the same kind of transfer' (Karve 2013: 70 – 71). She does not name the rite nor does she refer to the titles of the *Upanishads* describing it. The name of the rite or ceremony is *sampratti*, according to *Brihad-aranyaka Upanishad* (I.5.17) – 'athatah samprattih' – 'now there is the transmission' (Radhakrishnan, 1990: 179-180). The other *Upanishad* dilating on it is *Kausitaki Brahmana Upanishad* (II. 15. athatah pita-putriyam sampradanam iti – now next the father and son ceremony or the transfer of tradition (Ibid: 772-773). Performance of the aforesaid rite or ceremony by Vidura and Dharma clearly indicates the father-and-son relationship of the two. Karve skillfully uses here an event from the traditionally revered epic itself to subvert the patriarchal tradition of the monopoly on the lives of women and their choices by their male counterparts and of the practice of the males' to conceal the reality whenever it does not suit *their* social construction and purpose at a particular time. Levirate seems to have ceased in the varna/caste society of the *Mahabharata* and hypogamous union (of Khatriya Kunti and Suta Vidura) has by then become impermissible. Hence, the story of the birth of Dharma as a result of god-human union. Karve's perceptive remark: 'One wonders if Dharma's claim would have been considered

inferior if he were known to be the son of Vidura, a Suta' (2013: 69). Ever silent on his biological relation with Kunti and Yudhisthira, Vidura continued to protect the interests of the Pandavas to his utmost ability.

Contrary to Ganesh's impression (2018: 53), Karve's annoyance with the male figures of the *Mahabharata* supplants her compassion for them. Her scrutinizing eyes did not even spare Krishna, considered to be the dependable friend, philosopher and guide of Draupadi, what to speak of other male characters. 'How little Draupadi mattered to Krishna can', writes Karve, 'be seen in Krishna's offer to give her and a share of the kingdom to Karna if he would join the Pandavas. Fortunately, Draupadi had no inkling of this *contemptible bargain*' (2013: 86, emphasis added). Nobody else noticed this grim feature of Krishna's conduct. Karve relentlessly criticizes Krishna and Arjuna for their mercilessly burning of the Khandava forest along with the Nagas (a royal clan) and other living creatures dwelling in it. Because of Karve's criticism of burning of forest by Krishna and Arjuna, she is deemed by Ramachandra Guha (2024) to be one of the first environmentalists of India. Karve goes to the extent of likening the Pandavas and Krishna with Adolf Hitler of modern times for their wanton destruction of ecology and human beings and non-human creatures (2013: 106).

Irawati Karve has had familiarity with Freud's psycho-analysis (cf. Karve, June 1950). In *Yuganta* she proceeded farther to present a sort of psycho-biography (cf. Freud 1957 and Zolton 2011) of *each of the three feminine characters* considered in it, viz., Gandhari, Kunti, and Draupadi. She excelled in her venture while delineating the contours and depth of the psyche of Draupadi. It must, of course, be noted that Karve did not follow the rigours of analytical construction of psycho-biography. But, her sensitivity and sensibility to the cravings and frustration felt and experienced by the womenfolk in our society bestow a measure of authenticity and credibility on her portrayals of the same, which fact is reflected in such celebrated works as Pratibha Ray's *Yajnaseni: The Story of Draupadi* [original Oriya novel, *Yajnaseni*] (1995/ 1984), Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* (2008) or Aditi Banerjee's *The Curse of Gandhari* (2019) in addition to *Nathabati Anathabat O Katha Amritasaman* (2012) by Saonli Mitra.

Gandhari

One may first take up Karve's narrative of Gandhari and Dhritarashtra. In her essay on Gandhari (Chapter Three of *Yuganta*) the feminist in Irawati extracts the (imagined) confession from Dhritarashtra: 'We Kuru men have done great injustices to women. And we have paid in full for them too. In Amba's wrath, Bhishma was burned. I am still burning in yours. My children too have been destroyed in it. Kunti was also married to a deficient man … Every person gets entangled in a mesh of injustices. I wronged you. Pandu wronged Kunti. And whose wrong doing was it that Pandu and I should lead

such fruitless lives? Gandhari you have been cheated and deceived. [Without being told of my blindness you have been married to me], but think for a moment in the three generations of our family every person has been cheated and deceived. I am pleading with you … to persuade you to give up, your fight against life itself. (Karve 2013: 36 – 37).

The king farther confessed (in Karve's construction) how he thought of killing Gandhari when she persistently refused on her first private meeting with him to remove the self-imposed blindfold. 'Gandhari too retorted bitterly, "I wish you had [killed me]. At least we would have, avoided this horrible future [of the devastating battle]'" (Karve 2013: 36; parentheses added). Yuganta's Gandhari is not that Gandhari who blindfolded her eyes in commiseration with her blind husband but is the one who sought to reprimand through these means the entire world of men for playing / practising deceit with her. This Gandhari is different also from the Gandhari of poet Rabindranath's 'Gandharir Abedan' (the Appeal of Gandhari) where she entreats Dhritarashtra to keep to the path of Dharma (righteousness) and sternly restrains his sons from inflicting injury and insult on the Pandavas and their wife (Thakur 1304 in Thakur 1400 : 375 – 395).

The realist in Karve prompted *her* Gandhari to confide with her companion, 'when the Pandavas were being sent to a small town on the border, those helpless children came to me to say farewell. Outwardly, I gave them blessings but at my heart I was thinking, "Good, now my children's way is clear"' (Karve, 2013: 32). Even if she went to the Royal Assembly ostensibly to prevent the fratricidal battle, 'Inwardly, I was telling myself that if they fought, the kingship of Hastinapura would remain with my sons'. The aforenoted sentiments of Gandhari, which are only common with ordinary flesh and blood, are never mentioned in the epic. They are Karve's conjecture based on her inferences from her reading of the *Mahabharata*. And such an inference was not entirely implausible in view of Gandhari's curse upon Krishna at the end of the battle for his role in destroying her sons, as recorded in the epic itself.

Gender scholarship of Karve does not put the women on a high pedestal away from the ordinary human beings. Also, though she started the 'cartography of resistance' by women in her delineation of the female character such as Gandhari or Draupadi (or even Sita of the *Ramayana*), she does not ignore or demean the traditional virtues of Indian women, which do not always and necessarily detract from their strength of character and even their exercise of autonomy. Thus, Gandhari in *Yuganta* removes the blindfold over her eyes at the anguished appeal of Dhritarashtra and firmly clasps the hand of her husband who is ready to consign himself to the flames advancing towards them from the nearby forest on fire. Says she, "Your majesty, I am not going to leave you, come, instead of waiting for the fire, let us walk toward it"… "You are, right, Gandhari". Dhritarashtra stood up (Ibid: 38 – 39).

The poignancy in the aforementioned narrative seems disturbed by Karve's stretching the narrative farther to suggest that the couple was followed by Vidura hand in glove with Kunti. The statement about Vidura-Kunti contradicts not only the epic but Karve's own statements about them in the following essay in *Yuganta* on Kunti: 'Vidura died first', and 'some time later' Kunti along with her 'parents-in-law'(i.e., Dhritarashtra and Gandhari) sacrificed herself in the forest–fire (Ibid: 57 – 58). The intention behind the extension and the implied suggestions in it remain highly confounding (Ibid: 39).

Kunti

In the epic itself, or in Karve's reconstruction of her story, Kunti is not known for any protest in public against patriarchy. Rather, her life is an illustration of the grim reality: 'The making of some lives is entirely in the hands of others. That was the case of the women in the times of the *Mahabharata*. Their happiness, their sorrows were decreed by men to whom they belonged. Men acted, men directed and women suffered' (Ibid: 2013: 40). Kunti had so many facts to regret. Given away by her genitor-pater to another king who as her foster-father made Kunti render service to a sage whose 'benediction' resulted in her improvident maternity. In fear of the infamy attending maiden-motherhood in the then socio-cultural order she abandoned her first-born child – a male one – who throughout his life was denied the status of a Kshatriya, which was due to him because of his birth in the womb of a Kshatriya woman. He bore all his life the identity of a suta as his foster father was a suta. At a late stage of his life when he came to learn the truth from Kunti, his genitrex, he had only wrath for her. Even poet Rabindranath, like many others, expressed his sympathy with Karna and not with Kunti (Thakur 1400 (1306) 403).

After her marriage with an impotent king, Kunti was asked by her husband to raise sons for his patriline through union with beings outside the wedlock and help her co-wife beget in the same manner. Her co-wife enjoyed, of course, sensual pleasure from her husband only once; the husband died instantaneously after the physical union. Kunti never had it from her husband. Devoured, naturally by jealousy, Kunti became cruel to her co-wife. One is repulsed by the Kunti who blamed Madri for her husband's death; but the same Kunti showered her love on Madri's orphaned children all her life (Karve 2013: 54).

As in the case of ordinary people in the mundane world, throughout Kunti's life we got alternate glimpses of meanness and nobility. She did not express any remorse for the death of the tribal woman and her five sons in the fire set by her sons on to the Jatugriha at Baranabata, wherefrom they and Kunti had a timely escape. She felt happy that she 'had foiled the plot of her sons' rivals. As a Kshatriya woman it was enough for her' (Ibid: 49).

Kunti had to suffer the experience of dependency and slight at Hastinapura during the thirteen years of exile of her sons and Draupadi. She did not forget it. When Krishna, as an agent of the Pandavas, went to Hastinapura to negotiate a truce with the Dhartarashtras, he called on his aunt Kunti also. 'The moment she saw him she fell upon his neck and burst into tears, recalling all the calamities that had befallen her since childhood' (Ibid: 51). But, gathering herself, she sent through Krishna words for her sons. They clearly reveal her mortifications but also her 'hopes for the future and her unbending will'. Kunti sought to remind them of the story of Vidula who roused through her stern words the conscience and spirit of her sons to fight out the enemies. Kunti's own words too were like the lash of a whip. 'Their aim was only one – to spur her eldest son to fight. Doubtless, Kunti's heart too was made of steel' (Ibid: 53).

And, Kunti succeeded ultimately. Her sons came out victorious in the battle against the Kauravas. She became the Queen-Mother only to relinquish her position after some time to make preparations for her final journey to the other world. No amount of entreaty from her sons and Draupadi, her daughter-in-law, would dissuade her from her self-chosen vow to 'practice austerity serving … [her] parents-in-law [Dhritarashtra and Gandhari] and thus attain heaven so as to meet … [her] husband' (Ibid: 57; parentheses added). Kunti left Hastinapur to keep her vow. When after some time fire broke out in the forest near their new dwelling and its flames were rapidly advancing towards them, Kunti along with her parents-in-law calmly awaited the flames ultimately to be engulfed by the same. 'She died, as she had lived, unbending' (Ibid: 58).

Draupadi

The portrayal of Draupadi in *Yuganta* brings out in clear relief Karve's strength as well as her infirmity as a feminist. She starts it with a comparison of Sita, the romantic character of the epic poem *Ramayana*, with Draupadi the earthly woman playing a vital role in the '*Mahabharata* … a history' (Karve 2013: 73). The overall impact of the two is one of immense contrast, save in one aspect, viz., ignoring of the women by the men. Draupadi's constant humiliation by the male folk including her own husbands may, to an extent. be comparable with Rama's sacrifice of Sita when she was pregnant. 'Is the sacrifice of an entirely defenceless person justifiable just for the sake of public pressure?' asks the feminist Karve, 'Couldn't Rama have given up the kingdom instead?' (Ibid: 87). The abandonment of Sita was unjust. That one event is a blot on the ideal portrait of Rama. But, 'in that very event Sita was transformed from being a shadow of her husband to a person in her own right, with her own sorrow, her own humiliation, and the opportunity to face them entirely on her own' . *Distinctiveness of Karve's perception lay not in her comparing the pativratya (loyalty to husband) of Sita with Draupadi's as the authors of Towards Equality and many others did, but in constructing the spirit of protest in the*

two. The tragic end of *Ramayana* is in self-destruction by Sita. 'She could have undergone some other ordeal to prove her innocence, *but she chose not to*, and her tragic end remains an unhealed wound in the hearts of Indians' (Ibid: 87).

Draupadi's sense of defiance of the demands of patriarchal socio-cultural order was much more pronounced. Her willingness to sacrifice herself, and her faithfulness to her husbands were too evident to be missed. But her sensitive pride turned Draupadi into a personality that 'stormed and raged' on different occasions (Ibid: 86). She was not to suffer all in silence. Draupadi was a true daughter of the earth because her feet were planted on the ground, her heart was in the world defined by her marriage and family, with the boundaries of her father's house, father-in-law's house and her own palace (Ibid: 88). Draupadi's troubles were human, brought on by people of this world and particularly, by her own husbands. Two words keep recurring in reference to Draupadi – *nathavati anathavat*, (having husbands, but like a widow (Ibid: 83, emphasis in original). Draupadi was 'the wife of five but bereft, the daughter of a rich house but like an orphan; she had brave allies but she was alone. This was the wretchedness of her situation. Every time she was dishonoured, her husbands and fathers-in-law stood watching in silence. The oxymoron-like epithet, *nathavati anathavat*, most aptly describes her desperate situation and it occurred in the epic itself though neither Karve nor Saonli Mitra, who following Karve's lead uses it for the title of her play, mentions the source (1). Karve's choice of the couple of words conveys a sort of sarcasm aimed at the male heroes of the epic.

The *Mahabharata* is the historical fiction depicting Yuganta, i.e., the end of a Yuga. 'Each agony of that dying *Yuga*, Draupadi suffered in her own person. When her sons were treacherously killed, she wept and complained for the last time. 'From then we hear her voice no more' in the epic (Ibid: 84). Prior to that Draupadi never forgot the smart of remembered insult. 'She clenched her fists and cursed, she burned with anger'. She displayed her agency by constantly agitating for redress.

A popular misconception originating in patriarchal value system is that Draupadi was the cause - at least the main cause – at the War of the *Mahabharata*. Indeed, one Purana mentions: 'in the Krityayuga Renuka was Kritya. In the Satyayuga Sita was Kritya. In the Dwaparayuga Draupadi was Kritya. In the Kaliyuga there are Krityas in every house'. A *Kritya* is a blood-thirsty, demonic female (Ibid: 84). Karve observes, 'Some misogynist has written these lines without any regard for facts'. Parasurama fought king Haihaya to recover the 'property of' his father – his wife Renuka and a cow – stolen by the king, not for defending the honour of Renuka, Parasurama's mother. Of course, Sita might be a cause for the battle between Rama and Ravana (Karve forgot to mention that Sita herself had no responsibility for that). But the seeds of the war in the Mahabharata, suggests Karve, were sown on the day of denial of the throne to Dhritarashtra. The enmity between the Dhartarashtras and

the Pandavas was a sequel to this event which took place before Draupadi's entry into the scene. And, finally, before the war broke out, the Pandavas 'were more concerned with getting a share of the kingdom than in revenging the insults to their wife' (Ibid: 85). This view is echoed in Sunder Rajan's statement that the 'great *Mahabharata* War is fought not to avenge Draupadi's insult; the "righteous war" … is fought to settle the long-standing struggle between the clans for political power' (1999: 334). Draupadi, horribly insulted and humiliated by the Dhartarashtras did not want it, i.e., any compromise. But 'as the true inheritors of India's patriarchal society, the Pandavas were hardly men to bow to the wishes of their wives' (Ibid: 86). Even Bhima, who alone avenged several wrongs to Draupadi, like his brothers, sought through Krishna a truce with Duryodhana and avoid the war. Draupadi alone kept on saying, 'Krishna, he [Duhshasana] dragged me by the hair, have no mercy on the man who put his filthy hand on my hair' (Ibid: 85).

Draupadi's dissenting and revolting spirit burst out into furious protest against the Dhartarashtras' attempt at dragging her out from the interior of the palace to the public space of the royal court of Dhritarashtra where she was exposed to the male gaze and in her interrogation of her husband's right to stake her in the dice-game. She inquired in desperate anger whether Yudhishthira staked her before or after he lost himself in the gamble. Later scholars are divided in their assessment of Draupadi as a feminist or proto-feminist judging her on the basis of the question posed by her. Alf Hiltebeitel, the noted Draupadi scholar, regards it as a feminist question since 'it challenges the men to consider … their lordship over and "ownership" of women in contexts of patriarchy'. Draupadi's interrogation carries with it a 'class-action appeal' on behalf of women which 'calls into question two kinds of male lordship: that of kingship and family, and that of the dharmic politics of kingship in the sabha or men's hall' (cited by Sunder Rajan 1999: 337). Philosopher B. K. Matilal has described Draupadi's question as the sole and 'unique' unanswered dilemma in the epic. 'But Matilal too notes a displacement: Draupadi's question is "more concerned with rights or legality … than with the morality of the situation"' (Ibid: 337). From his contemporary location Matilal also concedes that it is a "point [made by] a social rebel, presumably a non-conformist". Draupadi's questions remained unanswered but if they were properly answered it would have required a "paradigm shift" in Indian social thought (cited by Sunder Rajan 1999). Janaky, however, interrogates the claim made in favour of Draupadi's status as a feminist or proto-feminist (1992).

Curiously enough, Karve remarks, 'Draupadi's question was not only foolish, *it was terrible*'. (2013: 90, emphasis added). Karve resents that Draupadi 'was standing there arguing about legal technicalities like a lady pundit when what was happening to her was so hideous that she should only have cried out for decency and pity in the name of the Kshatriya code' (Idem)! Karve's comment appears somewhat 'perverse' to John Brockington who wrote the 'Introduction'

to first Orient Longman publication of *Yuganta* (Op. Cit. xvi). Karve read, of course, a dilemma hovering over the plausible answer to Draupadi's question. An affirmative answer as to whether Dharma had a right to stake her in the dice-game once he had been defeated would have confirmed the validity of Dharma's action. A negative answer would have severed the tie between Draupadi and her husbands and placed her in a serious plight, she would have been considered 'truly widowed'. But, would have the later situation further worsened Draupadi's plight, nathavati anathavat as she had already been?

Janaky, a later scholar declines to accept Suddhabrata Sengupta's proposition in favour of Draupadi as a representative model of 'universal woman' (Sen Gupta, 1991) just on the ground which Karve seems to have prescribed for Draupadi's proper conduct in the royal court though she does not refer to or criticise Karve here. By raising the question of slavery and claiming the privilege of protection as the 'kulabadhu' of the clan, Draupadi foregrounds feebly the class- and-caste aspects of sexual oppression as well the political dimension allied with it (Janaki 1992). Draupadi's image can be retrieved for feminism not by essentialising her predicament as 'women's issue', but by remaining aware of the 'sexual vulnerability and political subordination of women within the large network of intersections of power and ideology at the multiple levels of caste, race and clan' (Ibid: 1999).

Evidently, Karve failed to adequately focus on or explicate the feminist viewpoint referred to above in the episode of attempted disrobing of Draupadi and her reactions to the same. Sunder Rajan observes in defence of Karve's suggestion regarding the desperateness of Draupadi's questions, 'Karve speaks with the bitter irony of a woman who knows that women must obey the rules' (Op. Cit. 337). But Sunder Rajan's defence gets weakened when one reads Karve's objections to Draupadi's argumentation with Dharma in public or private. How does a feminist advocate acquiescence of women to whatever their male partners say or do (cf. Karve 2013: 90 – 92)? Did Karve, cradled in the overall patriarchal culture of the society of her times, suffer from a hesitation to cross the *limen* of the patriarchal officiousness over women's conduct and women's right to protest against the inofficious behavior of the males? Interestingly, Saonli Mitra, who followed Karve closely, did not express any such hesitancy in her projection of the fearless indomitable female in Draupadi.

The indeterminacy noticed in the foregoing discussion by Karve of Draupadi's conduct is dissipated in her *conjecture* on Draupadi's admonition of her husbands and her last minute revelation to herself of her strongest love for Bhima. Rigid authority of the patriarchal system every time seeks to suppress the mental and emotional life of the female folk. It succeeds only temporarily. Beneath the surface, however, the impulses of the unconscious remain active and may burst forth in a sudden explosion as it happened in the case of Karve's Draupadi at death's door.

Draupadi's story ends with her fall in the final journey undertaken by her following her five husbands. And, Karve's penetrative mind starts working thenceforth. Draupadi lying on the ground has not yet completely lost her consciousness. She comes to learn what reason is adduced to her fall in Dharma's explication of the same to Bhima who enquires into the reason of the failure of everyone in the team in reaching the desired destination. Draupadi's fall is due to the blemish that she loved Arjuna the most instead of apportioning her love equally to all the five of her husbands. Draupadi 'recognised the hurt in Dharma's words, the contempt too. For the first time in her life *she pitied the king from her heart*' (Karve 2013: 93; emphasis added). Throughout her married life, even when she commiserated with Dharma about his wretched condition, Dharma never told her what he was feeling. 'Only today in a single sentence he had told her what he thought was her one defect and in doing so had laid bare the life-long wound in his heart'. She felt regrets but only for a while. Instantaneously she asked, what was astonishing in it if she adored Arjuna the most? It was Arjuna who won her garland in the *swayamvara sabha* by accomplishing the incredible feat in archery. Did the king, did anybody, realize her pain when polyandry was foisted on her? 'She had had to kill her mind'. Despite that in her actions she had treated all her five husbands alike. But at heart, she had loved Arjuna the most. 'Perhaps the mind could not be killed completely'.

Draupadi's mind stopped for a moment. What does it mean to have loved? Arjuna married women besides her: Ulupi, Chitrangada, Subhadra. But, could any woman win Arjuna's heart? 'Is love like that'? Sighed Draupadi. 'I pine for someone who does not return my love, someone else yearns for me' (Ibid: 94). Just at the moment, suddenly a realization pierced her cerebration like an electric flash. Instantly recalled Draupadi that there was one person who gave his whole life for her – Oh! It was Bhima, Bhima avenged the wrongs done to her. Oh! He was fuming with rage when she was dragged down to the hall attended by the Dhartarashtras and their associates. He wanted to burn the dice-playing hands of Dharma. While in exile, he sought to comfort her in moments of her weariness. In the battlefield he drank the blood of Duhshasana who pulled her hair and tried to disrobe her, it was Bhima who plaited her hair with gory hands. It was Bhima, not Arjuna, who killed Kichaka, the teaser and tormentor of her in the palace of Virata. At the penultimate moment of her life it was the same Bhima who sought to comfort her. Bhima dragged himself with utmost pain and efforts near Draupadi and asked her: 'what can I do for you?' In less than no time Draupadi brought 'Bhima's face close' [and muttered] "In our next birth be the eldest, Bhima, under your shelter we can all live in safety and joy' (Ibid: 95). The indomitable feminine spirit stood triumphant in Karve's imagination but Karve could not take one step further like Saonli Mitra, who made the protagonist of her dance drama, i.e., Draupadi, whisper into the ears of Bhima: 'In the next birth Bhima let you be mine, only mine … Let you only be mine' (Mitra 2012 : 70: cf. Bhowmick *et al* 1983).

Tailpiece

In concluding *Yuganta* Karve observes that in claiming that an epoch ended with the *Mahabharata* war she does not mean to say that everything in [the socio-cultural order depicted in the epic] … came to an end or vanished.

Though *Yuganta* is an analytical story of mainly the female characters of the royal family dominating the grand narrative presented in the epic of *Mahabharata,* it contains Karve's valuable reflections *en passant* on different aspects of socio-cultural reality prevailing in the era or the epoch. For instance, Karve unambiguously condemns, more than once, in *Yuganta* the cruel act of Krishna and Arjuna in annihilating the Khandava forest and the creatures sheltered by it. She was the first figure in voicing the anguish over the destruction of environment and ecology and forest dwelling community (the Nagas) by the aggrandizement of male-centric and comparatively powerful groups (no female figure is mentioned either in the epic or in Karve's narrative to have participated in mutilation of nature). Men's domination over the females converges with the former's domination over and injury to nature. Karve is very pertinently placed by Ramachandra Guha as one of the first environmentalists of India.

' Certain social systems like the patriarchal household have continued almost to the present day … The Mahabharata is the story of the quarrel between cousins for the possession of property and status [though limited within a royal Kshatriya family]' (2013: 162-163, parenthesis added). Such quarrels are fought on various scales from then to the present. **But what is strikingly important is the ideal of woman and womanhood that was upheld in the Mahabharata continues till date though in a somewhat altered form. Barring a few exceptions, most of the ideals at present are *adversely* affecting women. In earlier times,** Karve reminds, **women who were rescued from the hands of the enemy and perhaps were used by them, '*were never abandoned. They were brought back to the family and given their status*'. But what has happened in modern times? 'The [erstwhile] attitude was in complete contrast to the later one and to that of the *modern Hindus who refused to accept their rescued wives who were brought back from Pakistan*'**(Ibid: 168, interpolation and emphasis added). The cost of callousness of the political powers, evinced in the Partition of India and the attendant mass violence became doubly oppressive in case of women because of their male counterparts' hostility toward them.

A similar or even more severe kind of cruelty of the patriarchal society towards the females is betrayed in the refusal of the parents or guardians or husbands to take back into the family the 'missing girls' or women who are rescued by the voluntary organizations and/or the police (Nandi 2021).

And the phallocentric culture continues to impact the minds of not only men *but also women.* It has been evinced in cases such as rape and murder

of the females in Khairlanji of Maharashtra on 29 September 2006. It was the *women* in the OBC mob that pulled dalit woman, Surekha Bhotmange, and her daughter Priyanka out of their house into open and beat them brutally and then the victims were gangraped and murdered by the menfolk (Teltumbde: 2010, 101-102). The OBC villagers did this to give Surekha a comeuppance. Surekha, a modern avatar of Draupadi, was 'an Archetypal Ambedkarite woman – socially conscious, intolerant of injustice, courageous and outspoken'. She displayed agency and subjectivity, qualities which are denied to women by the patriarchal as well as caste-dominated culture of the Indian society. And that was her offence. Another infamous incident in the string of events of sexual violence against women in post-Khairlanji period took place in Hathras district in Uttar Pradesh on 14 September 2020 when a 19-year old Dalit woman was gangraped by four upper-caste men. She died two weeks later in a Delhi hospital.

Though Dalit women are the worst victims, sexual harassment and violence are perpetrated on non-Dalit women as well. And, in all the cases justice is inordinately delayed and denied to the victims because of the perpetuation of 'patriarchal fundamentalism and its regulation of gender' and the conduct deemed appropriate to it (Bhaba: 2007: 328). It thwarts the much required 'radical interrogation of the social responsibility for individual/collective violence against women' (Sunder Rajan: 1999, 352-353). The 'ideology' of patriarchal supremacism gets reflected in people's quotidian conversation and comments.

A gruesome instance of it is met in the Abhaya case in West Bengal in recent times. On 9 August 2024, a thirty-one-year-old female post-graduate trainee doctor at R.G. Kar Medical College and Hospital in Kolkata, West Bengal was raped and murdered in a college building while she was on duty. Her body was found in a seminar room on campus. The steps taken by the police and the legal proceedings following them blatantly exposed the patriarchally dominated state-system. The only ray of hope lay in the protracted protest against it of the civil society. Women would not, indications are there, remain silent sufferers of atrocities against them.

Feminism in all post-colonial countries addresses 'the problem of specifying the patriarchal gendered nature of civil society and disturb[ing] the symmetry of private and public which is now shadowed … by the difference of gender which does not neatly map on to the private and public' (Bhabha: 2007: 15). And this effort was initiated in India by authors like Karve who remains, therefore, an unforgettable figure in the discourses on feminism *pari passu* with critical traditionalism in India.

Note

At the very beginning of the Mahabharata in the Anukramanika Parvan Dhritarashtra laments that Draupadi was dragged into the assembly hall (but does not mention any attempt

to strip her)

Yadâsrausam draupadm aúrukanthm,

Sabhâm ntam duhkhitâm ekavastrâm/

Rajasvatâm nathavatm anâthavat,

Tadâ nâúamse vijayâya samjaya//

When I heard that Draupadi, tears in her throat, had been dragged into the assembly hall grieving, in a single garment, and she in her period, while her protector stood by as though she had no one to protect her – then Sanjaya, I lost all hope of victory 1.1 : 106, van Buitenen's English translation (1981).

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DISABILITY AMONG MUSLIMS OF INDIA: MINORITIZATION AND INTERSECTIONALITY

Abstract

Disabled people are considered to be a minority group globally. Their access to resources and rights as citizens is deeply compromised in the countries of the global south. They are however, not a homogenous group as their membership in a minority group further exacerbates their marginality. This article tries to examine different axes of minority status of Muslims with disabilities. How disability is perceived among Muslims and how they negotiate with it. Further their caste and class status also result in accessing resources like education and health care and despite the Right of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016, their condition remains dismal. An intersectional perspective helps in exploring the different aspects of how they are minorities in a multiple sense.

Introduction

In modern society, more and more individuals are becoming aware of the fact that they have a limited sphere of opportunity and that they face a greater amount of hostility and/or trivialisation than others. This has led to a new subjective awareness of the objective discrimination, a broadening of the definitions of who belongs to a minority group and also an increase in the number of people included in these definitions (Deegan, 1981). A minority group thus is any group of people, who because of certain characteristics associated with the physical and/or cultural aspects of their lives, are singled out and experience differential and unequal treatment (Wirth, 1945). Thus, there are two conditions that need to be met; the differential or unequal treatment (a minority status) and an awareness for the basis of discrimination for this group. And very often, a status might exist for a long period of time without the emergence of the group. A minority group with one subjective identification can then be defined as a 'single minority group' On the other hand, when emergent patterns of inequality emerge that are not in line with any one identity status, but rather as an interaction of multiple minority groups, we could see this as 'multiple minority group' (Deegan, 1981).

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For Robinson (2012), minority studies in India however, is not a very well-established field so far. In India, minorities are often thought of as only in terms of religious minorities, but the field of neither religious studies nor minority studies is well established. For her, this was partly due to the result of the early political leadership of India who saw a strong hold of religion as a problem in the lives of Indians rather than a solution. This too had its roots in the colonial legacy of using religion as a tool to divide the country. However, in later years, this very attitude led to a sensitivity to the position of the minorities in India as well as impeded the historical and comparative study of religion, minorities and ethnicity in India. Robinson maintains that the term 'minority study' as borrowed from the West, cannot be applied to the Indian context directly and needs to be understood carefully through its religious, cultural, political, constitutional and social lenses. In short it needs to be interdisciplinary to say the least.

The present work is thus an attempt to look at the minority identity from the point of view of two major marginalities, and how this further gets intertwined with other identities.

a. Multiple Minority identities

In classical sociological thought, concepts such as "alienation" as given by Marx to explain the conditions of the workers in a capitalist society, or that of "anomie" as given by Durkheim to explain a sense of imbalance in the society leading to social lacunas, have been used to look at the relationship between the society and the individual. However, in the context of the United States, since the 1960s there has been a reemergence of ethnic consciousness among the minorities following the civil rights movement as well as the introduction of immigrants and refugees from the developing nations of Asia and Latin America.

Vega and Rumbaut (1991) tried to look at how mental health is looked at and dealt with when looked at from the lens of minority status. Among Blacks, it was observed that data on mental health was often influenced by access to psychiatric care itself in various regions of the country. The general pattern is that they have similar or slightly lower rather than non-Hispanic whites. Among the Hispanics, Mexicans Americans had lower rates of admissions to mental hospitals so it was concluded that the culture acted as a buffer to stress and other behaviours that might lead to mental illness. Among the Asian populations, it was initially concluded that they had and inferior psychological makeup as there were higher raters of suicide among Japanese in California. Later this was contradicted as the number of admissions in hospitals was highly underrepresented of their population size. However, subsequent works showed that many immigrants experience depression because of disappointment with the opportunities available. Many were able to cope better if they had support systems, and immigrants who had lower expectations

than the native-born minorities experienced less stress. Thus, it is not just the minority status, but the overall conditions and a complex overlapping of all factors that played a role in the mental health of each member of the community.

b. Disability as a minority identity

Over the years, many definitions of disabilities have emerged which have been altered in accordance with the new emerging discourses as well as understandings of what it means to be a disabled body. According to WHO, ¯Disabilities is an umbrella term, covering impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions. (WHO, 2016). However, for a single unified definition to emerge which takes into account all the different forms of disabilities are very difficult. And so, as observed by Oliver and Barnes (1998), broadly definitions of disability can be grouped under two headings, the first set of definitions are those which are the official definitions that emerged out of those definitions of disability as used by the government agencies, the officials and academicians. The second set of definitions are used and developed by people with disabilities and by the organizations that they run and control.

A compiled and annotated bibliography by Miles (2002) gives a very comprehensive idea about various texts are related to the understandings of disability, the mental disorders as well as deafness to be seen in the context of religion and the accompanying beliefs and practices in areas of Middle East, South Asia as well as East Asia. The extensive nature of the work is such that it lists out 460 entries, made from all over the world, from short journal articles to epics like the *Mahabharta*. It also gives a general idea about how disability is usually seen as a result of suffering and affliction from the religious and moral point of view.

Generally, disability is not conceived as a social rights issue or a developmental issue Mehrotra (2020) which would marginalize a certain class of people but as an inconceivable and invisible life condition. But if we take Susan Sontag's (1978) understanding of illness as a metaphor, then we realize that everyone is only temporarily able bodied. For her, all of us belong both to the realms of illness and health equally. Most of us may remain in the 'healthy' state most of the time but we do eventually have to go into the state of illness as well, albeit for a short period of time. Such an explanation opens up realms of understanding illness and consequently disability. But as Ghai (2003) observes, people with disabilities are usually permanently delegated to the realm of sickness and whether disability was present by birth or acquired later, it results in marginalization in almost every sphere. For instance, disabled are denied employment, education, income, identity or social recognition. Disability is usually seen in absolute terms, with one being either disabled or 'normal'. However, Davis points out that one should be wary of such absolute distinctions as the understanding of disability as being an issue of only a few

people is not a correct view. It is part of a larger constructed social discourse that talks about the historicity of the body. Very similar to how race, class and gender shapes up the lives of those who are not black, not poor and not female, the concept of disability also regulates the lives of those who are 'normal'. The very conception of normalcy is tied to the concept of disability so much so that normalcy and disability form a part of the same system. (Davis, 1995, p. 2)

Normalcy is more than often defined as the absence or lack of any markers of illness, disability or deviance, which effectively makes it a definition of exclusion, and if these characteristics are not present in the individual, then one is considered as 'normal'. (Smart, 2001). However, a major flaw in this definition of normal is that invariably, the notions of 'normal' seem to get attached to the definitions of 'natural', while those of abnormal to those of unnatural, (Anderson, 2013) which heavily influences how people perceive the world around them as well as how they define their own self.

In the context of disability theory in the recent past, how a person experiences impairment is very closely linked to the social as well as the cultural expectation of what is understood as 'normal'. Government, non-government and academically funded research institutions tend to give priority to research that is oriented towards improving facilities of medicine, education as well as social opportunities. However, lately scholars have also become aware of the importance of the history of disability, of viewing it as an important factor while writing about other socially constructed categories such as class, race and gender. Additionally, the experience of disability is increasingly being taken up as pieces on experience of marginalization and exclusion (Kudlick 2003 as cited in Buckingham 2011)

There exist two dominant models which help us understand the terms and concepts relating to disability, the medical model and the social model. The medical model sees the diagnostics and solution to disability in medical knowledge. The focus is on bodily 'abnormalities', disorder or deficiency, and the way in which this in turn 'causes' some degree of 'disability' or functional limitation. The recommended solution lies in curative and rehabilitative medical intervention, with an increasing involvement of allied health practitioners, psychologists and educationalists. (Barnes, Geoffrey, & Shakespear, 1999)

During the 1970's and 80's the disabled activists increasingly criticized the medical model by arguing that it is society which disables people with impairments and therefore any meaningful solution must be directed at societal change rather than individual adjustment and rehabilitation. It was The Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) which was the forefront of the creation of an alternative model of disability, one which placed the responsibility for disability squarely on the failures of the society. For them it was the society that disabled individuals and that disability was something

that was imposed on top of one's impairments such that one is excluded from full participation in the society. It focused on the experience of disability, but not as something which exists purely at the level of individual psychology, or even interpersonal relations, but considered a wide range of social and material factors and conditions, such as family circumstances, income and financial support, education, employment, housing, transport and the built environment, and more to be included in this experience . (*ibid,* 27-28).

The understanding of social stratification, in general and specifically in India has for a long time been around the axis of economic understanding, where a quantitative analysis of the society is possible. Being so closely related to the understanding of economic terms, it often does not take other social phenomena into consideration which also led to the perpetuation of hierarchy and differences. Over the years, understandings of how race, gender, and caste also further these inequalities have entered into the arena and are now seen as important steps in the understanding of social stratification. In the recent past, socio-cultural factors such as religion are also now being seen as an important factor around which other hierarchies get arranged. Disabilities, however, despite their universalised nature of being present in all human societies and cutting across social-cultural boundaries, are still not included in the fold. In fact, due to its universalising nature, it interacts with all other divisions in the society, such as caste, class, race, and gender within the communities. Not just these themselves, but interactions with them further creates or restricts the access to other social resources like education, health care, employment among others (Gulyani & Mehrotra, 2023)

c. Muslims as a minority community in India

India is a constitutional democracy that guarantees to its citizens civic equality irrespective of the individual's gender, class, ethnicity, caste or religion. However, the constitution makers at the time of drafting recognised that certain group identities have historically been a source of disadvantage for its members and thus made provision for an affirmative action that would level out the playing field, so to say. However, despite all the best efforts, about seventy-five years later, the country still stands divided, in some aspects more than before. In spite of provision being present to tackle issues related to caste, ethnicity and religion, these divisions have become wider as well as sharper. In some cases, the division is due to the positive effect of the affirmative action, as in the case of the emergence of a middle class during the ex-untouchable communities. The policy of reservation thus has helped them achieve social and economic mobility. However, among others, this has not been the case. Those who were on the margins continued to be in precarious situations, as while other sections experience growth, some as a direct result may be facing further economic marginalisation and social exclusion. The understanding of the Indian Muslim is one such case, as it is extremely tricky

to define them. They are not a community in the classical way sociology would understand. They are neither a status, nor a class category. They are diverse based on the history of their culture, their sect, their history and their region. However, colonial policies of enumeration have clubbed them together on the basis of religion instilling a sense of collective identity as well as marked boundaries of distinction which had been very liminal till then. The subsequent Partition of the country and the politics of identity in South Asia has only managed to further sharpen these religion-based distinctions, embedded within a hierarchy of power and position which has further produced a new narrative of what it means to be a majority as well as a minority (Fazal , Vaid, & Jodhka, 2024)

Kalyani Devaki Menon's work, 'Making Place for Muslims in Contemporary India'(2022) is an interesting and enlightening take on the everyday life of Muslims in Delhi. In a time where most Indian Muslims are seen as "others", this work tackles a pertinent question of how one treats the religious minorities in the country. Based primarily in Old Delhi, this work also presents a larger discourse on the diverse nature of Muslims in India. The author argues that the Old Delhi Muslims construct a separate notion of self and community in the midst of the hegemonies that are existing around them, many of them, competing in nature. Furthermore, religion is not the only framework that is utilised by them to understand their own lives but rather one of the many interactions. Even from the religious point of view, she looks at understandings of the Shias and Sunnis, the Sufis and the atheists, the Barelvis and Deobandhis, the Ahl-e-Hadis and yet others who do not identify by any *Maslak* (path) (Kaithwas, 2024)

She outlines some specific ways in which Muslims are experiencing marginalisation in India currently. The first of these are the special and social segregation that they experience in the India cities, where they are relegated to certain neighbourhoods or 'ghettoes.' This type of segregation is social as well as special in nature, which restricts Muslims from integrating into the society. Also, in the present social and political ideologies, there are also the emergence of the understanding that Muslims are threats or are outsiders to the Indian style of state that is dominant currently. This then leads them to be perceived as "less Indian" thereby leading to an exclusion from the political and civic spaces. The notion of being 'outsiders' also puts the onus on the community itself to prove their loyalty and allegiance to the country, many times at the cost of downplaying the religious and cultural practices, since this leads to further scrutiny. A social exclusion also seeps into and finds its ways in economic, legal and institutional discrimination and disadvantage as well for the community. However, she also points out that despite the challenges, the community has also devised many ways to resist these and to express their identity and rightful place within Indian society. (Menon, 2022)

i. Sachar Committee Report

The Prime Minister's High-Level Committee for the Preparation of a Report on the Social, Economic, and Educational Status of the Muslim Community in India, also known as the Sachar Committee report was a significant piece of research done for unearthing the systematic inequalities that were faced by the Indian Muslims. The report was able to bring to light, in particular, those injustices faced by the community in question, which other official reports so far had been unable to trace. It was an important entryway into the discussion which catered around minority identity in general, on the idea of social justice as well as on the concept of inclusive development. The committee was set up in 2005 under the then Prime Minister, Mr. Manmohan Singh and was chaired by former Chief Justice of India, Rajinder Sachar. The committee was able to present its findings in November of 2006 with the main finding being that the Indian Muslims face significant disparities in the country vis a viz other community. It is this very report which has been the foundation of many subsequent laws and policies in the country. (Sachar Committee Report, 2006)

The report found despite forming the largest minority, about 14% of the population according to the 2001 census, the Indian Muslims still faced a plethora of issues. In terms of economic stability, educational attainment as well as having a representative representation in the public institutions, the Indian Muslims were lagging behind. The committee looked at the educational conditions, the economic and employment status, their access to bank credit, their access to the physical and the social infrastructure of the society, the standard of living with relation to consumption and poverty standards, the programmes implemented by the government for their welfare, affirmative actions for the Muslims, as well as looked at Wakfs assets in the country.

The policy concluded that the educational attainment was significantly lower as compared to other groups. It also highlighted that the lack of adequate schooling, enrolment rates being low as well as a significantly high dropout rate contributed to this issue, especially more among the girls, which adds another dimension of gender with the religious community. With regards to employment, they were mostly engaged in self-employed professions, and in activities pertaining to trade and usually in the informal sector, which has its own drawbacks when compared to the formal structure. A related topic of Bank Credit was also analysed and it was found that not only is the access to bank credit low, but also that the average size of the bank credit is also meagre. As regards to housing facilities, the Muslim usually lived in poorer neighbourhoods with the infrastructure of these structures, which included amenities like drinking water, electricity and sanitation was generally inadequate. This further was worsened by the fact that the report findings showed that Muslims tend to face higher levels of poverty. Even the findings on the programmes implemented for the Muslims reflected that not have been

beneficial, either due to the number of beneficiaries being low or else the total amount invested being too inadequate. When looking at affirmative action for Muslims, the situation is bleaker as since Other Backward Classes in general seem to be lagging behind the Indian average, the OBC Muslim is even further deprived than a Muslim from the Unreserved Category.

In order to address these issues, the Committee identified key policy recommendations which centred around providing access to educations, improving opportunities for employment, encouraging political participation, improving access to Bank credits, improving the infrastructure in Muslim majority areas and paying more attention to basic amenities as well as employing social security schemes that would help in the longer run (Sachar Committee Report, 2006)

2. When minority identities coincide

The WHO states that worldwide about one billion or about 15% of the individuals face some form of disability ((WHO, 2001). In India particularly, the 2011 Census and the 76th National Sample Survey estimated that disability prevalence in India was 2.2%, and this population has risen from 21.9 million in the 2001 census to 26.8 million in the 2011 census. Of the total 28,43,917 respondents across all age groups, the number of individuals of Islamic faith were 3,62,313 or 12.74% of the total population and of these 3,462 were disabled. (NHFDC, 2021). These numbers clearly show that both disability as well as Muslims are a minority in their own right. And when these minority identities intersect with each other, they do present certain unique characteristics. (Pattnaik, S et. al, 2023)

As discussed above, the minority identities need to be understood in the context of the socio-political and economic environment in which they emerge in. These minority identities interact with other social constructs as well as with other identities. However, when one or more minority identities intersect, it is not simply a layering of the two identities, but rather a collision of two worlds, each with their own understandings made more complex with the social situations they are present in. Also each minority identity does not simply add to the previous one but rather evolves into a completely new understanding.

Here, the article will look at two minority identities in India, namely persons with disabilities and Muslims. The former is a socio-medical position, which is largely still seen through the lens of a medical understanding. However, it is largely social in nature, as how we react to and perceive disability is embedded not in the medical condition but rather in the social understanding. In India, the social understanding is also to a large extent coded by the religious norms. On the other hand, the understanding about Muslims in India is layered in centuries old notions of annexation, of colonial rule, of political strife and

the ideas of nation building. The notion is not that of a private belief but that of a public feeling.

An intersection of these two identities, again looked at in the context of other factors such as region, gender, class and so on creates a more nuanced understanding that has not been researched extensively.

a. Disability and Islam – religious perspective

As a country, India has the existence of multiple cultures, languages and traditions which give it a special positionality when trying to understand it. One of the ways in which this diversity is exemplified is through religion, where there is a multitude of religious denominations in the country. The major religions are Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Jainism and Buddhism with many other minor religions also existing. The reason that religion becomes vital for our understanding is because the norms and values that are followed in everyday life are very often embedded within these religious beliefs. From the ancient period, it has been these religious beliefs and texts which have been guiding the individuals in each and every aspect of their lives. And even today, many people often rely on religion to regulate their day-to-day life. Mehrotra (2013) argues that different religious and cultural societies have their own understanding of disability which depends largely upon the context which needs to be explored further.

We will now turn towards understanding what the fundamental religious tenets of Islam are and how they tie to the understanding of disability. The term is derived from the Arabic verb Aslama which means to accept, surrender and submit to God. The religion came up around 610C.E where Muhammad received the first series of revelations from God over a period of 23 years. It is these revelations that are collected and organised into the Qur'an which is considered to be the highest form of religious authority. (Rooshey Hasnain, 2008).

A central concept to the understanding of disability in Qur'an is related to the understanding of disability. In Islam, the understanding is that all human beings are born pure and, in a sense, therefore, perfect. The understanding then of bodily perfections and imperfections therefore have little to with the way human life is viewed. For the Islamic rituals, each human being is equal and finding solutions to problems for those with disabilities is a part of the rituals and the worship. (Islam, 2019)

Islamic teaching, while deep rooted in the idea of God's goodness and justice, does not put the blame of being disabled directly on the individuals themselves but rather it asks for concern rathe than compassion for those around them. It expects that the society provide them with dignity and full participation in the society. (Bukhârî, 1997)

Islam included the observation of five main goals or *ibadat* which are the belief in one God, the recitation of daily prayers, giving of legal alms, the observation of the feast of Ramazan, and the pilgrimage to holy places at least once in the lifetime (Sharif 1921)

In this religious belief system, during pregnancy and after the birth, there are many practices which are tied to the idea of having a 'healthy' and 'normal' child. Whether it is asking the expectant mother to wear certain blessed threads around her wrists or forbidding her to enter certain places, all to avoid evil spirits from harming the mother or the child. Even after birth, certain objects are kept near the child so as to ward off the evil eye. (*ibid*)

Islam also has a belief system where certain dispositions of the planets at the time of birth, may cause issues of health and illness. So, the Sun, Venus, Mercury, Moon, Saturn, Jupiter and Mars have an impact on the physical and behavioural traits of an individual, both desirable and undesirable. Not just the planets, but even the days of the week are significant. The weekly Islamic calendar starts from Saturday and each day is related to a special cause of psychological illness and disease.

While looking at the special references for disability in Islam with reference to the Qur'an, Bazna and Hatab (2005) sees that there are not any specific generic terms that are used for disability but the texts do refer to it in a progressive sense. It encourages the inclusion of all individuals at the community level. The Qur'an does have terms for different people with disabilities such as the blind, lame, and so on, while also having specific terms for the weak, sick, destitute which may have been a way of including those people who could have a 'disability'. Rooshey Hasnain, (2008) argues that although the Qur'an does not provide any stigma to disability but rather favours removing disabling barriers. Muslims with disabilities are relaxed from practicing prayers as certain procedures have to be adhered to before starting praying such as washing head, arms and feet to purify the body. Disabled people with limited functional capability cannot follow these regulations and also different kinds of prayer positions are hard to do. Disabled people have to face several challenges while going on Hajj pilgrimage, especially Muslim women with disability, and so this rule is also relaxed for them.

Difference is duly acknowledged as a condition of humanity in the Qur'an, but the behaviour of believers towards the physically different is regulated, not the behaviour of the marked. It is incumbent on every Muslim to respond ethically to human differences (Richardson 2012: 22.)It understands that disadvantage can be a factor that is created by the society and be imposed on the individuals who might not have the economic, social and physical traits to gain access to opportunities and services, which may be available to other individuals. The religion views disability neither as a blessing nor as a curse but more as a neutral stance, and is considered as a part of the natural state of

human existence. (Rooshey Hasnain, 2008)

However, there are still multiple mentions of the disabilities. There are forty-eight verses on blindness, seven on muteness, two on lameness, two on leprosy and one even on the occurrence of blue eyes. The Quran sees these as follows: 'there is no blame on the blind, nor is there blame on the lame, nor is there blame on the sick'. Even if they are not to be blamed, but yet they are not to be assumed to be on the same footing as those without a physical condition. They are physically different and distinct. Difference is duly acknowledged as a condition of humanity in the Qur'an, but the behaviour of believers towards the physically different is regulated, not the behaviour of the marked. It is incumbent on every Muslim to respond ethically to human differences (Richardson 2012)

Disability also raises theological questions about how a benevolent and merciful God allow such injury and mishaps to happen. The solutions lie from denouncing the existence of God altogether, to the presence of two opposite divine Gods, where one is good and one bad, to also crafting explanations based on revelations from the scriptures. (Pessagno, 1984). In the Islamic tradition, the issue of inequality is tackled early on in the story of Adam, wherein his children, when shown to him by Allah, are in differing in status, in term of wealth and in terms of health. When he asks Allah why he crested them with so much of differences, and wouldn't creating all as equal be better, Allah replies, "I create them into two types of being in order that one may be grateful and that he might be thanked." (Mawcilî, 1984). However, while this answers the religious question, but the problematic idea still persists (Singh, 2024)

Pooja Singh (2018) in her work brings out various perspectives from which disability and region could be analysed from. The first conceptualisation she mentions is that of disability as a *majboori* or a weakness. She mentions the narratives of a Kazi of Jama Masjid in Jararee village who explains that there is no mention of word disability in the holy book Qur'an . But there is mention of blind, deaf and dumb persons as weak. According to a Muslim villager:

> *Islam ka matlab sukoon, aman aur mohhabat hai. Kisi ko takleef mat do. Agar padosi pareshani me hai to jab tak uski pareshani door na ho jai tab tak apni khusi mat dekho. Qur'an me viklangta ko kamjori mana gaya hai. Viklang ko sataye nahi, hamesha uski madad kare jisse use mahsoos na ho ki wo viklang hai.* (Islam means satisfaction, peace and love. Do not trouble anyone. If a neighbour is in trouble, try to help them in solving the problem. Disability is seen as a weakness in the Qur'an. Do not create problems for them; always try to help disabled so that they do not feel disabled).

Thus, disability is a weakness and disabled people are weak, and since

those who are weak need to be supported, society needs to look after them. Religion is also seen as an unwavering faith in the decisions of God. Singh (2018) found that informants who had locomotor disability, especially those who belonged to the Sunni faith had a stronger religious value and norm. The idea was that whatever Allah did was for the good of the people, and so if Allah decided to 'give' them a disability, one was not to question it. A third linked way of conceptualising disability was from the point of view of *Karma* or Fate. Her work in Jararee and Isapur show that disability is a result of *Kismat* and *Kudrat* (fate and nature respectively). It was the supreme will of Allah to write the fate of all individuals and so it is his wish whether to make a person disabled or non-disabled. Whatever is fated, one must face it. During a focus group discussion by Singh (2018) in Jararee village a non-disabled person Meeraj explained the reason for disability as: *Viklaangta na to abhishaap hai na vardaan hai jo kismat me likha hai wahi hoga*.(Disability is neither curse nor God gift, whatever is written in fate must happen). Yet another respondent, Arshad, a 30 years old man, having severe lower limb disability, gave an explanation of his disability as: *Viklaangta to allah ki marji hai hum logo ke haath me kuch nahi hai.* (Disability is the wish of Allah; we have nothing in our hands). Fate and nature are also linked as Jainul, a severely locomotor disabled, gives reason for his polio suffering as *Kudrat ki maar thi use koi nahi taal sakta. Sochne se kuch milne wala nahi kudrat jitna degi utna hi milega.* (It's unfortunate… no one can change this. One will not get anything out of much thinking, whatever is in one's fate one will get only that much). Another respondent, Nazreen, a locomotor disabled woman, explains that according to the Qur'an disabled and other weak people should not be troubled by others because it is God's wish to make people in that way as he wants. She said*: Kamjoron ko aise na bole jo usko pareshani ho. Allahtala ka hukm hai jisko chahe jaisa kar de.* (No one should speak such words which may hurt disabled persons. It is Allah's wish to make one disabled or non-disabled person). Thus, *Kismat and Kudrat* (fate and nature) made up the two sides of the same narrative and they reciprocated with each other.

Singh (2018) also talks about a religious folk tale narrated in the Jararee village which shows yet another side of using religious beliefs as coping mechanisms. The folk tale was as follows;

> Jangal me ek basti thi jisme ek viklang baccha rahta tha. Raste me daku-lutere islamic roop lekar aane-jane walon ko loot te the. Ek martaba vo lutere us viklang bacche ke ghar panah lene ke liye pahunch gaye. Ahlekana (ghar walon) ne samjha ki humare ghar koi pakke-sachhe musalman aaye hain. Unki khub mehmanavaji ki gaye, unka jutha pani hifazat se rakha. Jab wo ghar se ruksat ho gaye to us bacche ke pair ki malish us juthe pani se ki gayi aur baccha sahi ho gaya. Jab wo lutere dubara panah lene ke liye waha gaye to us bacche ko dhundha. Bacche ke walid ne bataya ki wo baccha to pani ki malish se sahi ho

> gaya. Un lutere ko ghar walon ne alahtala samha. Pura vakya sunne ke baad luteron ne loot se tauva kar li aur kaha ki ye karishma unke akide ki buniyaad par hai.
>
> (There was a disabled child who lived in a jungle. There was a group of robbers who dressed up in Islamic style clothing to pretend to be religious individuals and used to loot the passengers. Once, this gang reached the disabled child's home to get shelter. His parents thought that some big Islamic followers had come to their house, so they greeted them, offered them good food and other things. When the gang went away, the parents kept the water used by them and massaged the child's legs with it. The child got cured. After some time, this group of robbers came to his house again to take shelter and searched for disabled child. The parents told them that his disability got cured by using the water. The robbers realized the miracle done by Allah and left robbing for good. They told the parents that it is their faith in God that cured their disabled child).

It is the faith in the optimism that motivates the individuals and their families to cope with the disabilities.

In addition, certain types of disabilities are also understood as a medical condition, especially those that are physical in nature such as blindness, deafness, locomotor disabilities and so on. The 'cure' for these disabilities is then found not only in the biomedical sphere, but also in traditional and spiritual healing techniques in some cases. Some Muslim informants of Singh (2018) who had locomotor disabilities stated that the reason for contracting polio is to do with supernatural powers. Taskin a man with polio affected legs narrated his story as:

> Pitaji ka kara-dhari ka kaam hai, ek aurat ayi thi dikhane uske upar uprari chakkar tha. Jalal (afternoon) ka time tha so pitaji ne mana kar diya ki agar iss samay tumara ilaj karunga to mere bacche ko nuksaan hoga. Wo aurat to thik ho gayi aur mere polio ho gaya. Hame teji se bukhar aya, tel wali latrine hui aur polio ho gaya.
>
> (It is all my father's fault. He has the knowledge to save people from evil spirits. One woman came to him as she was suffering from the evil spirits. It was afternoon, therefore father refused her and asked her to come some other time as if I cure you now my child might get harmed. She got well and I suffered from polio. I got high fever, oily stools and got polio).

The behaviour of the families also differs from culture to culture ranging from not believing that the child has a disability or misunderstanding the nature of their disability to treating them with sensitivity and care. It is the cultural factors that both limit as well as facilitate the attitudinal factors that

lead to opportunities for Muslims with disabilities (Rooshey Hasnain, 2008) Thus, one can see that a single understanding of Islam and disability is far from possible and that cultural context and the societal position of the individual affects it to a great extent.

An interesting analysis of the stigma faced by both persons with disabilities as well as those belonging to the Muslim community was done by Alexios, et al. (2015). The study is based in Greece which has a minority Muslim as well as Romani population. In addition, emigrants from Balkans and the former USSR also form other minority groups. Finally, people with disabilities are a group that are often excluded and stigmatised from society. The study took into account 280 people who were given questionnaires and asked to rank their attitude towards various members of the minority group on a 6-point scale with 0 signifying strong disagreement and 5 strong agreement. The participants consisted of 70 people that belonged to the Muslim minority of the western Thrace, 70 were Romani, of which 36 lived in campus and the rest were socially integrated, 70 who were foreigners and 70 Greeks who also served a s the control group. The results showed that the Greeks had a more positive attitude towards disability as compared to the foreigners. Additionally, those who had higher academic levels were more positive towards PwD. In terms of religion, the Christian had a more positive attitude towards PwD than Muslims. The final results showed that native Greeks and Romani who were integrated with the Greek society were the most positive about PwD and those who were foreign to Greek were least positive about them. This issue of immigration strongly led people to identify more closely with their own community and their own struggles while the natives and integrated individuals did not have these issues to contend with. Also the attitudes of the participants were dependent on their religious identities.

b. Disability Policies and minorities- Looking at UNCRPD and RPwD 2016

In response to the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific (ESCAP) declaring 1993 to 2002 as the Asian and Pacific Decade of the Disabled Persons, the Indian Parliament enacted the Persons with Disabilities Act 1995. This act aimed to eliminate the discrimination against the people with disability in areas like education, employment, public transportation access to public buildings and so on (Dias, 2013). However, the law was not without its loopholes and with the passage of time, it was unable to keep up with the growing needs of the persons with disabilities. It had only seven categories of disabilities which inadvertently excluded many conditions and thus many individuals who had a right to reasonable accommodation.

The ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in 2006, which was eventually adopted by India on 1st October 2007 gave a long pending impetus to the changing of the

existing law (Addlakha & Mandal, 2009, p. 62). The understanding was that the law needed to be revised, keeping in mind the current requirements of Persons with disabilities, by recognising that disability was not a singular category but rather was to be seen depending on the social positionality of the individual. After the ratification of disability organizations started to put pressure on the government to amend the existing disability law to be in line with the Convention. The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment set up a committee under Dr. Sudha Kaul so that a new draft law could be outlined. The National Academy of Legal Studies and Research (NALSAR) was taken aboard as one of the consultants in the process to draft a comprehensive bill (Mehrotra, 2013, pp. 83-84). The result of these collaborative efforts was that a Draft of the bill for Rights of Persons with Disabilities came to life in 2011, which was prepared in consultation with both the civil society as well as the disability sector. The Rights of Persons with Disabilities was introduced in the Rajya Sabha in 2014 by Mallikarjun Kharge. After a lot of back and forth, with many drafts being presented, it was in 2016 that the bill was finally passed and the Act emerged (The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016).

The new RPwD 2016 was surely an improvement in terms of the previous Act. It broadened the definition to now include twenty-one disabilities as compared to the earlier seven in the PwD 1995 Act. Additionally, with the inclusion of UNCRPD suggestions, one could see a shift from the medical model which focussed on rehabilitation to a rights-based model which emphasised on accessibility and inclusion. The newer Act also introduced stronger punishments for non-compliance and also made provisions for better redressal of grievances. In the sector of education, the focus is now on inclusion and not on segregation via special schools. Similarly, the employment sector now has to reserve 4% positions in government jobs for PwD as compared to the 3% earlier and this is now expected (though not binding) on the private sector as well. Finally, more provisions for empowerment and for social inclusion have been made in the new law for all the stakeholders.

However, the UNCRPD and the RPWD 2016 still have their limitations. The proper implementation of UNCRPD is highly dependent on the country's willingness to implement the suggestions, the resources available as well as the existing infrastructure. Additionally, the broad language of the CRPD is useful for larger reach, it also allows for a shift in interpretation, which could lead to a gap between what is desired and what is legalised. This is true for the RPwD as well. While the inclusion of twenty-one disabilities from seven is a welcome change, it still excludes many disabilities.

However, both the Convention as well as the Act of 2016 fail to take into consideration the voices of the disabled themselves as well as intersectionality that are present within the understanding of disability. Firstly, treating it as a whole is in itself a mistake. It depends on a variety of factors such as the disability itself, the visibility or invisibility of the conditions, the

medical nature, the stigma attached, the awareness in the society, and so on. Further, disability is but one minority identity in Indian society. It will constantly interact with other identities of the individual, either increasing or decreasing the discrimination experienced. It is a constantly evolving space, which keeps changing depending on the relative position of each identity in the society. Here in such a situation, making laws that do not interact with each other boxes the individual. They now need to avail the provisions' identity by identity but live their lives by experiencing all identities simultaneously. Also, it is possible that many provisions vis a vis one minority identity may nullify the provisions provided by another. Then, one is forced to rank the identities and choose the ones that may be offering maximum benefits at the cost of the others.

The laws and conventions thus need to be able to look at this intersectionality and they need to be in conversation with each other so that the individual for whose benefit the laws are made are not at a loss.

3. Muslim identity and the experience of Disability

a. Access to healthcare

The understanding of health in the popular understanding mainly emerges from the domain of biology with little to no emphasis on social relationship, culture, social class and structure. However, within Sociology of health, it is seen as a holistic pattern which combines both the biological and medical elements as well as the social ones (Nagla, 2014). Sociologists and anthropologists writing about India have emphasised on the intersections of caste, class, region, religion, gender and so on and linked them directly to the ability to access to health care facilities. Adding disability to this makes the understanding more complex, whereby persons with disabilities are more likely to face problems in accessing the healthcare services (Mukherjee, 2001).

Even the disability law in India as well as the UN Charter on which it is based both emphasise on health access being a vital necessity for Persons with Disabilities. The UNCRPD, under its Article 25, recognises that PwD have a right to enjoyment of the highest standards of health without discrimination on the basis of their disability and the States Parties should ensure the same (UNCRPD), 2006, p. 18). Even the RPwD 2016 states that the appropriate government and the local authorities will take the necessary measures to ensure that PwDs have access to health care within a reasonable distance from their locations, especially in the rural areas. In case the family income is below a certain limit, such services will be free of cost. Additionally, there will be barrier-free access in all parts of the hospitals and healthcare institutions run by them as well as give priority of treatment to PwD (The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, p. 24)

The understanding of health services though is a little varied when it

comes to ground realities. Many families in India seek curative resources from both biomedical as well as non-biomedical practices like Ayurveda, Chinese medicine and Tibetan medicine. It was this practice that was described as 'medical pluralism' by anthropologists in the 1980s. Even in the case of disability, many families seek medical pluralism, where they primarily visit hospitals but are also simultaneously involved in the traditional healing. This practice points very strongly to the fact that disability is a matter of both medicine as well as culture (Mehrotra, 2006).

The study by Singh (2018), also shows a similar kind of health seeking behavior among some of the Muslim disabled individuals and their families. So strong were the religious beliefs and customary practices in the community that they would reject polio vaccine based on their cultural belief that it leads to infertility. Also, since children are seen as a gift from God, infertility was seen as a bad omen. However, with changing times, and education spreading, such beliefs are becoming less. The work also shows how traditional and bio-medicinal practices went hand in hand. For some families, the first choice would be bio-medicine, but when it did not work, especially in cases of Polio, which was common there, the families would then change doctors and even start visiting far off places for a cure. Some were able to avail corrective surgeries which benefited them but could not completely cure. Yet others started to visit *Hakim* (traditional doctor) in hopes for a cure. Visits to the *dargahs* also became a common occurrence.

A common finding in the field was that people traveled to far off places in search of a cure, sometimes to other villages, cities and even other states. The question that Singh (2018) then poses is that is it a disability that poses a limited access to health care? She posits that it is not the disability in itself, but rather the social, physical and environmental barriers that are the main impediments. Informants have spoken about how boarding trains, buses etc. is very difficult as they are not accessible at all. Using the toilets in the trains is near impossible which makes long travels problematic. Economic hardship also forces them to not be able to travel to far off places, where good treatment may be available or afford the cost of the treatment itself even if they can afford the travel. Thus, those with moderate locomotor disabilities and other social constraints find it hard to travel while those with severe disabilities and/or additional social, economic constraints are unable to even start the journey.

Thus, while disability does pose a barrier to health care, it is the social, physical and attitudinal barriers that hinder this access more.

b. Situations of war

Over the last few decades, with the changing geopolitical climate, a lot of communities, especially the minority communities have come under the

scanner. With the outbreak of war-like situations in multiple locations across the globe and with increasing political tensions, it has been observed that these minority communities bear the brunt of the situation. As we have already seen, the access to scarce resources, whether physical or social, is further exaggerated by the existence of socially created hierarchies that rank individuals according to the presence or absence of certain belief, practices, ability, appearance, thought and so on.

The experience of war like situation further is caught up in a vicious cycle with the experience of disability. Not only do such situations create an unfavourable living condition for those with existing disabilities, making their survival even more bleak than their able-bodied peers, but it also further creates situations where people may also enter the realm of disability as a direct result of these wars.

Speaking about the recent genocide situation in Gaza, the identity of being disabled when colliding with those of being a Muslim is explored by Loh (2024) where he accounts how the news about the attack by Israeli military on the Atfaluna Society for Deaf Children (ASDC) in early March 2024 was similar to the many similar attack that had been happening in the city. But yet, what made this more heart wrenching was the fact that this was one of the only two schools in Gaza for the Deaf and was a safe and empowering space for these individuals before the attacks began. When the attacks began and under the fear of constant and unannounced bombardment, he talks about how deaf Palestinians in Gaza, about 15,000 in a population of 1.8 million, found themselves in extremely dangerous situations which they cannot avoid without relying on others. Unable to hear the shelling and the evacuation "warning" sirens from the military before the attack, the deaf individuals need to rely completely on others for help.

However, even this communication is also not easy. Even in ordinary circumstances, about 90 percent of deaf children are born to hearing parents which means that unless the family picks up sign language, the child does not have a direct way to communicate with the other members. Often, many families pick up only basic signs which may not encompass all nuances of language, and often are not capable of expressing complex thoughts. The language in itself is not deficient in this but owing to the fact that most advanced signs are not learnt and thus further taught, it leads to a gap in communication. (Gulyani 2019). Loh (2024) further points out that this already limited mode of communication becomes even more deficient when trying to explain a complicated situation like fleeing, brutality, fear among others. And even among those families where well-defined signs exist, a practical problem such as the frequent blackouts due to power cuts leaves this visual language extremely difficult to follow. Further, injury to or loss of arms is the loss of language in itself, as one can no longer communicate. Even assistive devices, such as hearing aids and cochlear implants in this case, require regular maintenance. It makes

it very difficult to charge devices, precure simple yet essential resources like batteries or other accessories and also access services like rehabilitation and therapy, which help keep the medical aspect of the disability in a manageable state.

Closer home, the political tension that has been flaring in Kashmir for many years now can also be looked at through the lens of disability and crip studies. Taking the help of visuals in calendars, Mistri (2020) discusses how they play a part in the ongoing struggle. The official calendar issued by J&K bank used images of Kashmiri youth who could be used as a source of inspiration, those who had done well in sports, jobs, arts and so on. On the other hand, the Aalaw counter-calendar issued images of those who had been injured or had played a crucial role in the resistance, both past and present. Both use disability within their narratives, the former as progress, empowerment, ability and possibility, to succeed against all odds, while the latter as debility, loss and death.

Both present a narrative that uses disability as prop, the first to talk about the super-crips, those who succeeded 'despite' the disability. This line of thought used by the state to enforce the idea of 'normalcy' contrasts against the stark ground realities and also ironically ignores the fact that many of the disabilities which are being overcome are a result of the state atrocities themselves. On the other hand, the counter calendar also uses the image of individuals disabled by the state violence as a means to further their understanding and cause of resistance. What is largely ignored in both is the idea that disability, while universalizing, is a complex understanding that exists between the two extremes of 'moving ahead despite the loss' and that of 'complete dependence and absolute loss'. This understanding, when intertwined with the notion of religion, as most of the people in Kashmir belong to the Islamic faith, complicates the understanding further.

Another incident which talks about how a crisis situation led to immediate as well as future cases of disability and distress in India was that of the Bhopal Gas tragedy. On 3rd December 1984, U.S. owned Union Carbide pesticide factory leaked close to forty tons of methyl isocyanate (MIC), an extremely lethal gas on the city of Bhopal. In just one night, the whole city was engulfed with this poisonous gas, for which the official figures put the number of dead at 10,000 and the number of disabled overnight at 30,000. In the years since then, continuous exposure to the MIC has disabled even more people. Yet, the understating of the disaster has very often neglected the history of those who experienced this disability. Not only does the marginalized community experience debilitation in such situations but the modes of survival and constant negotiations also produce more debilitation. The poor lower caste and the Muslim workers in the city were subject to the negotiations of the transnational corporate world, the racialized environmental regulations as well as the profit seeking behaviour of the government, factors that ultimately

led to the disaster, for many years before the tragedy actually struck. The way in which the victims had to contend with the vulnerability before the leak and how this vulnerability compounded in the aftermath of the incident has often not paid heed to (Pandya, 2023)

In his understanding on religion, (Geertz, 1973) looked at the notion of suffering as an 'experiential challenge in whose face the meaningfulness of a particular pattern of life threatens to dissolve into a chaos of thing-less names and name-less things' (p. 103). In this light then, how religion locates the problem of suffering then is not in how to avoid it but rather as to how one can make the notion of suffering, of pain, loss, agony more bearable, or rather more 'sufferable' (p.104). Veena Das (1995) also argues that the notions of pain and suffering should not be located within the individual body or experience only, but rather be also seen as being created as well as distributed by the workings of the social order. Even though they are housed within the individual but yet have the authority of the society. It therefore becomes important to look at not only the ways in which pain is manufactured, but simultaneously also how the theological understanding of suffering informs the social order around the notion of suffering (p. 138)

c. Gendered Experiences

Gender as a notion has long been present in academic spaces. However, the understating of what constitutes has been evolving over the decades, and rightly so, as more and more intersectionalities emerge and make the concept more nuanced. In order to understand Gender, it becomes important to also look at it in the context of the physical space it exists in. Spain (2014) weaves interesting connections of how the physical spaces in the urban landscape often mirror gender inequalities. Historically, urban public spaces have been built keeping the men's needs in mind. Not only buildings, but even the special arrangement of the cities also reflect as well as reinforce the traditional gender roles. This greater access to the spaces is also then linked to men being able to access resources and knowledge more freely and with minimal barriers. For her, a reimagining of public spaces could be a vital step in addressing gender inequalities.

In the understanding of the gender inequalities in India, Hans (2003) states that even though women make up half the population and contribute to the household and the economy, they still hold a lower social position than men. Even though we have constitutional provisions that advocate for equality and justice against discrimination, still the ground reality hasn't changed. Again, the situation greatly varies depending on the other social conditions present. For example, women in the rural areas are more likely to face discrimination than those in the urban areas due to limited opportunity to access education, employment and other resources (Singal, 2010). Disabled women in rural areas then face another layer of discrimination that stems from their combined

identity of being a disabled woman from a lower stratum. The position becomes even more hierarchized with the understanding of caste intertwined with it. (Mehrotra, 2013)

Looking at particular instances from the field, Singh (2018) points out how in Islam, certain rules which are strictly followed can be relaxed in the case of disability. The notion of *pardah* (veil) is very essential for women in Islam, wherein it is taken as a safety tool to protect them from harassment outside their homes. In Islamic belief, a woman must wear a veil at all times in public spaces when in the presence of men except when in the company of close male family members such as the father or brother. But in the Jararee and Isapur village it was observed that those women who had a locomotor disability but who were able to walk with little help or with assistive devices like a stick were still following the norms of veiling at least when they went out. But when women had severe disabilities, such that they could not walk and had to move about with complete assistance from others or by crawling, they had relaxed rules about wearing the veil, even outside the house.

Trying to look at this from the point of view of the feminist movement in Iran in the 1970s, Abu Odeh (1991) looked at how a woman who has decided to wear the veil is under the constant scrutiny of the ideological indoctrination where she is 'supposed' to cover herself so as to not seduce men and in turn, obey the words of Allah. Not following his word will lead to facing his wrath on Judgment Day. Taking this into consideration, Singh (2018) further analyses that in case of women with disability and the relaxation with the veil can be seen in two ways; firstly, that a severely disabled women's body is not considered as being able to seduce men. Their bodies are considered as asexual and thus not in the need of constant supervision. Secondly, it could also rest on the functional aspect of the veil, wherein those who are able to walk on their own are not exempt from it but those who need help even in their everyday activities may not be able to handle the veil and so are allowed to not wear it.

4. Conclusion

The article tries to look at how a minority status is understood and how to use the lens of intersectionality becomes critical in understanding the various sections of the society. It first throws light on the way Muslims are perceived in India, keeping in mind historical, religious and political scenarios. Based on this, we further discuss how this leads to a social backwardness among some members of the community which further leads to lesser opportunities in health care, economic welfare, healthcare. This compounded with their already minority status based on the religion leads to a minoritization. Applying the intersectional approach, another minority status that is discussed is that of disability. A near universalizing phenomena, it is hardly taken into consideration when discussing minority groups. Yet, it is one status that cuts across all other differences and inequalities.

An intersection of the Muslim and disabled identity is thus hardly discussed in the context of India. Just taking these two, we see that within Islam, there is a neutral stance adopted towards persons with disabilities, where it is seen as the will of Allah. All members of the community are urged to help those in disadvantageous positions themselves, including those with disability. However, when we see this in the context of region, gender, and class, we see that many disabled Muslims are in a more vulnerable position. Many do not have access to health care facilities or assistive devices, and are not aware of their disability rights. As a direct consequence, they do not actively participate in the Disability Rights Movement. This directly feeds into the fact that they then are even further removed from the healthcare facilities that are their rights, and this continues in a cyclic fashion, which may get worse over time. Additionally, many provisions in the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016 are far removed from the actual living conditions of these individuals.

Even at the global scale, in situations of crisis and disaster, in war situations, in political unrest and in man-made disasters, the effect of the disaster on certain populations, such as those of Muslims, is still under-researched and needs to be studied. Finally, within the context of disability studies, Muslims are rarely seen as a minority but rather as a minority within a minority.

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IMPACT OF KOREAN POPULAR CULTURE ON TRIBAL YOUTHS OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY

Abstract

This study endeavours to comprehensively examine the far-reaching influence of Korean popular culture, especially K-pop, on various facets of Korean culture within the daily lives of tribal youths in Arunachal Pradesh. The research, conducted over seven months amid the heightened COVID-19 pandemic situation in the state, largely focuses on the Itanagar Capital Region. The study aims to elucidate the historical underpinnings of the Korean wave's presence in this region, studying the perceptions of the local populace vis-à-vis Korean culture through empirical data, and discerning the emergence of Korean culture as a notable socioeconomic trend within the Itanagar Capital Region. This analysis reveals diverse perspectives among tribal youth relating to Korean culture, eventually highlighting K-pop, K-dramas, and the process of globalization as instrumental channels for the diffusion of Korean culture within the study area.

Keywords: *Korean-popular culture, Impact, Daily - habits, Perspective, Globalization, Arunachal Pradesh.*

Introduction

Hallyu is an intensive and widespread wave of popular Korean culture. It is described as the rising popularity of Korean popular culture (Marchang 2019: 16). *Hallyu,* popularly known as the 'Korean wave', is the word used to describe the popularity of South Korean cultural products across the human race (George 2021: 15).

The Chinese media coined the term *Hanliu* (Mandarin) or *Hallyu* (Korean) to define the explosive interest in Korean culture inside China, which came overnight. From that, the popularity of everything that is Korean has started, from pop bands to fashion, and it has continuously increased and spread all over the Asian Continent (Chen 2011: 102). 'Korea Tribe' was the name given to the new generation of consumers in China by 2001, as people were

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adopting And imitating Korean lifestyles, even plastic surgeries (Chen 2011: 104).

The Korean wave has not only surpassed Asia but has also left a significant mark in Europe and America (Zhang and Bi 2019: 73). Its (Korean wave) phase can be traced initially to South Korea's selling of Television dramas or K-dramas to mainland China, Taiwan, and many other Southeast Asian countries (Chen 2011: 103).

The impact of South Korean television dramas is believed to be the original agent of the widespread Korean wave. Starting from watching K-dramas, the effect spread to other cultural aspects such as music, film, food, and fashion, which are believed to be the establishment pattern of the Korean wave (ibid).

Music and dance culture is believed to be the most popular among all the aspects of the Korean wave, which is commonly known as K-pop or Korean popular culture (Tania 2019: 33). K-pop is a term that has been in use since the beginning of the twenty-first century and refers to pop music originating from South Korea (George 2021: 15). K-pop is presented by various kinds of audiovisual elements (Chang 2014: 7). K-pop culture is believed to be the most important piece in the *Hallyu* phenomenon (Tania 2019: 33). Even though all those forms of music are not believed to have been created in South Korea in totality, due to the amalgamation of a variety of music forms, K-pop music has become a new modern genre of Music (Chang 2014: 8).

The availability and accessibility offered by the internet have also provided the K-pop industry with larger audiences and fan following (George 2021: 15). While having its major charisma in the Asian region, nowadays, fans of *Hallyu* can be found in diverse ethnic groups- North America, Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East (Otmazgin and Lyan 2018: 290).

All over the world, fans of the Korean wave organize parties, sell Korean goods through online mediums, and set up Korean language schools to earn some money and establish a new transnational pathway that will connect them (Otmazgin and Lyan 2018: 294).

Building on the existing literature, this study explores the emergence of Korean culture, particularly Korean popular culture, within the Itanagar Capital Region of Arunachal Pradesh using a mixed-method approach. It examines the historical development of the K-pop phenomenon and how it is perceived by tribal youth in the state. Beyond music, fashion, and food, the study also considers public understanding of Korean culture and Korea as a nation, and how these influence local youth. To strengthen the analysis, case studies of established Korean-themed stores will also be included.

Objectives

Firstly, this study proposes to establish a historical framework for the

emergence of the Korean wave within the Itanagar Capital Region of Arunachal Pradesh, specifically identifying the channels through which this cultural phenomenon has penetrated the region. Secondly, this paper will assess the level of familiarity among the local populace with Korea as a nation and Korean culture, with particular stress on the essential role played by K-pop. Additionally, this research will investigate the extent to which the Korean wave has infused into the daily lives of tribal youths in Arunachal Pradesh, examining its impact on various aspects of their lifestyle. To conclude, the study will explain the burgeoning presence of Korean culture as a burgeoning socio-economic trend within the Itanagar Capital Region of Arunachal Pradesh.

Methodology

Since the 1980s, the global landscape has seen the profound phenomenon of globalization, driven by technological advancements that facilitate rapid international transactions in trade and finance. This term summarizes the process of integrating people worldwide into a unified global society (Do 2011: 15)

Over the past decade, the global rise of K-pop has made a significant impact in regions like India's Northeast, with Arunachal Pradesh standing out as a key example. The growing presence of Korean restaurants, beauty stores, cafés, and retail outlets reflect the rising popularity of Korean culture in the state. This cultural wave has been largely driven by the internet, mass media, and television, which have made Korean content easily accessible. As a state still undergoing development, Arunachal Pradesh remains open to external cultural influences. Ongoing interactions among diverse communities have further encouraged the blending and adaptation of various cultural elements, including Korean culture, into local everyday life.

To explore the impact of Korean culture on tribal youth in Arunachal Pradesh, a mixed-method approach was used. Quantitative data were gathered through structured questionnaires, mainly Yes/No, multiple-choice, and a few descriptive questions, using stratified random sampling. The study targeted 200 students from schools, colleges, and universities in the Itanagar Capital Region, including institutions like Lekhi Public School, Donyi-Polo Vidya Bhawan, GHSS Polo Colony, and Dera Natung Govt. College, Don Bosco College, and Rajiv Gandhi University. Respondents included 50 male and 50 female school students (Class 11–12), and 50 male and 50 female college/ university students. Questionnaires served as the primary tool for quantitative data collection.

Due to COVID-19 constraints, qualitative data were collected using snowball and purposive sampling, focusing on individuals closely linked to Korean-based events and outlets. Semi-structured interviews lasting at least one hour and thirty minutes were conducted through face-to-face meetings,

phone calls, and social media platforms like WhatsApp and Instagram. Audio-visual tools were used to support and document the process. The study focused on the Itanagar Capital Region, Itanagar, Naharlagun, Nirjuli, and Doimukh, recognized as the academic and cultural hub of Arunachal Pradesh's tribal communities.

Perception of Korean Culture and its historicity in the Itanagar Capital Region

Tribal youths in Arunachal Pradesh view Korean culture as vibrant and multifaceted, encompassing music, food, fashion, and lifestyle. This paper explores their perceptions, noting influences of Buddhism and Christianity in Korean society. Koreans are admired for their hygiene, skincare, love for spicy food, respect for elders, and industrious nature, reflected in a strong culture of competition across education, work, and business. However, some youths also express concerns over Korea's emphasis on physical appearance, linked to the widespread practice of cosmetic surgery from as early as age 15, often supported by families. Additionally, mandatory military service for men aged 18–28 adds to the complex image of Korean society.

For many, Korean culture is synonymous with distinctive culinary delights such as *Kimchi*, *Kimbap*, and *Bibimbap*. Others associate it mainly with K-drama and K-pop, as highlighted by the Arunachal K-pop Hub (AKH)1 team, who note the predominant popularity of B.T.S. and Black Pink among teenagers. Korean popular culture, especially K-pop, is widely embraced across age and gender for its vibrant visuals, catchy music, and relatable themes like confidence and self-love. Now in its 5th generation, K-pop is driven by idols who undergo intense training and are admired for their talent, discipline, politeness, fashion, and aesthetics. Fans are drawn to their live, dub-free performances, striking looks, and artistic versatility. Many idols also write music and pursue higher education, including master's and Ph.D. degrees, further impressing their audience.

Table 1 delivers insights into the historical distribution of respondents' encounters with K-culture. Notably, 35 percent of respondents reported encountering K-culture between the years 2010-2019, whereas 14.5 percent indicated their initial experience with K-culture during the preceding decade, spanning 2000-2009. A minor fraction, including 1.5 percent, reported encountering K-culture within the years 2020-2022. A substantial proportion, accounting for 49 percent of respondents, did not respond to this query.

The variation in initial exposure to K-culture is partly due to the diverse age groups of respondents. As shown in Table 5, participants came from various age brackets, and Table 1 indicates that K-culture has been present in the Itanagar Capital Region for over two decades. However, its peak popularity was notably during 2010–2019.

Table 1: Analysis of Encounter with K-Culture Over Time

Year	Male respondents	Female respondents	Total	Percentage
2000-2009	8	21	29	14.5%
2010-2019	33	37	70	35%
2020- 2022	1	2	3	1.5%
No response	58	40	98	49%

Source: Fieldwork 2021

In light of the increasing popularity of K-pop and K-culture, it is imperative to explore the avenues through which respondents first encountered these cultural phenomena. Table 2 provides insights into the channels and sources through which respondents were introduced to K-pop and K-culture, shedding light on the primary means of exposure.

Table 2 shows that 54.5 percent of respondents first encountered K-pop and K-culture through social media, making it the leading source of exposure. Friends were the next major influence at 27.5 percent, followed by family at 6 percent, highlighting the role of interpersonal and familial networks. Notably, 12 percent did not specify their source of exposure. These figures offer insight into the main channels through which K-culture has spread among respondents.

Table 2: Means of Initial Exposure to K-Pop and K-Culture

Respondents	Friends	Family	Social media	No response
Male	28	7	55	10
Female	27	5	54	14
Total	55/200	12/200	109/200	24/200
Percentage	27.5%	6%	54.5%	12%

Source: Fieldwork 2021

Understanding how individuals in the Itanagar Capital Region first encountered Korean culture is crucial. Interviews reveal that DVDs of K-dramas played a key role in early exposure, later followed by the rising popularity of K-pop.

The Role of K-Dramas and Movies

Interviews reveal that many in the Itanagar Capital Region were first introduced to Korean culture through K-drama DVDs, sold for 100–150 rupees at local CD libraries or for 300–350 rupees from other states like Manipur and Mizoram, especially when internet access was limited. Popular titles such as Classic, He Was Cool, 100 Days with Mr. Arrogant, Millionaire's First Love, and Boys Over Flowers played a key role in shaping local perceptions of Korean culture.

The Emergence of K-Pop

While K-dramas introduced Korean culture, K-pop soon followed,

gaining popularity through digital platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter. Groups like BTS, Girls' Generation, EXO, GOT7, Twice, and Blackpink captivated local audiences. Psy's global hit "Gangnam Style" also played a key role in drawing widespread attention to K-pop.

Influence on Fashion and Language

The influence of K-dramas and movies extended to local fashion, with respondents visiting salons to replicate Korean hairstyles. Media exposure also led some to adopt Korean phrases like *Annyeonghaseyo* (Hi or Hello), *Saranghaeyo* (I Love You), and *Oppa* (Brother or Boyfriend) in daily conversation, sparking curiosity among peers.

The Chain of Cultural Dissemination

Individuals from Arunachal Pradesh played a key role in spreading Korean culture, creating a ripple effect as enthusiasts introduced it to friends. This qualitative survey highlights how media, fashion, language, and local efforts collectively fuelled the Korean wave in the Itanagar Capital Region.

The Role of Social Media Platforms in the Global Spread of K-Pop/ Culture

To gain insights into the people's perspectives on the contributions of different social media platforms to the spreading of the Korean wave, a survey was conducted, and the results are presented in the table below.

Table 3 shows that Instagram was the leading platform for spreading the Korean wave, cited by 37.5 percent of respondents. YouTube followed with 29.5 percent, then Twitter at 15.5 percent, and Facebook at 7 percent. OTT platforms like Netflix and Amazon Prime were noted by 4.5 percent, while 6 percent did not respond. Table 3 highlights the strong impact of the Korean wave, largely driven by social media. During the COVID-19 pandemic, engagement with K-dramas, movies, vlogs, cooking shows, and mukbang surged as lockdowns led many to explore Korean content online. This reflects the wave's adaptability and growing influence during global challenges.

Table 3: Contribution of Social Media Platforms

Respondents	Twitter	Instagram	Facebook	YouTube	OTTplatform	No response
Male	17	35	11	28	2	7
Female	14	40	3	31	7	5
Total	31	75	14	59	9	12
Percentage	15.5%	37.5%	7%	29.5%	4.5%	6%

Source: Fieldwork 2021

Table 4 shows that 37.5 percent of respondents felt influenced by Korean

culture, with 23 percent of them being female and 14.5 percent being male, highlighting a notable gender difference. Meanwhile, 24.5 percent reported no influence, and 38 percent did not respond, suggesting varied cultural preferences or neutral views. These findings offer insight into the extent and complexity of Korean culture's impact within the surveyed group.

Table 4: Respondents Influenced by Korean Culture

Response	Female respondents	Male respondents	Percentage
Yes	46	29	37.5%
No	33	16	24.5%
No response	21	55	38%
Total	100	100	100%

Source: Fieldwork 2021

The data shows that 85.33 percent of those influenced by Korean culture are aged 15–24, highlighting strong youth engagement. In comparison, 13.33 percent fall within the 25–34 age group, and only 1.33 percent are 35 or older. This points to a clear generational divide, with younger individuals being far more receptive to Korean cultural influences.

Table 5: Age distribution among Korean-influenced respondents

Age distribution	Male respondents	Female respondents	Percentage
<15	0	0	0%
15 – 24	24	40	85.33%
25 – 34	4	6	13.33%
35 and above	1	0	1.33%
Total	29	46	100%

Source: Fieldwork 2021

Table 6 shows that 62.66 percent of respondents influenced by Korean culture belong to the *Nyishi* tribe, making them the most receptive group. The Galo tribe follows with 11.11 percent, while both the *Tagin* and *Apatani* tribes account for 6.66 percent each, indicating varying levels of cultural influence across tribal communities. The *Nocte* tribe accounts for 4 percent of respondents influenced by Korean culture, while the *Adi*, *Khamti*, *Tangsa*, and *Miji* tribes each represent 1.33 percent. Additionally, 2.66 percent did not specify their tribal affiliation.

Table 6: Tribe affiliation of respondents influenced by Korean culture

Tribes	Male respondents	Female respondents	Percentage
Nyishi	16	31	62.66%
Galo	1	7	11.11%
Tagin	3	2	6.66%
Apatani	4	1	6.66%
Nocte	0	3	4%

Adi	1	0	1.33%
Khamti	1	0	1.33%
Miji	1	0	1.33%
Tangsa	0	1	1.33%
No response	2	1	2.66%
Total	100	100	100%

Source: Fieldwork 2021

Table 7 shows that 61.33 percent of respondents influenced by Korean culture identify as Christians, followed by 20 percent who follow *Donyi-Poloism*. Hinduism accounts for 4 percent, while Buddhism and Animism each represent 1.33 percent. Additionally, 12 percent did not disclose their religious affiliation, reflecting diverse beliefs among those influenced by Korean culture.

Table 7: Religious Affiliation of Respondents Influenced by Korean Culture

Religion	Male respondents	Female respondents	Percentage
Christianity	17	29	61.33%
Donyi-Poloism	5	10	20%
Hinduism	1	2	4%
Buddhism	1	0	1.33%
Animism	0	1	1.33%
No response	5	4	12%
Total	29	46	100%

Source: Fieldwork 2021

Table 8 shows that 57.33 percent of respondents influenced by K-culture are pursuing Higher Secondary education, while 42.66 percent are in college or university, highlighting strong interest among students across both levels.

Table 8: Educational Qualification of Respondents Influenced by K-Culture

Educational Qualification	Male respondents	Female respondents	Percentage
Higher Secondary	16	27	57.33%
College/university	13	19	42.66%
Total	29	46	100%

Source: Fieldwork 2021

Distinguishing True Fans from Those Influenced by K-Pop/K-Culture

A noteworthy observation emerged during the study, as many respondents self-identified as true fans of K-pop, as opposed to merely being influenced by K-culture. This distinction is characterized by a clear differentiation in attitudes and behaviours toward Korean pop culture and its associated artists.

True Fans

Respondents who identified as true K-pop fans emphasized that being

a fan means deeply admiring and respecting the artists for their hard work, rather than imitating their makeup, style, behavior, or lifestyle. In contrast, casual fans often try to emulate Korean culture in their daily lives.

Fandom Communities

True fans often join online fandoms like BTS's 'ARMY' or Blackpink's 'BLINK' to share content and connect over shared admiration. They actively defend their favorite artists in online spaces and sometimes take part in charitable efforts, such as fundraising for disaster relief or health causes, in their idols' names, reflecting both passion and social commitment.

Fan-Driven Popularity

K-pop's global success is largely driven by dedicated fans who boost viewership on platforms like YouTube through streaming parties and group efforts. Their passion not only promotes artists but also supports charitable causes, highlighting the powerful and multifaceted role of K-pop fandoms in shaping global culture.

Engagement through Dedicated K-Pop Platforms

K-pop fanatics have access to specialized apps and social media platforms like *Weverse* and V-live, as L.P. Monia2 pointed out. These official fandom apps allow idols to share content and live stream for fans, who subscribe monthly or through packages. They offer a direct and exclusive space for fan-artist interaction.

Fan-Organized Celebrations and Events

Fandoms often celebrate idols' birthdays by hosting paid events in cafes or public spaces, bringing fans together. These gatherings boost fan engagement, expand the idol's fanbase, and increase their visibility, leading to opportunities like brand endorsements and industry recognition.

Official Merchandise and International Concerts

Fans show their dedication by buying official Korean merchandise, often signed by the idols and costing thousands of rupees. Many also travel abroad to attend concerts, with ticket prices ranging from 16,000 to 20,000 rupees.

***Sasaengs*: Extreme Fans with Intrusive Behaviour**

In K-pop fandom, a subgroup called '*Sasaengs'* displays extreme, intrusive behavior, obsessively tracking idols' personal lives and crossing privacy boundaries. They often have access to extensive details, including the

artists' daily schedules, dating history, and other personal aspects of their lives.

Overall, K-pop fan culture ranges from supportive online communities and events to international concert travel and, at its extreme, such unhealthy obsessions, reflecting its complex and evolving nature.

Table 9 highlights respondents' varied interests in Korean culture: 41.5 percent are interested in K-pop, 9.5 percent in K-dramas and movies, and 29 percent in Korean fashion and dressing styles. Meanwhile, 20 percent either did not respond or expressed no interest in these aspects. This segmentation highlights the diverse aspects of Korean culture that respondents engage with, offering insights into their varied cultural preferences.

Table 9: Interest and Preferences of Respondents in Korean Culture Components

Categories	Female respondents	Male respondents	Percentage
K-pop	61	22	41.5%
K-Drama/movies	9	10	9.5%
Fashion	28	30	29%
No response	15	25	20%
Total	100	100	100%

Source: Fieldwork 2021

Initiation of Interest: K-Dramas and Movies

Many respondents were first introduced to Korean culture through K-dramas and movies, often seen as romantic and tragic. While some fans find these themes repetitive, the study reveals that Korean entertainment also tackles diverse topics like bullying, social issues, history, like the Joseon dynasty, gender roles, and same-sex relationships, offering far more than just love stories.

As Gopi Doke3 perceptively points out, true fans of Korean culture appreciate the richness and diversity of the content produced, delving beyond what may have garnered popularity or recognition based solely on viewer ratings. This deeper appreciation reflects the multifaceted nature of Korean entertainment and its potential to captivate and engage audiences with a wide spectrum of storytelling beyond the perceived clichés.

Diverse Appeal of Korean Dramas (K-Dramas) and Music (K-Pop)

K-dramas remain popular for their charming concepts, especially among Korean audiences, while international fans are drawn to their evolving, diverse storylines. Some viewers binge-watch episodes, finding emotional escape and joy, while others balance viewing with daily routines. K-dramas also influence tourism, drawing fans to experience the scenic locations and culture shown

onscreen, boosting South Korea's economy.

In Arunachal Pradesh, K-pop is cherished for its soothing melodies and inspiring lyrics that promote love, unity, and awareness of social and environmental issues. These songs uplift fans, boost self-confidence, and offer emotional comfort and motivation.

An interesting observation is that K-pop enthusiasts in Arunachal Pradesh do not discriminate against other musical genres. As pointed out by Ajum Ete4, the love for music transcends the confines of a single genre, reinforcing the notion that a genuine appreciation for music should encompass a broad spectrum of styles and artistic expressions.

The Appeal of K-Culture and K-Pop Idols

Respondents highlight that K-pop idols play a key role in the global appeal of K-culture. Their politeness, humility, and genuine fan interactions foster admiration, while their hard work and rise to success, like BTS's journey, inspire many. The mandatory two-year military service further deepens fans' respect, reflecting shared values and dedication.

Popular K-Pop Groups and Idols

Among the respondents, several K-pop groups and idols have garnered substantial popularity, including:

B.T.S: An eminent and hardworking boy band, known for their rags-to-riches story, reverberating with followers as a testament to the rewards of perseverance and dedication.

Twice, 17teen, GOT7, Black Pink, Girls' Generation, Big Bang, E.X.O.: These groups have also left a permanent mark in the hearts of fans, exemplifying the charisma and musical excellence associated with K-pop.

Individual Idols: Figures such as Lee Min Ho (of 'Boys Over Flowers' fame) and Han Bin, with their struggles and triumphs, have inspired many individuals, reflecting the power of personal narratives in K-pop.

Jay Park, V, Jungkook, Hwasa: These artists have carved out unique identities, with Mamamoo's Hwasa challenging conventional beauty standards and promoting natural beauty.

Cultural Assimilation

Some fans have adopted aspects of the Korean lifestyle, particularly its clean and orderly aesthetics, which resonate strongly with individuals who have OCD (obsessive-compulsive disorder) due to the culture's emphasis on tidiness.

Fashion and Culinary Preferences

Fans also adopt Korean fashion, favoring oversized styles, and are drawn to the taste and health appeal of Korean cuisine. Overall, the influence of K-culture and K-pop idols goes beyond music, reflecting a deep fascination with Korean values, lifestyle, and aesthetics worldwide.

Table 10 provides insights into the impact of K-pop on the daily habits of its followers. As per the data, 34.5 percent of respondents reported observing positive changes in the daily habits of K-pop enthusiasts, while the majority, constituting 65.5 percent, did not perceive any noticeable changes in the daily habits of K-pop followers.

Table 10: Impact of K-Pop on Personal Habits and Cultural Awareness of Influenced Respondents

Respondents	Yes Response	No response
Male	34	66
Female	35	65
Total	69	131
Percentage	34.5%	65.5%

Source: Fieldwork 2021

K-pop's influence on fans in Arunachal Pradesh reveals notable lifestyle changes. Many show increased responsibility in academics and personal life, inspired by idol dedication. They are more aware of mental health, influenced by South Korea's struggles with stress and bullying. Fans challenge gender norms through colorful fashion, adopt Korean skincare and hygiene habits, and lead healthier lives by reducing smoking and alcohol use.

Their interests now include South Korean comics (*Manwah*) like *Solo Leveling*, and they actively seek knowledge about Korean history and culture, especially the Kim dynasty. K-pop has also fostered respect for elders and openness to other cultures. However, some respondents note that not all fans show genuine change, some simply imitate Korean behavior superficially, highlighting the complex impact of K-pop on daily life.

Table 11 shows that 55.5 percent of respondents observe positive behavioural changes among K-pop fans in Arunachal Pradesh, noting increased discipline, respect, hygiene, and politeness. However, some criticize fans for imitating Korean culture superficially, using terms like '*Oppa'* or '*Saranghaeyo*,' which some view as inauthentic. Meanwhile, 44.5 percent see no major behavioural changes, suggesting any impact is minimal.

Table 11: Perceived Behavioural Changes Among K-Pop Enthusiasts

Respondents	Yes Response	No response
Male	56	44
Female	55	45

Total	111	89
Percentage	55.5%	44.5%

Source: Fieldwork 2021

Table 12 reveals that 50 percent of respondents in Arunachal Pradesh wish to visit South Korea to experience its culture, while the other 50 percent have no such interest, showing a clear split in travel aspirations.

Table 12: Desire to Visit South Korea among Respondents

Respondents	Yes Response	No response
Male	38	62
Female	62	38
Total	100	100
Percentage	50%	50%

Source: Fieldwork 2021

Respondents in Arunachal Pradesh express varied motivations for visiting South Korea. Many wish to immerse themselves in Korean culture, explore cities like Seoul and Busan, visit Buddha temples and UNESCO sites, and attend events like the cherry blossom festival. Some hope to study or work there but recognize the country's competitiveness and often feel rooted in their *Arunachali* identity. Others see South Korea as a virtual second home due to cultural affinity. Additional interests include meeting K-pop idols, attending concerts, visiting Jeju Island, enjoying Korean food, and exploring plastic surgery options. Conversely, some prefer to explore Arunachal Pradesh over visiting South Korea.

Table 13 shows that 41 percent of respondents in Arunachal Pradesh are aware of Korea as a country, while 41.5 percent lack knowledge about its political scenario. Additionally, 15 percent did not respond, and 2.5 percent are only aware of North Korea, indicating limited understanding of South Korea's political context.

Table 13: Awareness of Korea's Political Scenario

Respondents	Yes responses	No responses	North Korea	No response
Male	38	48	5	9
Female	44	35	0	21
Total	82	83	5	30
Percentage	41%	41.5%	2.5%	15%

Source: Fieldwork 2021

Understanding of Korea's Political Divide

Respondents in Arunachal Pradesh exhibit a discerning awareness of the political divide between North and South Korea, as detailed below:

Respondents noted that South Korea, officially the Republic of Korea,

is a democratic nation led by an elected president, while North Korea, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, is a dictatorship under the Kim dynasty. North Korea is known for human rights abuses, limited internet, and a single state-run TV channel. In contrast, South Korea is economically advanced with strong U.S. support, while North Korea is poorer and backed by China. Some respondents liken this dynamic to India-Pakistan relations. Respondents identify South Korea's President as Moon Jae-In (in office since 2017) and North Korea's leader as Kim Jong Un (since 2011). Some mention Kim's alleged "punishment book" and note that interviews in North Korea are tightly controlled to ensure only positive remarks about the regime.

Table 14 shows that 32.5 percent of respondents see cultural similarities between South Korea and Arunachal Pradesh, while 61.5 percent do not. About 6 percent gave no response.

Table 14: Perceived Cultural Similarities Between South Korea and Arunachal Pradesh

Respondents	Yes	No	No response
Male	24	68	8
Female	41	55	4
Total	65	123	12
Percentage	32.5%	61.5%	6%

Source: Fieldwork 2021

Respondents who saw cultural similarities between South Korea and Arunachal Pradesh cited shared Mongoloid features, use of fermented soybeans, rice as a staple, and paddy cultivation. Both have Buddhist communities, emphasize community over individualism, and show gender role similarities. They also share patronymic naming systems, bowing or greetings like "*Tashi Delek*" among *Monpa* people, and a common love for noodles.

Many respondents did not see strong cultural similarities between South Korea and Arunachal Pradesh, emphasizing each region's distinct identity. They felt Arunachal Pradesh aligns more closely with Chinese, Japanese, and Tibetan cultures in terms of physical traits and broader cultural influences.

Table 15 shows that 23 percent of respondents view K-pop and Korean culture as having a positive impact, 22.5 percent see it as negative, while the majority, 54.5 percent, hold a neutral perspective.

Table 15: Perceived Impact of K-Pop and Korean Culture on Society

Respondents	Positive	Negative	Neutral
Male	12	29	59
Female	34	16	50
Total	46	45	109

Percentage	23%	22.5%	54.5%

Source: Fieldwork 2021

The impact of Culture, particularly K-pop, on society and individuals in Arunachal Pradesh is viewed through a diverse lens, as expressed by the respondents. Their viewpoints cover a range of perspectives:

Some respondents view K-culture's influence as largely positive, promoting cultural exchange, open-mindedness, and respect. K-pop encourages humility, hard work, and dedication, inspiring greater responsibility, discipline, and appreciation for the arts. Some respondents view K-culture's influence negatively, especially among younger generations, citing obsession with Korean beauty standards, financial pressure on parents, and reduced productivity due to excessive K-drama consumption. They also worry about declining interest in traditional culture, language, and attire. Devoted K-culture followers assert that their interest in K-pop doesn't compromise their native identity. They actively engage in traditional practices and view K-culture as a hobby that complements, rather than replaces, their cultural roots, emphasizing the importance of balance.

The emerging socio-economic reality of Korean culture

The appeal of the Korean lifestyle in Arunachal Pradesh is boosted by easy access to Korean-themed shops, cafes, restaurants, and products. These locally run or agency-supported businesses offer Korean food, fashion, skincare, and merchandise to meet growing demand.

Table 16 shows that 52 percent of respondents are aware of Korean-based stores in the Itanagar Capital Region, while 31.5 percent are unaware, and 16.5 percent did not respond.

Table 16: Awareness of Korean-Based Stores

Respondents	Yes	No	No response
Male	39	45	16
Female	65	18	17
Total	104	63	33
Percentage	52%	31.5%	16.5%

Source: Fieldwork 2021

In the Itanagar Capital Region of Arunachal Pradesh, growing interest in Korean culture has led to the rise of various Korean-inspired establishments. Fashion stores like Misa Shoppe reflect Korean style, while eateries such as Kori's, Café Glee, Caffe Moa, and Black Sparrow Café serve popular Korean dishes like *Kimchi*, *Bibimbap*, and *Kimbap*. Shops like *Miniso*, *Mumuso*, and *Ximi Vogue* offer Korean lifestyle products, and SKYCT and Adara K Beauty Clinic cater to the K-beauty trend. Local stores also stock Korean snacks, sauces, and ramen, showcasing the region's embrace of Korean culture.

Table 17 shows that 35 percent of respondents in the Itanagar Capital Region have visited Korean-based stores, while 55.5 percent have not, and 9.5 percent did not respond. This highlights a growing interest in Korean culture and suggests strong potential for expanding Korean-themed businesses in the region.

Table 17: Visitor Ship to Korean-Based Stores

Respondents	Yes responses	No responses	Others
Male	24	63	13
Female	46	48	6
Total	70	111	19
Percentage	35%	55.5%	9.5%

Source: Fieldwork 2021

Conducting Case Studies on Prevalent Korean-Based Establishments in the Itanagar Capital Region

To meet the research goals, the researcher conducted case studies on popular Korean-based retail outlets in Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh. These studies explored how these stores operate and why they attract so many local customers. With Korean culture gaining popularity in areas like fashion, beauty, and food, the researcher chose to focus on a few well-known shops to better understand their growing influence in the region.

The case studies used interviews and on-site observations to gather insights from store owners, staff, and customers. The study explored consumer preferences, buying habits, and views on Korean culture. This helped reveal how Korean culture is shaping shopping behaviour in Itanagar, offering a deeper understanding of its local impact.

Case study 1

Misa Shoppe

In December 2019, Minu Oni Modi (28) and Likha Sara (29), both avid K-pop fans, launched a Korean fashion and K-pop merchandise store in the Itanagar Capital Region. Inspired by rising local and global interest in Korean culture, they aimed to offer Korean-style clothing and authentic K-pop goods. The store features items like albums, posters, key rings, polaroids, and light sticks, especially popular B.T.S. merchandise, which is their top seller. Their main customers are school-going teenage girls, often visiting with friends or parents. To boost accessibility, they also operate actively on Instagram for orders and inquiries.

Minu Oni Modi and Likha Sara began their K-pop merchandise business on social media before opening a physical store in response to rising local demand. Initially facing challenges with importing goods from Bangkok, they

later streamlined sourcing through certified Korean websites. The COVID-19 lockdown forced them to shift fully online via Instagram. Despite early concerns about market reception, affordability for teen customers, and store location, growing interest in Korean culture helped their business thrive. Today, they operate successfully both online and offline, driven by their passion for K-pop.

Case study 2 SKYCT

On January 20, 2021, Yayam Bagang launched SKYCT, a K-beauty and wellness brand in Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh. Starting on Instagram, SKYCT expanded into physical stores, with outlets in Pasighat, Ziro, Bomdila, and Aalo, each run by independent entrepreneurs. Focused on Korean skincare, the brand promotes women's empowerment through a female-led franchise model, with plans to include men in the future. SKYCT focuses on K-beauty skincare, offering products from top brands like Klairs, Cosrx, SNP, and The Face Shop. Their range includes serums, moisturizers, face washes, perfumes, and makeup. K-beauty's strict 10-step testing ensures high quality, contributing to its global popularity.

Yayam Bagang's interest in K-beauty stemmed from her college days in Delhi, where she engaged with K-pop and admired Korean values like precision and hard work. During the COVID-19 pandemic, SKYCT adapted by shifting sales to Instagram and later launched a website, ensuring nationwide access and showcasing the brand's resilience.

Case study 3

Adara: A Complete K-Beauty Centre & Academy, Brows & LashesSkin & Hair Clinic and Wellness Centre

In October 2019, Bina Markio founded Adara K Beauty Clinic and Academy in Arunachal Pradesh to bring the transformative influence of K-beauty to the region's conventional beauty scene. Motivated by South Korea's global reputation in aesthetics, she completed a year-long training at *Pitangui* Group in Seoul, where she trained under Lee Na Young Aesthetic and met Master Kim, an experience that shaped her innovative vision.

Adara K Beauty Clinic and Academy blends Indian, Korean, and pharmaceutical expertise, using certified Korean vendors like Beauty Talks and Beauty Barn to ensure authenticity. The clinic imports advanced equipment and products like *Botox* and Scalp Micro Practitioner (SMP) from South Korea, chosen for their compatibility with Mongoloid skin and hair types.

The clinic offers customized services like IV (Intravenous infusion injection) skin whitening, Kajol injections, hair loss treatments, PRP (Platelet Rich Plasma) therapy, microblading, and nail and eyelash extensions, skills founder Bina Markio acquired in Bangkok and Korea. The Clinic primarily serves women aged 25+, offering advanced treatments with a 25 percent student

discount. Services are open to clients 18+, with semi-permanent makeup available from age 16. Compared to global beauty standards, K-beauty is seen as more affordable and effective, especially for the mongoloid race.

Adara K Beauty Clinic offers semi-permanent makeup courses attracting students from across India, with eligibility requiring prior training. During the COVID-19 lockdown, it temporarily closed per government rules, allowing staff to return home. Operations resumed post-lockdown and continue actively.

Evolving Beauty Standards in South Korea: A Complex Landscape

In South Korea, traditional beauty standards, like big eyes, fair skin, and thin bodies, once led to extreme diets, bullying, and even suicides among idols. However, these ideals are shifting. Today, diverse features such as dusky skin, bold traits, and smaller eyes are gaining acceptance, reflecting a move toward natural beauty and cultural inclusivity.

Table 18 shows varied views on K-beauty standards. A majority (73.5 percent) support cosmetic surgery as a personal choice. Meanwhile, 20.5 percent oppose rigid beauty ideals, advocating for body positivity and inclusivity. About 6 percent gave no response.

Table 18: Public Perceptions of K-Beauty Standards

Respondents	Supported	Unsupported	No response
Male	58	34	8
Female	89	7	4
Total	147	41	12
Percentage	73.5%	20.5%	6%

Source: Fieldwork 2021

Table 19 highlights respondents' perceptions of K-beauty products. About 28.5 percent support their global acclaim, citing long-term use and positive results like natural glow, hydration, and skin compatibility. The shared Mongoloid features between Koreans and North East Indians build user trust. Though affordable in Korea, these products are costlier elsewhere.

23 percent of respondents felt K-beauty products didn't suit their skin, noting that skincare results vary by individual. Meanwhile, 48.5 percent did not respond to the question.

Table 19: Assessing Perceptions of K-Beauty Products

Respondents	Worth the hype	Not worth the hype	No response
Male	15	8	77
Female	42	38	20
Total	57	46	97
Percentage	28.5%	23%	48.5%

Source: Fieldwork 2021

The Emergence of Korean Cuisine in the Itanagar Capital Region (ICR): An Investigation of Public Perceptions

Over the past decade, the Itanagar Capital Region has seen a culinary shift, with many cafes and restaurants integrating Korean dishes like *Kimchi* and *Kimbap* into their menus. This study explores public perceptions of Korean cuisine, aiming to understand the reasons behind its growing popularity and the evolving food preferences within the region.

Case Study 4

Caffe Moa

Established in 2017 by Korean national Yeong Kuen Han and his Nagamese wife Watichala, Caffe Moa is one of the earliest Korean fusion cafes in Itanagar. Now managed by Pegul Pertin, the café employs four female assistants trained for a month by the owner, all of whom had a prior interest in Korean cuisine. Caffe Moa offers a curated menu featuring popular Korean dishes like *Kimbap*, *Mandu*, *Kimchi* fried rice, and drinks such as Korean coffee and ginseng tea. Its main clientele includes teenage girls. Ingredients are sourced both locally and from cities like Delhi or Korea. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the café partnered with delivery platforms like *Hungryji* and *APeats*, though profit-sharing made it less ideal than dine-in. With restrictions lifted, dine-in has resumed, while online deliveries continue.

Case study 5

Kori's Restaurant, Bar, and Karaoke

Kori's Restaurant and Bar, founded by Korean entrepreneur Lee Sang Hoon, is a leading Korean eatery in the Itanagar Capital Region. Opened in Naharlagun on November 2, 2018, Kori's first entered the Indian market in July 2012. Lee's vision was inspired by India's cultural diversity and his aim to introduce Korean cuisine, which was still relatively unknown in India at the time.

Kori's offers a wide range of authentic Korean dishes like *Kimbap*, *Bibimbap*, *Japchae*, and more, sourced directly from South Korea. The restaurant also features a bar with Korean drinks and a karaoke setup for added entertainment. Staff are recruited through various channels and receive thorough customer service training to ensure high-quality service. Korean pop culture's growing popularity among Indian youth has boosted Kori's customer base, attracting first-time diners eager to try Korean food. While Kori's serves all age groups, most patrons are females aged 15–25.

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted Kori's in-house dining, but the restaurant quickly adapted by using delivery platforms like Zomato, Swiggy, and *APeats*. Committed to quality, Kori's now plans to expand and bring Korean cuisine to more locations in India.

Perceptions of Korean Cuisine and Authenticity in the Itanagar Capital Region

The introduction of Korean cuisine in the Itanagar Capital Region has reshaped its culinary scene. According to Table 20, none of the respondents found the Korean food fully authentic, while 45 percent felt it lacked authenticity. About 15.5 percent saw it as a fusion with other cuisines, and 39.5 percent did not respond.

Table 20: Authenticity of Korean Cuisine

Respondents	Authentic	Unauthentic	Mixed ingredients	No response
Male	0	25	11	64
Female	0	65	20	15
Total	0	90	31	79
Percentage	0%	45%	15.5%	39.5%

Source: Fieldwork 2021

Consumer Perceptions of Korean Food Taste and Authenticity

For individuals deeply immersed in K-culture and K-pop, Korean food holds a special place in their preferences, often prioritizing it even when traveling to different locales. Lod Moomi5 expressed that the taste of Korean dishes could vary between different locations, citing differences in the taste of offerings in Kori's outlets in Naharlagun and Delhi. Such variations in taste experiences, even within establishments serving Korean cuisine, underscore the complexity of assessing authenticity.

Some informants, like Sinung Zeblun Messar6, highlighted the integral challenge of determining the authenticity of Korean food. Without having visited Korea and directly sampled the cuisine in its place of origin, they found it difficult to make definitive judgments about authenticity.

Several informants raised the issue of ingredient sourcing. It was noted that obtaining all necessary supplies directly from Korea can be next to impossible for some establishments. Gamong Singpho7, for instance, encountered a tea bag with a 'Taj Mahal' label, which is an Indian product, while ordering ginger honey tea, which led him to question the authenticity of the food.

One group of K-pop enthusiasts shared their disappointment with the food they encountered at a local café. They ordered ramen, a popular Korean dish, but were served a bowl of soup with Maggie noodles and eggs. This unexpected experience left them dissatisfied, as they had anticipated a more authentic rendition of the dish.

Table 21 shows that 26 percent of respondents enjoy Korean food, finding it tasty and healthier than some Indian dishes. However, 41.5 percent prefer

traditional Indian cuisine, even among K-pop and K-drama fans. About 31 percent gave no response.

Table 21: Liking Korean Cuisines

Respondents	Yes	No	No response
Male	15	35	50
Female	40	48	12
Total	46	83	62
Percentage	27.5%	41.5%	31%

Source: Fieldwork 2021

Culinary Proficiency and Korean Cooking

Many male and female respondents in the Itanagar Capital Region reported learning to cook Korean dishes like *Ramen*, *Kimchi*, *Kimbap*, and *Danmuji* through YouTube and friends, especially during quarantine. Some now regularly prepare and store *Kimchi* and *Danmuji*, showing how Korean cuisine has become part of their daily lives.

One informant, Bengia Aku88, belongs to the *Nyishi* tribe of Arunachal Pradesh, interviewed on 17th January 2022 in Itanagar. He's the leader of Arunachal's K-pop boy band 'The Trend', who has represented the state in K-pop India Contests, and shared insights on *Kimchi's* cultural roots. While researching its recipes, he discovered that *Kimchi* dates back over 3,000 years and was developed to preserve vegetables like cabbage and radish for survival during harsh winters and wartime food shortages.

In summary, the respondents' ability to cook Korean dishes, use online resources, and appreciate the history of foods like *Kimchi* highlights the growing influence of Korean cuisine in Itanagar. This reflects a broader cultural exchange enabled by globalization and digital media.

Conclusions

The study reveals diverse views on K-pop among tribal youth in Arunachal Pradesh. Those with deeper awareness appreciate its cultural richness, while others with limited exposure view it negatively. Overall, youth attitudes range from embracing cultural diversity to holding firmly to traditional values. Many respondents see K-pop culture as a foreign influence, with elements like male makeup and bold fashion clashing with local gender norms. While some view this negatively, others see it as promoting gender neutrality. This reflects a cultural shift in Arunachal Pradesh, shaped by growing exposure to diverse influences

A significant concern raised by respondents is the potential erosion of traditional cultural traits as commercial interests accentuate the promotion of Korean culture over indigenous traditions. This shift towards promoting

Korean culture, driven by profit motives, has the potential to accelerate culturally changes and, in some instances, replace traditional cultural practices. Similarities in culture and physical attributes between tribal youths of Arunachal Pradesh and Korean youths play a pivotal role in popularizing Korean culture. For some segments of the youth, Korean culture resonates more strongly than the cultures of mainland India.

Beyond the societal concepts of one's own culture versus alien cultures, the forces of globalization wield significant influence in the context of cultural change and diffusion. Globalization is a powerful driver of cultural exchange and is inexorably linked to the spread of cultures across the world. The study underscores the tribal youth's capacity to accept and integrate cultural traits from various sources, a phenomenon facilitated by the diffusion of culture. This diffusion, a well-established concept for comprehending cultural transformations on a global scale, is manifest in the increasing acceptance and integration of K-pop culture among the tribal youth of Arunachal Pradesh.

In conclusion, the diverse perspectives on the diffusion of K-pop culture within the tribal youth of Arunachal Pradesh reflect the complex interplay between awareness, cultural values, globalization, and the forces of change. These perspectives underscore the evolving nature of culture in a globalized world, where the boundaries between one's own culture and foreign cultures are continually blurred, fostering a rich tapestry of cultural exchange and transformation.

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RELEVANCE OF ONLINE AND OFFLINE EDUCATION: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY ON YOUTH PERCEPTION IN LUCKNOW

Abstract

This study investigates youth perceptions of online and offline education among students preparing for competitive examinations, with a specific focus on those enrolled at a prominent guidance centre in Lucknow. Grounded in Manuel Castells' Network Society theory, the research paper explores key sociological concepts such as the digital divide, networked individualism, timeless time, and the space of flows. This research paper based on mixed-methods approach was adopted, involving 132 participants who completed a Google Form comprising both quantitative (closed-ended) and qualitative (open-ended) questions. Quantitative data were analyzes using descriptive statistics, weighted mean scores, and Pearson correlation, while qualitative responses were examined thematically. Findings reveal that while students value online education for its flexibility and accessibility, they perceive offline education as more effective for doubt resolution, peer interaction, and emotional support. Emotional challenges such as isolation, fatigue, and reduced motivation were commonly reported by online learners, regardless of digital proficiency or socio-economic background. Notably, even digitally skilled students experienced screen fatigue, underscoring that emotional well-being plays a more critical role than mere access to technology. The study finds that socio-economic status significantly determines digital access and also influences students' emotional experiences in online education. The findings highlight the importance of blended learning models that integrate the strengths of both online and offline education. Ultimately, the study underscores the need for emotionally supportive and inclusive educational policies to improve learning outcomes in the digital era.

Keywords: *Online learning, offline education, digital divide, emotional well-being, network society, competitive exams, blended learning.*

Introduction

The rise of digital technology has significantly transformed education,

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particularly in the realm of competitive exam preparation. With increasing internet access, smartphones, and digital platforms, traditional classroom-based learning is being redefined. Students now demand flexibility, expert guidance, and access to quality content beyond geographical constraints. In India, where millions compete for limited government jobs through exams like UPSC, UPPSC, and NET-JRF, online education has emerged as a powerful alternative to conventional coaching institutes. Ed-tech platforms, live classes, digital tests, and interactive doubt-solving sessions offer new ways to learn, though not without challenges. Online education provides flexibility and wider reach but is hindered by digital divides, reduced face-to-face interaction, and the need for greater self-discipline. Offline learning, meanwhile, offers structured environments, peer support, and direct engagement with mentors.

This study explores youth perceptions of online and offline education among 132 competitive examination aspirants age groups 17–30 at the guidance centre,Lucknow. Using surveys, interviews, and statistical analysis, the research examines links between digital access, socio-economic status, satisfaction, and emotional well-being. Grounded in Manuel Castells' "Network Society" theory, the study reveals how digital networks shape education, identity, and inclusion highlighting both opportunities and inequalities in today's learning landscape. While online education offers flexibility, it also presents challenges related to engagement, digital literacy, and a sense of isolation. Offline education, on the other hand, remains resource-intensive and limited in scalability. In this context, it becomes crucial to understand how young aspirants perceive both formats, what factors influence their preferences, and how these experiences impact their academic preparation. Hannay and Newvine (2006) found that online education offers flexibility and convenience, especially for non-traditional students, though it is often perceived as more challenging than traditional learning. Their study highlights that online courses demand greater time management and self-direction. They advocate for hybrid learning models that blend the strengths of both formats to enhance accessibility and educational quality. Hilton, Moos, and Barnes (2020) examined evolving literature comparing online and face-to-face learning, especially post-COVID-19. Their study reviewed student satisfaction, learning outcomes, and demographic influences, highlighting how digital adoption has reshaped perceptions of education. They found that while online learning offers accessibility, student preferences and outcomes often vary based on prior experience, learning style, and technological readiness. As said earlier this research is framed within the theoretical lens of Manuel Castells' "Network Society" theory, which provides a powerful tool to analyze the intersection of technology, communication, and society in the digital age. The growing shift toward online education has led scholars to examine its quality, challenges, and student-instructor perceptions. Early contributions by McGorry (2003) and Herrington et al. (2001) identified core strengths of online learning flexibility, interactivity, and learner autonomy while Means et al. (2010) emphasized

multimedia integration and self-directed learning. However, despite claims by Allen and Seaman (2013) that online outcomes rival or exceed traditional formats, other studies (Kuzma et al., 2015; Tratnik et al., 2019) suggest students often find face-to-face learning more satisfying. Demographic factors also play a role. Research shows women and older students often adapt better to online learning (Price, 2006; Selwyn, 2007; Barnes, 2017). Alsaaty et al. (2016) reported that minority students appreciated online flexibility but faced challenges with instructional clarity and access. Hilton et al. (2020) and Smart & Cappel (2006) emphasized the importance of course design, as students' responses varied based on course type, motivation, and tech experience. Shambour & Abu-Hashem (2022) found instructors' acceptance of online teaching was strongly influenced by institutional support, not just personal or demographic variables. In the Indian context, Jena (2020) and Rastogi (2019) highlighted the COVID-19 pandemic's role in accelerating digital education. While digital platforms like SWAYAM and DIKSHA ensured learning continuity, issues like the digital divide, screen fatigue, and lack of training persisted. Rastogi warns against overreliance on digital modes, urging policymakers to develop blended models that protect student well-being and foster meaningful teacher-student interaction, ensuring a balanced, inclusive, and responsible educational future. Arora, Srivastava, and Sahai (2021) highlight the psychological impact of COVID-19 on Indian youth in higher education. The sudden shift to online learning increased academic pressure, stress, and anxiety. Students faced isolation and workload burdens, prompting calls for mental health support, inclusive policies, and balanced workload strategies to ensure both educational continuity and emotional well-being.

Relevance of the Study

The transition from traditional to online education, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has significantly altered the landscape of learning, especially for youth preparing for competitive examinations. In India, where coaching institutions play a crucial role in exam preparation, understanding how students perceive online versus offline education has become a pressing concern. This study is relevant as it explores these perceptions in the context of changing pedagogical practices, digital accessibility, and socio-economic realities.

Objectives

The objective of this study is to compare youth perceptions of the effectiveness of online and offline education. It also aims to investigate how digital access and usage influence students' overall learning experiences, explore the impact of socio-economic status on both access to and perception of online education, and examine whether students feel more empowered or isolated within online educational environments and digital networks.

Methodology

This research study adopted a mixed-method approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative methods to explore the perceptions of youth preparing for competitive examinations toward online and offline education. The research was conducted at RACE IAS Coaching Institute, located in Alambagh, Lucknow.

Research Design

This study uses a descriptive cross-sectional design (DESCRIPTIVE-because perceptions and factors are described and analyzed).

Universe of the Study

The universe of the study comprises all students enrolled in a specific batch at RACE IAS Coaching Institute, Alambagh, Lucknow, who are preparing for competitive examinations using both online and offline education modes.

Sample Unit

The total population of the selected batch was 200 students. Applying the formula yielded a sample size of 132 respondents, ensuring adequate representation and statistical reliability.

Sample Size

To determine the appropriate sample size, Cochran's formula for finite population correction was used. The total population of the selected batch was 200 students. Applying Cochran's formula yielded a sample size of 132 respondents, which ensures adequate representation while maintaining statistical reliability for a finite population. To determine the required sample size for this study, Cochran's formula for finite population correction which are as follows:

Steps 1: Cochran's Formula for an Infinite Population

Cochran's formula for sample size determination is widely used when dealing with proportions and categorical data. The formula for an assumed infinite population is:

Where:

n0 = the initial sample size for an infinite population

Z = standard normal deviation corresponding to the desired confidence level

p = estimated proportion of the population with the attribute of interest

$q=(1-p)$

e = acceptable margin of error

For the present study, the following values were used:

Confidence level = 95 Percent, hence Z=1.96

Estimated proportion of interest p=0.5 (chosen to maximize variability and ensure the most conservative estimate)

Hence, $q = 1 - 0.5=0.5$

Margin of error e = 0.05 Substituting these values into the formula:

Thus, for an infinite population, the required sample size would be approximately **384** respondents.

Step 2: Finite Population Correction (FPC)

Since the total population of the batch under study was finite (N = 200), the above sample size was adjusted using the Finite Population Correction formula, as follows:

Substituting the known values:

Rounding to the nearest whole number, the final sample size required for the study is **132**

Sampling Method

The sampling technique used in this study is purposive sampling (non-probability technique). The coaching institute was deliberately chosen because it caters to aspirants who are preparing for a range of competitive examinations (such as UPSC, UPPSC, NET-JRF, etc.) and have exposure to both online and offline learning modes. Participants were specifically selected based on two inclusion criteria:

Age range between 17 to 30 years.

Experience with both online and offline modes of learning, either through the institute or through other platforms. only those who fulfilled both conditions were invited to participate in the survey.

Tools of Data collection

The primary data collection instrument was a structured Google Forms questionnaire. The quantitative section included closed-ended questions using categorical and Likert scales to assess demographics, digital access, digital skills, and perceptions of learning, engagement, confidence, independence, isolation, and academic stress. The qualitative section featured open-ended questions that captured detailed insights into students' personal experiences,

challenges, and suggestions, enabling a comprehensive understanding of their educational preferences and emotional responses across both learning modes.

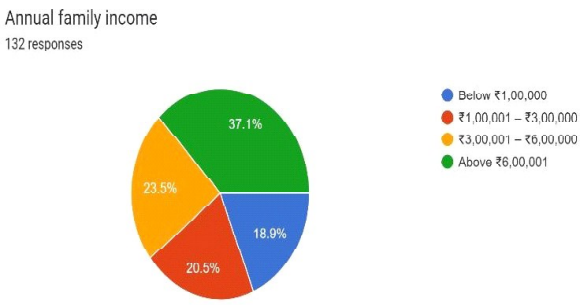
Result and Discussion

This Research Paper find out presents and interprets the empirical finding gathered the structured questionnaire administered to the perceptions of youth preparing for competitive examinations toward online and offline education. The research was conducted at RACE IAS Coaching Institute, located in Alambagh, Lucknow. The aim is to explore how digital networks shape education, identity, and inclusion highlighting both opportunities and inequalities in today's learning landscape. While online education offers flexibility, it also presents challenges related to engagement, digital literacy, and a sense of isolation. Offline education, on the other hand, remains resource-intensive and limited in scalability.

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The research begins by outlining the demographic details of the sample, which consists of 132 respondents, determined using Cochran's formula. The participants are aged between 17 and 30 years and are enrolled in courses such as (UPSC, UPPSC, NET-JRF) at RACE IAS Coaching Institute, located in Alambagh, Lucknow. All respondents are young individuals preparing for competitive examinations and have experience with both online and offline modes of education.

Pie Chart 1: Annual Family Income Distribution



Data presented in pie chart. 1 reveal that the annual family income of 132 respondents reveals a diverse socio-economic background among participants. A significant portion 37.1 Percent reported an annual family income above ¹ 6,00,001, indicating a relatively well-off group. Meanwhile, 23.5 Percent fall within the ¹ 3,00,001 to ¹ 6,00,000 range, and 20.5 Percent reported earnings between ¹ 1,00,001 and ¹ 3,00,000. Notably, 18.9 Percent of respondents come from families earning below ¹ 1,00,000 annually, reflecting a lower-income segment. This financial variation among participants suggests

that economic status may influence their access to educational resources, particularly in digital learning environments.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Learning Mode Preference

Learning Mode Preference	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Both equally	42	31.82
Depends on subject/faculty	24	18.18
Offline	25	18.94
Online	41	31.06
Total	132	100.00

Table no. 1 Presents the data respondents were asked about their preferred mode of learning 31.82 Percent of students preferred both online and offline equally, showing a balanced attitude. 31.06 Percent fevered online learning, while 18.94 Percent preferred offline classes. Another 18.18 Percent said their choice depends on the subject or faculty. These results show that students have varied preferences shaped by context and convenience.

Table 2: Youth Perception on the Effectiveness of Online and Offline Education (in Percent)

Statement	Strongly agree	agree	Neutral	disagree	Strongly disagree	Weighted mean score
Online education is more flexible and time-saving	23.5	36.4	25.7	5.3	9.1	**3.60**
Online classes allow access to more diverse and high-quality content	29.0	35.1	19.1	6.9	9.9	**3.66**
Online tests and materials help improve exam preparation	24.2	40.9	19.7	3.8	11.4	**3.63**
Online learning is effective if self- disciplined and motivated	37.29	28.0	18.9	5.3	9.8	**3.76**
Offline education provides better focus and discipline	35.6	25.8	23.5	6.8	8.3	**3.74**
Teachers explain better in offline classrooms	22.7	26.5	29.5	15.2	6.1	**3.44**
Doubt resolution is more effective in offline mode	40.2	27.3	18.2	7.6	6.8	**3.87**
Offline coaching creates a more competitive and motivating environment	41.7	28.0	16.7	6.1	7.6	**3.90**

Table no. 2 Presents the data respondents youth preparing for competitive examinations, 23.5 Percent strongly agreed and 36.4 Percent agreed that online education is more flexible and time-saving, while 25.7 Percent were neutral, 5.3 Percent disagreed, and 9.1 Percent strongly disagreed. For

the statement that online classes allow access to more diverse and high-quality content, 29.0 Percent strongly agreed, 35.1 Percent agreed, 19.1 Percent were neutral, 6.9 Percent disagreed, and 9.9 Percent strongly disagreed. Regarding online tests and materials helping in exam preparation, 24.2 Percent strongly agreed, 40.9 Percent agreed, 19.7 Percent were neutral, 3.8 Percent disagreed, and 11.4 Percent strongly disagreed. On the effectiveness of online learning for self-disciplined and motivated students, 37.29 Percent strongly agreed, 28.0 Percent agreed, 18.9 Percent were neutral, 5.3 Percent disagreed, and 9.8 Percent strongly disagreed. In contrast, 35.6 Percent strongly agreed and 25.8 Percent agreed that offline education provides better focus and discipline, with 23.5 Percent neutral, 6.8 Percent disagreed, and 8.3 Percent strongly disagreed. For the statement that teachers explain better in offline classrooms, 22.7 Percent strongly agreed, 26.5 Percent agreed, 29.5 Percent were neutral, 15.2 Percent disagreed, and 6.1 Percent strongly disagreed. Regarding doubt resolution being more effective offline, 40.2 Percent strongly agreed, 27.3 Percent agreed, 18.2 Percent were neutral, 7.6 Percent disagreed, and 6.8 Percent strongly disagreed. Finally, for the statement that offline coaching creates a more competitive and motivating environment, 41.7 Percent strongly agreed, 28.0 Percent agreed, 16.7 Percent were neutral, 6.1 Percent disagreed, and 7.6 Percent strongly disagreed.

Table 3: Access to a Personal Digital Device

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	127	96.21%
No	5	3.79%
Total	132	100.0

Table no. 3 The data presented in indicates that a significant majority of the respondent's 96.21 Percent reported having access to a personal digital device such as a smartphone, laptop, or tablet. While only 3.79 Percent reported not having access. This high level of digital device ownership suggests that most of the surveyed individuals are well-equipped to engage with digital platforms, which is particularly relevant in the context of online learning, communication, and access to information. The widespread availability of personal digital devices among participants reflects a strong foundation for implementing or expanding digital education initiatives.

Table 4: Type of Internet Connection Available at Home

Type of Internet Connection	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Broadband/Wi-Fi	72	54.55
Mobile Data	55	41.67
No reliable internet	4	3.03
All of the above	1	0.76
Total	132	100.0

Table no. 4 The data presented in indicates that a significant majority of the respondent's Regarding internet connectivity at home, 54.55 Percent of respondents reported using a broadband or Wi- Fi connection, while 41.67 Percent rely on mobile data. A small portion, 3.03 Percent, mentioned having no reliable internet, and only 0.76 Percent reported access to all types of connections.

Graphs 1: Feeling of Loneliness while Studying Online (1–5 Scale)

The analysis of the data presented in graph no. 1 reveals that a significant majority on the feeling of loneliness while studying online, 15.2 Percent of respondents strongly agreed and 30.3 Percent agreed that they feel lonely. Meanwhile, 28.8 Percent gave a neutral response, 18.9 Percent disagreed, and 6.8 Percent strongly disagreed.

Table 5: Online Education Flexibility Rating (1–5 Scale)

Rating	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1 (strongly agree)	31	23.48
2 (agree)	48	36.36
3 (neutral)	34	25.76
4 (disagree)	7	5.30
5 (strongly disagree)	12	9.09
Total	**132**	**100.0**

Data presented in table no. 5 reveals that the majority of the respondent's on the flexibility of online education, 23.48 Percent of respondents strongly agreed, and 36.36 Percent agreed, that it is flexible. Additionally, 25.76 Percent gave a neutral response, while 5.30 Percent disagreed, and 9.09 Percent strongly disagreed.

Graphs 2: Feeling of Isolation/Anxiety in Online Mode (1–5 Scale)

The analysis of the data presented in graph no. 2 reveals that the majority of respondents do not associate online learning with feelings of isolation or anxiety. Specifically, 21.2 Percent strongly disagreed and 29.5 Percent disagreed with the statement. Meanwhile, 25.8 Percent remained neutral, indicating uncertainty or mixed experiences. On the other hand, 18.9 Percent agreed and 4.5 Percent strongly agreed, suggesting that nearly one-fourth of the respondents did feel some degree of isolation or anxiety. These findings suggest that while online learning does not negatively impact the emotional well-being of most students, a notable portion still experiences psychological discomfort, highlighting the need to integrate emotional support systems within online education frameworks.

Table 6: Offline learning helps reduce academic stress through routine, peer interaction and support

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1 (Strongly Agree)	40	30.30
2 (Agree)	46	34.85
3 (Neutral)	26	19.70
4 (Disagree)	16	12.12
5 (Strongly Disagree)	4	3.03
Total	**132**	**100.0**

Table no. 6 presents data indicating that a significant majority of respondents believe offline learning helps reduce academic stress through routine, peer interaction, and support. Specifically, 30.30 Percent strongly agreed and 34.85 Percent agreed with the statement, totalling 65.15 Percent. This suggests that structured schedules and social engagement in offline settings are perceived as effective in alleviating academic pressure. Meanwhile, 19.70 Percent of respondents remained neutral, reflecting uncertainty or mixed experiences. Only a small portion 12.12 Percent disagreed and 3.03 Percent strongly disagreed did not find offline learning helpful in this regard. Overall, the findings emphasize that offline education offers emotional and social benefits that contribute to stress reduction among students.

This study highlights the complex, multi-dimensional nature of students' learning experiences in both online and offline settings, particularly in the context of competitive exam preparation in India. While online education offers flexibility and cost-effectiveness, it often lacks the emotional depth, interpersonal connection, and structured guidance needed by many students. In contrast, offline education provides psychological support, peer motivation, and immediate doubt resolution, making it especially beneficial for aspirants of demanding exams like UPSC and NET-JRF. However, online platforms remain indispensable for those managing multiple responsibilities or residing in remote areas. From a sociological lens, Manuel Castells' theory of the Network Society provides a powerful framework to understand these dynamics. His concept of the *Network Society* illustrates how students operate within digital ecosystems, forming connections that are functional but often emotionally shallow. The *Space of Flows* and *Timeless Time* reflect the spatial and temporal flexibility of online learning, which, while enabling access, can disrupt discipline and increase anxiety. The *Digital Divide* emerges not only in infrastructure but also in emotional and psychological experiences. *Networked Individualism* explains how digital learners function autonomously, which suits some but isolates others. Additionally, *Informed Exclusion* highlights that students may disengage from online learning despite access, due to screen fatigue or emotional detachment. Overall, the shift to digital education is not merely technological but deeply social and emotional. Castells' theory helps unpack how online learning reshapes educational relationships, often

privileging autonomy over connection. The future lies in developing blended models that merge digital convenience with human-centered support.

Conclusion

This research underscores the multifaceted nature of students' preferences and experiences with online and offline education, particularly among youth preparing for competitive examinations in India. The findings reveal that while online education is valued for its flexibility, accessibility, and diverse content, it also presents significant challenges related to engagement, emotional well-being, and self-discipline. Conversely, offline education is recognized for its structured environment, peer interaction, and psychological support, which many students find crucial for managing academic stress. The study highlights notable socio-economic diversity among students, affecting their access to digital resources, and further complicating the shift to online modes of learning. Through the lens of Manuel Castells' Network Society theory, the research illustrates how digital education, while enabling autonomy and spatial-temporal flexibility, may inadvertently contribute to emotional isolation and informed exclusion. The contrast between networked individualism and community-based offline learning points to the need for hybrid education models that combine the strengths of both systems. Ultimately, the study calls for a more inclusive, empathetic, and context-aware approach to education that addresses not only technological access but also the emotional and social dimensions of learning.

Suggestion

Based on the findings of this research, several suggestions can be made to enhance the educational experience of students preparing for competitive examinations. Firstly, a blended learning approach that combines the flexibility of online education with the structure and interpersonal engagement of offline classes should be promoted. This would allow students to benefit from both digital convenience and face-to-face support. Secondly, targeted digital literacy initiatives are necessary, especially for students from lower-income backgrounds, to ensure equitable access and effective participation in online education. It is also important to provide emotional and psychological support within digital learning environments, as a notable proportion of students reported feelings of loneliness and isolation. Teachers should be trained to create interactive and engaging online content to maintain student motivation. Furthermore, coaching institutes and educational platforms should consider integrating regular feedback mechanisms to tailor learning experiences based on student needs and preferences. Finally, policymakers and educators must address the digital divide not just in terms of infrastructure, but also in the emotional and cognitive aspects of learning, ensuring that education remains inclusive, accessible, and supportive for all learners.

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Jyoti Das

ETHNOGRAPHIC PRACTICES: THE SCIENCE AND THE STORY-TELLING IN RESEARCH

Abstract

With its foundation in anthropology's study of the "other" and sociology's turn toward the "self," ethnography today is a popular qualitative methodology embraced across multiple disciplines. This article examines the evolving trajectory of ethnography shaped by scientific rigor and narrative expression. Long debated as whether science or storytelling, ethnography draws strength from integrating empirical observation with interpretive meaning-making. Through textual analysis and a systematic literature review, this study demonstrates how ethnography embraces multiple ways of knowing and transcends the objectivity-subjectivity dichotomy in the social sciences. Engaging with realist and anti-realist stances in the philosophy of knowledge, this article evaluates ethnography's continuing relevance as both a methodology and a reflexive, emancipatory practice of meaning-making in contemporary academia.

Keywords: *Ethnography, Qualitative methodology, Reflexivity, Knowledge production, Epistemology, Fieldwork*

Introduction: Ethnography Between Science and Story

> "I love the power of stories, especially tales told within circles of attentive listeners. Sharing our experiences, viewpoints and values is essential to creating (just) community, especially where these are stories of resistance and survival"
>
> (Schmid, 2019: 280).

The development of ethnography as a window into understanding cultures is shaped by a method-narrative dialectic in qualitative methodology, marked by the tension between scientific rigor and literary expression. While the writing dimension of ethnography is embedded in an aspiration toward objectivity, it cannot ignore the inherent subjectivity of the ethnographer-author. The scope of qualitative research methodology in social sciences broadened significantly with the introduction of ethnography between the 19th and 20th centuries. It not only forged a unique identity within scientific analysis

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of human societies but has continually adapted to newer methodological challenges, withstanding the test of times. With its foundation in anthropological fieldwork tradition of studying the 'other' and furthered by sociological studies of the 'self', ethnography today is a popular methodology embraced across multiple disciplines. As a research process, it combines the act of observing behaviour of a social group as a whole in their natural setting referred to as "field" and writing a description thereof (Scott & Marshall, 2005). It is the written account, the final outcome of an ethnography that has become a matter of scrutiny over the years. Scholars have raised questions about ethnography's scientific truth-claim, with apprehensions of it being reducible to story-telling, influenced by experiences, emotions and interpretations of the researched as well as that of the researcher. Tim Ingold (2008) argued that ethnography is inseparable from scientific theory. Between them lies a shared space, the "interstitial field of anthropology" where stories meet concepts, facts meet meanings, and objectivity meets subjectivity. This article evaluates the trajectory of ethnographic practices, often caught in the science versus story-telling debate, particularly in the backdrop of realist and anti-realist stances in the philosophy of knowledge. The objective was to critically examine the merit of ethnography as a qualitative approach highlighting both its scientific rigor and its narrative commitments.

Methodology and Materials

Ethnography operates at the intersection of multiple epistemological traditions, shaped by enduring tensions between objectivity and subjectivity. Scientific realism (Musgrave, 1999) upholds the possibility of accessing a mind-independent reality, while social constructivism, influenced by Schutz and Berger and Luckmann (1966), emphasizes reality as socially produced through shared meanings. Interpretivist and hermeneutic approaches further stress on subjectivity, context, and reflexivity. These debates intensified with Clifford and Marcus's *Writing Culture* (1986), which questioned ethnography's claims to neutrality by highlighting power relations and narrative strategies. Critical realism (Bhaskar, 1975; Archer, 1995) offers a middle ground, advocating methodological pluralism and multi-method ethnographic inquiry. Drawing on these traditions, along with feminist and decolonial critiques, this study evaluates ethnography's ongoing relevance through a systematic literature review and textual analysis of purposively selected ethnographies. Tables 1.1 and 1.2 outline the strategies for textual analysis and systematic literature review, respectively.

Table 1.1: Purposive Sampling Strategy for Textual Analysis

Category	Inclusion Criteria	Representative Texts
Time and Space	Classical 20th century texts and contemporary 21st century texts to capture disciplinary shifts and newer trends; colonial and post-colonial writings, texts from Western and non-Western academia.	• Marcel Mauss's The Gift The form and reason for exchange in archaic societies (1954) • Janet Carsten's The Heat of the Hearth (1997) • Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing's Friction An Ethnography of Global Connection (2005) • William Foote Whyte's Street Corner Society: The Social Structure of an Italian Slum (1943) • Amita Baviskar's In the belly of the river: Tribal conflicts over development in the Narmada valley' (1995) • Author's PhD research (2021)
Genre	Inclusion of anthropological and sociological texts, feminist and decolonial writing, singular-sited and multi-sited ethnographies, realist and virtual ethnographies (to reflect thematic diversity).	
Narrative Aspects	Analysis of writing strategies, literary styles, representation of self/other in ethnographic texts (to reflect positionality of the ethnographer-author).	
Scientific rigor: Epistemological & Methodological Concerns	Issues concerning objectivity and subjectivity in research, use of reflexivity as a tool, discussion of theoretical frameworks and methods used by the ethnographer (to reflect theoretical diversity and methodological innovations).	
Reflexive Anchoring	Incorporation of my own doctoral fieldwork material as reflexive engagement with ethnographic writing practice.	

Table 1.2: Strategy for systematic literature review

Category	Inclusion Criteria and Examples
Time period	19th to 21st century literature including canonical texts, contemporary ethnographies, widely cited literature on the subject, disciplinary and methodological relevance
Source of texts	Scopus and Web of Science, JSTOR, Google Scholar, bibliographies and references
Search Key words	Ethnography, classical fieldwork traditions in anthropology, origin of ethnography, Chicago school of urban ethnography, fieldwork in sociology, colonial ethnography, post-colonial ethnography, realist ethnography, feminist ethnography, virtual and digital ethnography, reflexivity in ethnographic writing, politics of writing and representation, new trends in modern ethnography, realist and anti-realist debate, qualitative research, post-Covid methodological innovations in ethnography, multi-sensorial ethnography, ethnography in India
Analytical Themes	Codes and categories under which systematic review was done (reflexivity, representation, objectivity vs subjectivity, literary style, methodological innovation, theoretical frameworks).
Exclusion criteria	Excluded grey literature, purely descriptive ethnographies without epistemological and methodological discussions or debates, non-peer-reviewed works
Reflexive Anchoring	Incorporation of my own doctoral study as reflexive engagement with ethnographic fieldwork

I have used experiential insights from my own doctoral study as well where I had adopted mixed methodology, combining ethnographic fieldwork

with household survey.

A brief history of methodological shifts in ethnography

The term *ethnography* is derived from the Greek *ethnos* (people) and *grapho* (to write), signalling its foundational aim i.e., the systematic description and interpretation of social life. Within the social sciences, ethnography has evolved through two major traditions (a) the classical anthropological model of long-term fieldwork in small-scale societies and (b) the urban ethnographies of the Chicago School. A defining feature of nineteenth-century anthropology was the gradual separation between the armchair theorist and the field-based researcher. Early anthropological knowledge was largely produced through second-hand accounts gathered by missionaries, colonial administrators, and travellers, as seen in the works of Morgan, Tylor, and Frazer. This methodological gap was decisively addressed in the early twentieth century by Bronislaw Malinowski, whose fieldwork among the Trobriand Islanders transformed ethnography into a rigorous, immersive research practice. His insistence on long-term residence, learning the native language, maintaining detailed fieldnotes, and participating in everyday life established participant observation as the hallmark of ethnographic method. Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922) exemplified this shift, combining close empirical observation with theoretical generalization. His analysis of the Kula exchange system laid the groundwork for functionalism, which interpreted cultural practices in terms of the biological and psychological needs they served. Running parallel to Malinowski's work, A. R. Radcliffe-Brown developed a structural-functional approach through ethnographies such as *The Andaman Islanders* (1922). Rather than focusing on individual needs, Radcliffe-Brown emphasized how social institutions functioned to maintain the stability of social structures. While both scholars profoundly shaped anthropological methodology, their work was later criticized for treating societies as static and ahistorical. Moreover, the posthumous publication of Malinowski's private diaries in 1967 revealed his personal biases and ethnocentric attitudes, exposing the tensions between lived field experience and refined ethnographic writing. Colonial anthropology was marked by an outsider's gaze that often exoticized non-Western societies, portraying them as 'primitive'. Johannes Fabian famously critiqued this stance as the "denial of coevalness" whereby colonized societies were placed outside the shared historical spectrum. A major corrective came from Franz Boas, whose emphasis on cultural relativism shaped American anthropology, influencing scholars such as Margaret Mead. While Boasian anthropology stressed analytical distance, Mead adopted immersive participant observation (Urry, 1972). Her *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928) portrayed sexually free Samoan adolescence in contrast to Western biologically deterministic models, later sparking enduring controversy. Derek Freeman (1983; 2017) argued that Mead's account was shaped by conceptual biases about Polynesian cultures. Central to Freeman's critique was the 1987 testimony of Fa'apua'a Fa'amu,

one of Mead's key informants, who claimed that she and another ceremonial virgin, Fofoa, had misled Mead as a prank in response to her persistent uncomfortable questions about sexuality. The ensuing Mead-Freeman debate continues to divide anthropology over reliability, cultural translation, and ethnographic truth, highlighting tensions between scientific credibility and interpretive mediation. Informants may conceal or fabricate sensitive information, and unpacking such accounts reveals cultural significance. Thus, anthropological emphasis on total immersion to document cultural systems provided both the conceptual framework and the practical toolkit for sociology's own ethnographic turn. This later shaped the Chicago School's urban sociology, redirecting ethnography toward modern industrial societies. William Foote Whyte's *Street Corner Society* (1943) exemplifies this, using long-term immersion to reveal informal networks and power in an Italian-American neighbourhood. However, by mid-twentieth century, dissatisfaction with positivist and purely descriptive approaches led to interpretive turning point. Sociologists such as Becker, Goffman, and Garfinkel emphasized meaning-making, interaction, and everyday practices, drawing on Alfred Schutz's phenomenology. These ideas were later systematized in Berger and Luckmann's *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966), which reframed social life as an ongoing accomplishment. The 1980s and 1990s further extended these critiques through postmodern and reflexive ethnography. Clifford and Marcus's *Writing Culture* (1986), exposed how ethnographic texts are shaped by power, politics, and literary conventions. Decolonial and feminist scholars subsequently challenged anthropology's colonial epistemic foundations, advocating indigenous methodologies, standpoint perspectives, and collaborative knowledge production. Scholars such as Smith (1999) and, more recently, Tripura (2023), emphasized indigenous methodologies such as conversational methods, engaged observation, and critical reflexivity as means of decolonizing ethnographic knowledge production, particularly in postcolonial settings like that of India. While realist philosophers such as Musgrave (1999) continue to defend the possibility of accessing a mind-independent social reality, ethnography has evolved into a multi-sited, multimodal, and multisensorial practice that integrates digital tools and methodological pluralism, bridging empirical rigor with interpretive depth.

'Field' and 'Text': Then and Now

One constant across time and space for ethnographic research has been the concept of "field". Something as complex as human society cannot be studied in controlled settings. Though early field expeditions for instance, Haddon's Torres Straits popularised 'intensive study' but it was Malinowski (1884-1942) who as the trendsetter, quintessential anthropologist encouraged qualitative researchers to immerse in the field, build rapport and reside with natives. British social anthropologists had borrowed the term 'field' from modern physics to add to the scientific claim of their own empirical research. They

used the then recently developed audio-visual technologies such as dry gelatine plate photography, wax cylinder photographs and film cameras, as standard tools in field expeditions. In the following generations, researchers started to carry smaller cameras and audio recorders (Kohl, 2016). John Van Maanen (1979) explained fieldwork based ethnographic texts as a form of realist writing supported by first-order concepts e.g., "facts" of an ethnographic enquiry and second-order concepts in the form of "theories" used by the researcher to explain these facts. Field data or "facts" emerge from an ethnographer's observations and conversations, while presentational data offered by participants may include truths or partial truths. Clifford and Marcus (1986) redirected attention to these "partial truths," questioning the ethnographer's totalizing gaze and advancing reflexivity as a self-critical practice that foregrounds researcher bias, power relations, and ethical dilemmas rather than claims of detached objectivity. Throughout ethnography's evolution, tensions have existed between scientific and aesthetic impulses, and between positivist, nomothetic approaches seeking general laws and interpretivist, idiographic efforts to comprehend cultural meanings. Early urban ethnography within the Chicago School, for instance, drew inspiration not only from positivist science but also from literary realism, including James T. Farrell's *Studs Lonigan* trilogy (1935), while earlier scholars had already noted affinities between Malinowski's ethnographic prose and Joseph Conrad's literary style (Delamont & Atkinson, 1995). Traditionally, ethnography legitimized itself through intensive engagement with a singular, bounded field site, emphasizing the study of people "in action" (Murchison, 2010). However, the notion of field has expanded, as ethnographic research increasingly recognizes multi-sited and even virtual spaces as legitimate spheres of social life (Wong, 2007).

Epistemological Moorings of Ethnography: Objectivity and subjectivity in qualitative research

The influence of objectivity and subjectivity in ethnography shifts as researchers move between different epistemological traditions, notably positivism, interpretivism/social constructivism, scientific realism, and critical realism. Positivism treats ethnography as objective, value-neutral science aimed at uncovering law-like social truths, assuming a reality independent of the researcher. In contrast, social constructionist perspectives (and other anti-realist schools of thought) reject absolute objectivity, emphasizing interpretation, positionality, and the researcher's socio-cultural background in shaping ethnographic knowledge. The matter and scope of inquiry is different in the context of social sciences (e.g., stratification in human society) when contrasted with that of natural sciences (e.g., stratification in earth's atmosphere). In earth and atmospheric sciences, the stratification of the atmosphere from the troposphere to the exosphere is based on universal physical factors such as temperature, density, pressure etc. hence its theoretical explanation remains constant across locations, even though thickness of these

strata may vary across geomorphic landforms. By contrast, in the social sciences, categories of stratification such as class, caste, gender etc. intersect differently across space, raising questions about unequal access to resources based on social location. So, when social scientists, in this case, ethnographers go to the field, they have to balance between the agency of the researched, their own agency as a researcher and the wider structure of the social world in which the field is located. The shaping of field relations by researcher's identity as a queer/female/male/non-binary/person with disability can significantly influence patterns of interaction with the researched. The relationship between objectivity and subjectivity thus acquires new meaning in social sciences unlike in natural sciences where generalization of objective knowledge becomes precise. Let me use another theoretical example here. The law of thermodynamics that helps in defining the concept of 'work' and 'energy' in physics remains universally the same. Whether someone is pushing the walls of their room in Asia or in Africa, it will still not qualify as work unless the wall moves, thus lending objectivity and universality to the formula of work where work = (force x distance). Critiques of positivist approaches in ethnography caution against uncritically transferring claims of objectivity from the natural sciences to the social world. Unlike detached observers, ethnographers are inevitably embedded in the field settings they study, and their insider-outsider position shapes relationships with participants and the knowledge produced. As a result, ethnographic findings are context-bound rather than value-free representations of reality. In response, social constructivist and interpretivist traditions emphasize reflexivity, encouraging researchers to make explicit the decisions, assumptions, and positionalities that inform each stage of research. Early challenges to positivist objectivity can be seen in Zora Neale Hurston's auto-ethnography *Mules and Men* (1935). A student of Franz Boas, Hurston foregrounded the ethnographer's presence in the text to produce a more nuanced account of African American life (Jirousek, 2006).

Drawing on Gilbert Ryle's contribution, Clifford Geertz (1973) proposed a hermeneutic approach through his concept of "thick description," arguing that social action can only be understood within its cultural context. Some positivists criticized it for lacking reliability and validity. However, the interpretive turn in anthropology and sociology emphasized that a comprehensive understanding of any social phenomena required an empathetic interpretation of human actions. Yet, practising such an approach in the field is burdened with challenges. Gaining access to the lives of the 'researched' and chalking out a detailed map of their culture is not a cake-walk. The settings to which researchers seek access may be open e.g., formal organisations or closed, e.g., deviant groups/gangs or drug subcultures (Bryman, 2001). Researchers may encounter open settings such as formal organizations or closed and sensitive contexts such as deviant subcultures, where trust-building is difficult. Thus, in contemporary world, far removed from Malinowski's and

Geertz's classical fieldwork days, ethnographers confront a new range of methodological and ethical dilemmas. Questions arise over status of research being overt or covert, obtaining ethical clearance, issues of scientific validity and reliability in narrative accounts and adoption of sampling techniques. These challenges remind us that the conduct of ethnography is not a neutral or mechanical procedure. At its core, ethnographic research is based on a repertoire of qualitative methods, with participant observation and in-depth interviewing being primary methods of data collection (Malinowski, 1922; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). Fieldnotes, diaries, and audio-visual recordings constitute key tools for documenting the "thick description" of cultural life (Geertz, 1973). While complete objectivity remains unattainable, ethnographers have developed diverse tools to minimize bias while maintaining analytical rigor. Increasingly, ethnographers use multimodal and digital methods such as online ethnography and collaborative media projects to capture the multi-layered, mediated nature of contemporary social worlds (Pink, 2009). Unlike traditional ethnography, which privileged an etic perspective and positioned the researcher as a detached observer, contemporary approaches increasingly emphasize emic approach that treats participants as co-constructors of knowledge. Within this frame, sampling is not merely a technical step but a critical decision that reflects both scientific rigor and sensitivity to the complexities of social reality. After all, a researcher does not always talk to every single person in the field. The qualitative nature of ethnography does not by default suggest skipping of sampling. The application of sampling technique thereby increases the credibility of research by pinpointing the scientific basis of selecting the subset population with whom the researcher engages in the art of observing, listening and conversing. Together, these methodological concerns highlight how epistemological debates, from positivism to critical realism continue to shape the credibility of ethnographic texts.

The degree of "otherness" between researcher and researched, shaped by experiences of class, caste, gender, race, ethnicity, disability, or tribe influences rapport-building and data quality. Critiques of positivist approach in ethnography warn against attempts of blindly copying 'objective' knowledge-claims to social world. Instead of prioritizing 'value-free' detached position of the researcher, several thinkers encourage an application of 'reflexive' thinking, clarifying the decisions taken at each stage.

Writing, representation and politics of knowledge in ethnography

> "Any presentation of ethnographic findings is not complete without proper documentation, a process that is concerned with how the investigator knows something is so and demonstrating it to the reader's satisfaction"
>
> (Gold, 1997: 299)

Ethnographic writing is usually found to adopt a specific strategy of authority. Critics insist that ethnographies do not mirror-represent social

reality, instead they are socially constructed by the ethnographer-author. Denzin referred to this process as 'crisis of representation' (Clifford & Marcus, 1986), problematising the scientific status of an ethnographic text. The term 'scientific' here refers to the clarity of methodical performances including objective nature of findings. To some scholars, ethnographic writing is more of a 'story-telling institution', in the sense that ethnographies are after all 'textual constructions of reality' (Hine, 2000: 44). Whatever be the sincerity with which they are written, ethnographic representation of reality runs the risk of being selective.

> "Tables and chairs, and people who sit at tables in chairs, are all objects composed of matter… Unlike tables, chairs and people, the particles of which matter is composed are entities which cannot be directly observed using unaided sense perception. We do not come to know of the existence and nature of such unobservable entities by means of sense experience. Rather, our knowledge of unobservable entities is a matter of inference, conjecture and hypothesis… When scientists tell us about such theoretical entities as atoms, electrons and other particles, what attitude should we adopt toward these claims? What is the status of such claims? Should they be treated as true, or approximately true, descriptions of actually existing things? Or are such claims to be treated as some sort of fictional discourse?"
>
> (Sankey, 2008: 11)

There is considerable debate among philosophers of science about the status of truth and objective reality. Both realist and anti-realist positions comprise pluralistic set of doctrines. Different variants of realism agree on the aim of science being discovery of the truth about mind-independent external world (objective reality). Traditional 'realistic' ethnographic practice assumed that perusal of an ethnography transports one through the book-as-mirror to social reality. Van Maanen referred to this as the 'doctrine of immaculate perception' (Aunger,1995;110). This view does not engage with the criticalities of ethnographic medium in which socio-psychological reality of time and space transforms into mental representations of a reader through at least one intervening intelligence, that of the ethnographer's whose account is embedded in a particular set of socio-historical occurrences. Anti-realists pointed out the importance of making sense of the world based on thought and experience where the aim of science is not to discover truth, but to construct empirically-adequate theories (Sankey, 2008). Unlike realist position whereby truth-claims rest on their correspondence to an external, independent reality, anti-realist stance suggested that truth rests on elements of demonstrability. This presents an inter-subjectively experienced world since we have no access to mind-independent reality, even if it exists. Is ethnography then a 'fictional discourse' as claimed by some anti-realists? Are ethnographers reducible to some kind of story-tellers or can they be referred to as social scientists committed to unearthing objective truth-claims about human societies? In the 21st century, ethnography has expanded the notion of "text" to include images, exhibitions, photo-essays, archives, digital media, dance and other performative forms, linking personal biography with social history (Solinger, Fox & Irani, 2008).

Narratives and even fiction have gained analytical value in capturing social facts and marginalized voices. The following section uses textual analysis of five ethnographies to trace shifts from the 20th to 21st century in writing style, representation, politics of knowledge and ethnographic authority.

Reading Ethnographies: From Generalising Laws to Reflexive Voices

Marcel Mauss's *The Gift* (1954) exemplifies early ethnography's commitment to objectivity and analytical distance. Excluding personal field experience, Mauss sought to identify universal principles of exchange, giving, receiving, and reciprocating, conceptualized as "total social facts" spanning economic, religious, legal, political, and moral domains. This reflected classical anthropology's search for general social laws but also revealed the limits of detached representation in capturing lived experience. During this period, the authority and positionality of the ethnographer were rarely questioned. This began to change in the mid-twentieth century with the publication of Malinowski's private diaries (1967) and Derek Freeman's critique of Margaret Mead (1983), which exposed tensions between ethnographic texts, field realities, and researcher bias. These debates highlighted issues of validity, interpretation, and reflexivity, prompting anthropologists to rethink methodological practices and experiment with new writing styles.

Janet Carsten's *The Heat of the Hearth* (1997) signals the late twentieth-century reflexive turn in ethnography. Unlike Mauss, Carsten explicitly foregrounded her presence in the field, weaving personal experiences into ethnographic narrative to enhance transparency and credibility. She deliberately minimized social distance through prolonged immersion and participation in everyday domestic and productive activities to develop an emic understanding of kinship. However, her approach also exposes the limits of reflexivity. By relying primarily on interactions with women, her portrayal of women's co-operative labor in rice production, contrasted with men's fishing practices as anti-community, offered a partial, gendered representation, showing that reflexivity alone cannot ensure comprehensiveness in ethnographic texts.

Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing's *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection* (2005) marks a further departure from both classical objectivism and singular reflexive narratives. Tsing embraced contradiction, fragmentation, and incompatibility as methodological resources rather than problems to be resolved. Her ethnography examines the "friction" generated through encounters between local rainforest communities in Indonesia and global forces such as capitalism and environmental politics. By tracing these uneven and awkward engagements across scales, Tsing blurred the boundaries between the local and the global. Methodologically, her work exemplifies experimental ethnography, blending genres such as history, autobiography, and literary analysis to produce what Marcus famously termed "mixed-genre texts." In this

framework, the ethnographer is no longer an authoritative narrator but a mediator of contested and partial realities shaped by global interconnections.

An earlier but equally influential shift in ethnographic practice can be found in William Foote Whyte's *Street Corner Society* (1943). Emerging from the Chicago School of sociology, Whyte extended ethnographic methods beyond anthropology into urban sociology. Through participant observation of an Italian-American neighborhood, he demonstrated how ethnographic authority could be grounded in sustained engagement with everyday social interactions. His work signalled a move away from holistic depictions of distant 'exotic' societies toward embedded analyses of power, organization, and political economy within modern urban contexts.

In the Indian context, Amita Baviskar's *In the Belly of the River* (1995) represents a critical synthesis of reflexivity and political economy. Baviskar's ethnography of tribal struggles over development issues in the Narmada Valley explicitly frames ethnography as a discursive and interpretive process rather than a neutral description of social reality. She emphasizes participant observation as an ongoing movement between "inside" and "outside" perspectives, balancing the fine line between empathetic engagement and critical distance. By reflecting on methodological adjustments necessitated by tensions between theory and lived experience, Baviskar's work not only documents local resistance to development but also contributes significantly to debates on qualitative methodology, marking a pivotal moment in contemporary Indian ethnographic scholarship.

Reflexivity and Methodological Pluralism

In my doctoral research (2021), I adopted a mixed-methods approach to examine the relationship between sustainable development and indigenous knowledge in a rural community of Northeast India. One of the research objectives was to understand the worldview of the research-participants in terms of the relations between their indigenous practices and community life. The research questions were framed to achieve an endogenous understanding of development, social well-being and gender role in given indigenous communities. I combined qualitative ethnography with quantitative household survey, using observation and interview method. Multiple samples were drawn using distinct sampling strategies, all of which were clearly detailed in the methodology. Reflexivity played a crucial role throughout the research as I continuously negotiated my positionality as a "fieldworker" and a "surveyor." Anecdotes, field experiences, and participants' voices were integrated into the narrative, while theoretical explanations were grounded in light of local meanings. This iterative movement between theory and field resonated with Baviskar's notion of ethnography as an "inside-outside" process. In the concluding chapter, I reflected on methodological limitations, moments of improvisation, and alternative strategies, aiming for transparency and an

ethically grounded representation of the community's worldview. These triangulation practices align with broader trends in contemporary ethnography that emphasize theoretical eclecticism, mixed methods, and reflexivity.

Scientific realists argue that the social world has an objective structure independent of human perception and that carefully collected ethnographic data can capture this reality as brute facts. Humanist realists, however, contend that data are always mediated by meaning-making cultural processes and are therefore intersubjective, advocating an emic, insider-oriented approach (Brewer, 2000). Anti-realist and postmodern perspectives further challenge claims to objectivity by emphasizing layered or multiple realities. Robert Pool (1991) documents how the "Rice Circle" scholars such as Marcus, Fischer, Rabinow, Clifford, and Crapanzano foregrounded issues of representation, reflexivity, and authorship. Rabinow's notion of "multiple truths," influenced by Foucault and Hacking, draw our attention to the impossibility of a singular ethnographic truth, while Talal Asad highlighted the problem of translation, arguing that cultural meanings are inevitably distorted when rendered through external categories.

Concerns about informants' reliability further complicated ethnographic authority, as knowledge came to be understood as shaped by power relations. Tsing's *Friction* (2005) illustrates this through multiple narratives of the same environmental struggle, each reflecting different positionalities within local-global hierarchies. Such insights led to the recognition of ethnographic truths as partial, situated, and incomplete (Clifford & Marcus, 1986). Ethnographers have responded by employing varied narrative strategies, interpretive, dialogical, experiential, and polyphonic to manage these limitations. Similarly, Michael Burawoy's *Global Ethnography* (2000) reframed globalization as a lived process, linking local experiences to global structures through the extended case method. While differing methodologically, both Tsing and Burawoy emphasized knowledge as co-produced, reflexive, and embedded in power-laden contexts.

Contemporary Ethnography: Pluriverse of trends

Robert Myers (2011) described ethnography as a practice that renders the strange familiar and the familiar strange, an insight that resonates strongly with Berger's (1963) articulation of the sociological perspective. Traditionally, this process relied on relatively stable distinctions between "self" and "other," "home" and "field," and "familiar" and "strange." In the contemporary world, however, these boundaries have become increasingly blurred, shaped by globalization and more recently, digitalization.

Recent debates on ethnographic method have focused on the disruptions and possibilities generated by digital environments, a shift brought sharply into focus during the COVID-19 pandemic. Lockdowns, travel

restrictions, and physical distancing compelled ethnographers to devise innovative strategies in the absence of conventional long-term field immersion. These changes were not merely pragmatic adjustments but signalled a deeper rethinking of what constitutes an ethnographic "field" in a globalized and digitally interconnected world. Increasingly, ethnographers confront situations in which "home" and "field" overlap, coexist, or even merge (Kumoro, 2022). Consequently, both before and after the pandemic, the social sciences have witnessed the proliferation of diverse ethnographic forms, including experimental ethnography, auto-ethnography, multi-sited ethnography, virtual or digital ethnography, rapid ethnography and patchwork ethnography. Some of these emerging approaches rely on what Plowman (2017) terms "ethnography by proxy," wherein certain aspects of data collection are delegated to non-academic collaborators or local actors. While this strategy decentralizes the ethnographer's role and challenges the primacy of "being there," it has not fully displaced the conventional emphasis on field immersion as a marker of ethnographic credibility.

> 'The ability of anthropologists to get us to take what they say seriously … is a result of their having … one way or another, truly "been there".'
>
> (Geertz, C.1988: 4-5)

Although contemporary ethnography increasingly acknowledges that prolonged presence does not guarantee access to a totalizing or unmediated truth however sustained engagement with social worlds continues to function as an important symbolic and methodological anchor. While the suspension of in-person fieldwork during the pandemic prompted anxieties about whether digital methods might replace "classic" ethnography, scholars caution against framing digital ethnography as a substitute. Instead, digital and multimodal approaches are increasingly understood as distinct ethnographic formations with their own merits, limitations, and ethical considerations. Collins and Durington (2024) argue that simply transferring face-to-face methods into online spaces risks flattening ethnographic practice and obscuring the structural inequalities embedded in digital infrastructures. In this sense, the pandemic did not reveal new inequalities but intensified long-standing ones, renewing critiques of anthropology's colonial legacies, epistemic hierarchies, and extractive research practices. In response, multimodal anthropology has emerged less as a technological innovation than as a critical reorientation of ethnographic practice. Rather than privileging the figure of the lone ethnographer, multimodal approaches emphasize collaboration, ethical labor, and shared ownership of knowledge.

Dattatreyan and Marrero-Guillamón (2019: 220-228) conceptualize multimodality as a "politics of invention," advocating multisensorial, performative, and participatory forms of ethnography that move beyond text-centric representation. Similarly, Martínez (2021) explained ethnographic experiments with artists, designers and curatorial practices reconceiving

fieldwork as co-creation, treating exhibitions as ethnographic fields and analytical devices. Parallel scholarship demonstrates how the digital turn has transformed assumptions about community, field, agency, and field-duration, giving rise to hybrid, multi-sited, and often short-term ethnographies that may combine online and offline inquiry (Padricelli and Punziano, 2023). These developments build on earlier interventions in ethnographic methodology.

Hine's *Virtual Ethnography* (2000) was among the first to conceptualize the internet as a legitimate ethnographic site, proposing an expanded understanding of the field as potentially physical or virtual, singular or plural. Around the same time, scholars such as Harper (2003) revived interest in visual ethnography, which had been part of early anthropological practice but was constrained by technological limitations. Advances in recording technologies have since enabled extensive use of photography, film, and video, foregrounding the interplay between the researcher's gaze and the technical mediation of cameras.

Another significant trend is auto-ethnography, wherein researchers examine their own experiences as members of particular socio-cultural groups, using the self as a site of analysis (Hayano, 1979). While auto-ethnography foregrounds reflexivity and positionality, other approaches, such as team ethnography and collaborative research, emphasize collective knowledge production. Relatedly, applied and critical ethnographies increasingly merge ethnographic inquiry with action research to challenge hegemonic discourses and address systemic inequalities faced by marginalized communities. These approaches resonate with participatory action research (PAR), indigenous methodologies, and ethnography at the margins, seeking to democratize knowledge production and foreground local epistemologies (Palmer & Caldas, 2016). Contemporary ethnography has also expanded into analytically challenging terrains. Dark anthropology and dark ethnography explore morally complex and politically sensitive contexts involving violence, extremism, or criminality (Ortner, 2016; Bangstad, 2017). Feminist and gender-sensitive ethnographies have profoundly reshaped the discipline by interrogating the gendered dimensions of fieldwork, authorship, and representation. Once dominated by white male scholars, ethnography has increasingly incorporated feminist epistemologies, queer perspectives, and studies of masculinity, demonstrating how gendered positionality shapes both field relations and ethnographic texts (Carsten, 1997; Tauber and Zinn, 2021). More recently, multispecies ethnography has extended ethnographic attention beyond humans to include animals, plants, and other non-human actors, challenging anthropocentric assumptions (Kirksey & Helmreich, 2010). Sensory and affective ethnography, grounded in phenomenology, critiques Western logocentrism and emphasizes embodied, multisensory forms of knowing (Pink, 2009). Decolonial and indigenous ethnographies continue to confront anthropology's colonial inheritance by prioritizing relational ontologies,

indigenous epistemologies, and co-produced knowledge (Smith, 2012). At the same time, the ethnography of infrastructure reveals how material and technological systems, from water pipes to digital platforms, structure everyday life and social relations (Star, 1999; Larkin, 2013). Taken together, these diverse strands reveal that contemporary ethnography is a pluriverse of approaches**,** reshaping what counts as a field and how realities are represented through texts.

Conclusion: Bridging Science and Story

Ethnography has come a long way from its incipient days in anthropology and sociology to its present embodiments across disciplines. What began as the study of culturally distant "others" gradually turned inward, examining neighbourhoods, institutions, and everyday life, and has now become a reflexive, critical, and multi-sited practice. Contemporary ethnography not only investigates social worlds but also interrogates the researcher's own positionality, assumptions, and modes of representation. As societies are shaped by layered histories, cultural meanings, and lived experiences, understanding them requires both empirical inquiry and narrative interpretation. This dual capacity constitutes ethnography's distinctive strength: its ability to operate at the intersection of observation and imagination, fact and meaning. The long-standing debate as to whether ethnography is science or storytelling is less a matter of rigid binary then. The realist concern with verifiable knowledge and the interpretivist emphasis on meaning need not be opposed. Metaphors, myths, and other narrative devices used in ethnographic writing do not undermine scientific inquiry; rather, they often make complex social realities intelligible and communicable. Contemporary ethnography accommodates diverse methodological orientations. It may rely on thick description and emic perspectives, combine qualitative and quantitative tools in mixed-methods designs, or be situated within participatory, feminist, indigenous, or digital frameworks. Each of these extends ethnography's analytical reach while remaining anchored in close engagement with social life. What is ultimately at stake is not merely methodological validity, but a broader epistemological question: how knowledge about social worlds is produced, justified, and shared. By legitimizing multiple ways of knowing, ethnography transcends the objectivity-subjectivity divide and emerges as a collaborative, reflexive practice that weaves together science and story. In an increasingly complex and mediated world, ethnography is less about mastering reality and more about engaging with reality in ethical and meaningful ways. The crucial question, then, is whether this convergence of science and storytelling serves only knowledge production, or also contributes to social critique, understanding, and emancipation.

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THE UNUSUAL PLAY OF DATA: REFLECTIONS ON SMART CITY MISSION

Abstract

This paper moves beyond the given conceptual and critical debates of smart cities and explores the basics of the smart city in India. Current scholarship on smart cities focuses on the use of digital technology in city management that boost economic growth and improve quality of life. The paper argues that the smart city and Ease of Living Index are welcome and could provide a sea change in the planning and implementation strategies. Beyond the project's feasibility and success, the paper argues that the project of transformation needs to be developed with a view to understanding existing ground realities supported by data. The paper explores how Indian cities are governed by incomplete and inaccurate data with speculative and intermittent outcomes. The city institutions lack a culture of data that has ramification on the projects and especially technological-based projects. Through ethnographic exploration, annual reports of the government and newspaper articles, the paper discusses the current approach of city management under the Smart City Mission. Exploring the importance of data and evidence-based approach in city management, the paper discusses how this lack of culture of data produces an intermittent urbanism which neither matches with the lived reality of cities nor fulfills dreams of smart city in India.

Keywords: *Smart city, Urban Data, Smart Urbanism, EoLI, Intermittent Urbanism.*

Introduction

Urbanization in India has become a significant and inevitable process. In an estimate, by 2030 Indian urban population will grow to about 60 crores (GoI MoF 2020-21:302). Rapid urbanization and increasing urban population pose significant challenges to basic services and infrastructure such as housing, public transport, water supply, sanitation, and solid waste management. The government aspires to transform and remake Indian cities more livable,

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economically vibrant, inclusive through economic liberalization, reform in governance, and inviting foreign investment (Hoelscher 2016). Despite the facts and efforts of the government, Indian cities are characterized by informality, slums, poor infrastructure, encroachment on the roadside, violation of rules and regulations of city institutions, and inadequate planning and governance. Das (2020) explores Indian cities that have been plagued by various issues such as traffic congestion, lack of green spaces, water and sanitation problems, public transport, safety and environmental pollution. Thus, policymakers, city planners, and city administrators in India and across South Asia have started to find innovative and sustainable approaches or solutions to tackle these problems with long-term positive effects on the environment and economy. With the evolution of "network society"[1], various technological solutions have been adopted for urban problems. The technical solution and intervention in city management have been popularized in scholarship as "high-tech" and "smart" to address the urban issues and problems and contribute to making cities more vibrant for economic growth, sustainable and livable (Shapiro 2006). The ongoing approach in city development is to make cities more sustainable, livable, and an economic growth center that will provide quality of life to its citizens. All these shall be driven by data and based on evidence.

For the last two decades, the smart city concept emerged and became popular for academicians, technocrats, businesses, international policymakers, and government to provide a solution to long pertaining problems (Albino et al. 2015). It is assumed that the smart city program will improve the infrastructure and economic efficiency of cities. In smart cities, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are at the centre, which further enhances cities' socio-economic, logistic, ecological and competitive performance (Kummitha and Crutzen 2017). Thus, a smart city is a technological advancement with particular intellectual ability that deals with various social, technical and economic aspects of growth, based on smart computing techniques. Smart cities are projected for the effective management of city resources, to protect the environment and everyday problems of urban life such as traffic, congestion, waste management and so on.

Locating itself within the theoretical frameworks of Smart Urbanism, the paper highlights the essentiality of data which nevertheless is not a neutral instrument but definitely enables smartness and may improve the cities efficient, sustainable and economically vibrant. Scholars in this sub-field argue that smart urbanism is just more merely a measure of improved systems that are assembled through evidence and data but constitute new modes, forms, methods and systems of urban governance. "Data assemblage" (Kitchin and Lauriault 2014), in the Indian context, reorganizes institutional priorities while obscuring its own limitations magnifies optimism but has to be negotiated through municipal incapacities, overlapped and contested jurisdictions and informal systems that operate on the ground (Harvey 2003; Anand 2012).

Therefore, instead of presuming that digital infrastructures inherently make the system "smart" outcomes, the paper foregrounds the idea of the culture of data as a tool to understand infrastructural and relational practice. That is: the method of collecting, verifying, maintaining, and mobilizing information that directs the municipalities and the authorities towards attention and action points. Noteworthy, the absence of such a culture of handling data produces intermittent and fractured smart cities (Singh and Upadhyay 2023). In foregrounding the essentiality of data for Smart City, this paper contributes towards academic discussions on: unevenness of data governance in India and the Global South that produces fractured cities. Such a positioning enables the scholars to understand failures of Smart City Mission (henceforth Mission) not merely a technological failure but as a failure of technical knowledge. Through the exploration of smart city projects and the "evidence-based and driven by data" approach, the paper points to the lack of data on various urban amenities that are very much required for practical needs and for working on urban projects and knowledge. Therefore, the unusual play of data highlights 'disjunctions', already evident in past urban public policy mistakes, between the real needs and imagined and proposed solutions of urban restructuring through policy conditions. Further, it argues that economies of scale, "smart urbanism" (Verrest and Pfeffer 2019) and "instant urbanism" (Murray 2013:290) can be achieved only when the city formulates various projects based on appropriate and correct data inputs.

At another level, the paper highlights how various indexes such Ease of Living Index (EoLI) and Municipal Performance Index (MPI) developed to rank livability in cities and the capability of the municipality do not correspond to the realist and real needs of cities in India. This paper employs a mixed methodological strategy of triangulation (Patton 1999) to reveal the gaps between policy narrative, official data collected and employed in SCM platform, and lived urban experiences. This approach helps in treating official data not as a truth claim but a one that is interrogated through ethnographic observations. The analysis uses comparative coding to locate disjunctures between: infrastructures and reported indicators (e.g. water availability, bill collection) and experiences of people around the promised delivery of services. This methodological and analytical approach helps us comprehend how intermittent and speculative outcomes are produced by the data itself. The paper, thus, attends to comprehensive and coherent understanding on the play of data in achieving the smartness in the system.

Smart City Mission: Progress in Ambiguous Stage

The vision to transform Indian cities and towns through an "evidence-based and driven by data" (MoHUA 2020-21) approach adopted by the Ministry hopes to offer a superior quality of life to its residents, a clean and high-quality environment as well as use innovative technological application and smart

solutions that facilitate in accomplishing better living conditions and high economic growth (MoHUA 2021). The Mission, launched in June 2015, has received much applause as well as criticism. The Mission envisages the application of digital technologies to improve urban infrastructure and services in 100 cities. It aims to enhance the economic ability of these cities and enhance the quality of life of citizens without compromising sustainability. Unlike earlier urban development plans, it is rather an experimental plan. Instead of focusing on the entire city, it aims to improve urban conditions in a small area, called area-based development, through redevelopment, retrofitting, or greenfield development. Further, it aims to incorporate digital technological solutions for other parts of the city, called Pan-City development. It prioritizes adequate water supply, assured electricity supply, sanitation, including solid waste management, efficient urban mobility and public transport, affordable housing, especially for the poor, robust IT connectivity and digitalisation, good governance, especially e-Governance and citizen participation, sustainable environment, safety and security of citizens, particularly women, children and the elderly, and health and education" (MoHUA 2015). The Mission aims to develop a model which can be replicated in other parts of the city.

As the name goes as well as imagined, this comprehensive area-based development requires work on data and information and offers smart solutions to improve core urban infrastructure. That means the cities shall have not only a volume of data but also quality data. The data should have the potential to tell the actual condition of infrastructure and services, allow identification of issues, and offer solutions. Perhaps, this is the aim of the Mission. The Ministry has developed two indexes— Ease of Living Index (EoLI) and Municipal Performance Index (MPI)— to rank livability in cities and capability of municipality respectively. Such innovative developments further buttress the possibilities for evidence-based planning that assesses and compares the outcomes of the projects and improves the perceptions of the livability of the citizens. These techniques of measurement further help in targeting the gaps in achieving the broader developmental goals. The EoLI uses information around three pillars: quality of life, economic ability, and sustainability. These three pillars further contain fourteen categories and fifty indicators. For example, the quality of life includes education, health, housing, water, sanitation, hygiene, solid waste management, safety, mobility and recreation (EoLI 2020). Noteworthy, the data with which the Mission has ranked the cities is not only insufficient but erroneous as well. Obviously, when one has an inaccurate data input, he/she achieves wrecked outcomes that lead to the failure of developmental programs. At the same time, news articles also fail to identify the real issue plaguing developmental goals. Recently, an article in a digital platform reported on the progress made in the achievements of the goals of smart cities. It reads, "out of the total proposed projects worth Rs. 2,05,018 crores (as per the approved smart cities proposals), only projects worth Rs. 35,457 crore or only 17 per cent of the total worth of projects have been

completed" (Singh 2021). Such reports only affirm our belief in the failures of developmental planning of the government. Interestingly, the news article does not look at the mechanisms of project execution. The reality is the implementation, and thereby, completion of projects depends on the date of the selection of a particular city in the Mission. As one may be aware, the selections of 100 cities under the Mission have been completed in four rounds: 20 cities in Jan 2016; 40 in May-Sep 2016; 30 in June 2017; and 10 in Jan 2018. The process of project execution starts only after the establishment of a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV), the appointment of Project Management Consultants (PMC), preparation of project design and the Detailed Project Report (DPR). The tenders for individual projects can be floated only after completing the aforementioned steps, which, as prescribed by the Mission, takes over 18 months (MoHUA 2020-21:44-45). If we take any city that was selected in January 2016, it can initiate any project only after June 2017. If we take five years to complete the Mission projects, then the cities selected in the first round should have finished all the work by January 2021. Looking at the Annual Reports of MoHUA (2020-21:56-57), these twenty cities have completed a little less than 90 per cent of all the tendered projects. Similarly, in the second round, forty cities were selected between May to September 2016, and, in the third round, thirty cities were selected in June 2017. Therefore, these cities would have begun projects in March 2018 and December 2018, respectively. As reported by the Ministry 2020-21, 89 per cent of work in round two cities and 78 per cent of all tendered work for round three cities have been completed by December 2020. So, without looking at these procedural aspects, the news article asserts something that misinforms and confuses the readers at large. Having said that, it does not mean that the unusual play of data concludes with this news article.

Indian Cities and Distorted Reality of Data

The question is not about the completion of tendered works, which does not ensure improvements in the quality of life in cities. There is an unusual play of data in the Mission. We are aware that Indian cities are a complex amalgamation of planned and unplanned, legalities and illegalities, and formal and informal practices and structures. The conditions of infrastructure and citizens' struggle in urban India are more or less similar whether one is in a small town or a metropolitan city. For example, water supply is intermittent and often not potable, leading to reliance on market solutions or individual efforts such as installing water pumps, overhead tanks, and water filters. There are struggles for rental housing and transportation. There is immense traffic. The pedestrians struggle to cross the road as pedestrian paths are either missing or encroached on by hawkers, vendors and shopkeepers. Stormwater and drainage lines are either choked or buried under illegal extensions. And there are substantial revenue deficits in municipalities. In fact, Indian cities are a patchwork of different groups of 'experts'. Interestingly, people manage their

living in cities amidst these shortages. Therefore, improvements in these urban conditions become essential over mechanical and cosmetic changes in technology-driven planning and delivery. In all, Indian cities need an overhauling of approaches dealing with data that captures the real situation. Therefore, instead of focusing on indexes and reducing the imagination and intent into rhetoric, the city administration needs to work on data that provide qualitative and quantitative information. Unfortunately, the dance of statistics and quantitative methods produces a lustrous picture that does not correspond with what is required. Therefore, the analysis of the achievements of the Mission shall not focus only on the completion of tendered works but also on what these projects achieve on various parameters that perceptively enhance the quality of living for urbanites.

One of the major flaws in the Mission is the absence of adequate data. As explored Singh and Upadhyaya (2023) the Mission might have used data available with the municipality or government agencies or other datasets such as National Family Health Survey (NFHS), National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) and the Census of India. This information hardly captures the quality of urban service. To an extent, these data may provide information on quantity but often lack exact numerical values. Further, the Mission might have incorporated and designated weight to citizens' perceptions, but there are severe inadequacies. If the Mission wishes to improve the quality of life, then it needs to have qualitative and quantitative information on urban amenities. It is apt here to draw attention to a report entitled "Datasmart Cities: Empowering Cities through Data", which asserts that Indian cities lack a "culture of data" (MoHUA 2021a:4)**.** This could largely be accepted because many cities under the Mission are working on existing data of the municipalities and other agencies which do not have adequate information. The Mission cities have not conducted baseline surveys. For them, the 'distorted' and 'inadequate data' of the municipalities serve as baseline data. The Mission might have adopted a methodology for formulation of survey or means of data collection, validation, and cleansing; but, again, it has worked on fragmented data. Perhaps, the methods of data collection and verification of data may not be the ultimate goal, but it is important to note that the data should serve the purpose of offering and enhancing the urban quality of living. It becomes essential because there is a change in the conception of the city under the Mission, which imagines the "city as a platform concept" (EoLI 2019)[2]. Apart from the "lack of culture of data", the Mission forgets its own purpose. This approach and insensitivity towards the requirement of quality data lead to failure to achieve the desired result. Further, the Mission managers not only failed to utilise available data but also did not bother to look at the areas where they did not have information. As the Mission objectives foreground, the smart cities depend on data governance and management. City managers "tend to resolve complex problems faced in their cities by delivering solutions through a fragmented, over-simplified and piecemeal approach. This can be seen in almost every sphere of work,

whether mobility or water management" (MoHUA 2021a) or urban planning at large.

Under the Mission, Smart Cities Open Data Initiative[3] started to host an open dataset of 100 smart cities, that is freely accessible to the public. However, if one looks at the available data, it tells the story of mismanagement and misgovernance. For example, if one looks at the data on water systems which is an essential focus of the Mission and the EoLI, then it talks about the sloppy approach. The only data available on the water system is about water taxes. This piece of information does not inform about the water system in the city. In order to achieve the Mission goal, for example, on adequate water supply, it should have collected information on available storage capacity in different zones and wards, total consumption of water in the city, current mechanisms of water purification by the Water Board in the city, number of households with and without piped water connection, availability of water to households, issues of leakages and pressure in the lines, timely release of the water bill, installation of smart meters and systems of tax collection etc. This kind of information is also critical to assess the EoLI, planning, and project formulation. As said, the available data on the Smart Cities Open Data Initiative platform, most of the cities provide information only on water tax, billed and collected. In fact, this data itself tells a lot about the capabilities of the municipalities. Many cities, for example, Dharamshala, do not provide segregated data on water tax for residential and commercial units, which may indicate that there are no commercial water connections in cities. While the National Government Service Portal[4] says commercial water connections are provided to shops, firms, units, and enterprises, it is not clear what kind of connections have been provided to commercial units in Dharamshala. Further, there are other discrepancies in this data. For example, in the year 2013-14, in Dharamshala, the total billed water tax was Rs. 58.654 Lakh, while the amount of tax collected for the same year was Rs 68.10931 Lakh. It might be possible that this excess amount, Rs. 9.45087 Lakh, was the pending amount of the earlier years, which was collected in 2013-2014. However, this accounting requires more precision and clarity. Exploring the water tax, it is found that municipalities fail to collect taxed bills. The revenue deficit for water tax, in Dharamshala, from 2014-15 to 2017-18 is Rs. 76.6 Lakh. Similar is the condition in Lucknow and other municipalities where the Water Board fails to collect taxes. In Lucknow, for the years between 2013-14 to 2017-18, the revenue deficit is over Rs. 18,687 Lakh. Despite knowing that municipal taxes are the major sources of revenue, municipalities fail to collect it's own money. In this situation, it can be contended that the transformations outlined in the Mission lose their importance, resulting in the proliferation of superficial rhetoric about development.

EoLI: Another Story of Data

Drawing from the history of urban development programs, schemes

and policies (Batra 2009) and critics of Indian smart cities (Khan et al. 2018), the Mission is a repetition and replication of earlier urban programs and reform. It is argued that previous programs of urban development have proven "Paper Tiger" (Mathur 2016), where desired outputs remain so far in reality. However, the exercise in this direction suggests the continuation of 'governance on paper' and does not make the shift what it envisages. At the same time, one can appreciate the changes in the approach of the government that does not subscribe to any particular meaning or definition of 'smartness' for Smart City and keeps the meaning open-ended, providing flexibility in execution and interpretation, thus recognising the particularities of each city. The Mission shifts the location of urban planning as well as the meaning of the city. It places people at the centre and considers cities not merely as economic growth engines but also as places that consider and continuously work to improve the experiences of citizens. As per the Mission documents and Annual Reports of the MoHUA, smart cities bring a change in urban planning mechanisms from input-based to outcome-based planning where urban governance, management and planning is evidence-based and driven by data (MoHUA 2020-21:49). It means the data is not just some random figures but forms the fulcrum for the Mission that should provide quantitative as well as qualitative information on the city, its amenities, abilities and capacities. In such a Mission, data is not only quintessential but also assumes indispensability without which execution of actions and digital intervention may not yield the desired result. Further, there are certain innovative developments in this direction.

The Ministry has developed two indexes— Ease of Living Index (EoLI) and Municipal Performance Index (MPI)— to rank livability in cities and capability of municipality respectively. Such innovative developments further buttress the possibilities for evidence-based planning that assesses and compares the outcomes of the projects and improves the perceptions of the livability of the citizens. It will also enhance the quality of life, infrastructure and establish a dialogue between citizens and urban policy planners for further improvements. These techniques of measurement further help in targeting the gaps in achieving the broader developmental goals. The EoLI uses information around three pillars: quality of life, economic ability, and sustainability. These three pillars further contain fourteen categories and fifty indicators. For example, the quality of life includes education, health, housing, water, sanitation, hygiene, solid waste management, safety, mobility and recreation. Similarly, economic ability includes the level of development, economic opportunities, sustainability: environment, green space and buildings, energy consumption, and resilience; and citizen perception survey (EoLI 2019:29). The indexes produced by MoHUA are governed by information that rates and ranks cities against one another. The move of rating the cities on their performance and indicators is new in urban development in India. Earlier indexes such as the Human Development Index (HDI), the Ease of Doing Business Indicator and Global Performance Indicators were introduced to create an economically competitive environment

and improve the quality of living. Whereas rating cities based on indicators is again based on the data filled by cities and collected from various agencies. As stated above, the data with which the Mission has ranked the cities is insufficient but wrong as well.

We discussed in the previous section, the data on water that is available for free access on the online portal of MoHUA. In EoLI, water is one of the important components to determine the quality of life in cities. The EoLI (2019) methodology report describes the question through which data is collected in different pillars. The EoLI has a total of five questions on water respectively, two questions in the perception survey, two in indicator description, and one question in sustainability (EoLI 2019:33-61). The nature of the question is not descriptive, and it has very little scope to incorporate the information that is crucial for the quality of water and the journey of water. In the Mission and other development projects, data is critical and valuable, whether in the form of qualitative or quantitative. The Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) (2019) reported that a number of Indian cities failed to meet the bureau's standards. In most cities, tap water cannot be drunk directly (Singh 2025). The report questions the quality of water and raises questions on the method of data collection for EoLI. The EoLI and other reports, data are collected by various organisations in their desired formats. Ironically, collected data is not in the same format that is required for the calculation of indexes. This is because of the lack of a centralised data collection system and its record maintaining system, or what one can call it a "lack of culture of data". Similarly, the National Sample Survey Office's (NSSO) 76th round (2018) noted that in urban India, only 40.9 per cent of households have piped water connections and 90.9 per cent of households have availability of drinking water throughout the year. These figures on water infrastructure in urban India produce the data that may be in consideration of EoLI. However, the ethnographic exploration and everyday struggles for water noted in metropolitan cities speak of another story that has not been considered.

Indian Cities: Beyond Data Reality

The data-driven approach in projects, policy formulation and filling the gap is a welcome move of the government. The use of ICTs in planning, policy formulation and capturing the lived reality of everyday life could prove a milestone in urban development. With the help of technology, data can be captured in real-time. The necessities and importance of data can be visualised to release various indexes and draw comparable pictures on various issues and problems. It is argued that the notion of smart city utilised the concept of data to improve the living standards as well as to reach the desired sustainability. Using accurate and correct data in smart city projects will reduce the cost and time and achieve the required result with the active engagement of their citizens (Nuaimi et al. 2015). The Mission also focused on a similar

approach to creating smart cities connected with technology, based on data inputs, to generate data and share among various stakeholders. Despite having an approach to solve the problems of cities and convert them into liveable and 'connected cities', the way data is captured, it produces a fragmented picture of Indian cities. Most of the data captured are not in a structured format, as data is compiled from many different sources and formats. The available data is in unstructured formats which make it too hard to organize and categorize.

The situation becomes worse when data is not collected correctly with a holistic approach, as we discussed in an earlier section about water. Observing the Indian cities and towns and going through newspapers and various other reports, speaks of another story of water. Starting from the western Himalayan cities of India, there are two towns selected for the Mission. One is the capital city (Shimla), and the other is Dharamshala (the state's second capital). The EoLI ranks Shimla in 1st place and Dharamshala in 37th rank among 62 cities in the less than million city categories. Even Shimla and Dharamshala received more or less similar scores in quality-of-life pillars 53.05 and 53.58. The hard reality is that both cities have a scarcity of water (EoLI 2021:36). In May 2018, various national newspapers, local editions and e-papers reported an acute water crisis in Shimla (Kshitij 2018). The print and electronic media mentioned various reasons for the water shortage. As an ethnographer and spending several years in Shimla, the reality is not about demand and supply. It is more about the working of institutions, blurred responsibilities, and organic growth of Indian cities. The water journey does not only start from the source to tap. In between, it has many processes to complete its journey. First and foremost is the data of total households, estimated family size, availability of water sources, storage capacity, consumption per person, treatment plant, networks of pipes, water connections—commercial and domestic, leakages issues, illegal connection, and payment of bills. After crossing all these processes, water reaches the tap and becomes a parameter of quality of life. Similarly, Dharamshala also has the same water supply situation where water comes only for a few hours a day. By focusing on the condition of water and its quality, the paper argues that city institutions do not have the practice of grounded exercise to collect data, process it and utilize it for project formulation. Equivalently, in 2019 one of the metropolitan cities of India ran out of water (Guntoju et al. 2019). The paper's objective is not to highlight the water crises but to show a holistic and realistic picture of Indian cities.

The core objective of EoLI is to provide information to citizens about their city on various parameters and the kind of possibility it creates for improvement. It will also start a dialogue between citizens and city institutions and the cities to share the learning. This critical dialogue depends on the quality of data while constructing the index. It is found that indexes depend on the data supplied by the cities and other secondary sources. Moreover, for indicators, the score depends on the availability of data with cities. In several

indicators, such as water, toilets, there is no other way to verify the supplied data. The illegal colonies, non-notified slums, and "socionatural relation" with city infrastructure (Anand 2011), "abject" population of the city (Anand 2012) included or not included is not clear in given data. Importantly, the quality of water indicators does not correspond to the mechanism deployed for water purification at the institute or household level. The report of NSSO (2018) shows that 12.1 per cent of urban households rely on bottled water, and households adopt different techniques for water purification, such as 20.8 per cent use electric water purifiers and 5.5 per cent use a non-electric purifier. Similarly, 11.1 per cent boil the water[1] for purification; 0.3 per cent use chemically treated with bleach or chlorine tablets purified water; 9.4 per cent filter with cloth, and 1.5 per cent adopt other methods for water purification. These figures are alarming and question the quality of water provided by city institutions to households. Even EoLI does not incorporate such parameters. A recent report on India's residential water purifier market noted that in 2019 residential water purifier market has been valued at $391.4 million. By 2024, it will reach $818 million. Individual households rely on the market mechanism for quality and purifying water (TechSci Research 2019). While calculating water availability, daily demand, water pressure, duration, pipe widths are essential aspects that give a holistic picture beyond the data collected by city institutions and other departments.

Conclusion

After the nine years of launching of the Mission, it is still debatable what entails smart and how Indian cities are becoming smart. We have argued that the Mission's central promise— evidence-based and data-driven transformation— is repeatedly undermined by the foundational absence of reliable, comprehensive, and comparable data. This gap is not merely a lack of information but leads us to the institutional and episteme of Indian municipalities: lack of the culture, capacity, and incentives to gather and mobilize data as an infrastructure for improving urban governance.

While discourses of smartness celebrate technological efficiency yet this paper has shown how smart solutions requiring smart knowledge is undermined in the Mission. This lack of data is not only fragmented and outdated but technological interventions neither resolve everyday issues nor fulfill the promises of planning. This ultimately makes the aspirational planning narrative a rhetoric. The fundamental question remains unanswered, and debates revolve around different aspects and conjectures of future smart cities. It was not the first time that city planners, policymakers, administrators and government have made their vision to transform the Indian cities. It was also evident in past urban policies and programs also have claims toward better cities, good governance, and infrastructure improvements that boost the economies. It is argued, and this paper is also located in understanding the

"disjunctions", already evident in past urban public policy mistakes, between the real needs and an unrealistic belief in the city's ability to suddenly become smart (Mukhopadhyay 2015; Somvanshi 2016). Planners, policymakers, and administrators have always been looking for solutions that have long-term positive effects. Interestingly, the intensity of urban issues and problems has been increasing. Among a wide range of approaches, often failed, that have been evolving for the past several decades, the new approach that has become extremely popular among policymakers, planners and administrators is the "fetishisation of technological" (Harvey 2003) solution for urban problems. Smart city has become an aspirational term, where it makes data and technology workable. It is noted that cities in India do not have a culture of data and more appropriately resources or capacity to collect data, analyse and select appropriate data sets for policy formulation and solution. It is noted that city institutions collect the data and analyse it through research institutes and consultancy services. This may be a complex and overwhelming process for cities without technological expertise in data handling to offer a solution and work on it.

This paper has pointed to the lack of a culture of data that is very much required for practical needs and for working on urban projects and knowledge. At the end, the question remains: what do Indian cities achieve from the Mission except for creating one more layer of failed planning? The data-driven approach is a welcome move that can provide solutions for urban problems with technological inputs. Without correct and strategic inputs, technological solutions could not achieve the desired goal as well as the quality of life and city of tomorrow's vision. In this article, we have argued that urban transformation programs and schemes, especially Mission, have the potential and vision to make Indian cities more livable and competitive for the economy's growth. We suggest that if the cities imagine providing digital technological solutions, the cities need to collect fresh and comprehensive information. A comprehensive baseline survey on all the urban amenities along with qualitative and quantitative parameters is required (See Singh and Upadhyaya 2023). The idea of economies of scale, network effect and smart urbanism can be achieved only when the city formulates various projects based on correct input data. And this data shall speak of the actual conditions and the lived realities. The SCM has the capacity to overcome everyday urban struggles of people and enhance the quality of services, infrastructure and quality of life of the people. However, without the baseline information, the projects under the Mission fail to deliver on the promises of smart cities and may remain rhetorical only.

Notes

1 The concept of network society was elaborated by Manual Castells in his book "The Rise of Network society". The network society is a society where social activities and structure are organized around the interconnected electronically processed information networks. The network society gives rise to new economic and social

dynamics in the era of information technology. For Castells networks have become an essential feature of modern society. In network society not only, technology play a significant role, but it is economic, political and cultural and social aspects that all combined create a network society (Castells 2010:501-502).

2 Ease of Living Index 2019, Assessment framework by Ministry of Housing and Urban Affair, Government of India mentioned in Secretary MoHUA message: cities and towns of Indian are in a good position to leverage the 'city as a platform concept' for the transformation of the economy and the society. https://livabilitystore175634-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/public/docs/EoL_Methodology.pdf (accessed on 8 June 2021).

3 MoHUA has developed a data bank of 100 smart cities of India. The objective of this initiative is engaging communities through open data and data can be utilized to solve everyday problems as mentioned on the website. The data on various cities in different categories are available free from this platform. https://smartcities.data.gov.in/(accessed on 8 June 2021).

3 Criteria for applying commercial water connection

4 Criteria for applying commercial water connection

https://services.india.gov.in/service/detail/apply-for-commercial-water-connection (accessed on 8 June 2021).

5 Bottle water includes water packed in bottles, jars, pouches, and similar containers. The bottled water is generally considered safe for drinking as it contains certain safety standards. Tap water supplied through pipes, and well water stored in bottles in households for their own convenience, was not treated as bottled water (NSSO 2018:13).

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MODERN WAVES, ENDURING TRADITIONS AMONG ALAPPUZHA'S FISHERFOLK

Abstract

The coastal communities of Alappuzha occupy a unique space where rapid technological interventions in fisheries intersect with long-standing cultural practices rooted in the sea. While mechanised craft, market-led production, and expanding marine infrastructure have reshaped livelihood patterns, elements of tradition—ranging from indigenous knowledge of tides and seasons to social rituals, kinship networks, and women's invisible labour—continue to endure. This study examines how Alappuzha's fisherfolk negotiate continuity and change in the context of shifting economic pressures, climate variability, and generational aspirations. Drawing from secondary literature, community narratives and policy perspectives, the paper traces the resilience of artisanal skill, collective identity, religious customs and coastal oral traditions even as modern waves reshape occupation, mobility, and social relations. The article argues that sustaining this dynamic cultural landscape requires recognising traditional knowledge as a living resource, fostering community agency in coastal governance, and supporting heritage-informed livelihood strategies. Rather than a narrative of loss alone, the work highlights the coexistence of adaptation and resilience, illustrating how modernity reconfigures—yet does not erase—the cultural rhythms of Alappuzha's fisherfolk.

Keywords: *Fisherman Community, Ethnic Socio-Cultural Life, Cultural Norms, Traditional Fishing Practices, Transforming Women's Role, Patriarchal Culture*

Introduction

Alappuzha's connection with the sea is ancient, with evidence suggesting active fishing settlements along its coast even prior to the first century AD. The particular geography of the district – bounded by the Arabian Sea on the west and the vast Vembanad Lake system inland – has made it a prosperous centre of marine and inland fisheries in Kerala, till date. For generations fisherfolk here have depended on hands-on workmanship, with wooden boats, hand-crafted nets, hooks and lines, and locally acquired

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navigational skills based on seasonal wind patterns, currents, and the behaviour of marine species. Their specialized knowledge of tides, monsoon cycles, lunar rhythms, and fish migration has become not just vocational skill but an inherited cultural capital that informed decision-making, ensured safety at sea, and organized community economies and market exchanges.

With the advancement of science and modern technology, however, the nature of fishing in Alappuzha has been undergoing a profound transformation. Satellite-based Ocean State Forecasts, Potential Fishing Zone advisories, GPS-enabled navigation and motorised vessels enable fishers to travel farther and harvest deeper waters than before. While these innovations have improved efficiency, they have also intensified fishing effort, contributing to resource depletion, ecological pressure, and uncertainties in marine livelihoods. As younger generations gravitate toward mechanised practices and alternative employment, the ancestral knowledge accumulated over centuries faces gradual erosion. What once thrived as oral tradition—transmitted through experience, apprenticeship, and everyday practice—is now at risk of fading with the passing of elder fishers and the shrinking of artisanal domains.

Historicising this corpus of traditional knowledge is therefore crucial for understanding how the fisher community's dependence on aquatic resources has evolved, and how cultural memory interfaces with modern coastal realities. Such reflection not only foregrounds the resilience of Alappuzha's fishing heritage but also helps identify sustainable pathways that balance technological advancement with ecological stewardship and cultural continuity.

Literature Review and Theoretical Background

Fishing communities along the Kerala coast have been widely studied from historical, socio-economic, ecological and anthropological perspectives, with particular attention to their artisanal knowledge systems and adaptive strategies. Early documentation of Kerala's coastal fisheries portrayed them as indigenous, community-embedded economies grounded in shared labour, customary gear, and intergenerational knowledge transmission (James et al. 2015: 135). Later works elaborated on the craft–gear complexes unique to the region and their ecological specificity (Ram 1990: 563). Studies from the 1970s onward consistently highlighted the artisanal character of fishing communities, their dependence on nearshore resources, and their distinctive folk-ecological observations of currents, winds, monsoon cycles and fish movements (Joseph and Jayaprakash 2003: 27; Shyam and Antony 2013: 8).

The introduction of mechanised craft and trawlers after the 1950s is widely recognised as a transformative moment in Kerala's marine economy (James et al. 2015: 135). Mechanisation shortened fishing time, increased spatial reach, and altered market structures, but also generated conflict over access

to inshore waters (Reiss et al. 2009: 370). Scholars agree that technological intensification increased productivity while simultaneously accelerating resource pressure and seasonal income instability. Studies from Alappuzha in particular noted that motorisation weakened beach-based production relations and reconfigured labour-sharing arrangements (Joseph and Jayaprakash 2003: 27).

Gender has emerged as a significant analytical dimension in recent literature. While women historically dominated post-harvest processing, drying, auctioning and market circulation, mechanisation and harbour-based landings displaced their labour from the visible economy (Pratheesh et al. 2024: 112). Studies record a subtle but persistent marginalisation through reduced access to catch, shrinking space in auction sheds, and undervaluation of domestic–reproductive labour (Santha 2008: 427; Joseph and Jayaprakash 2003: 27). Gendered ethnographies from Alappuzha demonstrate that women continue to anchor cultural transmission, yet their ecological knowledge is under-documented and policy-invisible (Pratheesh 2021: 33; Pratheesh et al. 2024: 112).

Parallel scholarship foregrounds traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) as a dynamic system shaped through lived experience rather than codified science. Fishermen interpret seascapes through sensory cues, cloud patterns, lunar phases and sound rhythms—knowledge refined by risk and apprenticeship. However, authors warn that TEK transmission is weakening as elders fade from active fishing, youth migrate to wage sectors, and technological information replaces experiential navigation (Reiss et al. 2009: 370). Remote sensing and Potential Fishing Zone advisories improve efficiency, but may also reduce dependence on inherited knowledge, distancing younger fishers from cultural memory.

Environmental research highlights that climate variability and coastal erosion intensify livelihood precarity. Shoreline retreat in Kerala threatens not only housing and landing spaces but also cultural sites where ritual, auction, craft-making and communal learning occur (Stock et al. 2017: E1604). Alappuzha's mudbank phenomenon, once a natural refuge supporting monsoon fishing, is becoming increasingly unpredictable, altering fishing calendars and species composition (Noujas and Thomas 2015: 551). These changes compound existing vulnerabilities such as debt, seasonal unemployment and overfishing-driven catch decline (Venkataraman and Raghunathan 2015: 318).

Theoretical treatments draw on political ecology, socio-technical transition theory and resilience thinking. Political ecology explains how mechanisation, capital inflow and policy regimes reshape power relations, often privileging mechanised groups and displacing artisanal practices (Samuel 1998: 89). Socio-technical transition frameworks show how new technologies reorder institutions, work rhythms and skill hierarchies, creating hybridised knowledge

ecologies rather than linear replacement (Noujas and Thomas 2015: 551). Resilience theory positions TEK as a sociocultural buffer that enhances adaptive capacity under uncertainty (Pradhan 1956: 160).

Despite extensive literature, a clear research gap persists. Most studies examine mechanisation, gender, climate stress, or knowledge erosion separately; few synthesise them to understand how modernity simultaneously challenges and coexists with tradition within a specific cultural landscape such as Alappuzha. Existing works describe *what is changing*, yet there remains limited inquiry into *how traditional knowledge persists, transforms or hybridises* under satellite forecasting, mobile apps, shifting market geographies and new generational aspirations. There is also a lack of documentation of oral memory, ritual ecology, idioms, and place-based identities that form the intangible heritage of the coast.

The present study addresses this gap by integrating historical knowledge, contemporary techno-economic pressures, and cultural resilience to examine how "modern waves" intersect with "enduring traditions" among Alappuzha's fisherfolk. By approaching TEK, gender relations, livelihood transitions and cultural symbolism as convergent rather than isolated domains, this research contributes to the understanding of continuity through change and highlights why preserving knowledge heritage is vital for sustainable fisheries governance and coastal policy in Kerala.

Methodology

This study adopts an ethnographic research design to explore the ethnic, socio-cultural, and knowledge systems of the sea fisherfolk community in Alappuzha, Kerala. Ethnography is employed as the primary approach owing to its capacity to capture lived experience, symbolic practices, and tacit knowledge embedded in everyday life. The focus of the research was to understand traditional maritime knowledge, social structures, cultural values, belief systems, gender relations, and livelihood dynamics within the coastal settlements. Fieldwork was conducted continuously over a period of six months, enabling prolonged immersion and establishing rapport with residents, which is critical for accessing deeper layers of cultural meaning and community narratives.

Data were generated through multiple qualitative techniques: (i) participant and non-participant ethnographic observation of fishing activities, rituals, community gatherings, auction spaces, and household life; (ii) semi-structured and structured interviews with active fishermen, elderly knowledge-holders, women involved in post-harvest work, youth, boat owners, and traditional leaders; and (iii) focus group discussions (FGDs) with fisher families, cooperative members, market agents, and women's groups. In total, interviews and interactions involved a diverse sample of respondents across age,

occupation, and gender categories, allowing for triangulation of perspectives. Informal conversations, life histories, fishing diaries, and field notes were used to supplement formal interviews and capture nuanced interpretations of the sea, work rhythms, risk, spirituality, and community memory.

Data were recorded through audio documentation, field notebooks, and digital archiving where consent permitted. All participants were informed of the purpose of the research, and ethical confidentiality standards were maintained. Thematic analysis was used to code data inductively, generating patterns around cultural traditions, resource knowledge, social institutions, gendered work distribution, and contemporary transitions under technological and environmental change. The combination of observation-based insights with narrative testimonies provided evidentiary grounding to interpret how tradition persists, adapts, or reshapes within modern fisheries.

The findings of this study are presented across four thematic sections: 'Fishermen's Community – The Socio-Cultural Chronicle', which introduces the historical foundations and structural organisation of the community; 'Fishermen's Community and Their Traditional Knowledge', which discusses artisanal skills, oral ecological knowledge, and inherited maritime practices; 'Fishing Villages and Customary Ethnic Beliefs', which analyses religious values, vernacular beliefs, rituals, and community ethics; and 'Transforming Women's Roles', which examines gendered participation, shifting labour divisions, and emerging roles of women in post-harvest and cultural domains. Together, these sections allow the research to illuminate how cultural continuity and modern waves coexist in Alappuzha's coastal life, offering a grounded understanding of community resilience amidst ecological and economic challenges.

Ethnic and Social Landscape of Alappuzha's Fishing Communities

The sea fishing communities of Alappuzha constitute one of Kerala's oldest maritime cultural groups, with historical evidence of marine occupation tracing back centuries. Scholars have extensively examined Kerala's fisheries and coastal livelihoods, though research largely focused on techno-economic, labour, and livelihood dimensions, while cultural and ethnological realities received relatively less systematic attention (Houtart and Nayak 1988: 67; Kurien 1985: A75). Literary writings in Malayalam have depicted fisher life symbolically, yet sociological and anthropological works offer deeper insights into community organisation, belief systems, and occupational identity.

Traditional fishermen in Alappuzha have long engaged in seasonal marine fishing between October and May, with inland backwater fishing occurring year-round. Approximately one-fourth of the coastal population depends directly on fishing, with artisanal knowledge, inherited gear systems, and orally transmitted sea-skills defining community identity. Caste and religious identities intersect strongly with occupational identity in Kerala's

coastal belt. While academic terminology often uses *fisherfolk*, *coastal people*, *Mukkuvars*, *Latin Catholics*, or *Dheevaras* interchangeably, these labels encompass distinct historical and cultural lineages (James et al. 2015: 135. The broad ethnic cluster historically referred to as *Dheevara/Araya* comprises endogamous subgroups such as Araya, Mukkuva, Mogeyar, Valan, Parava and Pattana, with the first three traditionally oriented to marine fishing and the latter to inland waters (Alex 2018: 44).

Among sea-oriented groups, the *Latin Catholic Mukkuva* community is particularly significant in Alappuzha, shaped by Portuguese missionary influence from the 16th century onward (Koilparampil 2001: 340; Ashni and Santhosh 2019: 192). The term *Mukkuva*—formerly used for all fishermen regardless of religion—today largely denotes Christian coastal groups, while Hindu fishermen are associated with the *Dheevara* fold and Muslim fishermen with the historic *Marikkar/Pooislan* communities (Fuller 1976: 56). Religious affiliations continue to influence social organisation, kinship, marriage, ritual, and coastal space-use, even as occupational practices remain largely shared across communities. Catholic fishermen show higher integration into cooperative structures and modernised fisheries, while Dheevara groups retain stronger artisanal orientations, though overlaps persist.

Historically, fisher settlements developed around beaches, estuaries, and backwaters, forming tightly knit neighbourhoods where labour, ritual, and resource sharing enforced collective survival. Sangam literature refers to the *Neythal tinai*—the maritime geo-cultural region inhabited by *Umanar* (seafarers)—indicating the antiquity of coastal cultural systems in South India (Ferro-Luzzi 1992: 318). Over centuries, caste, faith, occupational specialisation, and coastal ecology co-evolved to shape a distinct socio-cultural world where sea-based labour, community festivals, folk beliefs, and moral codes structured daily life.

Today, the fishermen community continues to represent a culturally cohesive society grounded in traditional knowledge and collective labour relations, although modernisation and socio-economic change increasingly influence aspirations, identity, and occupational trajectories. This cultural foundation offers the backdrop for understanding knowledge practices, village life, ritual traditions, and contemporary transformations, which are elaborated in the subsequent sections.

Coastal Villages and Ethnic Belief Systems

The coastal belt of Alappuzha comprises several traditional fishing settlements, including Valiyazheekal, Tharayilkadavu, Kallikkadu, Arattupuzha, Pathiyankara, Thrikkunnapuzha, Pallana, Tuttappally, Punthala, Purakkad, Ambalapuzha, Neerkunnam, Punnapra, Vadakkal, Kanjiramchira, Thumboli, Chethy, Chennaveli, Arthunkal, Thaikkal, Ottamassery, Azhikkal

and Pallithodu. Oral narratives within these communities trace their ancestry to ancient seafaring groups and mythic origins, often citing references from the *Matsya Purana*, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* as cultural legitimacy for an age-old maritime occupation (Mathur 1995: 112). These textual memories reinforce a belief that fishing is not merely an economic pursuit but a divinely ordained vocation embedded in cosmic order.

Among Latin Catholic fisherfolk, occupational identity is also rooted in Biblical tradition, particularly the New Testament accounts where Christ calls fishermen as his disciples (Matthew 4:18–22; Mark 1:16–20; Luke 5:2–11; John 1:40–42). This association shapes religious cosmology wherein fortunes at sea, abundance or scarcity of fish, and even accidents are perceived as expressions of divine will. Scriptural retellings, such as Jesus and Simon Peter's miraculous catch, circulate widely in coastal sermons and catechism narratives, reinforcing faith-based interpretations of marine life (Pratheesh et al. 2024: 112).

Ethnographic studies note that both Hindu Dheevara and Latin Catholic Mukkuva communities conceptualize the sea as *Kadalamma* (Mother Sea), a life-giving deity who nourishes yet must be respected (Udayabhanu 1990: 145). Seawater is therefore treated as sacred and used ritually during birth, death and healing practices. Hindu fisher settlements often maintain temples dedicated to *Kali* or sea goddesses along the shoreline, while Latin Catholic villages are structured around the church, with Mary venerated as protector of men at sea. Ritual interventions—such as priests blessing the coast and sprinkling holy water during lean seasons—reflect belief that divine mediation influences fish availability (Samuel 1998: 89).

Community festivals further reinforce collective belonging. *Ponkala*, an important ritual among Hindu fisherwomen, involves preparing sweet rice offerings to *Kadalamma* as a plea for prosperity and safe voyages. The ritual stresses purity norms and associates' women's chastity with men's safety at sea (Bhagyalekshmi 2019: 250). Belief in omens, sea spirits and planetary alignments remains integral to decisions on departure, direction and anticipated catch. Stars, winds and tidal cues are interpreted symbolically alongside practical knowledge, forming a hybrid epistemology of faith and experience.

These belief systems illuminate how coastal worldviews merge ecology with cosmology. Religion, myth, and ritual operate not as peripheral customs but as structuring forces that guide risk perception, moral conduct and economic rhythm. The next section examines how these belief-centred traditions intersect with everyday fishing knowledge, passed primarily through oral transmission and experiential learning within families and crew networks.

Indigenous Marine Knowledge and Ecological Practices

Traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) among Alappuzha's fisherfolk

represents a cumulative body of observations, skills, and belief-governed heuristics transmitted orally across generations. Unlike codified scientific models, this knowledge emerges from lived experience in the sea and is sustained through apprenticeship, storytelling, and repeated engagement with the marine environment. Although contemporary technologies such as GPS, PFZ advisories and satellite forecasting are increasingly used, TEK continues to shape decisions on timing, navigation, net deployment, fish processing, and safety, demonstrating that modern adaptation does not erase traditional cognitive systems but coexists with them.

Spatial knowledge of fishing grounds is historically expressed through indigenous measurement terms rather than nautical standards. Distance and depth are estimated through *maaru* (approximately 1.5 m) and *muduth / murdh* using weighted twine lines. This non-instrumental method enables quick habitat estimation even in rough seas. Fishermen also classify seawater by colour, temperature, turbidity, smell, and dissolved sediments—an embodied oceanography that anticipates shoals, plankton presence, or seabed disturbance long before instrumental detection (Agnew and Chipeta 1979: 350; Kurien 1985: A75).

Wind and seasonal patterns constitute another core knowledge domain. Fishermen distinguish winds by direction, intensity, and sensory qualities—*karakkaattu* (easterly), *kadalkkaattu / mekkaatu* (westerly), *thengarakattu, vadarakattu, thembrayikattu,* etc.—many tied to Malayalam months and monsoon cycles. Certain winds are believed to improve catches, while others warn of rough seas. Traditional calendars link lunar phases to spawning migrations: catches peak near new moon and decline during full moon due to light interference (Pratheesh et al. 2024: 112). Fishers also recognise celestial cues—stars like *Muzhakkol, Perumalayan, Saptarshi, Koottu Nakshathram*—to navigate at night, estimate time offshore, and identify fishing peaks. Such knowledge forms a cognitive navigation system developed long before radar-based aids (Raju et al. 2016: 40).

Local ecological interpretation extends to animal behaviour, cloud formations, air odour and surface bubbles as early warnings of storms or seabed shifts. Sea snakes, worms and unusual turbidity are read as disturbance indicators; thick bubble clusters during summer signal mud bottom cracking, hinting at poor fishing conditions (Stock et al. 2017: E1604). Similarly, the seasonal appearance of *Kavaru*—bright bioluminescent shoal reflection—guides sardine and mackerel targeting (Pradhan 1956: 150). This capacity to convert environmental signs into actionable decisions demonstrates a refined ecosystem-literacy built outside formal science (Florence and Pratheesh 2024: 113).

Knowledge further extends to processing, preservation, nutrition and folk therapeutics. Sun drying, salting, sand storage and *padam* drying on coir mats were historically managed by women, reflecting gendered expertise in

post-harvest ecology (Mahish 2015: 37; Pratheesh and Reema 2024: 10504). Fish oils, dried seahorses, shark cartilage and specific species are believed to cure asthma, rheumatism and respiratory ailments, while certain fish are avoided for perceived ill-effects (Jayaprakash 2004: 22). These practices reveal a medicinal bio-culture where food, ecology and healing converge (Ashok et al. 2021: 50).

Ritual still interlaces TEK: *Kazhcha veppu*, *muttarukkal*, sea blessings, and prayer before voyage frame fishing as moral engagement with *Kadalamma*, shaping risk ethics and community solidarity. Seasonal abstention during *Karkidakkam* illustrates ecological prudence embedded in belief rather than regulation. The fishermen's interpretive system thus functions simultaneously as a knowledge archive and a moral compass that governs sustainable behaviour.

Taken together, TEK in Alappuzha is not a static relic but an adaptable knowledge system negotiated in dialogue with modern tools. This study argues that as climate pressures intensify, traditional forecasting, lunar navigation and ecological sensing may serve as valuable complements to scientific models—particularly where technology fails or access is limited. Preserving this knowledge is therefore crucial not merely for cultural continuity but as a living resource for future marine governance.

Contemporary Transformations and Adaptive Challenges

The contemporary fishing landscape of Alappuzha reveals a dynamic interplay of technological modernisation, climate-driven uncertainties, and shifting socio-economic aspirations. While traditional ecological knowledge continues to guide seasonal rhythms and moral frameworks of the fisherfolk, rapid mechanisation and market-oriented fishing have reconfigured livelihood structures and resource relations. The motorisation of crafts since the 1980s, followed by the widespread use of mechanised trawlers, GPS navigation, fish finders, and satellite-based Potential Fishing Zone advisories, significantly altered fishing effort and catch distribution (Kurien 1985: A75). Government-introduced digital forecast systems and remote sensing tools enabled fishers to travel deeper into the sea, but simultaneously increased fuel dependency and financial risk, disproportionately affecting artisanal boat owners (Florence and Pratheesh 2024: 113). Consequently, fishing shifted from a subsistence–ritual economy to a competitive, capital-intensive occupation, often governed by middlemen and auction networks that influence price realisation.

Environmental degradation intensifies these pressures. Coastal erosion, rising sea surface temperature, erratic monsoon patterns, and depletion of nearshore stocks have been repeatedly reported across Kerala's coast (Teixeira et al. 2013: 245). Artisanal fishers in Alappuzha express concerns over declining availability of sardines, mackerel, and anchovies—species once abundant in

shallow waters—forcing longer voyages and increased operational costs. Frequent storm surges, cyclones, and unpredictable winds interrupt fishing days, and degradation of breeding grounds has reduced spawning biomass (Caddy and Bakun 1994: 205). The community interprets these shifts through both scientific and cultural lenses: for elders, the anger of *Kadalamma* (Sea Mother) symbolises ecological imbalance, while younger fishers attribute it to trawling, climate change, and over-extraction.

Socio-economic transitions are equally profound. Traditional coir-based net making and fish processing—once a stronghold of women's economic agency—have declined due to factory-made nets, ice storage, mechanised dryers, and export-oriented supply chains (Ram 1990: 563; Pratheesh 2021:189). Wage volatility created precarity, and while the state offers welfare pensions, insurance, and kerosene subsidies, access remains uneven and bureaucratically mediated (Mahish 2015: 38; Pratheesh 2025: 39). Youth increasingly seek alternate employment in Gulf migration, tourism, loading work, or private logistics. Older generations perceive this shift as a cultural rupture, weakening intergenerational knowledge transfer and community cohesion. Festivals like *Ponkala* and rituals of seawater consecration continue, but participation among younger men shows visible decline, signalling tension between cultural continuity and modern livelihood rationalities.

Gender relations reflect layered transformations. Women historically dominated post-harvest activities—sorting, drying, auctioning, and door-to-door retail (Shyam and Antony 2013: 8)—but mechanised landing centres, male-dominated auction yards, and wholesalers have marginalised their labour presence. Yet, women continue to hold symbolic authority in ritual spaces, family budgeting, and community decision-making. Recent microcredit collectives and self-help groups enable financial autonomy, though their bargaining power in the value chain remains limited. The shift in women's position demonstrates the complexity of change—not simply loss, but re-negotiation of visibility and agency.

These transformations place the community at a critical threshold: between heritage-based identity and survival-driven modern adaptation. Fishers innovate by blending ancestral weather reading with PFZ forecasts; they install outboard engines but continue to worship sea spirits; they digitise auctions but still rely on kinship networks. The resilience of Alappuzha's fisherfolk thus lies in hybridity—an adaptive cultural ecology where traditional knowledge interacts with technological modernity, neither disappearing nor remaining static, but evolving as lived practice. Understanding this transition is crucial for policy, as ensuring sustainability today requires supporting both ecological conservation and cultural continuity. The segment that follows discusses the implications of this hybrid transformation and situates Alappuzha's experience within broader debates on coastal resilience and community-based sustainability frameworks.

Transforming Women's Role

The study reveals that women in the Alappuzha Sea fishermen community are crucial in their community's livelihood, performing tasks like fish processing, marketing, and household management. They also preserve the community's cultural heritage. However, they face challenges like patriarchal norms and gender-based discrimination, which restrict their access to education, employment, and decision-making power. The belief that fishermen returned home safe every day is based on subjugation of women, rather than religious sentiments. Women in fishing hamlets are treated as second-class citizens, and losing their chastity becomes the talk of the seashore, leading to unfaithfulness and a direct relationship between custom and tradition. These ideas exacerbate inequality and perpetuate gender-based discrimination.

Traditional occupations for women included fish marketing (door-to-door sale and market place sale) and preserving fish, including sun drying, dry salting, and wet salting. The unpredictability of marine resources does not always provide fishing families with enough cash to live comfortably (Hapke 2001: 1105). Poverty and economic constraints have led many women from poor rural households to labour outside the home, engaging in a variety of economic activities while performing traditional domestic tasks. In these fishing villages, women were traditionally viewed as men's subordinates, restricted to familial obligations, and prohibited from going fishing or operating fishing boats.

The well-known Malayalam novel "Chemmeen," in which the protagonist Karuthamma falls in love with Pareekutty, the son of a wealthy merchant, effectively explores the myth and social realities surrounding Mukkuva (fishermen's wives). Chakki, her mother, cautions her against believing the myth of chastity, which is exclusive to women in cultures where men predominate. After internalizing this, Karuthamma weds Palani, an orphan, in spite of protests. But in her new coastal community, Karuthamma is not accepted, and Palani has unpleasant encounters and is not allowed to fish with fellow fishermen. Karutama's adulterous relationship resulted in the sea goddess casting Palani into the depths of the ocean as a punishment. By the time the book concludes, Palani has defeated the storm and both Karuthamma and Pareekutti are dead. This narrative describes the hardships that women from the fishermen section suffered in the past (Houtart and Nayak 1988: 67).

In short, from preharvest to harvesting, women are essential to all aspects of fishing. They create and repair nets, make hooks and baits, and engage in netting, clam and mussel harvesting, seaweed gathering, and pearl diving, among other tasks. However, women are typically only permitted to engage in household fishing activities and are not permitted to engage in actual fishing operations that require going out to sea. Women in fisheries confront

significant challenges such as limited access to resources, limited influence on decision-making processes, and a lack of adequate marketing and processing infrastructure. The patriarchal restrictions in their daily lives, including limited access to education, restricted mobility, limited economic opportunities, and gender-based discrimination (Kurien 1985: A75). Many drop out of school early to help with household chores and childcare. They often rely on their husbands or families for financial support and experience violence, harassment, and marginalization.

However, within the past few decades, there have been some changes to the cultural and socioeconomic contexts. This study reveals that women in Kerala's fishermen communities are increasingly taking on new roles in the fishing industry, including increased participation in fishing activities, emerging roles in the community, and economic empowerment. Factors driving this change include economic necessity, increased access to education and training, government initiatives promoting women's empowerment, and changing social norms. However, women still face challenges such as patriarchal norms, lack of infrastructure, and limited access to credit.

Even though, K.C. Rekha, commonly known as Rekha Karthikeyan, is a 45-year-old fisherwoman from Kerala, India, and the first woman in the country to be granted a license to fish in the deep sea. She started fishing when her husband's two employees quit and he couldn't afford to pay them. Rekha has faced obstacles such as community hostility, health concerns, and the prospect of an unproductive career. She has garnered hundreds of awards and has inspired students and peers. However, the sea took her boat, giving her pain. The pair sails 20-30 nautical miles without modern navigation technology or life jackets, relying solely on traditional wisdom and faith in the sea goddess Kadalama.

Among the 53.7% of women in the fishing community, 99% now have matriculation, 84% have higher secondary education, and 43.8% have university education. In terms of employment, conventional fishing-related activities are now the least popular among the new generation of female of this community. After completing a decent education, they favour government service, and their share of the police department, revenue, civil supplies, education, nursing, and other service sectors is growing. Economic necessity drives women to take on new roles in the fishing industry, while education and training enable them to acquire new skills. Government initiatives also provide opportunities for women to take on new roles. Changing social norms and attitudes towards women's roles in the community have also enabled women to take on new roles and participate in the industry. To address these challenges, the study recommends promoting women's empowerment, addressing patriarchal norms, prioritizing infrastructure development, and providing access to credit. This will help women gain access to education, training, and credit, enabling them to invest in their businesses and participate in the fishing industry.

Discussion

The ethnographic and historical evidence from Alappuzha's fisherfolk reveals a dynamic socio-ecological system in which traditional knowledge, cultural identity, and livelihood practices interact with modern technologies, market pressures, and environmental change. This section synthesises these findings and situates them within wider scholarly debates on coastal resilience, hybrid knowledge systems, and the transformation of traditional communities under globalising forces.

The persistence of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) demonstrates that knowledge embedded in experience, spirituality, and collective memory continues to anchor fishing practices, despite the increasing penetration of scientific tools and technological modernisation. Studies across the Indian Ocean (James et al. 2015: 134) have shown that TEK forms the intellectual and moral foundation of artisanal fishing, shaping risk perception, cooperation, and seasonal rhythms. The Alappuzha case reinforces this argument: TEK is not merely a residue of the past but an active component of decision-making, from reading winds and lunar phases to interpreting water colour, currents, and sea behaviour. These findings align with global scholarship on hybrid knowledge systems, which argues that resilience emerges not from abandoning tradition but from the adaptive blending of multiple knowledge domains (Ashni and Santhosh 2019: 191).

The study further demonstrates that technological modernisation—motorised crafts, digital navigational tools, PFZ advisories—has reconfigured spatial patterns of fishing, altered labour organisation, and intensified resource extraction. While these innovations enhance efficiency and reduce uncertainty, they also accelerate capital dependency and widen inequalities between mechanised and artisanal groups. Similar patterns are reported in Kerala (Islam and Klausen 1971: 150) and other coastal regions of the Global South, where technology often amplifies economic stratification, marginalises women from post-harvest roles, and redirects youth aspirations away from traditional occupations. In Alappuzha, modernisation is not experienced as linear progress but as a negotiated reality imbued with ambivalence, reflecting the global shift from subsistence-oriented to market-driven fisheries.

Environmental change emerges as a major destabilising factor, shaping both ecological outcomes and cultural perceptions. Declining fish stocks, erratic monsoon cycles, and coastal erosion corroborate broader scientific findings on climate impacts in the Arabian Sea (Venkataraman and Raghunathan 2015: 318). Yet, the fishers' interpretive frameworks—such as attributing ecological imbalance to violations of *Kadalamma's* moral order—demonstrate that environmental change is understood through multiple epistemic lenses. This alignment of spiritual ecology and scientific observation underscores the cultural dimensions of resilience. The ethnographic evidence suggests that

the community's adaptive capacity is strongest when cultural meanings remain intact, social networks are maintained, and traditional rituals continue to provide collective orientation.

Gender dynamics within this transformation reveal complex patterns of change. Although women's traditional roles in processing and marketing have been reduced by mechanised supply chains, their influence in ritual, household budgeting, and community networks remains significant. This resonates with feminist scholarship arguing that coastal transformations often reconfigure rather than eliminate women's agency (Ram 1990: 563). In Alappuzha, women's labour is increasingly shifting toward microcredit participation, cooperative activities, and household-level financial management, indicating the emergence of new forms of gendered resilience.

Taken together, these findings illustrate that the Alappuzha fishing community is not merely undergoing socio-economic transition but actively producing a hybrid cultural modernity—one that selectively incorporates technology, retains ritual practices, and negotiates market forces while continuing to draw meaning from ancestral knowledge. This supports theoretical positions within cultural ecology and resilience theory, which argue that traditional communities survive not by resisting change but by reorganising their social systems, symbolic structures, and economic practices in response to shifting environments (Samuel 1998: 89).

The research also highlights a critical epistemic gap: policy frameworks in Kerala continue to treat fishers either as beneficiaries of welfare schemes or as labour units within marine production, rather than as knowledge-bearing communities with sophisticated ecological reasoning. By documenting the intricacies of TEK and its contemporary relevance, this study argues for a reorientation toward community-centred governance models that integrate fisher knowledge into resource management, early warning systems, and sustainability planning. The Alappuzha case thus contributes to international debates on co-management, participatory coastal governance, and the recognition of local epistemologies in environmental policy.

Overall, the discussion demonstrates that the coexistence of modern waves and enduring traditions among Alappuzha's fisherfolk is not a contradiction but a defining feature of their adaptive identity. It positions the community as a resilient socio-ecological system, shaped by historical continuity, cultural coherence, and the creative negotiation of emerging challenges. The concluding section builds on this synthesis to outline pathways for sustaining both cultural heritage and ecological wellbeing in a rapidly changing coastal world.

Conclusion

The coastal fishing communities of Alappuzha represent one of Kerala's

most enduring socio-ecological systems, shaped by centuries of accumulated experience, ritual life, kinship organisation, and intimate engagement with the sea. This study illustrates that despite rapid technological, environmental, and economic transformations, the cultural and symbolic foundations of the fisherfolk remain resilient. Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), belief systems centred on *Kadalamma*, and collective practices that bind families and villages continue to influence daily fishing decisions, moral reasoning, and community solidarity. At the same time, modernisation—through motorisation, digital navigational tools, mechanised supply chains, and global market integration—has restructured labour relations, altered resource dependencies, and intensified vulnerability to environmental instability.

The study demonstrates that Alappuzha's fisherfolk are not passive subjects of change but active agents crafting a hybrid cultural modernity. They adapt by selectively incorporating technological innovations while retaining ritual and ecological wisdom, thereby sustaining both livelihood strategies and a sense of identity. Yet, this adaptive capacity is increasingly constrained by declining fish stocks, coastal erosion, erratic weather conditions, capital-intensive production systems, and uneven institutional support. These factors intensify household precarity and place disproportionate burdens on artisanal fishers who lack the financial buffers enjoyed by mechanised operators.

Gender dynamics reveal a similar duality of continuity and transformation. Women have historically anchored the post-harvest economy through drying, sorting, marketing, and managing household finances. Although mechanised landing centres and market consolidation have reduced their visibility within traditional value chains, women's roles are reconfiguring rather than disappearing. Increased participation in microcredit networks, cooperative activities, community leadership, and emerging economic niches points toward a shifting landscape of gendered resilience. Nevertheless, patriarchal norms, mobility restrictions, limited access to credit, and gendered occupational segregation persist, warranting targeted interventions.

The findings underscore the need to re-envision fisheries governance in Kerala by recognising fishers as knowledge holders rather than merely beneficiaries of welfare schemes. Integrating TEK into coastal planning, early warning systems, and resource management frameworks is essential for strengthening resilience. Policies must also address the ecological pressures arising from overfishing, habitat degradation, and climate-induced variability, aligning local livelihood needs with sustainability imperatives (Santha 2008: 427).

Policy interventions must recognise the fisherfolk of Alappuzha as knowledge-bearing communities whose traditional ecological expertise is essential for sustainable marine governance. Integrating this knowledge into formal decision-making processes—particularly in seasonal regulation, species

monitoring, and early warning systems—can significantly enhance adaptive capacity. Strengthening climate resilience through improved coastal protection, reinforced landing centres, and efficient dissemination of hazard warnings is equally crucial, given the increasing unpredictability of monsoon patterns and coastal erosion. Women's empowerment requires dedicated support through gender-sensitive credit access, market inclusion, mobility enhancement, and training opportunities that acknowledge their historical contributions while facilitating new economic roles. Parallel to this, youth engagement must be encouraged through vocational pathways in marine engineering, aquaculture, safety protocols, and coastal tourism, enabling them to diversify livelihoods without detaching from the maritime economy. Sustainable harvesting practices and habitat conservation—such as stricter monitoring of mechanised fleets, restoration of breeding grounds, and regulation of destructive gear—are integral to replenishing declining stocks. Finally, improving artisanal fishers' access to infrastructure and markets, including cold chain facilities, digital auction systems, and direct marketing channels, can help reduce dependency on intermediaries and stabilise incomes. Collectively, these measures can fortify the ecological, economic, and cultural resilience of Alappuzha's fishing community while supporting a balanced transition between traditional practices and contemporary challenges.

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SOCIO-CULTURAL MOBILITY OF '*DHANGAR*' NOMADIC COMMUNITY IN NANDED DISTRICT OF MAHARASHTRA

Abstract

This paper is an attempt to understand the changing belief systems and religious rituals of 'Dhangar' nomadic community in Nanded District of Maharashtra. This paper is referred to M. N. Srinivas's work on Sanskritization to understand the nature of socio-cultural changes in the lives of 'Dhangar' nomads. This community has gone through different cultural transformations. Their wandering tradition shaped their way of living with unique features. This community has experienced a nomadic, semi nomadic and settled lifestyle. They have been engaged in cattle rearing, seasonal agriculture and settled agriculture. Nowadays Dhangars have got some exposure to education, employment and development. They have started adopting the customs and religious rituals of upper castes by imitating the way of life of higher castes. The Dhangars are changing their traditional way of life and livelihood sources. The consumption of meat and animal sacrifice is considered as a religious practice of this community. But now some families are pushing themselves towards vegetarianism. This paper examines the socio-economic impacts of cultural mobility on the life of the Dhangar community in Maharashtra.

Keywords: *Social Change and Mobility, Sanskritization, Development, Vegetarianism.*

Introduction

The archaeological evidence and ethnographic data suggest that the contemporary *Dhangars* in Maharashtra are the result of more than one migration. They migrated from different parts of India such as Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan and Gujarat states. Hence their population exhibits cultural diversity. The majority of *Dhangar* population is located in rural areas of Maharashtra. The *Dhangar* nomads have been scattered among village communities as members of low ranking castes. They occupied lower positions in the social caste hierarchy. Their sub castes are divided on the basis of

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source of income. They live in villages or near the village with their herds and interact with sedentary people by agriculture related activities, trade and food exchanges. The major source income of *Dhangar* shepherds is by the sale of sheep and other products like milk, wool, and skin, manuring agricultural land by animals and shearing. The penning of sheep is considered a secondary source of income. The sheep keeping depends on availability of grazing land. There is a growing number of *Dhangar* nomads shifting to sedentary lifestyles and engaging in agricultural activities due to lack of accessibility of the grazing land. The *Dhangars* have taken up land cultivation activities and have become semi sedentary and some have become fully sedentary. Some of them have taken agriculture with animal husbandry. "A large area was opened for regular agriculture during the last 150 years which resulted in *Dhangar* becoming agriculturists in the course of time." (Rao 2003: 379) Some *Dhangar* nomad families are engaged in agriculture as they have become aware about the value of land property. Earlier the distinct identity of *Dhangar* nomads was maintained by their occupation of sheep herding. The sheep breeding was economically very attractive but now there is no profit in it. Some families find goat rearing more convenient than sheep rearing because of the higher demand of goat meat than the sheep meat. Some land owning communities also keep animals, but sometimes their animals are reared by *Dhangar* nomads in villages. If a family keeps animals like buffalo, cows, and goats, it is easy to manage these animals with agricultural work but it is very difficult to manage sheep herding and agriculture together. Hence *Dhangars* have to either lease their sheep to focus on agriculture or lease their land to focus on sheep herding. But both options have not contributed much to the improvements in their socio-economic conditions. There are some *Dhangars* who do not have their own herds and land also. They herd animals of other agriculturalists or they work as a wage labour on others land.

Statement of Research Problem

The *Dhangar* pastoral nomads in Maharashtra are economically reliant on their herds for survival. They wander seasonally to find a means of subsistence and resources for their herds. As their livelihood is based on raising livestock on natural pastures, they moved from one place to another place in search of grazing land and water sources for their livestock. Their seasonal mobility and systematic travelling is an important mark of their identity and culture. It has shaped their culture and ways of life. Their lifestyle has been treated and considered as less civilized and degraded by settled village lifestyle because of their association with animals and consumption of meat. Their livelihood is dependent on the sale of animals and their products like milk, manure, wool, and skin to gain food stuffs by exchange with sedentary people. Now *Dhangars* are gradually leaving their traditional occupation as they could not sustain on these traditional income sources. Due to lack of access to grazing land for herds, mechanization of woolen weaver, they have to give up their

occupation. Dairy farming and cattle farming are taking over their occupations. The *Dhangars* are at a low position in the caste based hierarchy. Hence they try to raise their social status by imitation of upper caste culture. They adopt worship patterns, food habits, dressing style and customs and rituals of upper castes.

Objectives

1. To understand the changing belief systems and religious rituals of the *Dhangar* nomadic community in Maharashtra.
2. To explore the Sanskritization process and its impact on the *Dhangar* nomadic community in Maharashtra.

Methodology

This paper is based on the narratives of people from the *Dhangar* nomadic community who are engaged in economic activities other than sheep rearing and migrated from villages to the city. The study has chosen five *Dhangar* families living in *Nanded* city for interviews by purposive sampling method. The observation and analysis is based on the personal narratives of people who are experiencing cultural transitions in their life. This paper explores how their life is influenced by dominant caste culture in their region. This study is limited to the interactions with five families from the *Dhangar* nomadic community in *Nanded* district who are experiencing economic, educational and occupational mobility and influenced by the Sanskritization process.

Theoretical Framework

The most apt theoretical approach for this study is the identity formation, both through the process of sanskritization and a reversal of that process. George Herbert Mead's symbolic interactionist perspective provides the main theoretical framework to situate practices of identity construction. It highlights how the identity of *Dhangar* nomads is developed through the social interactions and communications with sedentary communities. George Herbert Mead has written on the self and the organism in his work on 'Mind, Self and Society' (1934). "The self is something which has a development: it is not initially there, at birth, but arises in the process of social experience and activity, that is, develops in the given individual as a result of his relation to that process as a whole and to other individuals within that process." (Appelrouth & Edles 2008: 332).

This is an in-depth study of lived realities and observations of everyday phenomena. Hence this paper has used an ethnomethodological perspective. It is an attempt to study the methods people use to understand their everyday life. *Dhangars* are trying to find the meanings of their own life. Ethnomethodological approach is concerned with how *Dhangars* are making

sense of their everyday circumstances. The study tries to find how *Dhangars* are making interpretations and explanations of their everyday life with reference to sanskritization, cultural transitions and social situations. Herald Garfinkel's concept of 'Indexicality' is used here as a theoretical background. A sense of any action can be achieved by the reference to its social context. These *Dhangars* are making sense of their life in a particular social setting and their understandings are indexical. "Everyday life is made up of not only determining the meaning of objects or practices within a given context, but also inferring meaning by creating or attributing a context or "index" when one is not readily apparent." (Appelrouth & Edles 2008: 577).

Limitation of the study

The data is based on the interactions with five *Dhangar* families from Nanded district of Maharashtra. Hence the analysis and conclusion is limited to these research samples and the field area.

Review of Literature

M. N. Srinivas (1966) in his writing on *'Social Change in Modern India'* explained that Sanskritization is the process by which a 'low' Hindu caste or tribal or other group changes its customs, rituals, ideology and way of life in the direction of a high and frequently, "twice born" caste. Such changes are followed by a claim to a higher position in caste hierarchy (1966: 6)

Kancha Ilaiah (1996) who belongs to *Kuruma* Shepherd caste used his personal experiences as a framework to deconstruct and reconstruct the socio-cultural and economic history of his community. He compared and contrasted the socio-economic and cultural differences between *Dalitbahujans* and the *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas* and the *Baniyas* in his book *'Why I am not a Hindu?'* He explained how many *dalitbahujans* have attempted to sanskritize themselves by changing their names, educating their children, assimilating into upper caste cultures, celebrating hindu festivals, refusing any connection with *Pochemma* and *Maisamma* goddesses but all this did not worked. This did not dilute caste discrimination in urban centres.

Though Sanskritization is put forward as a method of social mobility, Christophe Jaffrelot (2003) has argued that Sansktitization coupled with other factors which have prevented the development of caste based position among the people of lower castes in North India. This picture has been different in western and southern India due to the weak influence of Sanskritization and spread of reservation. In his book titled, *'India's Silent Revolution The Rise of the Low Castes in North Indian Politics'* he wrote, "The resilience of Saskritization had a major impact on the low caste movements of North India because it prevented them from establishing their claims on ethnic grounds and from shaping large coalitions like the non-Brahmin groupings or at least

from forging caste federations. In contrast with what prevailed in southern and western India, their organization went no further than the caste associations. However, the mobilization of the low castes was also hindered by the limited scale of the reservation policy in North India". (2003: 213)

Sanskritization process and *Dhangars*

M. L. K. Murty and Gunther D. Sontheimer (1980) written on 'Prehistoric Background of Pastoralism in the Southern Deccan in the Light of Oral Traditions and Cults of same Pastoral Communities' and explained how the traditions of pastoral communities were influenced by the Sanskritization process in India. "Nonetheless, as a result of constant interaction with the predominantly Hinduized societies, their religion had been subjected to continuous Sanskritization probably over the last three thousand years. Owing to the spread of Sanskritic rites and the increasing Sanskritization of non-Sanskritic rites, one finds, as has been observed by McKim Marriott (1955:171-222) an Indian village, a transmutation and transformation of great and little traditions resulting from upward universalization (carrying forward of religious contents which are already present in the little traditions to the levels of literate Sanskritic great traditions of Hinduism under the influence of the latter) and parochialization (downward devolution of great traditional elements and their integration with the little traditional elements), although it is difficult to know whether the present religious traditions of these communities are the result of one, and not also the result of the other, of these two processes."(Murty & Sontheimer 1980: 164)

People assumed that the process of formal education should lead to Sanskritization rather than inculcating scientific temper and modern values in a person. They emphasize more on cultural changes than the enlightenment through formal education. It is believed that a sign of an educated person is that he/she should emulate the upper caste and follow the practices, traditions, customs and rituals of upper caste people. Hence believing in upper caste cultural values and norms is considered as upward cultural mobility and sign of improvement in life. As a result, nowadays in educated, urban middle class families the celebration of festivals and rituals and customs of their own community have been replaced with upper caste festivals and traditions. Sometimes they celebrate their own community's festivals on a small scale and in a simple way but upper caste festivals with grand celebration. But according to M. N. Srinivas, "The mobility associated with Sanskritization results only in positional changes in the system and does not lead to any structural change" (2005: 6) The *Dhangars* in Maharashtra also imitate the way of life of higher castes assuming that it gives them a prestigious position in society. There are internal cultural changes within the community by external cultural forces.

Changing belief systems and religious ritual of *Dhangars* in Nanded District

A woman from the first family shared her childhood experience about the imitation of customs and rituals of the upper caste people. She said that her father is educated and got a job in government service, hence they were shifted from a village to *Nanded* city. To raise the living standard of her family residing in the upper middle class locality, her parents used to send her to the house of the upper caste neighbors to learn the rituals and customs related to different festivals and religious practices. She said,

> "*We used to visit our neighbor's house on different festivals to see how they are performing rituals on different festivals and religious occasions. What type of food do they offer to God as Prashad? Which prayers and Mantra should be chanted for which God? How to do Puja, Aarti and decoration for performing religious rituals? This way we started celebrating different festivals and following religious and cultural practices of the upper caste. We abandoned the traditional festivals and religious rituals of our own community. Our festivals and celebrations were replaced with upper caste festivals. We used to worship our local deities and celebrate our festivals with animal sacrifices. And arranging feasts with non-vegetarian food. Our marriage used to be celebrated with meat. 'Jagran' (awake at night) is one of the important customs in our community. Marriage would not be completed without this occasion. A sheep or goat is sacrificed on this occasion and all relatives are invited for dinner at night, all people gather for the programme and do not sleep all night to celebrate this occasion. But now we are not doing it."* She is very doubtful about what they have adopted from the upper caste and why? According to her, it does not lead to any change in their status in the society.

A married woman from the third family shared experiences of weddings. She said that her marriage was held in a village in a traditional way. The marriage rituals were performed by the *Jangam* and not by a Brahmin priest. A *Jangam* is a *Lingayat Guru* who has rights to perform marriage rituals and religious rituals at local village deities. There were no *Saat Phere* and *Home Hawan* in her marriage but now due to the influence of upper caste marriage practices and event management businesses in urban locality, the rituals of *Saat Phere* and *Home Hawan* were performed by a Brahmin priest in her brother's marriage which was held in *Nanded* city. Further she said,

> *"Though we have adopted upper caste practices, but we are still lagging behind in terms of women's status and education. We are restricting our women from freedom and independent identity as upper caste people do. We do not abandon the patriarchal rituals which restrict women. Instead our community is becoming more ritualistic and practicing customs and traditions."*

Second family shared their experience of how they were being advised to be vegetarian. They told that their family used to rear sheep and goats and when they bought a cow at their home for a living, the upper caste neighbors advised them to abide by the meat consumption. As they have a cow at their home now they should worship cows instead of being non vegetarian.

"Brahmans maintained vegetarianism strictly. They regarded vegetarianism and teetotalism as symbols of purity. These values adopted by the Brahmans helped them achieve higher status over the other non-vegetarian and alcohol imbibing castes." (Dahiwale 2005, 92) The castes which consume the forbidden food by Hindu religion are considered as degraded. The *Dhangars* who are trying to raise their social status in the caste hierarchy are adopting vegetarianism.

One man from the third family shared his experience of being vegetarian. He said,

> *"Earlier our whole family used to consume non vegetarian food but since my father joined pilgrimage to Pandharpur with all villagers, and became a devotee of Lord Vittal he started using an auspicious thread necklace (A Tulsi Mala) and became vegetarian and then the whole family started following vegetarianism. Those who became Varkari (Devotee of Lord Vittal) and Malkari (wearing an auspicious thread necklace -Tulsi Mala) started following vegetarianism."*

Consumption of meat was a religious cultural practice of the *Dhangar* community but with the educational and occupational mobility, now people hesitate to celebrate their festivals in their traditional way. They feel shy and low graded while doing such rituals. Hence they have abandoned these practices. Instead of this, now they are following what upper caste people are doing as a cultural celebration.

The fourth family informed that they started following vegetarianism since they started following the rituals and customs of the upper caste. They find their practices superstitious and backward. Upper caste people also follow some superstitions but their practices are considered as religious sentiments and religious beliefs but the cultural beliefs of lower caste are always graded as false and superstitious.

A man from the first family shared his religious practices. He said,

> *"We used to celebrate a festival of Lord Khandoba called 'Sat' with sacrifice of an animal and feast of non-vegetation food and we would invite all our relatives for dinner on this occasion. Now we are following the way of celebration of the upper caste for the same festival. We started offering Baingan Bharta, Bajra Roti and Kheer instead of meat for dinner. Some of our relatives are celebrating this festival twice following both ways. One celebration is with upper caste rituals, food pattern*

> *and religious practice on Champashashti of the Margashirsha month as per Hindu calendar and another celebration is on any one Sunday of the same month with meat consumption. There were some other festivals also in the Dhangar community like sanj and kanduri which were celebrated with animal sacrifices to local deities and feast of meat consumption."* He said that his family assumed that their way of living was completely wrong and they needed to follow upper caste rituals. Now they are completely influenced by the upper caste beliefs systems and practices and started following them.

A man from the fifth family told that his family used to sacrifice animals to a Muslim god. It was a mandatory custom at the time of the birth of first child in a family; the hair of the first child was offered with an animal sacrifice to the Muslim god.

Most of these cultural transitions are observed in the families which have experienced educational and occupational mobility and given up the sheep/ goat rearing and engaged in other occupations and have settled in urban locality. The next generation of these migrated families has been socialized with upper caste cultural values and has been told how their traditions and cultural practices are wrong and bad.

A man shared his childhood experience and told that, his parents used to make use of sheep wool for many necessary things in his childhood but now that woolen blanket has been missing in the urban locality. Having a woolen blanket on shoulder was an identity of *Dhangar* but now it has disappeared.

The *Shravan* is a very important and auspicious month for Hindus. It is considered as a sacred and holy month. Hence it is known as a month of fasting. A young boy from the fifth family shared his childhood experience about *Shravan* and he said,

> *"In our childhood, when Shravan month arrived we used to be very excited as we used to get lots of mutton (meat) to eat".*

One might get surprised to hear such a different reaction on arrival of *Shravan* month because usually during the month of *Shravan*, meat/ non-vegetarian food is avoided in many *Maharashtrian* middle class Hindu families. There are religious, cultural, traditional, as well as health related reasons and references available to avoid non-vegetarian food during *Shravan* month. All these reasons and references have been influenced by the dominant culture and customs of the society in such a way that it suppresses and degrades the life experiences of marginal communities. The traditional way of life of the Shepherd community and their customs, rituals, cultural beliefs and religious practices are changing under the influence of the dominant caste and their culture in India. This young boy from Shepherd community told that whenever he shared his childhood experiences of *Shravan* month with others, either

people laughed at him or got angry. Some people felt disgusted and criticized him. While reminiscing about his childhood experiences he said that the facts of his life are very different from what others practice.

> "My family engaged in goat and sheep rearing. My younger brother took care of cattle. He often used to cook mutton during Shravan month. I remember he used to make it almost every day, because there was no demand for mutton during Shravan month from the villagers. There was a lot of demand for mutton a day before the Shravan month began and the day after the Shravan month ended. People who consume non vegetarian food celebrate the Amavasya (New moon or no moon day) before and after the Shravan month. These two days are celebrated to eat non vegetarian food and in local language these days are known as 'Gattari' and 'Kari'. During Shravan month many people from villages practice fasting and avoid non vegetarian food. As people abstain from consuming non vegetarian food, the flesh of sheep or goat was not sold completely. As a result the remaining mutton had to be eaten at home. If a goat or sheep fell sick or developed symptoms of fever they were slaughtered. Especially during Shravan, due to the rains, many animals suffer from various diseases. The feet of the goat and sheep are constantly in rain water and mud. The feet get wet and their hooves become soft and moist, hence their feet get infected with diseases like foot ulcers, broken feet. Due to this they used to die within two - three days. If animals developed blisters or showed signs of limping or if my brother found out that they are not eating anything, then he could recognize that these animals are going to die soon and they need to be slaughtered as early as possible. But many times if the meat would not sell completely, all the family members had to eat the remaining meat. In such situations, my brother would plan to cut an animal for sale on days which are not strictly followed in the Shravan month. Generally people avoid non vegetarian food on Monday and Saturday hence we couldn't cut the animals on such days. Some days are considered more sacred than the other days; people seek blessings of various gods and goddesses on different days. Many people abstain from meat and non-vegetarian food these days. Hence we had to leave out these days as we did not get customers for selling meat. When the brother plans to cut an animal he will visit the houses in the village to find out those who will eat meat and then he will estimate the requirement of meat in the village. This way he comes to know how much meat would be sold on that day. Then he will make shares of meat, one share for one house. He will distribute the shares to the houses and remaining shares will be consumed at home. If it is difficult to sell complete meat, we children used to become very happy as we get to eat our favorite pieces of mutton. Sometimes my mother made pickles of the remaining meat. It was very difficult to get

> customers for meat if there was a sudden death of an animal. We had to search houses which do not practice Shravan vegetarianism and we used to sell it cheaply or see if anyone from the village would like to take it now and pay the amount later."

Now this young village boy has started following *Shravan* strictly after celebrating *Guttari* a day before *Shravan* so that his urban friends would not laugh at him and his family for their habits of meat consumption during *Shravan* month. His brother from Village said that he has drowned the occupation of his own house by adopting vegetarianism and fasting practice. He said, *"Our own people will be responsible for drowning our own community's livelihood source".* Today people from educated families who are involved in occupations and services other than pastoral nomadism are abandoning their way of life and cultural practices in shame. While living a middle class life, in urban locality they are afraid of what their neighbors, colleagues and friends would think about them, how they would react and treat them when they get to know that they are not following vegetarianism in *Shravan* month. They feel ashamed and guilty within the urban middle class and upper caste cultural values. They feel that if they adopt the culture of the upper caste they will be included in the mainstream society. But according to Kancha Ilaiah, "Sanskritization process did not dilute caste identities and caste based humiliations. Many *dalitbahujans* who got sanskritized later realized the fact that sanskritization is no solution to hindu barbarity." (1996: 70) Only the feeling of social degradation has pushed lower caste people towards the adoption of the upper caste values and practices. Hence *Dhangar* people have accepted the belief systems and religious practices of the upper caste and they hope that it upgrades their living standard in socio-cultural life.

Many communities in India have changed their customs, dressing style, food habits and living standard, some even hide their dialect. Those who have raised their economic, political and educational levels are taking these efforts to get a higher status in the caste system. They are trying to get a prestigious place in socio- cultural life through the upper caste socialization process. But no one is willing to give up the caste based hierarchy.

An attempt for De Sanskritization (Reverse process of Sanskritization)

The cultural mobility through Sanskritization is making these people more ritualistic and religious than being rational and scientific. A woman from the first family said,

> "The imitation of upper caste culture and practices has made us more religious and we are trapped in the religious rituals and customs. It does not mean that we were not doing any rituals earlier. We were doing it but we were told by upper caste neighbors that we were doing it wrongly. Hence we are trying to learn or adopt the correct way of

doing and performing rituals by imitation but we do not know whether they are really correct."

The external cultural forces are responsible for the internal cultural changes in the lower caste community. Dominant cultural ideas are portrayed as rational, practical and scientific. They are justified as ideal cultural concepts and made legitimate by dominant cultural values. The beliefs and practices of lower castes are always considered as misinterpretations of religious philosophy and superstitions. But the beliefs and practices of the upper caste are always considered as scientific, theological and religious ideology. An educated man from a family said,

> *"Whatever we do as our cultural practice and traditions, they are considered as superstitions and a wrong practice of religion. Our way of worshiping God is different from the dominant culture. As we have a wandering tradition in our culture, we are influenced by various cultural ideologies and practices. Settled community treats us as a backward community and advises us to adopt their way of life. Otherwise we feel excluded. Hence we follow and adopt their cultural patterns and religious practices to upgrade ourselves. Why don't we celebrate our festivals proudly and practice our beliefs without any hesitation? If we accept western culture and upper caste culture with its good and bad implications, then we should accept our own culture also with both connotations. I believe that the educational, economic and political mobility of a community is more important than the following upper caste cultural values."*

Now the young generation of *Dhangar* nomadic community is questioning the cultural changes which took place in their life by the influence of upper caste religious practices. They are doubtful about these practices. A young boy from a family questioned, *"Are such cultural changes really needed for the development and upliftment of our community?"* Urban middle class educated *Dhangars* in Nanded district of Maharashtra are culturally sanskritized and materially modernized and westernized. People are trying to understand how their life is understood and perceived by others. They find contradictions between what they are experiencing in their life and how others perceive their life. Hence the young generation of this community became conscious about such cultural transitions within their community and started **suggesting reversal of Sanskritization**. It means they are suggesting that instead of following the upper caste religious practices and cultural values, people should find an alternative for social mobility and economic development and they have to reject the cultural ideas and rituals of the dominant caste. It can be called as a process of De Sanskritization. They have a hope that the process of De Sanskritization will bring change in their life.

Now *Dhangars* are trying to achieve social mobility through political

participation. They believe that access to political power can be an alternative for Sanskritization. The *Dhangar* community currently gets the reservation benefits under the Nomadic Tribes category but they are claiming for Scheduled Tribe status. They are continuously protesting for their long pending demand for reservation from Scheduled Tribes category and Scheduled Tribes status in Maharashtra. The *Dhangar* people became politically active with caste consciousness. They use yellow flags and wear yellow scarves around their necks as a symbol of their cultural identity. They use the slogan of *'Jai Malhar'* (Victory for Malhar/ Long Live Malhar) for greetings. (Malhar is a Hindu deity, another name for Khandoba who is an incarnation of the god Shiva.) It has become a symbol of cultural and political identity but it is not a very revolutionary move. The *Dhangar* leaders are using traditional and cultural symbols of community for identity politics. People are encouraged to wear their traditional turban on head and put a woolen blanket on their shoulder to show their traditional identity. It is a social and political attempt for socio-cultural and economic mobility.

Conclusion

Indian society has diverse food consumption practices along with social and cultural diversity. Socio- cultural practices, customs, traditions and rituals of various communities are not uniform in Indian society. These practices vary from each other and are rooted in people's lived realities. A culture is shaped by human struggle for survival. When people want to gain power, they spread an ideology or a particular culture. They create ideal concepts related to a particular culture and connect superior- inferior connotations with it. This paper neither intended to glorify the traditional occupation of a community, practice of consumption of non-vegetarian food nor tried to suggest that everyone should celebrate and follow only their own traditions, customs and rituals. But it is an attempt to shed light on the social and cultural changes taking place in various communities and the process of fading cultural diversity of these marginalized communities. This paper has drawn attention not only on food culture but also the socio-cultural diversity in Indian society to understand the disparity and discrepancy in cultural ideology. People have a sense of inferiority towards the food culture of the lower caste. But the food culture is always based on what is available around us? What can be made edible from available resources? What is edible in our territory? What can be grown in our geographical conditions and seasons? How can humans imagine and prepare a variety of food items for consumption?

If there is no option for people to decide what to eat then there is no room for deciding which food is good for health and which is bad for health. When people's everyday struggle is for survival then they do not believe in any cultural ideas such as following vegetarianism means good, pure and sacred and being a non-vegetarian/ meat eater means bad habit, wrong and impure

practice. Due to dominant cultural pressures, people feel that they are committing a sin and doing something wrong by consuming meat. But the process of Desanskritization can be used as a strategy for socio-cultural emancipation and it can be a challenge to the cultural monopoly.

Now the Indian food culture is completely influenced by globalization and western food cultures. We have adopted the lifestyle and food habits from all over the world. Some food items like *Pizza, Burgers* and *KFC* and global food cultures like Korean foods, Chinese foods with vegetarian and non-vegetarian flavors became a part of everyday life of urban people in India. It has become a daily meal for many people in urban areas and now it would not take much time to reach the rural areas as well. The online food ordering culture may encourage the younger generation to embrace non vegetarianism in *Shravan* month also as a trendy style. If the market finds it difficult to get customers for non-vegetarian food in *Shravan* month, they will sell it at a cheaper price and with different offers to attract customers. Now lifestyle is completely in the hands of cultural industry and popular culture. It will decide what one should eat and we will have to accept what the market, capitalist economy and consumer culture will provide to us. People will have to consume whatever market makes available in this new world. Consumerism has made us a mere customer of the market, regardless of the class, caste, race we belong to. The capitalist market is investing in food production. It makes readymade food available to us as per their convenience and needs, and not as per our choices. We have to consume it without thinking about whether it is good for our health or not, whether it has nutritional value or not, whether it is harmful or healthy, whether it is vegetarian or non-vegetarian food.

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ECONOMIC SHIFTS AND CULTURAL LOSS: A CASE STUDY OF WULAR LAKE'S FISHERFOLK

Abstract

This research uses an anthropological lens rooted in cultural ecology and political economy to explore the deteriorating socio-economic and cultural situation of fisherfolk near Wular Lake, Kashmir. Traditionally, these communities depended on the lake for sustenance and identity, but environmental decline, unchecked resource use, and lack of policy support have disrupted this balance. Marginalised by changing economies and state neglect, fisherfolk face threats to their livelihoods and cultural heritage. Through ethnographic research, the study finds that structural inequalities, poor education, and insufficient institutional support have intensified their vulnerability and eroded traditional fishing identities. Younger generations are increasingly leaving the trade, highlighting a growing disconnect from cultural roots. The study calls for policies that link environmental sustainability with social justice, including education, market reform, and community-based fisheries management, to boost resilience and preserve Kashmir's unique lacustrine culture.

Keywords: *Cultural decline, Economic marginalization, Environmental degradation, Marginalization, Sustainability*

Introduction

The cultural legacy of Kashmir is diverse, reflecting the vibrant natural surroundings that have influenced and inspired it over time. The sanctity and eternal magnificence of the place are evident from the immaculate and sparkling snow that covers the tall peaks of its rocky surroundings. Year after year, the gentle rays of the sun imbue our mountains with a warm and reddish hue, providing sustenance to our melodious streams, thunderous cascades, and serene lakes. Moreover, this radiant nectarine glow has greatly influenced our mindset in perceiving unity among seeming distinctions. The indubitable influence of Buddhist compassion, Hindu tolerance, and Muslim enthusiasm for life is evident in the achievements of the Kashmiri intellect and mindset. Culture is always undergoing change and transition. It is an uninterrupted cognitive expedition with no opportunities for respite. It is the exact manifestation of the deeply ingrained beliefs held by the residents of this Happy

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Valley.

The valley of Kashmir is adorned with several lakes and rivers, which not only enhance its visual appeal but also serve as important hubs for various cultural activities. One such example is the formidable Wular Lake, located around 35 kilometers northwest of the city of Srinagar. Wular Lake has a substantial role in the valley's fishing resources. The ecosystem plays a crucial role in sustaining a large population by providing valuable resources such as fish, water chestnuts, feed, lotus stems, and timber. The fish output in Jammu and Kashmir is mostly derived from Dal and Wular Lake, which together contribute about 70 percent of the overall output (Qureshi and Krishnan, 2015). The wetland generates income for the state government through activities like fishing and the commercial sale of economically important species like water chestnuts and fodder. The lake is situated in the districts of Bandipora and Baramulla. The area is encompassed by 31 neighboring villages, which had a total of 10,964 households according to the 2001 census. The population has likely increased significantly during the previous decades. A multitude of individuals in these rural areas depend on the resources of the lake for their daily needs. About 60 percent of the residents of the lake are living below the poverty threshold, and their limited access to clean drinking water and basic sanitary services hinders their ability to achieve a better quality of life (WUCMA, 2023).

Communities in Kashmir that depend on fishing are subjected to social marginalization. The inaccessibility of education and healthcare services for a substantial portion of the population is the cause of low literacy rates and poor health outcomes. These communities' younger members are increasingly pursuing alternative sources of income, which poses a threat to the transmission of fishing expertise from one generation to the next. The traditional socio-economic structures are being further eroded by the increasing number of individuals who are migrating to urban areas in search of better opportunities (Malik et al., 2018).

The complex relationship between traditional methods of subsistence and contemporary challenges is exemplified by the socio-economic circumstances of the Kashmir Valley's fisherfolk. Fishing has been an essential component of the cultural and economic milieu of Kashmir for an extended period, providing a critical means of sustenance for numerous communities that reside in close proximity to the region's abundant water sources, such as Dal Lake, Wular Lake, and the Jhelum River. The aquatic bodies have not only provided fish, which is a staple in the local diet but have also facilitated the development of other industries, such as fish processing, net production, and boat construction, thereby establishing a diverse economic ecology (Hussain et al., 2016; Dar et al., 2014).

In recent decades, the socio-economic status of these fisherfolks has

experienced considerable pressure. The decline in fish populations can be attributed to environmental degradation, mostly caused by pollution and overfishing. The traditional fishing methods, which were once successful in achieving a sustainable catch, are now inadequate in dealing with modern ecological challenges. The proliferation of unregulated and often illicit fishing practices has exacerbated the depletion of aquatic resources, posing a threat to the sustenance of numerous populations (Dar et al., 2014; Malik et al., 2017).

The absence of sufficient infrastructure and market accessibility exacerbates economic difficulties. Fishermen frequently have difficulties in promoting their catch, since inadequate transportation and a lack of proper refrigeration facilities result in substantial losses after harvesting. The cyclical nature of fishing also contributes to financial volatility, making it challenging for families to anticipate and prepare for the future. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused significant disruptions to conventional supply networks and led to a decrease in market demand, resulting in heightened economic suffering for many.

Notwithstanding these difficulties, there exist opportunities for further enhancement. Aquaculture promotion, encompassing the practice of cultivating fish in controlled conditions, offers a viable and sustainable alternative to conventional fishing techniques. Policy initiatives targeting market access, institutional assistance, and education and training can elevate the socio-economic standing of fisherfolk. Community-driven efforts that prioritize conservation and sustainable practices can be essential in restoring the natural equilibrium of Kashmir's water bodies (Hussain et al., 2016).

The objective of this article is to conduct a thorough analysis of the evolving socio-economic dynamics affecting fisherfolk communities around Wular Lake in Kashmir. Through a deep dive into historical trends and present-day challenges, we aim to assess the factors leading to the decline of this traditional occupation and its cultural significance. This study highlights how socio-economic changes, environmental degradation, and inadequate policy frameworks have collectively weakened the livelihoods of fisherfolk, threatening their future.

We examine how these communities, despite their rich cultural heritage, face challenges due to marginalization, poor market access, and environmental degradation. The analysis focuses on both the historical resilience of these communities and the pressures they now confront in the face of modern economic and environmental challenges.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored within the intersecting frameworks of cultural ecology and political economy, complemented by insights from the **sustainable**

livelihood approach. Drawing from Julian Steward's concept of cultural ecology, the research explores how the fisherfolk of Wular Lake adapt their cultural and economic practices in response to environmental changes and resource constraints. The study views the community's fishing traditions not merely as economic activities but as culturally embedded systems shaped by ecological interdependence. Simultaneously, through the lens of political economy, it interrogates how broader structural forces such as state policies, market interventions, and socio-political marginalization—shape the economic vulnerabilities and social positioning of these communities. This dual approach enables a holistic understanding of how environmental degradation, governance failures, and capitalist transformations jointly influence the fisherfolk's livelihoods. The sustainable livelihood framework further contributes to this analysis by emphasizing the importance of access to assets—natural, social, human, and financial capital—in determining adaptive capacity and resilience. By integrating these perspectives, the study situates the decline of Wular's fisherfolk within the larger discourse of environmental anthropology, highlighting the complex interplay between ecology, culture, and power in shaping human survival and identity in resource-dependent communities.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study integrates ecological, socio-economic, and policy dimensions to understand the declining livelihood systems of the Wular Lake fisherfolk. At its core, the framework posits that the sustainability of the community's traditional fishing practices is shaped by the dynamic interaction between environmental conditions, economic structures, and policy interventions. Environmental degradation manifested through pollution, siltation, and shrinking water resources directly undermines the natural base upon which fishing livelihoods depend. Simultaneously, economic marginalization, market fluctuations, and inadequate infrastructural support constrain income generation and perpetuate poverty. These pressures are compounded by weak institutional mechanisms and exclusionary development policies that fail to recognize the cultural and occupational specificity of fisherfolk. The framework therefore conceptualizes livelihood decline as an outcome of interlinked ecological stress and structural inequality. Cultural identity and community resilience emerge as mediating variables that influence how fisherfolk adapt to these transformations whether through occupational diversification, migration, or the abandonment of traditional fishing. By connecting these variables environment, policy, economy, and culture ; the framework provides an integrated lens to analyze how systemic neglect and ecological imbalance threaten both the socio-economic security and cultural continuity of the Wular Lake fisherfolk. This holistic model not only situates the community's struggles within broader anthropological and developmental discourses but also guides the formulation of context-specific policy recommendations for sustainable and inclusive fisheries management.

Material and Methods

The Baramulla and Bandipora Districts of Jammu and Kashmir were intentionally chosen for the current investigation. The choice of these districts was made based on their portrayal of the socio-economic conditions in the region and the significant presence of fishermen in the area. Socio-economic research was conducted on fishermen residing in the area of the River Jhelum and Wular Lake in these districts. The study employed a sample size of 87 individuals with different age groups directly or indirectly engaged in fishing traditions. The socio-economic data was gathered using in-depth Interviews and a well-designed questionnaire that had been pre-tested and properly structured. This questionnaire was specifically built for conducting face-to-face interviews. The secondary data for this study was collected from various sources such as journals, published books, periodicals, and fishery bulletins of Jammu and Kashmir. Furthermore, the material was subjected to a thorough analysis using the specialized knowledge of individuals.

This research examined a heterogeneous sample of participants. The quantity of participants and the criteria for their selection are specified in Table 1.1. Irrespective of the criteria, the most crucial characteristics for all responders were their willingness to communicate and availability. While 87 respondents were interviewed, the research also benefitted from informal interactions that took place during participant observation. The sampling strategy employed in this study ensured that all families residing in the study regions had an equitable chance to participate. Therefore, due to the representative nature of the sample, it was anticipated that no biases would be present.

Table 1.1: Details on respondents and the selection criteria.

S. No.	Respondents	Selection Criteria	Sampling Technique
1	27 Fishermen	Principal respondents, Selected age and experience.	Purposive and for their Snowball Sampling
2	17 Fisherwomen		
3	7 Employed Fishers	Key informants. Selection is based on their occupation and geographic location.	Snowball Sampling
4	16 Young Studying Fishers	Key informants. Selection based on educational activity.	Stratified Random Sampling.
5	03 Administrative Officials	Key informants. The selection was based on the departmental position.	Snowball Sampling
6	3 Local Village Heads	Key informants. The selection was based on fishing experience and age.	Random Stratified and Snowball Sampling
7	8 Local Fish Traders	Key informants. Selected for their geographic location and commercial. activity	Purposive and Snowball Sampling
8	6 Local Chestnut Traders		

Literature Review

The recent corpus of scholarship on small-scale fisheries underscores a global convergence of ecological degradation, economic marginalization, and cultural disintegration within traditional fishing communities. Studies such as Basurto et al. (2025) and Smith et al. (2019) illustrate that small-scale fisheries contribute not only to food security but also to the preservation of social identity and cultural continuity—dimensions often neglected in state-centric development frameworks. Within the paradigm of cultural ecology, Martino (2023) and Broch (2023) highlight how fishing practices embody cultural heritage, spiritual values, and place attachment, yet face erosion under neoliberal restructuring and environmental stress. This crisis of cultural continuity resonates across contexts—from the Aral Sea region, where Alieva (2023) traces the disappearance of fishery-based heritage following ecological collapse, to the coasts of India, where Rao (2023) documents internal fisher migration as both a livelihood strategy and a symptom of socio-economic displacement.

Political economy analyses by Fabinyi et al. (2022) and Flanagan (2025) deepen this understanding by situating fisherfolk marginalization within broader systems of global trade, resource governance, and state neglect. Their work reveals how market-driven policies and privatization have reconfigured access to aquatic commons, producing new hierarchies of power and exclusion. Similarly, Mosepele et al. (2017) and the Nicholas Institute's (2016) governance report emphasize that inadequate institutional mechanisms perpetuate inequality, as fisher communities remain voiceless in decision-making processes that directly affect their subsistence and environment. Gender-focused research, particularly by Hapke and Ayyankeril (2018) and Ramachandran et al. (2023), exposes the disproportionate burdens borne by women, whose unpaid labor sustains household economies yet remains invisible in fisheries governance and data systems.

From a sustainability perspective, Ilosvay et al. (2024) demonstrate how adaptive responses to climate and market shocks depend on social capital and knowledge exchange rather than solely on technological interventions. This aligns with the FAO's (2015) assertion that embedding cultural and local knowledge into fisheries policy is essential for achieving equitable and ecologically resilient outcomes. Collectively, these works articulate a consistent pattern of structural vulnerability—where environmental degradation intertwines with social inequality and the erosion of cultural practices. This body of literature provides a critical foundation for understanding the crisis among Kashmir's fisherfolk, whose experiences echo global struggles over resource access, identity, and survival amid changing political and ecological regimes.

Within the South Asian context, particularly in Kashmir's lacustrine

environment, the predicament of Wular Lake's fisherfolk exemplifies these broader global dynamics of ecological decline and cultural loss. Studies from the region (Dar & Mir, 2024; Habib & Jan, 2023; Atufa et al., 2022) reveal that unregulated fishing practices, pollution, and siltation have drastically reduced fish stocks, undermining traditional livelihoods and destabilizing the intricate human–environment relationship that historically defined these communities. Mirroring global findings (Fabinyi et al., 2022; Broch, 2023), the fisherfolk of Wular Lake are increasingly caught between market dependency and state neglect, resulting in the erosion of self-sufficiency and community-based management systems. Younger generations are disengaging from the fishing occupation, perceiving it as economically unviable and socially stigmatized—a phenomenon that parallels Alieva's (2023) observations from the Aral Sea region and Rao's (2023) findings on India's coastal migrations. The gendered dimensions of this transition are equally pronounced: women, while central to fish processing and household sustenance, remain absent from institutional discourses and resource governance, reflecting patterns identified by Hapke and Ayyankeril (2018) and Ramachandran et al. (2023).

These transformations signify more than economic decline—they represent a cultural rupture wherein intangible heritage, customary practices, and ecological knowledge are steadily diminishing. Wular's fisherfolk, much like small-scale fishing communities globally, occupy a liminal space between tradition and modernity, resilience and marginalization. Existing literature has largely documented the ecological and economic aspects of this decline, yet few studies have anthropologically examined how these changes reshape social identities, intergenerational aspirations, and cultural memory. By adopting a framework grounded in cultural ecology and political economy, this research bridges that gap, offering a nuanced ethnographic understanding of how the fisherfolk of Wular Lake negotiate shifting ecological realities, redefined market systems, and diminishing cultural capital. In doing so, it contributes to a growing body of interdisciplinary scholarship that calls for integrating environmental sustainability with social justice and cultural preservation in the governance of aquatic commons.

Results and Discussion

1. Historical Context

Fishing in India has a rich and illustrious past, serving as a means of livelihood for a population divided by caste. Humanity employed fishing as one of its first ways of livelihood. The significance of fishing in India grew progressively after the introduction of economic planning in the post-independence era. The fisheries industry in India has the potential to accelerate the growth of the country's agrarian economy, thanks to its vast coastline and rich continental fringe. The marine harvest had a positive impact on the

socioeconomic situations of fisherfolk, leading to an improvement in their livelihoods, an increase in export money, and the creation of new job possibilities. The rise of other sectors has created a substantial danger to traditional and critical businesses like fishing, which serves as a source of income and sustenance for many people. Ignoring this challenge is not credible. However, the rise of capitalism has had a profound effect on the productivity of traditional fishing communities, making it extremely difficult for them to compete in the global market.

Fishing in Kashmir has been a longstanding practice that spans several centuries, with fisherfolk playing a crucial role in the region's socio-economic structure. Traditionally, fishing served not just as a means of sustenance but also as a cultural tradition that was transmitted from one generation to another. The waterways of Kashmir teemed with many fish species, fostering a thriving fishing business. Nevertheless, other causes have played a role in the decrease of fish populations, leading to a subsequent reduction in the socio-economic status of the fisherfolk.

Around the lake and river margins of Kashmir, there is a substantial fishing colony known as Hanji[1] in official records and *Heanz*[2] in the local Kashmiri dialect. The majority of the population is concentrated in the vicinity of Wular Lake, Dal Lake, Nagin Lake, Manasbal Lake, and Gangabal Lake. Both men and women exert equal effort to guarantee their survival. They work together as a collective to guarantee their economic survival. Men are more involved in fishing, while women are more interested in marketing activities, such as procuring domestic supplies and selling fish. As (Pramanik, 1993) wrote, "A community is solely defined by the common occupation of fishermen and the responsibilities that come with it. In other terms, it is an occupational community. Until now, all studies on mariners, whether conducted in India or abroad, have regarded them as a community."

The socioeconomic status of the fisherfolk in the Kashmir Valley has experienced a substantial decline, which is profoundly rooted in both historical and contemporary factors. The region's fishing communities have historically prospered as a result of the abundance of aquatic bodies such as Wular Lake, Dal Lake, and the Jhelum River, which have provided them with sufficient resources to sustain their occupations. In the past, these communities were essential to the local economy and culture and enjoyed a stable economic position. Nevertheless, the decline in fish populations was initiated by the onset of environmental degradation, particularly during the 20th century, as unchecked urbanization, pollution, and mismanagement of water resources had a significant impact. Furthermore, the socio-economic conditions of the region were further exacerbated by political instability and the protracted conflict, which restricted access to markets and disrupted their traditional trade routes. The traditional fisherfolk were marginalized by the introduction of modern fishing technologies and competition from more organised sectors,

resulting in a reduction in their earnings and a descent into deprivation. This decline is indicative of a more generalised trend of marginalisation and neglect that Indigenous and traditional communities are experiencing in the context of modernisation and political instability.

2. Socio-Economic Status

The economy of Jammu and Kashmir is also substantially impacted by agriculture and fisheries, which together account for 23% of the state's Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) (Government of Jammu & Kashmir, 2017). It is a significant contributor to the agricultural economy and a source of self-employment and essential associated activity. At present, the state of Jammu and Kashmir produces 20,700 metric tonnes of fish. Over the past decade, the production of fish has fluctuated between 19,000 and 20,000 metric tonnes (Statista, 2019). The fishery sector in Jammu and Kashmir generates a total income of Rs. 56,012,000 (Economic Survey, 2017).

Fisheries in the Kashmir Valley generally come from disadvantaged segments of society. The fishing community is predominantly marked by poor literacy rates, insufficient healthcare, and restricted access to contemporary amenities. Based on a survey, a considerable proportion of the fishing community is comprised of individuals aged 41-50 years, and their levels of literacy fluctuate greatly across various regions (Hussain et al., 2016; Dar et al., 2014).

The fishing community in the Kashmir valley has consistently experienced marginalisation and possesses a low social status. This rural community is well-known for its artisanal/traditional fishing industry, which provides the bulk of the fish that its people consume. The artisanal fishing group frequently faces substantial exploitation and is commonly located outside of economic, social, and political involvement. Initially, they dwelled in houseboats, occupying and encircling various bodies of water with diverse shapes, sizes, and types of boats. They exhibit exceptional boating expertise and find pleasure in manoeuvring their boats against the powerful and swift currents of the river. This subgroup, which is a part of the Muslim community, is not considered to be one of the highly recognised social classes (Habib, 2022). They are seen as a group with low social status, and other Muslims avoid marrying into their families. Although fisheries in the valley have significant potential, they are commonly perceived as a low-wage profession mostly pursued by those with low socioeconomic levels. The occupation in the valley is mostly shaped by the socioeconomic conditions of the fishing community. The fisherfolk community in Kashmir has been officially designated as belonging to the Other Backward Classes (OBC) category in the Jammu and Kashmir Union Territory. To facilitate the sustainable expansion of the fishing sector and improve the socioeconomic welfare of fishing communities (Quyoom et al., 2016).

2.1. Livelihood Pattern:

The community may be classified into many segments depending on their livelihood patterns, which can be tiered as follows:

Gadd-Heanz (Fishermen): - The *Gadd-Heanz* is a distinct subgroup within the *Hanji* community that specialises in the pursuit of fishing. The fisherfolks in the village are the most economically and socially disadvantaged group, and they play a crucial role in our research. Their material belongings are few, and their lifestyle is uncomplicated in contrast to other social classes within the Hanji or other sectors of society. As a result of their decision to primarily engage in fishing during ancient times, this specific group of Hanji had significantly poorer economic, social, and professional conditions in comparison to their counterparts.

Gair-Heanz (Water Chestnut Gatherers): - This ethnic group resides in the Wular and Dal lakes, where they collect green and black chestnuts throughout various seasons, along with fodder and lotus stems (*Nilumbium*). Additionally, they like fishing as a leisure activity.

Demb-Heanz (Vegetable Growers): - There is another subset within the Hanji people that earn their livelihood by producing different varieties of vegetables along the shores of Dal Lake. These vegetables are cultivated in hydroponic gardens and are the main factor contributing to the encroachment on these globally recognised aquatic ecosystems. These vegetable growers vend their products and other essential items like flowers, green vegetables, shawls, and carpets at a market that takes place early in the morning on Dal Lake. Nevertheless, the individuals residing on the shores of the lake have been adversely affected by a range of socio-political issues. Pollution, declining water levels, and encroachment pose a significant threat to their future.

Shikara-Heanz (Owners of Passenger Boats): Shikara-Heanz is a faction within the Hanji community that specialises in the transportation of diverse goods between different locations. Their primary function is to transport visitors, travelers, and tourists across Dal Lake and Wular Lake, serving as a means of sustenance for them. In addition, they extract sand from rivers and lakes through the process of distillation and also fulfill the role of transporting people as ferrymen. Many individuals have made investments in mechanized motorboats intending to attract both local and international visitors. Although there has been an increase in the availability of vehicles for transportation in the state, the demand for these services has decreased, leading to a substantial economic loss.

Doonga-Heanz (Owners of luxury Houseboats): - Doonga-Heanz is a specific subset of the Hanji community that sustains itself by leasing opulent houseboats to tourists. The Kashmiri boat people have successfully preserved their ancient culture and way of life for decades. They reside in wooden houseboats on the majority of Srinagar's water bodies and depend on the lake

for their survival. The initial houseboats were constructed from seasoned timber and were compact and agile to evade the intense summer temperatures in Srinagar. Modern houseboats are significantly oversized for that purpose. Houseboats, similar to hotels, are categorised by the Department of Tourism according to their degree of opulence. The Tourism Department has classified the houseboats based on their level of luxury into the categories of Deluxe, A, B, C, and D.

2.2. Income and Expenditure

Fishing remains the principal source of livelihood for the fisherfolk communities around Wular Lake; however, it has become increasingly less profitable in recent years. Compared to other occupations in the region, the average income of fisherfolk is considerably lower, reflecting the growing economic vulnerability of these communities. This instability is further intensified by seasonal variations, declining fish stocks, and market uncertainties (Hussain et al., 2016). As occupation directly determines income levels, it also influences patterns of expenditure and overall household well-being.

The data presented in Table 1.2 reveals notable disparities between household income and expenditure across different occupational groups. Due to differences in employment type and geographic location, the cost of living varies significantly. Respondents engaged exclusively in fishing report lower monthly incomes than those who have shifted to non-fishing occupations. On average, a fisher household of four members spends approximately Rs. 496 per day, translating to Rs. 14,880 per month, while their average income remains at Rs. 10,600, highlighting a clear income–expenditure gap. In contrast, households engaged in trade and commerce record higher earnings than expenditures, indicating greater financial stability. Labour households show a modest balance, with average incomes of Rs. 9,700 and expenditures of Rs. 9,400, suggesting a narrow margin of economic resilience.

Overall, the analysis underscores the financial precarity of the fishing sector. Unlike other occupations, fishing households experience a persistent deficit, exacerbated by off-season unemployment, environmental degradation, and fluctuating market conditions. This growing economic imbalance signals the urgent need for policy interventions to ensure livelihood security and sustainable income generation among the Wular fisherfolk.

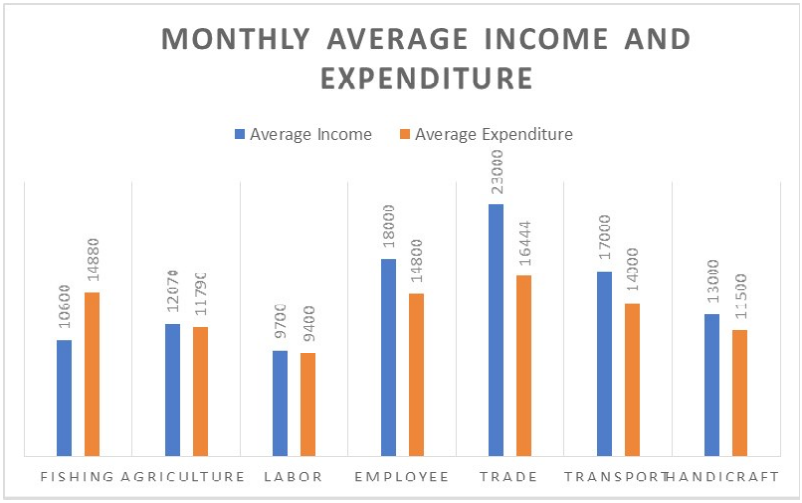


Table 1.2: Bar chart representing the respondent households' average monthly income and expenditure (in rupees).

2.3 Savings

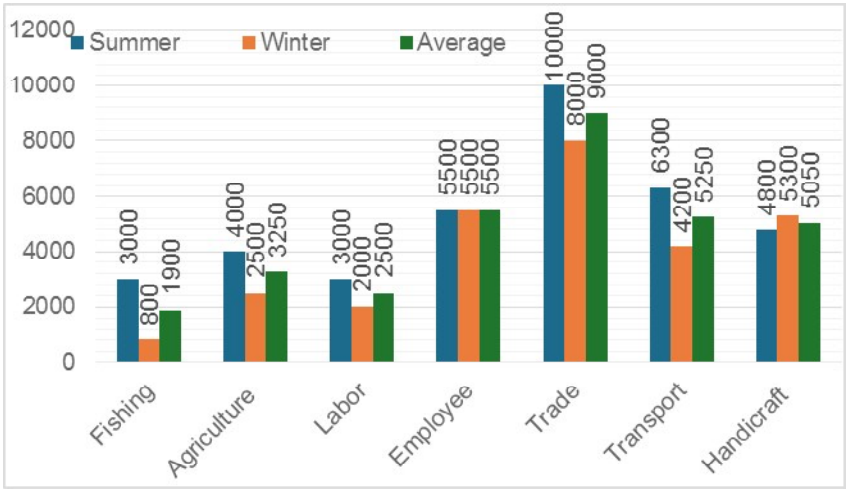


Table 1.3: Column representation of average monthly savings of the respondents in two seasons.

To understand disparities in economic stability among different occupational groups, an analysis was conducted to determine the average monthly household savings across professions in the study area. The results, presented in Table 1.3, highlight significant variations influenced by income levels, employment type, and seasonal fluctuations. Collecting accurate data was challenging, as many respondents preferred to keep their earnings at home rather than in banks and were hesitant to disclose precise amounts.

The findings indicate that seasonal variation has a pronounced effect on fishing households, where savings are directly linked to fluctuating fish yields and market dynamics. On average, fisher households manage to save around Rs. 1,900 per month, reflecting their precarious financial situation. In contrast, households engaged in trade and commerce report the highest savings, averaging Rs. 9,000 per month, attributed to steady income flows and diversified economic activities. Employed individuals maintain relatively stable savings of Rs. 5,500 per month, largely unaffected by seasonal changes. Meanwhile, households involved in transport and handicrafts achieve moderate financial stability, saving approximately Rs. 5,000 monthly.

Overall, the data underscores the economic marginalization of the fishing community, whose limited and irregular savings reflect their vulnerability to environmental, seasonal, and market uncertainties. These patterns reaffirm the urgent need for sustainable livelihood strategies and institutional financial inclusion programs tailored to the fisherfolk of Wular Lake.

2.4 Credit

Based on the previously discussed patterns of income and expenditure, it is evident that most fisher households around Wular Lake frequently rely on external financial assistance to meet essential needs. Their recurring expenses often stem from family obligations, healthcare costs, maintenance or acquisition of fishing equipment, and social events such as weddings. During the lean fishing season, when income is minimal, fishermen commonly depend on credit extended by fish merchants in anticipation of repayment during the peak season. However, this credit system places them in a cycle of dependency, as merchants often exploit their vulnerability by dictating the prices of fish and deducting additional amounts, thereby limiting the fisherfolk's financial autonomy.

In addition to monetary loans, fishers frequently receive essential consumables—such as rice, cooking oil, and even wooden boats—from non-local fish vendors, further reinforcing this patron–client relationship. As presented in Table 1.4, around 38% of fishermen reported borrowing between Rs. 15,001 and Rs. 20,000 from various sources, including relatives, friends, and traders, due to insufficient monthly earnings. The data also reveal that 20% of respondents had outstanding credit above Rs. 20,000, while 5% avoided loans altogether, either because of smaller household sizes or diversified income sources. Notably, one respondent reported borrowing over Rs. 2,00,000 from a fish trader to finance his daughter's marriage and has been repaying the debt through his fish catches for several years.

Overall, these findings highlight a pervasive system of economic dependency and informal credit that perpetuates indebtedness and restricts

upward mobility among the Wular fisherfolk.

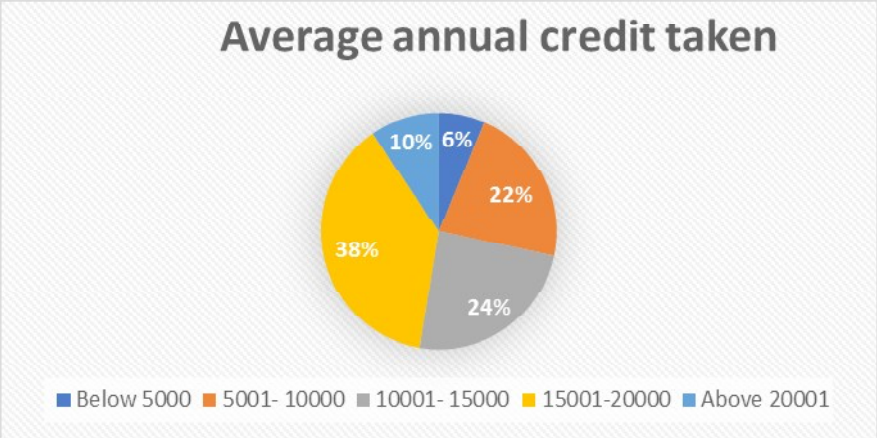


Table 1.4: Pie chart representation of average annual credit taken by site 1 fishers.

2.5 Health Infrastructure

Fisherfolk, especially in locations such as Kashmir Valley, face considerable difficulties in obtaining healthcare and education because of socio-economic situations. These fisherfolk have limited access to healthcare, often depending on traditional medicine and local healers. The level of education achieved is also rather poor since many children are forced to leave school at an early age to help support their families financially. This perpetuates a cycle of poverty and limited opportunities (Hussain et al., 2016).

Access to healthcare for fisherfolk is significantly restricted owing to many circumstances. These Fishing villages face limited access to modern healthcare services due to their geographical remoteness and insufficient infrastructure. Consequently, a significant number of fishers still depend on traditional medicine and local healers to meet their healthcare requirements. Although strongly ingrained in cultural beliefs, these ancient techniques typically lack the effectiveness of current medical treatments and can result in neglected or inadequately managed health concerns. The dependence on local healers also indicates a lack of trust or unfamiliarity with formal healthcare institutions, which may not be readily available or culturally appropriate.

Healthcare Aspect	Challenges
Access to Modern Healthcare	Limited due to geographical isolation and inadequate infrastructure.
Reliance on Traditional Medicine	High reliance on local healers; modern treatments are often inaccessible.
Cultural Barriers	Mistrust and unfamiliarity with formal healthcare systems.

2.6 Educational Attainment

The level of education achieved by these fisherfolks is very low, which is a major factor in the ongoing poverty within this community. The economic constraints experienced by families engaged in fishing encourage children to join the labour force at an early stage, resulting in elevated rates of school dropout. Education is frequently given lower priority in order to prioritise immediate financial contributions, which are essential for the family's survival. This scenario perpetuates a loop in which the absence of education constrains prospective employment prospects, thereby sustaining the cycle of poverty.

Educational Aspect	Challenges
Dropout Rates	High due to economic pressures to contribute to family income.
Educational Attainment	Education is generally given little priority in favour of a job.
Impact on Future Opportunities	Limited job opportunities perpetuate the cycle of poverty.

3. The cycle of Poverty and Limited Opportunities

The interaction between restricted healthcare availability and inadequate educational achievement establishes a cycle of impoverishment that is hard to overcome. Fisherfolk experience health issues that might diminish their capacity to work and provide for their families in the absence of sufficient healthcare. Likewise, those with less education have constraints in terms of accessing higher-paying employment or expanding their sources of income. This cycle is perpetuated with each successive generation, as offspring are drawn into the same economic hardships that their parents encountered, resulting in the continuation of poverty and restricted prospects.

To tackle these difficulties, specific initiatives are needed to enhance healthcare accessibility and foster education among fisherfolk groups. By disrupting the cycle of poverty via improved health and education, this community may progress towards more sustainable and affluent futures.

4. Environmental Challenges

The problem of overfishing in Wular Lake has reached a critical level, causing a major reduction in fish populations and posing a threat to the long-term viability of the local fishing sector. The lake, which has traditionally served as a crucial means of sustenance for the local fishermen, is currently experiencing significant ecological strain as a result of uncontrolled fishing methods.

A key factor contributing to this issue is the extensive utilisation of illicit nets and fishing methods. These techniques, frequently utilised where there is less regulatory supervision, allow for the capture of significant amounts of fish, particularly young and unintended species, resulting in a swift decrease

in fish populations. The excessive fishing pressure has caused several fish species to reach a critical point, breaking their natural reproductive cycles and reducing the overall fish population in the lake.

Overfishing has ecological ramifications that go beyond the mere loss of fish populations. The aquatic environment of Wular Lake is carefully balanced, with several types of fish, plants, and microbes playing vital roles in preserving its well-being. Overfishing disrupts this equilibrium, resulting in a series of adverse consequences on the biodiversity of the lake. For example, the decrease in fish populations might modify the food chain, impacting the interactions between predators and prey and resulting in the excessive development of some aquatic plants or the decrease of others, therefore causing more instability in the environment. The ecological balance of water bodies is disturbed, affecting not only fish populations but also the overall health of the aquatic ecosystem (Malik et al., 2017; Dar et al., 2014).

Furthermore, the reduction of fish populations has significant socio-economic consequences for the local fishermen, who depend extensively on the lake for their means of living. As the availability of fish decreases, there is a rise in rivalry among fishermen, which frequently results in more overexploitation and a detrimental cycle of resource depletion.

To tackle the problem of overfishing in Wular Lake, it is crucial to promptly and collectively implement fishing laws, advocate for sustainable fishing methods, and restore the lake's biological equilibrium. In the absence of these actions, there is a substantial threat to the long-term sustainability of both the lake's environment and the livelihoods of the fisherfolk.

5. Marketing and Infrastructure

Fisherfolks across the world have significant difficulties in promoting their catch, mostly because of insufficient infrastructure and ineffective logistics. The lack of adequate infrastructure for fish storage and processing significantly reduces their profits and exacerbates post-harvest losses. Hussain et al. (2016) highlight that underdeveloped fish markets, lacking adequate storage and transportation amenities, contribute significantly to these losses. This situation is particularly difficult for female fishermen, who are responsible for the marketing aspect. They are frequently required to travel considerable distances to sell their catch, which exposes them to health risks associated with protracted physical labour and inadequate working conditions.

Given the time-sensitive nature of raw fish sales, any delays may result in the spoilage of the capture, resulting in a loss of income and a waste of resources. This has an immediate impact on their financial stability and exacerbates long-term economic disparities within their communities. These women, who are indispensable contributors to the fishery industry, are burdened by the confluence of economic pressure and health issues.

It is imperative to enhance the livelihoods of fisherfolk by enhancing marketing logistics and infrastructure. Investments in refrigerated storage facilities, efficient transportation systems, and local market development could alleviate post-harvest losses and alleviate the physical strain on marketers. Furthermore, the resources and training required to empower these individuals could be provided by government support programs and community-based initiatives. The economic well-being of fishing communities and the promotion of sustainable fishing practices necessitate the resolution of these challenges, with a particular emphasis on the support of women who play a critical role in this sector.

6. Changing Roles and Migration

Traditional roles within this fishing community are undergoing significant transformation as younger generations increasingly seek alternative livelihoods. The declining profitability of fishing, exacerbated by overfishing, unregulated practices, and ecological degradation, has made it a less viable option (Hussain et al., 2016). Many young people are no longer drawn to the occupation that once supported their families for generations. However, this shift is often constrained by a lack of education and the necessary skills for non-fishing employment. Limited access to formal education and vocational training creates a barrier to pursuing alternative livelihoods, leaving many within the community trapped in low-income, high-risk work (Das & Mandal, 2020).

Migration to urban areas in pursuit of improved opportunities is becoming more prevalent in response to these economic challenges. The social fabric of the community is altered by this migration, as younger individuals abandon their traditional roles, thereby reshaping family dynamics and community interactions. The migration to urban areas also provides migrants with access to new social networks and opportunities, but it frequently results in the loss of their cultural identity and social connections in their native countries (Dar et al., 2014).

Furthermore, the geographic marginalisation of these communities, in conjunction with the stigma associated with fishing as an occupation, further induces individuals to abandon the trade. Fishermen are frequently subjected to social exclusion as a result of the remote locations in which they reside and the perceived “unskilled” nature of their work (Kurien, 2004). Their inclination to migrate is further exacerbated by the absence of infrastructure, healthcare, and educational facilities in these regions. Despite the profound cultural and familial significance of the occupation, for numerous individuals, the sole means of escaping the cycle of poverty is to abandon it (Salagrama, 2006).

To address these challenges, targeted interventions, including education, skill development programs, and social support systems, are necessary to facilitate the transition for younger generations who are seeking

alternative livelihoods and to ensure the sustainability of traditional fishing communities for those who choose to remain (FAO, 2021).

7. Gender Roles

Women in fisherfolk communities, particularly in the Kashmir Valley, are essential in post-harvest activities, which include the washing, drying, and sale of fish. Women frequently encounter socio-economic obstacles, and their labour is inadequately acknowledged, despite their substantial contributions. Their potential for economic empowerment is restricted by their lack of access to critical resources, including credit, land ownership, and decision-making opportunities (Malik et al., 2018).

In the Kashmir region, where the occupations of numerous individuals are sustained by fishing along lakes and rivers, men and women collaborate to guarantee the economic prosperity of the community. Nevertheless, gender roles continue to be distinct within these fishing communities. Men are typically responsible for the physical fishing, which is typically restricted to lakes and rivers, while women manage a significant amount of post-harvest labour. Frequently, this necessitates them to travel considerable distances to market centres to separate, clean, and ultimately sell fish. This extensive travel exposes fisherwomen to a variety of challenges, such as occupational discrimination and health dangers, which further complicates their already demanding duties.

Women in the community are involved in a variety of activities, including chestnut harvesting, weed collection, caregiving, and domestic maintenance, in addition to their fishing-related jobs. Their workload is frequently excessive as they attempt to coordinate domestic responsibilities from sunrise to sunset with economic contributions. Women continue to experience marginalisation as a result of entrenched gender norms and restricted access to education and healthcare, despite their critical role in supporting the economic activities of both the household and the community.

Furthermore, the necessity for targeted interventions is underscored by the economic exclusion that these women experience, which is further exacerbated by the absence of infrastructural support. It is imperative to implement initiatives that prioritise their access to resources, vocational training, and market opportunities to elevate their socioeconomic status. Not only would the empowerment of fisherwomen aid their families, but it would also contribute to the sustainability of the fishery industry as a whole.

Conclusion

The traditional way of life and socio-economic stability of the fishing community in the Kashmir Valley are at significant risk, as they are experiencing a gradual and agonising decline. The community, which was once an essential component of the region's cultural and economic milieu, is

currently entangled in a multifaceted web of environmental degradation, political instability, economic marginalisation, and socio-cultural transformations. The fisherfolk are now in a precarious position, as they are unable to withstand the increasing pressures on their occupations as a result of the convergence of these factors. The Kashmir Valley's long-standing fishing tradition, which represents a rich cultural heritage, may vanish utterly if urgent and effective interventions are not implemented.

Environmental degradation, notably the depletion of aquatic resources in lakes like Wular, has been a significant factor in the decline. It is becoming increasingly challenging for fisherfolk to sustain themselves due to the significant reduction in fish populations caused by overfishing, pollution, and unregulated fishing practices. Furthermore, the community's access to essential resources and support systems is restricted by the political instability in the region, which further exacerbates these challenges. Fisherfolk frequently finds themselves on the periphery of both political and economic developments, which renders them susceptible to external disruptions and reduces their ability to adjust to evolving circumstances.

Another significant contributing factor to the fishery community's decline is their economic marginalisation. Fisherfolk have been historically excluded from conventional economic opportunities, and their capacity to generate a sustainable income has been further diminished by the absence of market infrastructure, refrigerated storage, and processing facilities. Women, who are essential in post-harvest activities, are particularly vulnerable to economic hardships, social exclusion, and occupational discrimination. The community is unable to break free from the constraints of their traditional occupation, as they are unable to access education and alternative livelihoods, resulting in a cycle of poverty and deprivation.

The traditional fishing lifestyle is also being eroded by socio-cultural changes, which are being driven by migration and the aspirations of newer generations. The social structure of the community is further weakened as a result of the growing number of young people who are leaving their occupations in pursuit of more lucrative opportunities in urban areas. The intergenerational transmission of knowledge and skills that has sustained the community for centuries is being lost as the newer generation distances itself from fisheries. The cultural identity of the fisherfolk, which is closely linked to their relationship with the water and the natural environment, is also at risk due to this transition, which also threatens the survival of fishing as a profession.

A comprehensive policy intervention is necessary to address the multifaceted challenges that the fisherfolk of the Kashmir Valley are currently confronting. In order to guarantee that fishing continues to be a viable vocation for future generations, environmental conservation initiatives must be prioritised to restore the health of the region's aquatic bodies. This should be

implemented in conjunction with the enforcement of sustainable fishing practices through community-led conservation initiatives, capture limits, and licensing. Economic interventions are equally important, with an emphasis on the diversification of income sources by offering vocational training programs, providing access to institutional credit, and enhancing market infrastructure. To address the gender-specific challenges that women encounter, it is also possible to empower them through targeted education and skill development programs.

Additionally, any intervention strategy should prioritize the preservation of the fisheries community's cultural heritage. Initiatives that are designed to celebrate and promote the traditional knowledge, practices, and cultural expressions of the fisherfolk can contribute to the enhancement of their sense of identity and resilience. In order to effect meaningful change, government agencies, non-governmental organisations, and the community must work together.

In conclusion, the fishery community of the Kashmir Valley is currently at a critical juncture. This centuries-old tradition, as well as the cultural identity and livelihoods of the individuals who rely on it, maybe permanently lost if immediate and coordinated action is not taken. The future of the fisherfolk is contingent upon the collaboration of policymakers, stakeholders, and the community itself to guarantee the survival and revitalisation of this essential way of life.

Policy Suggestions

The socio-economic situation of fishermen in the Kashmir Valley can be improved by the implementation of many policy initiatives, including the following:

Capacity Building and Education

The objective of capacity building and education for fisherfolk is to enhance their capacity to manage aquatic resources and diversify income sources. This policy necessitates literacy programs, vocational training, and formal education that are customised to meet their requirements. Sustainable fishing practices, fish husbandry, and subsidiary occupations such as boat construction, small-scale aquaculture, or net weaving could be the focus of programs. Financial literacy and entrepreneurial skills would also be incorporated into the educational curriculum to assist fisherfolk in comprehending market dynamics and enhancing their bargaining power.

Implementation Scenario: Most of the fisherfolk lack formal education, rendering them susceptible to economic problems. Local NGOs, government initiatives, and community institutions can all be utilised to implement vocational training programs. Workshops on subsidiary occupations,

such as net weaving or fish husbandry, can be particularly beneficial to fisherfolk during the off-season, as they can diversify their income sources. Literacy programs could be implemented in collaboration with adult education initiatives and local institutions. Dar et al. (2014) suggest that local community leaders and cooperatives could be instrumental in the organisation of training sessions, thereby guaranteeing that these programs are accessible to the women and adolescents who are frequently excluded from traditional fishing occupations.

Market Development

Enhancing market development is crucial for enhancing the profitability of fisherfolk. This entails the establishment of enhanced market infrastructure, such as the implementation of cold storage facilities, the enhancement of transportation systems, and the formation of cooperatives to facilitate collective marketing. Providing fisherfolk with access to institutional loans and credit can help them increase their productivity and improve their livelihoods.

Implementation Scenario: It is imperative to enhance the local market infrastructure in order to mitigate post-harvest losses for the fisherfolk in the vicinity of Wular Lake. Fisherfolk can store their produce and reduce deterioration by establishing cold storage units in critical fishing villages. Fisherwomen who are engaged in the sale of fish in local markets could benefit from cooperative marketing strategies, which would enable them to combine resources and negotiate more favourable prices. The establishment of cooperatives will ensure that fishers receive equitable prices for their haul, thereby empowering the community. Additionally, local banks and microfinance institutions could provide low-interest loans to fisherfolk, allowing them to invest in more advanced equipment and vessels, thereby enhancing their fishing capabilities (Hussain et al., 2016).

Regulation and Conservation

The sustainability of fisheries is contingent upon the regulation of fishing activities and the preservation of aquatic ecosystems. This encompasses the regulation of access to aquatic bodies, the enforcement of fishing quotas, and the licensing of fishers. Community-based conservation programs, in conjunction with enhancement technologies such as fish husbandry, can assist in the restoration and preservation of fish populations.

Implementation Scenario: The Wular Lake ecosystem is currently experiencing stress as a result of unregulated fishing practices and exploitation. By implementing licensing for local fishers, the number of individuals fishing in the lake would be regulated, thereby preventing overexploitation. In order to prevent the depletion of fish stocks, it is possible to implement stringent fishery regulations, such as capture limits. A sense of ownership and responsibility can be fostered by community-driven conservation programs,

which involve local fishers in the monitoring and management of the lake's health. The sustainability of fishing in the lake could be further bolstered by the enhancement of fish stocks through controlled breeding programs or husbandry (Malik et al., 2017).

Post-Harvest Processing

The objective of post-harvest processing is to increase the value of fresh fish, thereby increasing the incomes of fisherfolk. New economic opportunities can be created by establishing fish processing facilities in or near fishery communities and training locals in processing techniques. This may involve the production of higher-value products, such as fish preserves, preserved fish, or fish meal.

Implementation Scenario: The profit margins of numerous fishers in Wular Lake are restricted by their dependence on direct sales of raw fish. The fisherfolk can receive substantial income increases by establishing small-scale fish processing facilities in critical villages. Training programs on the curing, smoking, and pickling of fish could be arranged through collaborations between government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The program would concentrate on women who are responsible for post-harvest activities. The income potential of fisherfolk could be enhanced by the marketing of these value-added products in both urban centres and local communities. This diversification would also result in increased economic stability, particularly during periods of low fishing activity (Hussain et al., 2016).

The fishing community in the vicinity of Wular Lake can substantially enhance its socio-economic status and guarantee the lake's resources' sustainability by adhering to these policies.

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Notes

1 An official term used to designate the individuals engaged in fishing activities in the region of Kashmir, as documented in government documents.

2 Indigenous nomenclature for those engaged in fishing activities.

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NEO-LOCAL SINGLE PARENT FAMILY: REALITY OF NEW INDIA

Abstract

In India, it is an established fact that joint families were more prominent earlier, and nuclear families are more prominent today. Sociologists and social anthropologists have even analysed that joint families have disintegrated into nuclear families. However, there are some who say that joint families are not completely disintegrated; rather functional jointness is still found. Further, today nuclear as well as single-parent families have become more common than that of traditional joint families. Single-parent families used to be an exception earlier, but not now. Nowadays, we see all sorts of single-parent families headed by a mother, a father having their offspring, or grandparents raising their grandchildren. The reasons for single-parent households are the separation of a spouse, the death of a partner, conflict, domestic violence, divorce, or some economic reasons. Mostly, it is found out that single-parent families are neo-local families, i.e., the family stays in a separate locality other than the parental/spouse house. Against this backdrop, this paper has two objectives: (a) to understand the reason for becoming a single parent, and (b) to analyze the process of adaptation of the single-parent family. The paper is mainly based on case studies.

Keywords: *neo-local, single-parent, functional jointness, divorce, conflict, domestic violence.*

Introduction

Family, household, and residence have been of crucial importance for human groups in the world, cutting across race, class, caste, gender, and region. There is no doubt that innumerable changes have occurred in the family's constitution, structure, function, and philosophy in different countries because change as a process in time and space and is an integral process of the society[1].

In the family also there have been many changes with time and space. Western societies have changed rapidly. Whereas the global south, particularly countries of southeast Asia, have not changed that rapidly, and family is no exception. The structure, function, and content of the family have undergone many changes. The present work is concerned with the emerging type of family

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today, i.e., neo-local single-parent family.

The objectives of this paper is to understand the reasons for the formation of single parent and also to analyse the process of adaptation by members to the single-parent family. The paper is based on qualitative methods, i.e., primary data has been collected through case studies. Further to analyse theoretically, Anthony Gidden's idea of Structure and Agency has been taken.

The Concept of Structure and Agency

Giddens claims that structure and action are two sides of the same coin. Neither structure nor action can exist independently, both are intimately related. Social actions create structures, and it is through social actions that structures are produced and reproduced, so that they survive over time. Indeed, Giddens (1984) uses a single word 'structuration' to describe the way that structures make social relationships survive over space and time. Giddens talks about the 'duality of structure', to suggest both that structure makes social action possible, and at the same time social action creates those very structures. He says, 'structure has no existence independent of the knowledge that agents have about what they do in their day-to-day activity'. In other words, it is you, I and every other individual who creates structures.

According to Giddens, a structure:- it is a set of rules about how to communicate, which seems independent of any individual. Members of society cannot simply change the grammar and vocabulary of English at will. Yet, if the language is to be reproduced, if it is to survive, it must be spoken or written by individuals in ways that follow its existing rule. Human agents, by their actions, can therefore transform as well as reproduce structure. In social life in general, Giddens identifies two aspects of structure: rules and resources. Rules are procedures that individual may follow in their social life. Members of society can reproduce such structural rules, or rules can be changed through the development of new patterns of interaction. The second aspect of structure, resources, also comes into being through human actions and can be changed or maintained by them.

Giddens' views on structures, systems and institutions are closely tied in with his idea of human action (or 'agency' as he usually refers to it), since they are all part of the 'duality of structure'. According to Giddens, human agents are constantly intervening in the world by their actions and in doing so they have the capacity to transform it. He would not though, accept the view that individuals create society determines individual behaviour. Structure affects human behaviour because of the knowledge that agents have about their own society. There is a large stock of 'mutual knowledge' of 'how to go on', or how to get things done. From what they have learnt, agents know how to go about their everyday lives and accomplish objectives. Giddens seems to think that humans have a basic degree of predictability in social life. They

need what he calls 'ontological security' or confidence and trust that the natural and social worlds are as they appear to be. He suggests tentatively that this may be connected to the human's basic security system, essentially a natural concern with the physical survival of the body.

EVOLUTION, STRUCTURE, AND FUNCTION OF THE FAMILY

The classical or unilineal evolutionists like Morgan (1963, cf. Malefijt 1974) among others supported the idea of promiscuity. Morgan analyzed the evolution of family into five stages[2]: (i) Consanguine Family; (ii) Punaluan Family; (iii) Syndyasmian Family; (iv) Patriarchal Family; (v) Monogamian Family.

A comprehensive definition of family given by G.P. Murdock (1949) who had surveyed 250 small and large societies and had defined "family as a social group characterized by common residence, economic cooperation, and reproduction. It includes adults of both sexes, at least two of whom maintain a socially approved sexual relationship, and one or more children born or adopted of the socially cohabiting adults." This definition implies that members of the family live together in the same household, pool their resources and work together, produce offspring and at least two adults have a sexual relationship. When Murdock gave this definition after studying so many societies, then also there were many societies this definition could not be applied. In India, such families are found in most of the areas. In the last few decades, many changes have taken place in the structure and function of the family due to modernization, industrialization, westernization, and urbanization.

Further globalization has changed the whole scenario. It has promoted large-scale migration not only within the country but also outside the country. Therefore, the same type of family could not exist ideally. Several studies on family in India (Chattopadhyay, 1961; Kapadia, 1956; Ross, 1961; Gore, 1968; Shah, 1973, and so on) point out that a variety of family existed in India. Kolenda (1987) spoke about 12 types of families in India where a number of joint families are found. For example, one is supplemental-collateral joint family that is a collateral joint family having one or more unmarried, divorced or widowed relatives. Typically, such supplemental relatives are the widowed mother of married brothers or the widower father or an unmarried sibling. Whereas, another family called supplemental lineal collateral joint family consists of a lineal collateral joint family with an unmarried or widowed or separated relative who belong to none of the nuclear family lineally or collaterally linked. For example, the fathers widowed sister or brother or an unmarried nephew of the father.

Thus, it is not easy to find many pure forms of family today in India as suggested by Murdock. These days joint families have upto some extent are having functional jointness. It means members of the joint family may not be

living together but must be having activities together like joint property, taking care of each other's health issues and attending religious rituals and life cycle rituals. On the other hand, there are many broken nuclear families found today and one of them is known as single parent family.

In traditional Indian society, there are three most fundamental social institution found: joint family, caste and village (Singh: 1970). All three institution are equally important even today. The joint family played a larger role in shaping the members personality earlier. Most sociologists and social anthropologists have analysed that joint family disintegrated into nuclear family. A. M. Shah (1998) proved that it is only a myth, functional jointness always existed for various reasons. Further, today it is not only the creation of nuclear family but it is the creation of nuclear households.

Shah said, in its purest form or maybe according to Murdock's definition families are not found in India rather households are found. It may be a joint household, a single-person household, a nuclear household or a single-parent household.

There are three types of joint households which A.M. Shah called "complex households". A complex household consists of two or more parental or part-parent family. The three types are: (i) two or more full parental family, (ii) one full parental family and another part of the parental family, (iii) part of one parental family and part of another parental family. A simple or nuclear household means a whole or part of the parental family. It is of six types: (i) husband-wife,(ii) only men or only wife, (iii) husband-wife and their unmarried children, (iv) Unmarried brother and sister, (v) father and unmarried children, (vi) mother and unmarried children.

Out of these forms of families, single-parent family have become a reality for some. Earlier husbands were having extra marital relationship and it was not a big issue in some cases. Either the wife did not know about it or even after knowing she used to be neutral for maintaining the family. But now things have changed, such relationships lead to conflict, in some cases killing or suicide and also divorce. On the other hand, the monogamous family also becomes a single-parent family in case of the death , divorce, or separation of a spouse. Post-marital residence rules specify where a couple resides after marriage and, accordingly, influence the structure and size of household units.

FAMILY AND RESIDENCE

There are many types of residence found based on descent : patrilocal and uxorilocal residence found in patrilineal society, matrilocal, avuncolocal and virilocal residence found in matrilineal societies. Ambilocal, neolocal, and natolocal residence found in both patrilineal and matrilineal societies.

The patrilocal residence found in patrilineal society. A patrilocal rule

specifies that, upon marriage, a man remains in his father's household, while his wife leaves her family to stay with him. As children are born, they are added to the paternal unit. The result is a patrilocal extended family, in which three or more generations of related men live together to form a shallow patrilineage. Patrilineal society also has uxorilocal residence where husband stays with wife in wife's parents house, locally it is known as "*Gharjamai*".

The matrilocal residence found in matrilineal society. A matrilocal family consists of a woman and her children remaining in her mother's household while her husband leaves his family to move in with her. As children are born, they are added to the maternal unit. The result is a matrilocal extended family in which three or more generations of related women live together to form a shallow matrilineage. Avuncolocal Residence found in matrilineal societies. The rule is that a man after marriage stays with his mothers brother. It is virtually mother's brother and sister's son's residence. Virilocal residence is where wife lives with the husband with his parents. In matrilineal societies, wherever there is a custom of visiting husbandship, then single parenthood is imperative because the father only visits during the night for a sexual relationship with his wife. The complete control and continuity are found with the mother or the mother's brother.

Ambilocal Residence found in both patrilineal and matrilineal societies. In an ambilocal pattern, a married couple decides whether to join either the husband's or wife's household of origin. According to the choice made in the previous generations, they may reside with either spouse's father or mother. The result is an ambilocal extended family.

Neolocal residence is a type of post-marital residence in which a newly married couple resides separately from both the husband's natal household and the wife's natal household. Neolocal residence forms the basis of most developed nations, especially in the West, and is also found among some nomadic communities.

Upon marriage, each partner is expected to move out of their parents' household and establish a new residence, thus forming the core of an independent nuclear family Neolocal residence involves the creation of a new household where a child marries or even when they reach adulthood and become socially and economically active. Neolocal residence and nuclear family domestic structures are found in societies where geographical mobility is important. In Western societies, they are consistent with the frequent moves that are necessary due to choices and changes within a supply- and demand-regulated labour market. They are also prevalent in hunting and gathering economies, where nomadic movements are intrinsic to the subsistence strategy.

In Western countries, employment in large corporations or the military often calls for frequent relocations, making it nearly impossible for extended families to remain together hence creating a new generation of families.

Whereas neo-local single parent means, one of the spouse lives alone or lives with child/children in a neo-local household. The cause may be death or divorce of the partner, separation due to one of the partner doing job elsewhere of separation without divorce.

In natolocal residence, after marriage, ego (self) stays near the parental household i.e., mostly found among the tribes of India as well as other families in India.

On the other hand, among non-tribal families in India including Hindu and Muslim families also nato-local residence are found. This is found when there is a division of property in the joint family or there is partition of the house due to conflict between father and son or between brothers.

But in the case of neolocal residence there may be possibilities that one of the partners lives in another city or state due to his/her work and the children remain with one of their parents, i.e., we can call it a new type of single-parent family.

SINGLE PARENT FAMILY

The socialization of children is very important for the continuity of any culture. The family is said to be the most important agent of socialization, especially for children. To ensure the development and well-being of their children, parents perform cultural, social, and biological roles. The roles are divided among both parents in a dual-parent family also known as an intact family. Due to some reason breakdown in the family leads to different family structures that is single-parent families. But sometimes single parenthood also is a choice considering the rapid cultural shift in the society. Some possible reasons for single-parent family structure include the death of one of the parents, divorce, separation, single unmarried biological parent, and single unmarried adoptive parent. Many challenges are faced by single parents in all aspects of life like emotional, economic, and cultural. But the challenges may not be limited to parents only it can also be experienced by their children as well. For example, the absence of a father in the family means a lack of an authoritative figure for the child. The absence of any parent can be a traumatic experience for the children, it brings sudden changes in family structure including in the socio-emotional and financial spheres. Psychological and physiological problems may manifest from unresolved traumatic experiences in single-parent children.

Some factors are responsible for determining the status of single parenthood. These factors are the divorce of couples with children, desertion, death of a partner, birth to an unmarried woman or unintended pregnancy, and single-parent adoption. The different effects of single parenting are psychological, educational, behavioural, and economic effects.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Gangopadhayay (2023) discusses about a new family form in urban India i.e., *Living Apart Together*. Using Anthony Giddens's theory of Pure Relationship she analyzed her data through in-depth qualitative interviews. She discussed four types of LAT families. the first case is of an arrange marriage couple, the husband lived in abroad and he allowed his wife to pursue Ph.D. in India. Subsequently, he insisted that she could take up a job anywhere she wanted to. The second case is a love marriage, where the husband lives alone in some other city. The wife were asked by her parents to leave the job and stay with the husband. But the husband never forced her to leave the job to live with him. The third case is a case of arrange marriage of a female respondent, who lived apart from her husband. The problem started with the birth of a baby. Both the husband's and wife's parents wanted them to stay together and they were unhappy because they stayed apart. The baby is with the mother with a full-time nanny and both are living a balanced life. And the fourth case is of a love marriage where the husband lives with his two-year-old daughter with a full-time nanny. He knew that his wife will not give up for her career to stay with him. In fact coercing with her only creates bitterness among them, and the husband realizes it.

According to Giddens (2021), single-parent households have become increasingly common in developed countries since the early 1970s. The pattern is different in different regions. For instance, in 2018, 15 percent of single parents are found in European Union households, with Denmark at the highest proportion that is 33 percent, Lithuania having 26 percent and Sweden having 24 percent. Among single parenthood with dependent children mainly female-headed households and also are among the poorest group of society. In addition, many of them whether they are married or not faced social disapproval, and economic insecurity and also get judgemental terms like 'deserted wife's', 'fatherless families', or 'broken homes'. However, these terms are slowly disappearing.

The article *"With or Without You – Starting Single Parent Families"* by Dries Van Gasse and Dimitri Mortelmans (2020) explains how individuals deliberately choose single parenthood by their own choice through different methods. The study includes 20 in-depth interviews with single parents by choice. Through these interviews, they investigate how these individuals prepare for and adapt to solo parenting. Gasse and Mortelmans explore four different pathways to single parenthood by choice that are: (i) the first group are those who opted for clinical fertilisation; (ii) the second group ae singles who used informal fertilisation; (iii) the third group includes people who became pregnant while they were in a relationship; and (iv) the fourth group includes people who have adopted a child. This study also found that gatekeepers played a role in the preparative process, having an influence on the expectations of single parents. It is also found that single parents by choice is not only rely on

the social and economic resources they already have to ensure a balance in their everyday life, but they also invest in social and economic resources to strengthen their position in the preparation phase.

McNulty (2015) had studied single parents and other combinations among the non-traditional expatriates. He defined them as those who have special circumstances that standard global mobility policies do not address. They differ from traditional expatriates due to: (a) family composition (e.g., step single parent, split, overseas adoption, and multi-generational families); (b) family challenge (e.g., special needs children); (c)family status (e.g., single expatriates, semi-retired empty-nesters); (d) sexual orientation (e.g., lesbian, gay, transgender); (e) gender (e.g., female breadwinners with male trailing spouses, single female expatriates). McNulty says that their main feature is hyper diversity because they have a unique point before relocating abroad, and expatriation at another layer of complexity. Out of the above, we stress upon the single-parent family that is "a parent, who is the primary caregiver for one or more children, that does not live with a spouse or partner. Status does not apply to single parent expatriates with children attending university in another location or the home country". Wilson (2011; c.f. McNulty 2015) said that "the nuclear family is no longer the predominant family structure in contemporary life. Divorce, remarriage, and the rise of same sex marriages have led to single-parent families, blended families, and families with two parents of the same gender". One of the case is: JC, a 50-year-old single parent from the UK, is raising two teenage daughters alone. She and her husband AM moved to Hong Kong for three years, then moved to Singapore. Both of them are working, and then they decided to raise a family. After sometime, she gave birth to a daughter and then adopted a second daughter. During this time, AM had an affair with another woman, and JC asked him to go away. She again found a job, but it was very difficult for her to raise the girl along with job. The girls lack a role model, but of course, they could empower themselves. Interestingly, formally they have not divorced. Many people helped her but the frustration continues. She had to continue working throughout her life because she could not afford to retire financially.

In a study in UP villages and urban areas, Gupta (2013) analyse the contemporary scenario of family. He found out marginal increase in nuclear families that is 55.67% and 44.33% joint families. He said that due to industrialization, modernization and urbanization nuclearization of families is taken place. Members are moving out of the rural families in search for jobs, education and some businesses. Kinship relations are also gradually changing. Extended kinship relations are of less importance now. The kinship terminologies are also changing people are using English terms like Uncle, aunt, cousin, dad, mom etc.

Chaudhury (2004) analysed the family structure among the Kondh tribe of Orissa. He studied the Desia Kondhs of Phulbani (now Kondhmal) district of

Orissa. The Kondh family is a patrilineal, patriarchal, patrinymic, and patrilocal family. However, patrilocality is only ideally found because they live in a single living-cum-bedroom household. Inside the room, one corner is used for the kitchen with a small partition. There is also an *attic,* having storage place including a small storage for grains. Therefore, for maintaining the privacy of the parents, adolescent children went to the dormitories (mainly daughters) to sleep in the night. Whereas the adolescent boys slept in the *Verandah* or went to their fixed dormitories in other villages. Further after the marriage, they are supposed to live with their parents but again the issue of privacy comes. The married couple lived in a separate house with a *hearth* adjacent to the parental household. It is constructed just before the marriage. Initially, they eat together from the parental kitchen only and later they cook their own food. This is a good example of nato-local household.

Blankenhorn's book 'Fatherless America' (1995) pointed out that most of the single parent families are headed by a woman and the consequence is lethal because the sons had no authority figure at need, they are confused. Vaughan's study (1990) says that there have been breakups among couples after long-term intimate relationships They have first social separation and then physical parting resulting in single-parent households.

In the changing world, scenario, Alvin Toffler gave eight types of families: Blended family, The remarried family, Adopted family, Single parent family, Zero parent, Family of convenience, and Virtual family. He said that before Industrial Revolution, people tend to live in large multi-generational households. But as the second wave began to move across first-wave societies, families felt the stress of change. The family no longer worked as a single unit as the economic production shifted from field to factory. Due to this the extended families gradually and painfully begin to change into nuclear families. However, as the third wave begins, the breakdown of the nuclear family is even more sharply evidenced in the spectacular increase in single-parent families. Due to many divorces, breakups, and separations. In recent years, huge growth in such households has been found.

Patnaik(1994) in his article, "Family, Women and Development Among the Paraja of Highland Orissa", examined some of the issues and themes pertaining to the family structure and women's position in the changing socio-economic scenario of tribal community of Eastern India, i.e., the Paraja community. The whole tribe is divided into various patrilineal exogamous clans or *bauns* (they regulate marriage and succession), each *bauns* is divided into several *kuda* (conglomeration) or lineages. The person who has descended from a common ancestor and lives in the same village belongs to the same *kuda. Kuda* consists number of families (*ghar*), which normally consists of husband-wife and their unmarried children. Son after marriage lives in the adjacent house near to his natal one and cooks separately. The inheritance of the land is in the hands of males and after the death of the head, the son

occupies the land. The role of *ghar* satisfying various needs biological, psychological, social and economic. Among the Paraja, the parents are the main agents of socialisation for their children. Father and mother also control the deviant behaviour of their children through punishment. Within the household, the division of labour is based on sex that are the responsibilities of cooking maintaining cattle shed and main house (*basa*), and nourishing the children which lies with the females. However, all family members work in the field together. But the ploughing is done only by males. Women also contribute to the economy by collecting *piri* and *balni* for brooms, fuel wood and edible roots. Further, they burn wood to make charcoal and sell it in the nearby *haat* (weekly market). By doing so, they generate little funds for themselves as well.

The above review of literature leads to the generalisation that the traditional form of family has been transformed, and many new forms of family have emerged. This paper is based on one such emerging type, i.e. single-parent family.

METHODOLOGY

For understanding and analysing Single-parent families, data has been collected through in-depth qualitative interviews in the form of case studies. These case studies have been taken from Lucknow, Sitapur, South Delhi and North Delhi. Here, I have included only eight case studies, two each from four criteria: death, divorce, separation, and job.

CASE STUDIES

Case 1: Aiman, a 35-year-old woman, married to Saif in 2021. They met on a matrimonial site. Aiman belongs to a middle-class family and she is a working woman. She worked as a receptionist in a clinic. Her husband's family lived in Balrampur. Saif runs a business, for which he has to stay on the site (outside home) for 10-15 days or till the completion of the project. In 2023, they were blessed with a baby girl. For about two months after delivery, Aiman's mother stayed with her to assist her in the necessary things. After she left, Aiman had to get all the work done by herself as she lived alone and her husband used to stay on the site. He used to visit them for about one to two days only. Sometimes things became difficult for Aiman to manage on her own all alone. Living in a neolocal residence and doing things all alone with a small child becomes more difficult. Her child often needed emotional and medical attention, then Aiman had to rush to the dispensary or hospital all alone. Sometimes Aiman fell sick and had to manage herself doing all household work, among other things.

Case 2: Megha, a 35-year-old woman lives in Sitapur. Her husband, Shubham lives in Bihar as he is posted there. Megha is working in a bank in

Sitapur, and lives there with her five-year-old son. Her mother came in alternate months to stay with her and helped her in various work. However, the child's parenting work was done by Megha as her husband was not able to come. Shubham used to come mainly on festivals or on any family function. Due to this distance, the son was not very attached to his father as he lived with her mother permanently. Megha looked after all the necessary things for her child, including his study. She taught him by making time in the evening so that he did not feel lonely, as she was busy all day with her work. Living separately made things more difficult for her as she had to fulfil all the needs of her child as well. In fact, the major issue were two-fold, (a) Megha worked in a 10-5 job where she had to leave at 9 o'clock in the morning and come back at 6 o'clock in the evening. Besides, she had to do the household work, outside work, including household shopping and taking care of the son. (b) Husband virtually stayed away from them because of his job. Hence, Megha lived in a forced neo-local single-parent household.

Case 3: Meenakshi is about 33 years old born in 1990. Originally, her parents were from Bihar, but she was born in Jharkhand and studied in Jharkhand. Their family stayed in Jharkhand, having a permanent house.. She completed graduation from Jharkhand. She got married in 2015, her husband was six years older than her, he was born in 1984 and Meenakshi was born in 1990. Her husband has studied at BHU (Banaras Hindu University). He completed PhD and got a job as an Assistant Professor at Delhi University in the Department of Hindi. Therefore, after marriage, Meenakshi came and stayed with her husband in Delhi. Meanwhile, her husband's parents and two brothers, along with their wives and children, lived in Bihar. They were blessed with a Baby girl after two years of their marriage In fact, her husband has been suffering from liver infection since 2010, i.e. five years before marriage. It was due to the consumption of food and drink which were excessively oily and spicy and sometimes unhealthy as said by her. But she was not informed about this during marriage.

In August 2018 he was admitted to a Delhi hospital. Suddenly, without telling her, they took her husband to Chandigarh and got admitted there. The sad news came that he passed away in October 2019. Then she landed in a single-parent family, which was a very traumatic experience. The first thing she had to do was to make adjustments to her daughter, who was only two years old then she started going to nursery, and now she is in 2nd class (i.e. in 2024). She lived with her daughter in a rented house. Since her husband was in Delhi University she tried for a job under the compassionate grounds. She had to struggle a lot to get the job, which she finally got in 2022.

Case 4: 54-year-old Ajay lives alone. His wife passed away as she was suffering from a severe Lungs ailment. Ajay is a government servant. Ajay has one daughter who is studying at Post Graduate level at the University (abroad). The family is economically well off. Ajay's parents passed away long

ago. Everything was going smoothly, but five years back, his wife's lungs problem started. He tried every senior doctor, specialist, and hospital to cure her, but the problem continued. There was enormous expenditure on hospital treatments and medicines, but the disease did not subside. Due to this menace, everybody in the family was disturbed and under stress. Finally, she was hospitalized and passed away in June 2021. Probably, COVID-19 infection aggravated Ajay's wife's lung disease. After her death, the problem of a single-parent family started. His daughter was also facing a traumatic time, and her friends and relatives convinced her to go abroad. She went abroad. She would often say, "It is difficult to describe how to live without the mother. My mother has been a close associate. We lived together with instant mutual cooperation on various matters. However, now I have to live alone, think alone and do everything alone. That's probably the will of the Almighty". After saying so, she continuously wept. Ajay has learned to live alone after his daughter left abroad for studies. But deep down, he knows that her daughter missed her mother and it was very difficult for him to calm her down. As a single parent, he is much worried about her single daughter's emotional and mental well-being.

Case 5: 49-year-old Zara got married in 2002 to a lawyer husband. The husband was from a well-established family in Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh. After marriage, they meet each other in Jaunpur or in Kanpur during weekends or holidays. After about two and a half years she got pregnant, then gradually the conflicting situation started, mainly with the irresponsible behaviour of her husband. Even the parents exhibited erratic behaviour towards her and did not cooperate with her things worsened to such an extent that she had to leave her in-laws' place. In 2005, she moved to her parents' house in Banaras when she was about six months pregnant then she delivered a baby girl. In 2008, she moved to Lucknow after she got into an assistant professorship in a prestigious college. They are separated but not divorced, the daughter did not know about her father's credentials. However, it seems the daughter misses her father's absence. Wherever the father's name is required, including the school admission form the father's name is mentioned. In this manner, the Identity of a father is there but the daughter is bereft of father socialization and training. Whenever there is any requirement like medical requirement or purchasing household items or anything else husband/father's role is not fulfilled. Emotional bonding with the husband and conjugal requirements have been missing, feels the lady.

Besides this, there is an issue of security and identity because she lived all alone with her daughter. Security in the sense the wife feels that with the husband one feels secure. Without her husband, one has to compromise in different situations to find out peace and security. It may sometimes lead to depression and consequently miss happenings but somehow they have to manage life and somehow get into the happiness of life

Case 6: Usha is about 42 years old and lives in South Delhi. Initially her aim was to be a teacher and was interested in sports as well as cooking. But the course of life had to tell a different story. She was asked to get married by her parents and she got married at the age of 26. While her husband was two years older than him i.e., 28 years. In fact, her marriage was a difficult proposition because, among the Baniya caste, there is a heavy demand of dowry. The person she got married, happens to be a distant relative of her and the marriage took place with a manageable dowry. His father is a happy-go-lucky person, which means he earns money and spends for himself. He regularly consumes alcohol, doesn't give any money to the family. Therefore, the sons earnings goes for the maintenance of the household. Interestingly, he never gave anything to his wife. Usha says that unnoticingly, she got pregnant, then she had a lot of requirements, including medicine but her husband did not give her anything. She ask for money for herself but he did not gave rather he started abusing her. Strangely all the in laws and her husband involved in domestic violence against her. She went to women cell of Saket Court for counselling in 2012. The baby was born in 2010. It was very difficult phase for her. From 2014 she lived separately in Pitampura with her husband. In 2018 she got guest teacher job in Government school of Pitampura. Then her husband did not give money for house rent and sons fees. It was virtually impossible to run the family with meagre earnings. During COVID times her father-in-law passed away and her husband lives with his parental family and she stayed alone with her son. Adding to the woes, she lost her job during the COVID times; somehow, she managed with the help of her sister and parents.

Then in November 2023, she went to the social cell of Women and the Child Court to get maintenance allowance. At present, she is dependent on her father's pension and her sister's help, and some earnings from her tuition classes. Formal divorce has not taken place, but since 4 years, she has been in a single-parent family, that is living with her son all alone. It has been a truly pathetic and traumatic case of domestic violence with the result single-parent family.

Case 7: Nikita, a 39-year-old woman, lives with her 7-year-old daughter, Mishu, in Lucknow. Nikita lives near her parents' house after the divorce. Subsequently, she worked as a Dental Surgeon in a private hospital. Her mother is a principal in a Girls' college, and her father is a government servant. Everything was going smoothly in her life until 2015, when Nikita got married to Anil, who was a government servant working in the rural development sector. Anil was posted in Lucknow, so they also came to stay with him. Initially, things were normal, and later, she became pregnant. In the early days of marriage, her husband was relatively silent, but later on, he became irritated over small things and started abusing her for no rhyme or reason. Subsequently, his behavior turned violent, and it became intolerable for Nikita. While she was pregnant, she had to confront abusive violence and brunt. Her in-laws eventually opened up and mentioned that he might have some mental issues

or Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD). When his behavior became unbearable, Nikita's parents asked her to stay with them. Her daughter was born in 2017 at her parents' place. In fact, her husband never came to see the child. However, he once messaged her saying, "God bless my child."

In the meantime, a divorce suit was filed, and they got legally divorced in 2024 after 9 years of separation. Throughout the relationship, Nikita experienced weak and depressive moments. However, she carefully brought up her child with the support of her parents. Her daughter is now seven years old (in 2024) and studying in Class 2. She studies in a reputed school.

Case 8: Sneha, 33 years old woman, lives with her parents in Lucknow. She is working in a private company. In fact, she did her schooling from Kanpur and completed her Bachelor of Technology (B.Tech) from Kanpur. After completing her final semester of the B.Tech course, she was recruited by a private company through campus placement. She continues to work there even now. She got married in 2019 which was an arranged marriage. The marriage partner was searched through the matrimonial website Shaadi.com. However, the boy happened to be a distant relative of hers. He was working in a private company as a development officer. He said that earlier he had completed a diploma course and was working with the Indian Air Force, but for some reason, he resigned and joined a private company. She doubted both the diploma course and his Air Force job because she didn't get any evidence. Deep trouble started after marriage. Her husband regularly demanded money and started abusing her, which gradually turned into physical abuse. In January 2020, she gave birth to a child. Then again, some old things continued, which took the form of domestic violence. Ultimately, she left her husband's place and came to Lucknow with her baby. She filed a divorce suit, and the case continues. Her daughter is about five years old and is studying in Upper KG. It has been a very pathetic life story for Sneha, who has been tormented and exploited to the maximum by her husband. Further, she is worried about the future, that when her daughter grows up, she might misinterpret the facts and blame her for the troubled relationship.

From the above case studies, it can be observed that the members of the family face a lot of trauma and turbulence in managing the affairs. This is particularly more stressful when it is headed by a woman. The children in such families also face psychological issues, and sometimes they find it very difficult to manage things.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

The general concept of a family is that husband, wife, and the children stay together, share emotional bonds, and take care of each other. In fact, Edmund Leach had analysed the marriage system and said that there are ten types of rights and responsibilities shared by the husband and wife (Leach,

1955). One of the responsibility was to create a common fund for the benefit of the children. It means the parents take care of the children, and they are responsible for the children's upbringing. In a single-parent neolocal household, it becomes the responsibility of one of the parents. Further, the single parent gets emotionally tired, resulting in stress. It is clear from case 1 of Aiman. However, these days it has become quite common where both husband and wife are working in different places, and one of them is taking care of the children. Earlier, the notion of working women was not there. Therefore, the wife/mother stayed with the family and took care of the children, husband, as well as others. Working women is a type of new normal because of two reasons: (a) the women is empowered and (b) economic support. Sometimes it results in ego problems, doubting each other's integrity, over burden by one of the parents, all these leading to divorce. However, it will not be wrong to say that neolocal single-parent family is gradually becoming a reality. In such families, children are also becoming less dependent on their parents and are closer to their friends/peer group. It is clear that a neolocal single-parent family is formed by choice and compulsion. Undoubtedly, it is difficult to adjust to Indian society's realities, which is based on family values and structure.

Besides this, there is always a difference between the ideal and real forms of any social institution. In people's minds, the ideal form of family exists. Therefore, they cannot accept any digression like a divorce, separation, extramarital relationship, or getting impregnated without marriage. Other than this, people also do not accept having only daughters. Thus, it leads to public criticism and not any kind of positive comment if it is a single-parent family or a family having one of the factors. However, the cases and the findings establish the fact that neo neo-local single-parent family is the reality of the new India.

Further, Giddens' idea of structure-agency has great relevance here, i.e. members of society can reproduce structural rules and rules can be changed through the development of new patterns of interaction. In the single-parent family the woman after separation or divorce changes the old rules of the family and adapts to the new rules. The second aspect of structure, resources, also comes into being through human actions and can be changed or maintained by them, i.e. in the single-parent family, members manage themselves in the neo local family.

Notes

1. This article is a part of my Ph.D. work. I am grateful to my supervisor, Prof. Anshu Kedia, and my teacher, Prof. Sukant K. Chaudhury for their guidance.

2. (i) Consanguine Family: It is the first type of family based upon the intermarriage of brothers and sisters, own and collateral, in a group; (ii) Punaluan Family: It is the next type of family based upon the intermarriage of several sisters, own and collateral, with each other's husbands, in a group; the joint husbands not being necessarily kinsmen of

each other. Also, based on the intermarriage of several brothers, own and collateral, with each other's wives, in a group; these wives not being necessarily of kin to each other, although often the case in both instances. In each case the group of men mere conjointly married to the group of women; (iii) Syndyasmian Family: It is the third stage of family based upon marriage between single pairs but without an exclusive cohabitation. The marriage continued during the pleasure of the parties; (iv) Patriarchal Family: It is the fourth stage of family based upon the marriage of one man with one wife; followed, in general, by the seclusion of the wives. There was no exclusive cohabitation for the couple; (v) Monogamian Family: It is the modern form of family based upon marriage between single pairs, with an exclusive cohabitation. It is the only legal form of marriage, and we may take it for granted as the standard mating system.

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WHERE THE DEITY DICTATES: WESTERN HIMALAYAN TEMPLES AND THEIR LIVING FOLK TRADITIONS

Abstract

The folk traditions of the temples present some of the important historical-cultural developments in the Himalayan region. They safeguard the rituals, traditions, and value system that governs the life of people. To gain greater insight into these traditions, a study has been undertaken of seven major temples in the Kathua district, Jammu and Kashmir. Drawing upon primary data through field visits, semi-structured interviews, and by participatory observation, the paper tries to understand a pattern in the folk stories while discussing their significance in presenting a 'parallel history', a vernacular historiography that complements historical discourses while contributing to the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage.

Keywords: *Folk, Himalayan region, Temples, Kathua district, Jammu and Kashmir.*

Theoretic framework

Oral tradition does not have anything in writing, rather is passed down the generations through oral channel (Bauman 1992). The term 'oral tradition' denotes the oral messages at least a generation old and also the process of their transmission by word of mouth over time. These messages can be in form of communication presenting news or an interpretation of existing situation. News aim to provide information originating from eyewitnesses, hearsay, or internal experience such as visions, dreams, or hallucinations. The other form is about expression of experience like personal reminiscences, iconatrophy, linguistic expressions (folk etymology) and literary expressions as in oral art (Vansina 1985)

The genres of oral literature include Folk traditions, which forms a popular and necessary part of all societies. They serve different functions such as historical artifacts; describable and transmissible entities; cultures; and

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behaviours (Jones and Georges 1995). Folklore is the subset of folk tradition and this term was coined by the British antiquarian William John Thorns in 1846, a translation of the German term Volkskunde. Folklore makes the core element in an authentic national culture, contributing to the spiritual and historical integrity of a people. The oral and face-to-face communication is prominent feature of folklore. (Bauman 1992)

The folk always have an association with certain community and region. Yi-Fu Tuan explains that the landscapes or spaces become meaningful when they have some attached memory, experience and attachment (Tuan 1977). Local legends are always attached to certain regions, where they arose centuries ago. They remain static, in place, though not necessarily in time. There may be identical local legends of region with no historical connection, as explained by theory of polygenesis which explains it as psychic unity of mankind (Krappe 1930).

In north Indian hilly regions, there are similarities in the local legends, usually associated with Pandavas and local gods. The legends associated with local gods makes them a powerful living entity. B. R. Sharma states that the village gods control the villagers and the customs. Therefore, it is the major dictator of their activities, hopes and despairs, virtues and vices, and natural and created misfortunes in local society. The god is thus, the symbol of the region's culture (Sharma 2007).

Robert Redfield and Milton B. Singer (1954) describe that the Great Tradition encompasses literacy, classical thought, and wider societal norms while the Little Tradition is localised, everyday cultural world. The cultural products embrace the Great Tradition of intellectual and aesthetic achievements as well as the Little Tradition of folk and popular culture (Singer 1972). Those two traditions are not mutually exclusive, but interdependent (Obeyesekere 1963). Their interaction leads to Great Tradition universalizing larger culture while the Little Tradition localises and modifies it within village life (Marriott 1955).

The current study is an attempt to understand and ascertain certain patterns in the folk legends associated with the temples in the Kathua district of Jammu and Kashmir.

Method

1. Study area

Figure 1 illustrates the temples associated with folk traditions, Kathua district, Jammu & Kashmir. The Shakti temples are of Jourian wali Mata, Sukrala Mata, Mata Bala Sundri, and Dhoula wali Mata, whereas, Shiva temples include the Neelkanth, Mahabilwakeshwar and Airwan temple.

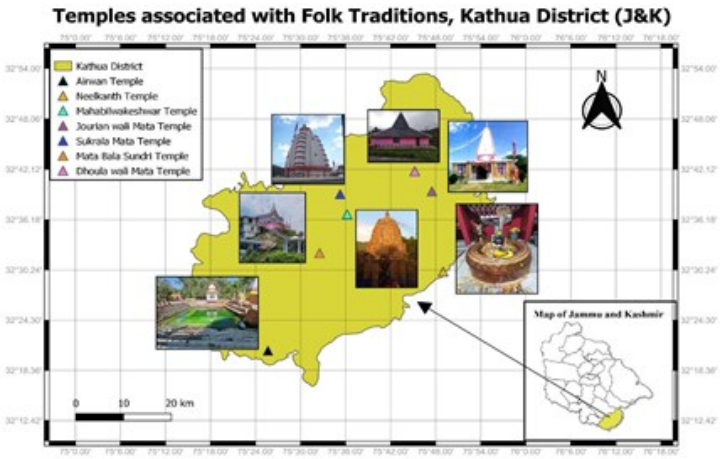


Figure 1: Temples of Kathua District, Jammu & Kashmir

2. Data Collection and Analysis

The study uses both primary and secondary sources. Primary data on deities, rituals, and local beliefs was gathered through site visits, semi-structured interviews with priests and villagers, and participation in community gatherings. Photographs of temples and related structures were taken on-site, and information in Dogri was translated as needed. Secondary material from journals, books, newspapers, and articles supplemented the field data. For analysis, the study adopts a qualitative approach using narrative and thematic analysis.

3. Literature review

Indian folklore's rich cultural heritage, regional diversity, and oral traditions are highlighted in research literature. While Islam (1985) highlighted folklore and myth as active cultural forces shaping social values, early scholars like Crooke(1896) documented living traditions. In the Himalayan setting, Handa(2004) studied Naga cults and the survival of sacrificial customs in spite of Brahminical influence, while Dracott (1906) documented regional stories endangered by contemporary change. Localised versions of epics and Puranic stories are also preserved in Himalayan temples; Tilak (2019) characterizes *Sthala Puranas* as legends of temple origin that preserve memory, divine forms, and forgotten builders.

Ghurye observes that major Hindu deities take on a variety of local manifestations shaped by community belief (Momin 1996), while Seethalakshmi's Folktales of Tamil Nadu shows the richness and vitality of regional oral traditions beyond the Himalayas. Theoretical perspectives further enrich this understanding: Nora explains how 'sites of memory' emerge when lived memory fades, and Geertz highlights how cultural symbols and meanings

shape human experience. Together, this scholarship provides a framework for interpreting the folk beliefs, temple traditions, and localised deity cults explored in the Kathua region.

Findings: Elements of the Folk Beliefs

1. First Appearance of the Deity

The Shiva-Shakti temples of the region are associated with folk legends that reveal the interplay between the Little and Greater traditions. In Shakti temples, the deity's first appearance is often described as a response to the devotee's call or as a saviour during a crisis: stories rooted in local, community-based Little Traditions. These accounts exist in multiple versions, each shaped by its time and the circumstances (Jones and Georges 1995). Further, several temples are linked to epic figures like the Pandavas, drawing on the wider civilizational Great Tradition. Together, these narratives show how local folk beliefs and pan-Indian traditions coexist and reinforce one-another in the religious life of the region.

According to the traditional beliefs, the deity interacts with a devotee in dreams and reveals her presence in the form of *pindi* (stone slab) or *trishul* (trident), instructing them to establish a shrine. In Mata Bala Sundri temple, the belief speaks that once a Brahmin struck a stone with his sickle while cutting grass, and the stone began to bleed. That night, the Goddess appeared in his dream and directed him to place the stone under a banyan tree for worship (Ganhar 1984). Later on, the stone was considered a reincarnation of the Goddess and, thus, enshrined in the temple. It is also said that the *pindi* form of the Goddess often changes its colour (Padha 2021).

In the Sukrala Mata temple, a belief states that about five-hundred years ago, a saint named Trilochan finished his sacred studies at a young age, and was instructed to return to his village, Sukral, to serve its natives. He, however, meditated in Baramulla (Kashmir province) and requested the Goddess Malla (incarnation of Goddess Sarada) to visit his birthplace and bless the community. Pleased, the Goddess asked whether he wished to become a great Pandit, Vaidya, Tantric, or a Poet. He declined, instead prayed that his decedents worship her with devotion (Mata Sukrala Devi Ji, 2021). His request was fulfilled a few years later when the Goddess appeared in a dream of his grandson, Shiva Nandan. She revealed that she dwelt in the jungles of Sukrala beneath a tamarind tree in the form of a *pindi* (Singh 2010).

Another version narrates that after twenty-five years of study in Kashi, and a few months of learning the *Durga Saptashati* in Kashmir, Shiv Nandan performed a *havan* (fire sacrifice) to please the Goddess, Malla. As the offerings were consumed, he started sacrificing his flesh with a *khanda* (sword). The Goddess then appeared, stopped him from offering his head, and granted him

a blessing. After a few months, he returned to Basohli, where she reappeared, now in his dream, and asked him to find her as a *pindi,* under a tree of *malti* flowers(Mata Sukrala Devi Ji 2021).

In another version, Amalok Ram, a Brahmin of the Sukral village, performed penance at the Sarada shrine, and obtained a promise that the Goddess would manifest in his third generation. Accordingly, during the time of his great-grandson, Shiva Nandan, a small *shila* rose miraculously from a spring (Kak 1972). Thus, the people started worshipping the Goddess in her *pindi*/*shila* form.

The temple was later built by Raja Umedh Singh of Chamba, the brother of the Chamba king, who ruled the Dogra state during 16th century. After being driven out of Chamba by his brother, Singh headed toward Billawar, where he fell ill after hunting *pijade* (wild goats). He was cured completely through the blessings of Goddess Malla, who also foretold that he would succeed his brother as ruler of Chamba. Stunned by her divine power, he sent men and materials to build the temple after becoming the king (Singh 2010).

The folk legends of several temples describe the deity appearing in human form, often as a little girl, and communicating with ordinary people, mostly shepherds. According to the legend regarding the Dhoula Mata temple, the Goddess appeared in the dream of a *Sanjaan Gaddi* shepherd, Roop, and directed him to visit a nearby mountain peak Mandhi Dhar. She appeared there as a little girl and instructed him to build a temple at Nuknali.

A different account is presented by a *chela* (disciple) of the Goddess, who served her temple for 60-years and belongs to the *Sanjaan* community. He recounts that the Goddess frequently appeared before Roop *Gaddi,* converse with him and once a *trishul* attached to the headwear of Roop, was also left in a sacred spot. The Goddess later directed Roop to build a temple at Nuknali. After a few months, she accompanied Roop to Dhoule hill, asked that another temple be built there. She instructed that she would spend only a few months in the temple and no prayers would be observed for three months, when the priest and his family stay in the Bhakoga village (Doblia 2018).

Similarly, the legend associated with the Jourian Mata temple states that the Goddess revealed herself through a dream. During summers, people from the Jourian region would take their cattle to the Dhani hill, but any animal that reached the hilltop perished. A boy from the Thakkar community named Praga faced the same experience. The Goddess then appeared in his dreams continuously for three nights, instructed him to build a temple. Praga, however, ignored it, believing it to be an evil spirit, until the Goddess returned to his dream again and insisted that the temple be built so the cattle would no longer perish. The next morning, Praga visited the hill with his parents and found all the previously dead animals alive and grazing. Convinced by the miracle, a temple was constructed at Jourian.

In contrast to the Shakti temples, the folk beliefs of ancient Shiva temples involve the ruling class and connection with ancient scriptures and characters. The Airwan temple, for instance, is believed to be named after Indra's elephant, Airawat, who was resurrected from one of the baolis at this site. According to the legend, when King Bhagirath brought the river Ganga from heaven to earth, her flow was blocked by a massive rocky mountain. All attempts to remove it failed until it was revealed that only Airawat could clear the obstacle. After Bhagirath prayed to Indra, Airawat was sent to break the mountain for the benefit of humanity.

After breaking the mountain, Airawat grew proud of his strength and claimed that he had enabled the Ganga to flow. To humble him, Ganga swept him away into the subterranean world, *pataal-lok*. Given that it sailed covertly beneath the earth, this branch of the river Ganga is known as *Pataal* Ganga or *Gupt* Ganga. This folk belief encodes geomorphic processes. When the Shiwalik ranges uplifted, they blocked river courses, creating lakes that later burst through the barriers and formed plains known as duns. Similarly, the belief in the underground flow of *Gupt* Ganga reflects the bhabar phenomenon, where river water percolates underground and resurfaces in the terai region.

When Indra learned that Airawat had been swept away, he and the other *Devtas* (gods) of *Dev-lok* (heaven) hurried to the earth. Narad Muni instructed him to pray to Lord Shiva. After being pleased with his meditation, he blessed Indra to have his elephant back from the *Gupt* Ganga. Consequently, Airawat is believed to have emerged from *pataal-lok* through a spring. Another version narrated by a priest, states that the meditation was performed by King Bhagirath to fulfil his promise of returning the elephant safely to Indra. The spot where Lord Shiva appeared is said to have retained a natural *linga* known as *Aap Shambhu*. Jerath (1998) claims that a monarch named Govind Chand built a temple at Airwan, the site of Lord Indra's meditation.

Paul (2012), mentions another tradition in which a devotee from the village of Nagri travelled daily to Rakh Sihari to worship Lord Shiva, as no nearby shrine existed. One day, he was unable to cross the river Ujh due to flooding and returned home in grief. That night, in his dream, Lord Shiva instructed him to search for the divine *linga* at Airwan. He successfully found the *linga* upon which a temple was eventually built. A folk account claims the temple was constructed by King Vikramaditya in the 4th century; another claim it was built by a legendary hero at Erwan, a township, which he had built in honour of his wife Erwan (Singh 2010).

The legend regarding Neelkanth temple Basohli states that the Shiva-*linga* originally rested in the Kishtwar region, where the ruling family worshipped it. The *linga* is said to date back to the Mahabharata era, when King Bhurishrava of the Chandra dynasty kept it tied to his arm as a mark of devotion to Shiva. During the war, Arjuna cut off Bhurishrava's arm, and an

eagle carried the severed limb away but dropped it into a well due to its weight. The eagle later died and was reborn as a girl in Kishtwar. One day, while fetching water from the same well, she saw an eagle in the sky drop a dead snake that miraculously came back to life. Amused, she began laughing loudly. The king of Kishtwar, who happened to be in the nearby *chaugan* (ground), noticed her laughter and questioned her about it.

The girl recounted her previous birth and explained how the severed arm bearing the Neelkanth *linga* had fallen into a well, just as the snake had fallen from the eagle's beak. The king then ordered a search, and the arm was found in a well at Kurukshetra and brought to Kishtwar, where he established a temple for Neelkanth (Shakir 2012). According to a priest, the *linga* had the unique power to reveal a person's face from a past life. The royal family worshipped it for centuries while it remained in the Kishtwar palace.

One day, a Kishtwari queen wished to see her former birth and was horrified to discover that she had once been a monkey. Fearing the king would reject her, she angrily removed the *linga* and threw it into a fire hearth. The sapphire *linga* was scorched, turning it black, as seen in Figure 2.



Figure 2: Neelkanth Shiva Linga

The decline of the Kishtwar kingdom is believed to have begun with the queen's act, leading to famine and thereby exodus of people. King Bhopat Pal of Basohli later saw the Neelkanth *linga* in a dream, attacked Kishtwar, and brought the *linga* to Basohli along with the princess through a marital alliance (Shakir 2012). The *linga* was placed in the Neelkanth temple at Basohli, where its associated beliefs are popular among the devotees.

2. Built structures and the folk

The popular folk tale of the Mahabilwakeshwar temple in Billawar (Kathua district), attributes its origin to the Pandavas. It states that, in *Dwapara Yuga,* when the Pandavas were in exile, they spent considerable time in north India, building temples, springs, and caves along their journey. In their final

year, they reached Billawar and discovered a dense forest of *bilwa* (wood apple) trees, which astounded them with its beauty and remote location (J&K Information Department 1998). Seeing the form of Shiva in each tree and *linga* in every leaf, they built a temple for Lord Shiva there, and installed a *linga* after performing a *yagya* (oblation) with *mantra* chanting.

Another belief holds that the Mahabilwakeshwar temple was built by the gods themselves. Drawn to the abundance of *bilwa* trees and its leaves dear to Lord Shiva (Dewan 2006), the gods found this place sacred and decided to build a temple here in secrecy. They began working only at night, but realising that a single night was too short, they prolonged it to six months to complete the structure. Around this time, a Teli (oilman) in a nearby village was grinding mustard seeds to prepare oil for which it usually took a night's duration. When all his mustard was exhausted and dawn had still not come, he fetched more, yet the night continued. Bewildered, he finally exclaimed, 'What a miracle is this?' and at that very moment, the sun rose. By morning, the people of Billawar were astonished to find a fully built Shiva temple. They gathered in large numbers to see this divine miracle and the beauty of the deities installed within (Shakir 2012).

Another version states that the Pandavas built this temple along with a Ganga shrine south of the Naaz river and 101 *baolis*, aiming to make Billawar a replica of Haridwar. Because they were in a*gyatvas* (incognito exile) and could not reveal their location, they had to work at night but completing the temple in one night was impossible. They therefore asked Lord Krishna to delay sunrise, creating a six-month-long night. An oilman noticed the miracle when he produced six months' worth of mustard oil in a single night and exclaimed in surprise; after which the sun finally rose. With dawn breaking, the Pandavas escaped from the region (Shakir 2012). The sudden sunrise caused Bhimsena to drop a large stone carved with Lord Hanuman (Figure 3), which he had been carrying for the temple. Another tradition claims that Lord Hanuman himself carried the stone but left it when dawn appeared, manifesting his presence in the carving. The stone still stands firmly in the middle of the Naaz river, surviving frequent floods. The river is considered sacred like the Ganga, and devotees immerse ashes here. The temple remains incomplete, as seen in the semi-carved stones behind it (Figure 4).



Figure 3: Lord Hanuman carved on the rock



Figure 4: Semi carved stones in Mahabilwakeshwar temple

Bhimsena, angered by the oilman's interruption, swung the stone-grinder about 100 km south to Falote village in Kathua, where its remains are still there (Figure 5). Later, King Vrabhu Vahana, son of Arjuna, completed the Ganga temple at Billawar (Padha 2021). Near the Naaz River in the area called Gurnaal, a temple (Figure 6) and many *baolis* (two shown below in Figures 7 and 8), are linked through folk memory to the Pandavas. Also, a stone arrow (Figure 9), struck in the ground of Gurnaal, is said to be the Goddess's weapon used against the demons.



Figure 5: stone-grinder at Falote village



Figure 6: Shiva temple, Gurnaal



Figure 7: Baoli



Figure 8: Baoli



Figure 9: Stone arrow in Gurnaal

In Shakti temples, *trishuls* hold a sacred place within the complex. For instance, the *trishuls* at the Dhoula Mata temple (Figure 10) are offered by the devotees to the Goddess. All the Shakti temples have this common tradition of *trishul* offering.



Figure 10: Trishuls in Dhoula Mata temple complex

The tale of Mata Bala Sundri temple links it to the Pandavas, as King Bhadruvahana of the Pandava lineage is believed to have built the temple 5,500 years ago in the *Dwapara Yuga* for the Pandavas' victory in the Battle of Kurukshetra. The battle is said to have left the temple roof unfinished. Later, a king of Akhnoor completed the structure and arranged for regular worship.

A small pond (Figure 11) and a cave is located near the temple from where the sound of water could be heard in the early morning, suggesting the Goddess bathing. A belief regarding the Berry tree is that the fruits on the tree are considered a divine blessing and only the fortunate receive them. To ease access to the shrine, stairs were later constructed; earlier, devotees had to climb using a rope and walk along the slope to reach the Goddess.



Figure 11: Pond in Mata Bala Sundri temple complex

3. Yatra (Pilgrimage) and other rituals

A notable aspect of these folk traditions is the deity's role in directing rituals and determining her place of residence, which may shift over time.

The Dhoula Mata temple was riginally at Nuknali, but the Goddess insisted relocation to the more accessible site of Dhoule. People visit her original temple at Nuknali once a year. On the third Monday of *Kattak* (Kartik in the Hindu Calendar), thousands begin a three-day yatra from Dhoula to Nuknali, known as the Kailash Yatra of Chandi Mata. Men and women perform (Figure 12), barefoot pilgrimage with heads covered (Mehra 2020).



Figure 12: Devotees returning back from Nuknali temple to Dhoula temple

According to the priest Gauri Shankar, the Dhoula Mata temple remains closed for five months: from the last Thursday of the *Margashirsha*/*Mongehr* until mid-*Magha.* It accompanies a ritual of transferring silver *trishuls* from the Dhoula temple to Bhakoga village. During this period, silver *trishuls* are ceremonially shifted from the Dhoula temple to Bhakoga village. One *trishul* is brought back during the *Navratras*, on the fifth day, when the *Mela Panchmi* fair is held, and it is returned the next day.

The Shiva temple at Airwan has a ritual offering copper snakes and scorpions to the deity along with *trishuls*. It is believed snakes and scorpions don't harm the worshippers or the villagers. Taking a holy bath in the *Gupt* Ganga is another ritual, primarily practised by women.

4. Sacrifices

With growing modernisation, many Shakti temples have moved toward vegetarianism, though some remote hilltop shrines still follow sacrificial rituals. The Sukrala Mata temple, for instance, once accepted goat offerings on Tuesdays and Sundays (Kak 1972). Devotees performed a sacrificial ritual known as *Sukhna* after fulfilment of their wishes. Located near the town, the temple has discontinued this practice, with only the *Bali Kund* remaining as a reminder (Warikoo 2009). The *aarti* of Goddess Sukrala also mentions that the sacrifice ended at the Goddess's own command. It states that:

Sadiyon se jo chalda si, pashuon ka jo vadhmaya I

Tere hukum de naal dati, hoya pal bich band maiya I

Hun rakt de kunde, te jhule tera laal jhanda

Jai jai Sukrala maa.....

Translation: From centuries which was going on, the sacrifice of animal; on your one command, it was stopped instantly; now on the *kund* of blood, your red flag swirls.

In contrast, the Dhoula and Jourian Mata temples, located on rural hilltops, still perform this ritual. At the Dhoula Mata temple, in a year, around 20-25 bulls are offered to *Bhairo* at midnight during severe crises, whereas goats are offered to the Goddess regularly. According to a folktale, when a buffalo or goat is sacrificed at a Dhoula Mata temple, its blood flows out of a hole in the temple's gate and reaches Kulaal village (Doblia 2018).

As per the folk legend of Jourian Mata, the sacrifice ritual was introduced by the deity. After Praga, the first priest, died in 1910, successive priests reportedly died every twelve years, creating fear among the villagers. They prayed to the Goddess, who instructed them to offer a bull every four years. This practice continues today, with goats or sheep sacrificed to Jourian Mata and a bull to Bhairo for the well-being of the region. It is also said that during the ritual, the *chela*, while in a trance, drinks the blood of the sacrificed animals (Dewan 2006).

5. Deity Communicating Through Her Devotees

In many Shakti temples, the deity is believed to communicate through her devotees, who enter a trance known locally as *chowki*, marked by intense vibrations and sudden movements. Through this state, the Goddess expresses her wishes or warnings. At Dhoula and Jourian Mata temples, such communication often occurs during crises like famine or heavy rainfall, when devotees seek her guidance.

A folk legend of Sukrala Mata temple mentions about Umedh Singh, the exiled prince of Chamba, who fell ill after hunting in the Sukral forest. A Brahmin, Shiva Nandan, performed a fanda (spell) for partial relief and asked the chela, Hira Thakur, to invoke the deity. In trance, the chela revealed that the Goddess was angry because the prince had killed her animals, and she would only cure him if he built a temple for her using materials from Chamba (Ganhar 1984).

6. Deity as a Living Entity

The goddesses are often seen as living guardians of their surroundings, reacting strongly whenever their will or the natural order is disturbed. The

beliefs associated state that the thieves who steal from temples often turn blind due to the deity's wrath. This divine protection makes locals feel secure, with many leaving their homes or shops unattended without fear.

The priest of the Dhoula Mata temple held that the deity has assigned different responsibilities to different communities. The Sanjaans perform daily *puja* and guard the temple, the Kanooni people of Dullangal open the gates after the seasonal closure, and the Mandalwale (from Sarohi area of village Bhakoga) join the Kanoonis in offering special prayers during times of crisis. These roles continue today exactly as the Goddess is said to have instructed.

For Mata Bala Sundri, the Upadhyay community believes that the Goddess protected their ancestors when they migrated from Kalanaur to escape the Aurangzeb army. Despite repeated attempts, the army could not reach them. Later, when the community prayed for a male child, the wish was fulfilled, and they began to revere the Goddess as their *kuldevi* (Padha 2021).

Recently, an incident about blessings of Jourian Mata is popular as follows:

'A man drilling a borewell for a factory failed to find water despite going deep. After seeking the Goddess's blessings, his wish was fulfilled, revealing her divine presence.'

Dhoula Mata is also said to exhibit her presence amid the chaos of India's partition. A popular tale recounts that the Goddess created an optical veil around the village, causing assailants to see the army or total darkness, protecting the common populace.

7. Remembrance: Through Folk-Songs

In contemporary times, many temple legends are also remembered by the local communities through folk songs, containing essential knowledge. The folk-song associated with Dhoula Mata is as follows:

vich nuknali mata parghar hoi,

Shakti aakhe roop gaddi gi dhole bhawan vanai,

Vich nuknali pehla teerth, dua dhoula mai,

Shakti saaren de kaaj suare, manne sab lukai.

Translation: Once the Goddess Nuknali appears in a village and through her powers told the Roop gaddi to make a place for her; the first pilgrimage should be at Nuknali and second at Dhoula. The Goddess benefits everybody and all believes in her.

Jourian Mata in Duggar's folk songs as:

Thaan teeusre da chali mata, vich jourian de aai,

Vich jourian lakkhu Thakkar di, mata sukhnae aai,

Mata sukhne aai thakkare gi, dean mera bhawan banai,

Mata parghat hoi jourian lean pahar noaai.

Translation: From a place called Teeusre, the Goddess reached Jourian; In Jourian, the Goddess came in the dream of Lakku Thakur and told him to build her a palace.

The portrayal of Sukrala Mata's instructions through a folk song:

Chambe De Raaje Ne Tera Bhavan Banaya si

Pathar, Chuna Pani san Chambe to aya si,

Fir mil gaya raaj unaa, taiyon Sukrala maa

Jai jai Sukrala maa.

Translation: The King of Chamba has built the palace for the Goddess; stone, cement, and water all came from Chamba; and just then he received back his kingdom.

Conclusion

Folk legends play a central role in shaping the cultural meaning of temples and offer insight into the region's historical and social life. This study shows that these stories share common elements, revealing similar cultural patterns. Local tales from the Little Tradition, along with influences from the epic-linked Great Tradition, create a rich cultural landscape. Together, they illustrate how oral stories and religious beliefs continue to support the region's cultural identity.

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INDIGENOUS ETHNOMEDICINAL KNOWLEDGE AND PLANT USE: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY IN BARAMULLA DISTRICT, JAMMU AND KASHMIR, INDIA

Abstract

Traditional medicinal plant knowledge is a vital component of indigenous healthcare systems in biodiversity-rich regions such as Jammu and Kashmir, yet it is increasingly threatened by modernization, urbanization, and reliance on allopathic medicine. This study documents ethnomedicinal plants and associated indigenous knowledge in Baramulla District, Jammu and Kashmir, India, and examines patterns of knowledge distribution among different social groups. Ethnobotanical data were collected from 399 informants (272 males and 127 females) through semi-structured interviews, guided field walks, and group discussions conducted across six tehsils, and were analyzed using quantitative ethnobotanical indices including Informant Consensus Factor, Fidelity Level, preference ranking, and paired comparisons, with statistical analyses performed in SPSS. A total of 21 medicinal plant species belonging to 20 families were recorded, with leaves being the most commonly used plant part and boiling/cooking the predominant method of preparation. Ethnomedicinal knowledge was significantly higher among key informants and older age groups compared to general informants and younger respondents. High informant consensus was observed for treatments of insect bites, obesity, liver inflammation, and respiratory disorders, while Rosa webbiana showed the highest fidelity level for cough and Punica granatum for jaundice. The findings demonstrate that Baramulla District harbors rich ethnomedicinal plant diversity and well-established indigenous knowledge systems; however, the evident erosion of traditional knowledge among younger generations underscores the urgent need for systematic documentation, conservation initiatives, and community-based knowledge transmission to ensure sustainable use of medicinal plant resources and strengthen primary healthcare..

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Introduction

Before the advent of modern or allopathic medicine, traditional medicines were widely used across different societies (WHO 2002: 1–3; Igoli et al. 2005: 134–136; Kiringe 2006: 61–63; Giday et al. 2016: 97–99; Tefera and Kim 2019: 2–3). Various traditional medical systems were practiced worldwide, drawing on wild and cultivated plants that embody local culture, customs, health-care practices, and rituals developed through generations of experience. Ongoing scientific analyses are increasingly validating indigenous ethnomedicinal knowledge, thereby enhancing its social acceptability. Moreover, the trade in medicinal plants provides livelihood opportunities and encourages continued use of traditional medicine (Bhat et al. 2003: 74–78; Malik et al. 2011: 350–352; Rather and Baba 2015: 12–15).

Historical evidence indicates the long-standing use of medicinal plants in traditional remedies. In China, plants were employed for medicinal purposes as early as 7000–6000 years ago (Rather and Baba 2015: 4–6), while records from Egypt, Hebrew, Babylonian, and Syrian civilizations date back to around 1600 BC (Dery et al. 1999: 10–12). Owing to accessibility, affordability, and fewer side effects, traditional medicine remains widely practiced in developing countries, including Bangladesh, Myanmar, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Indonesia (WHO 2002: 8–12). The global demand for ethnomedicinal plants continues to grow, with trade estimated at approximately US$14 billion annually and increasing at a rate of 15–25%. The Kashmir region, often described as a "heavenly abode on earth," harbors rich medicinal plant diversity ranging from valley floors and karewas to dense forests and alpine zones (Ahmed 2007: 356–360; Dar et al. 2001: 45–52).

Jammu and Kashmir comprises several valleys, including the Kashmir, Tawi, Chenab, Poonch, Sind, and Lidder valleys (Vij 2017: 2–4). The Kashmir Valley covers an area of 15,520.3 km^2 and is bordered by the Himalayas and the Pir Panjal range (Guruswamy 2016: 3–5; Khan 2018: 6–8). With an average elevation of about 1,850 m, the valley is drained primarily by the Jhelum River, along with the Tawi, Ravi, and Chenab rivers (Vrinda and Ramanan 2017: 3–5; Encyclopaedia Britannica 2015: 1–2; Agencies 2019: 2–3).

Records indicate that approximately 1,748 medicinal plant species occur in the Indian Himalayan Region, of which Kashmir forms a significant part (Ahmed 2007: 361–365; Dar et al. 2001: 55–60). The region is inhabited by diverse ethnic groups possessing distinct cultural identities and long-standing traditions of herbal medicine (Pie and Manandhar 1987: 98–101; Kala et al. 2006: 4–6; Utkarsh 2001: 52–54). This knowledge, transmitted orally through generations, requires urgent documentation. Despite its significance, ethnomedicinal studies in Kashmir remain limited. Ethnobotany and ethnomedicine focus on understanding relationships between human behavior and plant communities (Martin 1995: 18–22).

Rapid urbanization and industrial growth pose serious threats to biodiversity and traditional knowledge systems in the region. Concern over the erosion of indigenous knowledge and potential loss of medicinal plant resources underscores the need for systematic documentation. The present study aims to provide insights into medicinal plant diversity, procurement, and use in Baramulla District, Jammu and Kashmir, while identifying knowledge gaps and establishing a baseline for future ethnomedicinal research.

Review of Literature

Recent global reviews and regional studies reaffirm the continued relevance of indigenous plant-based healthcare systems for biodiversity conservation and sustainable rural health (Heinrich et al. 2021; Ahmad et al. 2023). Ethnomedicinal research has therefore gained increasing attention due to growing recognition of indigenous knowledge systems and their importance in primary healthcare, particularly in rural areas with limited access to modern medicine (Igoli et al. 2005; Kiringe 2006; Giday et al. 2016; Tefera and Kim 2019). Such knowledge is culturally embedded and largely transmitted orally across generations.

In the Indian Himalayan region, ethnobotanical studies document high medicinal plant diversity and strong dependence on wild flora for healthcare needs (Dhar et al. 2000; Kala et al. 2006). Studies from Kashmir report extensive use of indigenous plants to treat common ailments, with leaves as the most frequently used plant part and decoction or boiling as the dominant preparation method (Bhat et al. 2003; Malik et al. 2011; Rather and Baba 2015).

Research further shows that ethnomedicinal knowledge varies within communities, with elders and traditional healers possessing greater knowledge than younger and formally educated individuals, indicating gradual erosion of traditional knowledge due to modernization and changing healthcare preferences (Giday et al. 2009; Kidane et al. 2018; Rather and Baba 2015).

Recent literature also highlights increasing threats to medicinal plant resources from overharvesting, habitat degradation, urbanization, and agricultural expansion (Dhar et al. 2000; Kala et al. 2006). In this context, home gardens and community-managed landscapes are increasingly recognized as important for conserving medicinal plants and associated indigenous knowledge.

Despite substantial ethnobotanical research in Kashmir, district-level anthropological studies focusing on knowledge transmission, informant variation, and conservation practices remain limited, particularly in Baramulla District. The present study addresses this gap by documenting medicinal plant diversity, usage patterns, and the socio-cultural dimensions of ethnomedicinal knowledge in Baramulla District, Jammu and Kashmir.

Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by the theoretical perspectives of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS), ethnobotanical knowledge transmission, and cultural ecology to understand traditional medicinal plant use in Baramulla District, Jammu and Kashmir. Indigenous Knowledge Systems theory views traditional medicinal knowledge as a cumulative body of practices and beliefs developed through long-term interaction between local communities and their environment, transmitted primarily through oral traditions and embedded within cultural and social life. In ethnomedicine, this perspective underscores the urgency of documenting plant-based healing knowledge amid rapid socio-cultural change.

The study also draws on ethnobotanical knowledge transmission theory, which explains variation in medicinal plant knowledge across social groups. Factors such as age, gender, education, and healing experience influence the acquisition and retention of ethnomedicinal knowledge, providing a basis for comparing knowledge levels among key and general informants and across demographic categories.

Additionally, the research is informed by cultural ecology, which examines interactions between human societies and their environment. This framework helps explain how local ecological conditions and biodiversity shape medicinal plant selection and use, while also highlighting the impacts of environmental degradation and socio-economic change on traditional medical practices.

Materials and methods Description of the study area

The district Baramulla which derives its name from the city of Baramulla, was founded by Raja Bhimsina in 2306 BC. The city is called as the gate-way to the valley as it was located on the route to the Valley from Muzaffarabad, now in POK, and Rawalpindi, now in Pakistan. Baramulla district is one of the 20 districts in the Indian Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir. Baramulla city is the administrative headquarters of the district. It is largest District in of Jammu and Kashmir in terms of both area and population (Moorcroft and Trebeck 1841: 12–15).

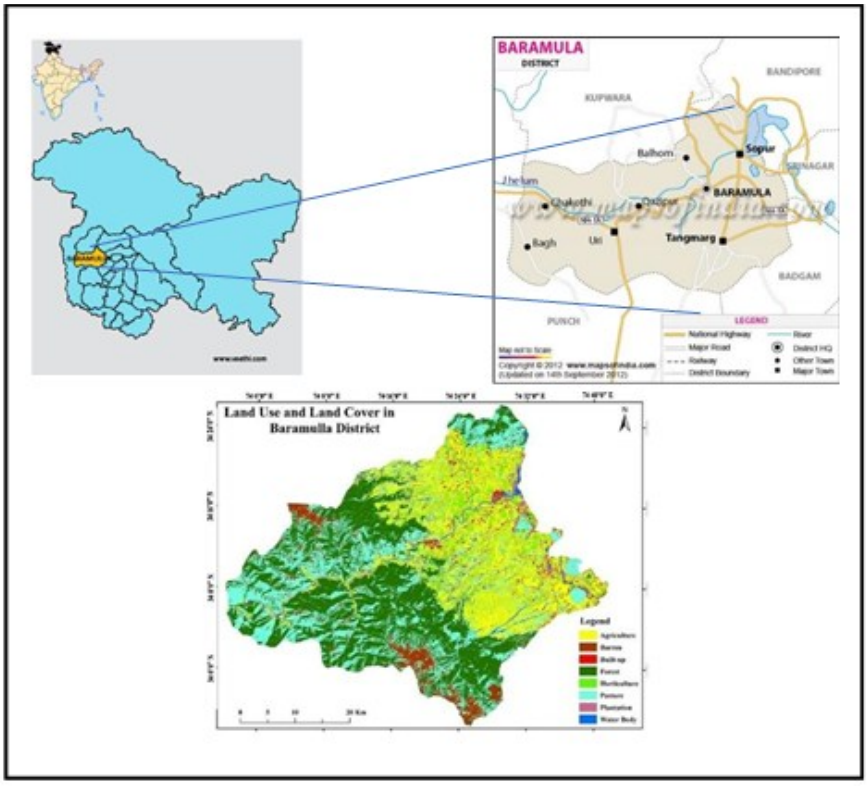


Figure 1: Map of Baramulla District, Jammu and Kashmir UT, India

The district headquarters of Baramulla lies between 34°11´53´´ N and 74°21´50´´ E (Figure 1) at an elevation of 1,850 m (6,069 ft) above mean sea level. The district is bordered by Kupwara District to the north and northeast, Srinagar and Budgam districts to the east and southeast, and the Line of Control to the west. The Pir Panjal range bounds Baramulla to the south and southwest, separating it from Poonch District of the Jammu province. The district covers an area of 2,072.42 km² and comprises 544 villages (Sajad 2019: 22–25).

According to the 2011 Census, Baramulla District has a population of 1,008,039, including 534,733 males and 473,306 females. The district comprises 205,946 households, distributed across tehsils as follows: Uri (21,757), Baramulla (43,984), Pattan (30,394), Tangmarg (27,720), Sopore (45,196), Rohama (14,396), Boniyar (8,766), and Kunzer (7,313).

Administratively, Baramulla District is divided into eight tehsils: Uri, Baramulla, Pattan, Tangmarg, Sopore, Rohama, Boniyar, and Kunzer. The district possesses extensive forest resources, with forests covering approximately 2,963 km², accounting for about 71% of the total area (Bhat 1984: 45–50; Buth and Nawchoo 1987: 113–115).

The district is inhabited by diverse ethnic communities, including Gujjars, Bakarwals, and Paharis. Global assessments highlight the importance of plant diversity for human survival; the State of the World's Plants Report (2016) estimates 391,000 vascular plant species worldwide, of which nearly 369,000 are flowering plants, though only a small proportion have been assessed for conservation status (Lawrence 1895: 88–92; Lone 2005: 34–38).

Sample size and informant selection

Six tehsils—Uri, Baramulla, Tangmarg, Sopore, Rohama, and Boniyar (Figure 1)—were selected from a total of eight based on recommendations from local elders and authorities, presence of traditional healers, vegetation cover, and agro-climatic conditions. A total of 399 informants (272 males and 127 females) representing different age groups were surveyed. Twenty herbal healers were purposively selected as key informants, while 379 general informants were selected randomly. The sample size was determined using Cochran's formula as presented by Bartlett et al. (Bartlett et al. 2001: 44–46).

where "n" is the research sample size, "N" total number of households in all six selected Tehsils, "e" is the maximum variability or margin of error of 5% (0.05), whereas 1 is the probability of the event occurring. As a result, we got a total sample size of: $n = 161{,}819/1 + 161{,}819(0.05)^2$, or n= 399.

The sample size of each tehsil was determined based on the proportion of the number of households (HH) in the respective tehsils. For example, total household number of Uri was 21757, yielding a number of 54 (n= 21757×399/ 161819). The same calculation was used for the other tehsils resulting in Baramulla (HH= 43984, n= 108), Tangmarg (HH= 27720, n= 68), Sopore (HH= 45196, n= 111), Rohama (HH= 14396, n=36), Boniyar (HH= 8766, n= 22).

Data collection

Ethno-medicinal plants were documented based on information obtained from elders and healers across the selected tehsils (Table 2). Ethnobotanical data were collected in Baramulla District using standard methods (Afsahul Kalam Mohd and Dar 2018: 5–8). Semi-structured interviews were conducted to record medicinal plant uses, including preparation methods, routes of administration, plant parts used, and conservation issues, following Martin's approach (Martin 1995: 23–28). Interviews were guided by a checklist prepared in English and translated into Kashmiri and Urdu. Guided field walks were undertaken to document local names, plant parts used, preparation methods, and ailments treated, during which plant specimens were collected from wild habitats and home gardens.

Group discussions with key informants were conducted to document the status, threats, and conservation of medicinal plants, and the information was recorded and analysed following Martin (1995: 29–32).

Specimen collection and identification

Plant species were identified both in the field and herbarium using standard taxonomic literature (Alexiades 1996: 45–50). Collected specimens were pressed, dried, labelled, and verified by elders and healers, with accompanying information on local name, collection details, and habitat.

Data analysis

Medicinal plant knowledge among different social groups was analysed using SPSS. Independent sample t-tests were applied to compare knowledge across gender and healing experience (key and general informants). Microsoft Excel (2010) was used for calculating percentages, summarizing data, and preparing tables and graphs.

Preference ranking was conducted when multiple plants were reported for the same ailment, following Martin's method, whereby informants ranked plants based on perceived effectiveness (Martin 1995: 33–36).

Data reliability was ensured through repeated interviews, and inconsistent information was excluded following Alexiades (Alexiades 1996: 51–55).

Participant agreement on plant use for specific ailment categories was calculated using the Informant Consensus Factor (ICF) as described by Friedman et al. (Friedman et al. 1986: 276–278):

$$ICF = (Nur - Nt) / (Nur - 1)$$

where Nur is the number of use reports for a particular ailment category and Nt is the number of plant species used for that category.

The cultural importance of individual medicinal plants was assessed using Fidelity Level (FL), calculated as:

$$FL = (Ip / Iu) \times 100$$

where Ip is the number of informants who independently cited a plant for the same ailment and Iu is the total number of informants who mentioned the plant for any ailment (Khan et al. 2004: 353–355).

Results Socio demographic characteristics of respondents

The informants represented a wide range of ages, genders, and educational backgrounds. Males constituted the majority (68.18%), while females accounted for 31.82%. Most informants were aged 21–31 years (31.82%), followed by 31–41 years (21.05%), 41–51 years (16.29%), 51–61 years (15.29%), 61–71 years (12.78%), and 71–81 years (2.76%). All informants were Kashmiri and belonged to different tehsils of Baramulla district. Regarding education,

37.34% had attained a bachelor's degree, 29.82% had completed high school, and 32.83% were illiterate. Key informants comprised 5.01% of the sample, while general informants accounted for 94.99%.

A two-tailed independent-samples t-test revealed a significant difference in medicinal plant knowledge between male and female informants, with males reporting higher mean knowledge scores (3.26) than females (2.98) (Table 1). Key informants demonstrated significantly greater medicinal plant knowledge (mean = 4.85) compared to general informants (mean = 2.98). Significant differences in medicinal plant knowledge were also observed across age groups and educational levels (Table 1).

The informants in the study area covered informants from different age groups, knowledgeable elders, males/females and youngsters, and from different educational levels. The majority of the informants in the study area were males (68.18%), whereas 31.82% were females. Informant age ranged from 21 to 31 years (31.82%), informant from the age group of 31 to 41 years (21.05%), informant from the age group of 41 to 51 years (16.29%), informant from the age group of 51 to 61 years (15.29%), informant from the age group of 61 to 71 years (12.78%), informant from the age group of 71 to 81 years (2.76%). All informants were Kashmiri belonging to different tehsils of Baramulla district. The informants who were having bachelor's degree level of education were (37.34%), high school informants (29.82%), illiterate informants (32.83%). The key informants were (5.01%) and the general informants were (94.99 %).

A two-tailed independent sample t test comparison of medicinal plant knowledge between male and female informants in the study area showed that there was a knowledge difference between them. The mean value for males was (3.26) whereas for females it was 2.98 (Table 1). Significant difference between key and general informants was observed in mean number of medicinal plant known and used in the study area: key informants were more knowledgeable (4.85) than general informants (2.98).

There was a significant medicinal plants knowledge difference between age groups in the study area (Table 1). Besides, there was also a significant medicinal plant knowledge difference between different education levels (Table 1).

Table 1: Medicinal plant knowledge among different social groups of the study area (n = 399)

Parameter	Category	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Sex	Male	127	3.26	1.249
	Female	272	2.98	1.304
Age Group	21-31	127	2.14	1.132
	31-41	84	2.86	.920
	41-51	65	3.00	.984
	51-61	61	3.95	.939
	61-71	51	4.37	.799
	71-81	11	4.91	.302
Educational Level	Bachelor's Degree	149	2.92	1.260
	High School	119	2.97	1.238
	Illiterate	131	3.33	1.344
Healing Experience	Key Informant	20	4.85	.366
	Simple Informant	379	2.98	1.254

Medicinal plant diversity, habitats, and growth forms

A total of 21 medicinal plant species belonging to 20 families were documented as being used by the inhabitants of Baramulla District. These plants were collected from multiple habitats, including natural vegetation, home gardens, crop fields, riversides, and roadsides. Most species were harvested from natural vegetation (38%, 8 species), followed by crop fields (28.6%, 6 species), home gardens (23.8%, 5 species), and riversides (9.5%, 2 species).

Plant parts used, modes of preparation, and administration

Various plant parts were utilized for medicinal purposes, including leaves, roots, stems, bulbs, seeds, fruits, bark, latex, and whole plants. Leaves were the most frequently used plant part (33%, 7 species), followed by roots (29%, 6 species) (Figure 2). Traditional remedies were prepared using fresh, dried, or both fresh and dried plant materials. Fresh plant parts were predominantly used (66%, 14 species), while both fresh and dried materials accounted for 19% (4 species) and dried materials alone for 14% (3 species).

Local informants reported multiple methods of remedy preparation, with cooking/boiling being the most common (38%, 8 species), followed by extract preparation (19%, 4 species) (Figure 3).

Medicinal plant diversity, their habitats and growth form Overall, 21 medicinal plants belonging to 20 plant families, were documented to be used by the people of Baramulla District.

People in Baramulla District collect medicinal plants from different sources, including from the wild, home gardens, crop field, riversides and

roadsides. Out of 21 medicinal plants, 8 (38%) were gathered from natural vegetation, 5 (23.8%) from home gardens, 6 (28.6%) from crop fields and 2 (9.5%) from riverside.

plant parts, mode of preparation and administration In Baramulla District, various plant parts—including leaf, stems, roots, bulbs, seeds, fruits, bark, latex and whole plants—are used in traditional medicine. The most widely used plant parts were leaves which accounted (33%, 7 species) followed by roots (29%, 6) (Figure. 2).

Traditional medicines in Baramulla District are prepared from fresh or dry, and both fresh and dry plant parts. The highest number, i.e., 14 (66%) of remedial plants, were prepared fresh followed by both fresh and dried (4, 19%) and dry (3, 14%). Local people, including the healers of the study district, agreed that traditional medicines are prepared through different methods. Most are prepared by cooking/boiling (8, 38%) followed by extract formation (4, 19%) (Figure 3).

Table 2: List of Identified Medicinal Plants found in the Study in the area

S. No.	Taxon name	Local name	Family	Altitude range; flowering phenology	Part(s) used	Method of preparation	Ethnomedicinal uses
1	*Aconitum heterophyllum* (Bhat et al. 2003: 75–77; Srivastava et al. 1986: 52–54; Dhar et al. 2000: 60–62)	Paewakh	Ranunculaceae	2,400–4,500 m; flowering April–May	Root	Crushing or directly consumed	Antidote for snake bites; headache and cough
2	*Artemisia absinthium* (Bhat et al. 2003: 78–80; Srivastava et al. 1986: 55–57)	Tethwan	Asteraceae	1,500–2,100 m; flowering June onwards	Leaves	Boiling/cooking	Obesity, diabetes, liver infection
3	*Coriandrum sativum* (Bhat et al. 2003: 81–82)	Danival	Apiaceae	500–800 m; flowering April–May	Seeds	Boiling/cooking	Hair fall
4	*Cannabis sativa* (Srivastava et al. 1986: 58–60; Dhar et al. 2000: 63–65)	Bhang	Cannabaceae	2,000–2,500 m; flowering May–July	Leaves, seeds, stem	Boiling/cooking	Earache, blood purifier, scabies, piles
5	*Cedrus deodara* (Srivastava et al. 1986: 61–63; Dhar et al. 2000: 66–68)	Divdar	Pinaceae	1,500–3,200 m; flowering May–July	Stem, bark	Crushing and pounding	Skin rashes, external ulcers
6	*Dioscorea deltoidea* (Giday et al. 2009: 6-8)	Kraeth	Dioscoreaceae	450–3,100 m; flowering May–July	Leaf	Boiling/cooking	Ophthalmic and urinary infections
7	*Datura stramonium* (Srivastava et al. 1986: 64–66; Dhar et al. 2000: 69–71)	Datur	Solanaceae	50–2,200 m; flowering July–September	Seeds	Boiling/cooking	Rheumatism, frostbite, toothache, tonic, birth control
8	*Ficus carica* (Bhat et al. 2003: 83–85; Srivastava et al. 1986: 67–69)	Anjeer	Moraceae	Up to 5,420 m; flowering May–August	Stem latex, fruit pulp	Crushing and pounding	Insect bites, warts, birth control
9	*Juglans regia* (Bhat et al. 2003: 86–88)	Doankul	Juglandaceae	3,000–4,000 m; flowering March–April	Leaf, bark	Boiling/cooking	Tooth infection, scrofula, rickets, leucorrhoea

10	*Malva sylvestris* (Srivastava et al. 1986: 70–72; Dhar et al. 2000: 72–74)	Sotal	Malvaceae	2,500–3,500 m; flowering April–June	Seeds	Boiling/cooking	Cough, fever, eyesight
11	*Papaver somniferum* (Bhat et al. 2003: 89–91)	Kashkhas	Papaveraceae	585–2,056 m; flowering April–June	Dry fruit	Chewing	Cough, diarrhoea
12	*Phytolacca acinosa* (Dhar et al. 2000: 75–77)	Brand	Phytolaccaceae	1,500–3,000 m; flowering June–September	Root	Boiling/cooking	Narcotic effect, sedative
13	*Portulaca oleracea* (Dhar et al. 2000: 78–80)	Nuner	Portulacaceae	2,000–2,800 m; flowering March–June	Leaves	Boiling/cooking	Liver inflammation, cough; plant extract for burns
14	*Punica granatum* (Srivastava et al. 1986: 73–75)	Daankul	Punicaceae	2,000–2,500 m; flowering January–February	Seeds	Crushing and pounding	Jaundice, anaemia
15	*Rosa webbiana* (Bhat et al. 2003: 92–94; Malik et al. 2011: 215–217; Srivastava et al. 1986: 76–78)	Gulab	Rosaceae	1,500–4,000 m; flowering May–July	Flowers	Extract	Cough and cold
16	*Rumex acetosa* (Bhat et al. 2003: 95–97; Malik et al. 2011: 218–220; Dhar et al. 2000: 81–83)	Obej	Polygonaceae	2,100–4,100 m; flowering April–June	Whole plant	Extract	Stomach problems; eaten as vegetable; nettle sting relief
17	*Taraxacum officinale* (Bhat et al. 2003: 98–100; Malik et al. 2011: 221–223; Dhar et al. 2000: 84–86)	Hand	Asteraceae	1,600–2,400 m; flowering May–July	Roots	Boiling/cooking	Back pain, common cold, chest infection
18	*Trigonella foenum-graecum* (Bhat et al. 2003: 101–103; Malik et al. 2011: 224–226)	Meth	Fabaceae	1,300–1,400 m; flowering January–April	Seeds	Boiling/cooking	Back pain
19	*Urtica dioica* (Bhat et al. 2003: 104–106; Malik et al. 2011: 227–229; Srivastava et al. 1986: 79–81)	Soi	Urticaceae	1,000–2,500 m; flowering August–September	Leaves, roots	Boiling/cooking	Rheumatism
20	*Viola odorata* (Malik et al. 2011: 230–232)	Bunufsha	Violaceae	1,800–2,600 m; flowering May–July	Leaves, seeds, flowers	Extract	Respiratory problems
21	*Vitis vinifera* (Bhat et al. 2003: 107–109; Malik et al. 2011: 233–235; Srivastava et al. 1986: 82–84)	Daech	Vitaceae	1,700–2,100 m; flowering April–May	Leaves	Extract	Skin rashes, sores, eruptions

Table 3: Fidelity Level of Medicinal Plant found in the area

Taxon Name	Local Name	Main Ailment Treated	IP	IU	FL = Ip/Iu× 100,	Rank
Rosa webbiana	Gulab	Cough	256	257	99.6109	1
Punica granatum	Daan kul	Jaundice	205	206	99.5146	2
Dioscorea deltoidea	Kraeth	Opthalmic	86	87	98.8506	3
Taraxacum officinale	Hand	Anaemia	256	260	98.4615	4
Aconitum heterophyllum	Paewakh	anti-emetic, and antiinflammatory.	201	205	98.0488	5
Malva sylvestris	Sotal	Cough	205	210	97.619	6
Portulaca oleracea	Nuner	Cough	172	178	96.6292	7
Juglans regia	Doan kul	Tooth Infection	98	102	96.0784	8
Cedrus deodara	Divdar	Skin	171	180	95	9

Ficus carica	Anjeer	Insect Bite	174	184	94.5652	10
Trigonella foenumgraecum	Meth	Back Pain	253	268	94.403	11
Phytolacca acinosa	Brand	Narcotic	157	167	94.012	12
Viola odorata	Bunufsha	Respiratory	185	197	93.9086	13
Vitis vinifera	Daech	Skin	156	167	93.4132	14
Papaver somniferum	Kashkhas	Cough	201	220	91.3636	15
Cannabis sativa	Bhang	Blood Purification	187	205	91.2195	16
Rumex acetosa	Obej	Skin	114	125	91.2	17
Coriandrum sativum	Danival	Hair Fall	98	108	90.7407	18
Datura stramonium	Datur	Tooth Ache	160	187	85.5615	19
Urtica dioica	Soi	Rheumatism	156	185	84.3243	20
Artemisia absinthium	Tethwan	Diabeties	201	256	78.5156	21

Table 4: Informant consensus factor for Eight categories of ailments

Ailment	No of plant species	Citations	ICF = Nur — Nt/Nur — 1,	Rank
Insect Bite and Warts.	2	273	0.996323529	1
obesity	2	95	0.989361702	2
liver inflamation	2	87	0.988372093	3
birth control	2	85	0.988095238	4
Indigestion, Constipation	3	145	0.986111111	5
Cough and Colds.	6	301	0.983333333	6
opthalmic	2	32	0.967741935	7
skin related	6	105	0.951923077	8

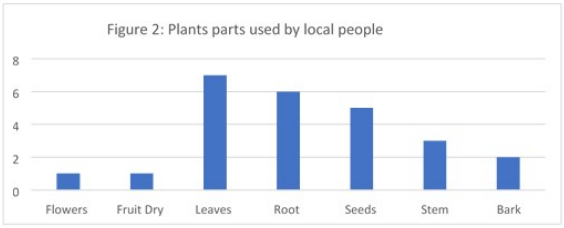


Figure 2: Plants parts used by local people

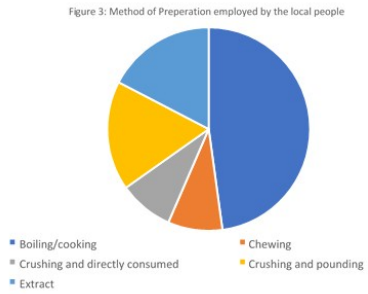


Figure 3: Method of Preperation employed by the local people

Discussion

The higher proportion of male respondents in Baramulla District reflects the customary transmission of indigenous medicinal plant knowledge primarily among men, a pattern widely reported in traditional healing systems (Martin 1995: 18–22; Cotton 1996: 41–45). The documented diversity of medicinal plant species indicates the continued reliance of local communities on traditional medicine.

Medicinal plants were sourced from both cultivated and wild habitats, including home gardens and natural vegetation. Consistent with earlier studies from Kashmir (Bhat et al. 2003: 74–78; Malik et al. 2011: 350–352; Rather and Baba 2015: 12–15; Khan et al. 2004: 351–354), most species were collected from natural vegetation, underscoring the importance of wild habitats in traditional healthcare.

Fidelity level analysis identified Rosa webbiana as the most frequently reported species and Artemisia absinthium as the least reported, likely reflecting differences in local availability and abundance (Heinrich et al. 1998: 1862–1866). Leaves were the most commonly used plant parts, followed by roots, stems, seeds, bark, and flowers, possibly due to ease of collection and perceived therapeutic efficacy (Srivastava et al. 1986: 49–53; Dhar et al. 2000: 57–60). Boiling or cooking was the predominant method of remedy preparation, followed by extract preparation and crushing, while chewing was least practiced (Martin 1995: 33–36).

Significant variation in medicinal plant knowledge was observed across gender, age, and informant categories. Male and key informants possessed significantly higher knowledge than female and general informants (Table 1), likely due to greater experience and the secrecy associated with traditional healing practices, as also reported by Giday et al. (2009: 34–37). Younger informants showed lower knowledge levels than adults and elders, indicating erosion of traditional knowledge due to increased reliance on modern healthcare, formal education, and oral transmission (Martin 1995: 22–25; Kidane et al. 2018: 48–52). Similarly, illiterate and minimally educated informants demonstrated greater ethnomedicinal knowledge than formally educated individuals, suggesting a negative influence of modern education (Utkarsh 2001: 51–54).

Group discussions revealed increasing scarcity of several medicinal plant species due to natural and anthropogenic pressures. Informants emphasized cultivation of medicinal plants as the most effective conservation strategy, followed by soil and water conservation, protected areas, and community awareness (Kala et al. 2006: 4–6; Dhar et al. 2000: 57–59). Home gardens were identified as key sites for conserving medicinal plant diversity and associated indigenous knowledge (Cotton 1996: 121–124). Integrating home-garden conservation with in situ protection of wild habitats is essential for

sustaining rural primary healthcare and ensuring future availability of plant resources for pharmacological research (Heinrich et al. 1998: 1869–1871).

Conclusions

Baramulla District harbours a rich diversity of medicinal plants and associated traditional knowledge related to their preparation and use. The documentation of 21 medicinal plant species reflects the continued importance of ethnomedicine in the region. However, secrecy in knowledge transmission, reliance on oral traditions, reluctance of younger generations, and rapid urbanization have contributed to the erosion of indigenous knowledge systems and increased dependence on allopathic healthcare.

Active involvement of local communities in the conservation and management of medicinal plant resources is essential. Encouraging the cultivation of multipurpose species such as Taraxacum officinale, Portulaca oleracea, Ficus carica, Coriandrum sativum, and Malva sylvestris, which also serve as vegetables, can enhance both conservation and livelihood security. Establishing community-managed forest areas should be prioritized to conserve forest ecosystems in general and medicinal plant diversity in particular.

Abbreviations

SPSS: Statistical Package for the Social Sciences ICF: Informant consensus factor HH: Household.

MSL: Mean Sea Level

FL: Fidelity Level

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Shorter Notes

Satyaki Paul, Sabatini Chatterjee and Anuradha Singh

BROKEN PEOPLE OF RAJASTHAN: GADIA LOHAR COMMUNITY FROM NOMADISM TO SEMINOMADISM AND SETTLEMENT

Abstract

The present article focuses on the Gadia Lohars who are on the brink of complete assimilation with the mainstream community by devaluing their traditional knowledge systems, customary laws, and other social practices. In the past, the historical community got bit by bit fragmented after the Battle of Haldighati which created separate sects or Broken Peoples. Dr. Ambedkar had discussed the scenario of battling tribes for resources, which can be revisited in this context to delve into the history of Gadia Lohar and their association with the Maharana Pratap. At present, the community is facing a social identity crisis due to the dissolved cultural ties with the Rajput community. In this context, an ethnographic survey was conducted among the Gadia Lohar community residing within three states of Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, and Himachal Pradesh to document their contemporary scenario to illuminate the socio-historical and anthropological aspects of the said community. This article partly showcases the deeper implications of neo-untouchability at play and highlights their transition from nomadism to sedentarisation. Apart from this, social change has also created an added nodi of cultural ethnocide considering contemporary times of global influences.

Keywords: *Broken Men, Dr. Ambedkar, Gadia Lohar, Untouchability*

Introduction

The Gadia Lohars a nomadic community dealing with blacksmithing and have a long historical nexus with the Rajputs that spans across generations (Musheera 2023). They were associated with the task of making and servicing weapons for the Rajputs (Cobas Puente 1984: 8). The being and becoming of the colloquially known Khanabadosh/Ghumantoo community has been mired with neglect, discrimination, and marginalisation for centuries. In India, there

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are several nomadic communities i.e., communities that do not have a permanent place of residence and move from one place to another with their cattle, belongings, and families in search of livelihood or resources for their sustenance. In most cases, such communities' lifestyle is intertwined with the natural environment, including grazing land for their livestock. The environment is related to the culture of the same community. In this vein, Thurnwald (1933: 390) observed that there are forms of nomads i.e., hunting and collecting nomads, pastoral nomads, and agricultural nomads. In a similar pulse, as described in the writings of Ruhela (1968: 1), the All-India Enquiry-Nomadic Tribes Report (1960) has divided them into pastoral nomads, khanabadoshes/wandering people, and semi-nomadic tribes. Herein Gadia Lohar falls within the classification of nomadic tribes.

There are several well-known nomadic and semi-nomadic communities in India such as Banjaras, Gadia Lohar, Gujjars, Raikas, Bhotiyas, Shompen, and so on. Bose (1956: 3) had lamented that most of the aforesaid communities cannot find permanent patronage in one single village and they have, so, become socially transformed into nomadic groups, forming a balance to the settled residents who inhabit the villages of India. The resemblance with the ideas of Dr. Ambedkar (1948: 33-34) is very much pertinent in this regard. In 2017, the Idate Commission submitted a detailed report which containing names of denotified nomadic, semi-nomadic tribes dispersed in the 28 states and 8 union territories of India. Gadia Lohar as per the report is present in states such as Punjab, NCT Delhi, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, and Maharashtra. However, their presence can be also found in different states such as Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, and so on, due to their nomadic livelihood practices as nomadic blacksmiths.

The expression "Gadia" is derivative from the Hindi language and means "cart" or "wagon". The Lohars are a group of people who have been working as blacksmiths for generations, and they travel from place to place in carts, setting up provisional kilns wherever they go. The traditional knowledge systems of the community regarding the forging of tools are still impeccable and inimitable. As they have noted that they can state the characteristics of iron just by hearing its sound or by seeing its colour after applying heat. Even their process of tempering tools is quite innovative considering the modern methods of tempering which is inferior to their traditional techniques.

In historical context, numerous records note the Godia Lohar are known to have served as blacksmiths in Maharana Pratap of Mewar's army, where they crafted the king's armour and engaged in combat. They swore not to settle down and not to go back to Mewar until Rana's authority was reestablished when the Mughals conquered the region. Since then, their life has been unpredictable and their mobile house has become their mobile home. After being expelled from Mewar, it's thought that they set about five taboos on themselves (Misra, 1977: 12). Even after absolving their five vows, the

Gadia Lohars still migrate in search of works that solely revolve around making and repairing iron tools. Moreover, their folk gods such as Ramdevji, Bhauruji, and Aie Lacha Mata have their temples in the state of Rajasthan. For pilgrimage, the members of the community living in the state of Uttarakhand visit such temples to pay their obeisance. Some small bands of the Gadia Lohar community living in Uttarakhand migrate to Himachal Pradesh for work, but they return home once their working season ends there.

In the contemporary context, despite their historic contributions to society, the Gadia Lohar community faces many social and economic challenges due to their lifestyle and lack of formal education and job opportunities. Several efforts have been made by the government and non-governmental organizations to provide them with basic amenities, education, and vocational training to improve their living standards and livelihoods. But there is a long way to go in terms of bringing back their lost glory which they had lost in the siege of Chittorgarh.

Methodology

For the ethnographic study in the states of Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, and Himachal Pradesh, members from the Gadia Lohar community were purposively sampled for studying in their social settings. The methods that were employed were of a mixed nature i.e., both qualitative and quantitative (or mixed approach). In our ethnographic fieldwork, the primary data was collected using tools such as in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with the participants. These primary data were jotted down in a schedule by us as per the interview guide. And snowball sampling was used in the field as a method of recruitment method. Moreover, our team interviewed several social activists working for the development of the Gadia Lohar community and asked them to refer to other probable participants they likely identify as Gadia Lohar for our ethnographic study. The outsider's views on the community are also an important subject for this present work. Brief notes were taken during the interview, particularly regarding the responses, tone of voice, and behaviours of the participants.

In our study, about 540 households (2808 individuals i.e., 1434 males and 1374 females) were visited for primary data collection from the aforesaid three states of India. Moreover, a secondary analysis was done on past reports, books, and journals.

Gadia Lohars: A Historical Community

The community strongly identifies itself with the lineage of Rajputs (Musheera 2023). There are several theories on their genesis. And one prevalent theory is that the Gadia Lohars are believed to be descended from the Rajputs, who were known for their warrior skills and expertise in metalworking (Ruhela 1968: 11; Misra 1977: 11). According to this theory, during times of war or

social upheaval, some Rajput families turned to metalworking as a means of livelihood (Tehrani 2015: 2). These families travelled from place to place, servicing and making weapons, tools, and other metal goods, eventually forming the Gadia Lohar community. This points out the fact they were a wandering community even before the battle of Haldighati.

Another alternative theory suggests that Gadia Lohar's lineages were settled craftspeople until the then Mughals defeated their ruler, Maharana Pratap of Chittaurgarh denoting their characteristics as Broken people. This was the most common link that we had discovered during our interactions with the field respondents. The links were especially with the Maharana Pratap of the Sisodiya clans of Rajputs. In order to find social, cultural, and religious sustenance, this community's progenitors were forced to leave Rajasthan in bullock carts (gadi), which is why the prefix Gadia or Gaduliya exists today. If we consider Dr. Ambedkar's (1948: 143) Broken men concept, it is clearly evident that both sides were fighting for resources. And the ones that lost were marginalised as they broke into bits forming the Broken people. This is in direct relation to the bloody battle of Haldighati (June-July 1576), fought between the troops of Maharana Pratap and the Mughal Emperor Akbar. Around 22,000 Rajput soldiers had gathered to fight against Akbar's men in the battle of what he calls "Huldighat," according to Tod (1920: 394), "only 8,000 left the field alive" (Ibid). The dissemination of a rumour that Maharana Pratap had been killed by the Mughals in the battle of Haldighati is said to have stirred feelings of socio-cultural and religious diffidence and despair, causing a certain group of Rajputs to flee Rajasthan in search of shelter and protection. The points identified by Dr. Ambedkar (1948: 34) are pre-requisite for thriving of an affluent community. Rajputs had a traditional duty (kshatriya dharma) to defend their community and strive for social justice as members of the elite high-caste Kshatriya society. But after the monarch was overthrown by Muslim armies, the Gadia Lohars dispersed to various locations throughout mediaeval India. They never made any permanent settlements and migrated for ages.

According to the book titled "Veer Vinod" authored by Mahamahopadhyaya Kaviraj Shyamal Das, during the reign of Maharana Sajjan Singh (r. 1874 - 1884 CE). It was noted that Maharana Pratap was the 72nd Custodian of the House of Mewar. In this book, author Shyamal Das stated that the affiliates of the Gadiya Lohar community left the Chittorgarh Fort when the Mughal army captured Chittorgarh during the reign of Maharana Udai Singh II (r. 1537 - 1572 CE), 53rd Custodian of House of Mewar, at that time they pledged/vowed that:

(i) They would again live in settled homes only when the Maharanas of Mewar recaptured the Chittaurgarh fort.

(ii) They also pledged not to return to the Chittorgarh Fort,

(iii) Not to light a lamp at night,

(iv) Not to keep a rope for drawing water from the well, and

(v) Not to keep the cot on the cart in the right manner (Misra, 1977: 18).

After the demise of Maharana Udai Singh II in 1572 CE, his elder son Kanwar Pratap Singh was set on the throne of Mewar. When Maharana Pratap (r. 1572 - 1597 CE), 54th Custodian of the House of Mewar, took a vow to lead a life of sacrifice, the Gadiya Lohar community became his close companions and integral part of his army.

In our ethnographic study, a folk tale that is orally circulated Gadia Lohar community observed that, during the vanquished Maharana Pratap's stay in the Mewar region's hills and jungles, the Gadia Lohar community joined him and made promises to abstain from particular behaviours (as discussed in the aforesaid vows). This fact was also reaffirmed in the ethnographic study of Promode Kumar Misra in his work "The Nomadic Gadulia Lohar of Eastern Rajasthan" (1977: 12).

Apart from these, even Gadia Lohar is linked with the Padmavat, this theory was presented by Lakhan Singh, another key respondent, who stated that the leaders of the Gadia Lohar community left with the Gora and Badal after a disagreement with Rawal Ratan Singh. Later, Gora and Badal joined the fight against Alauddin Khilji, but the Gadia Lohars did not join and kept on roaming. Thus, the act of nomadic practices was way before the battle of Haldighati as per common perceptions. Some of the community members contend that the Gadia Lohars did not start as blacksmiths but rather adopted the trade after being evicted from Rajasthan. As a result, they now provide specialised services, and their visits coincide with specific agricultural activities of their peasant clientele in various locations (Barth 1987; Misra 1977: 241-242; Rao 1987: 13). It is important to note that the origin of the Gadia Lohar community is not a singular event, but rather a complex interplay of historical, social, cultural, and mythological factors. The community's history had likely evolved through migration, trade, intermarriages, and cultural assimilation. In essence, theories and folklore associated with their origin may vary among different sub-groups and regions within the community.

From Nomadism to Semi-Nomadism Towards Settlement

The nomadic attribute of the Gadia Lohar community originating from Rajasthan has persisted since time immemorial. And, their path choice to Uttarakhand is multifaceted while that of Himachal Pradesh is directly linked to seasonal vocation. In contrast, others have been displaced due to land acquisitions or other development projects in their home state of Rajasthan. In a similar pulse, some have also migrated due to environmental factors such as drought, which has affected the availability of work and resources in Rajasthan. In due course, the migrated populace seemed to be sendenterised in the urban localities by fulfilling their role as blackmiths and working for the

mainstream population. Some of them are even working as daily wage labourers leaving their traditional vocation in favour of more paying jobs in the cities.

This process of 'sedentarisation' of the Gadia Lohar has not progressed evenly in all areas of Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, and Himachal Pradesh. Nevertheless, the 'sedentarisation' of the Gadia Lohar bears out the process that has been marked among many of the nomadic populations of the world (please see Berque 1959: 490; Musham 1959: 539; AbouZeid 1959: 551). However, the nomadism of the Gadia Lohar of Rajasthan and Malwa is considerably different from that of the pastoralists, food gatherers, and hunters (Misra 1977: 1989). The nomadism of the Gadia Lohar is more related to their history and larger economic system than to their natural environment. The nomadic Gadia Lohar is part of a much wider economy and they fulfil a complimentary economic role in the larger economy of the village. In other words, the nomadism of the Gadia Lohar is based on such factors as being prone to rapid changes which can be also observed in the state of Rajasthan. Herein some of the members of the community have shifted to the selling of scrap materials. However, the central question is whether the nomadic Gadia Lohar would accept such changes or not in the long term and, if they do, how would they incorporate it into their cultural life, which are problems of considerable significance. Because there is a high risk of forceful cultural assimilation (short term) or ethnocide (long term). Those of the Gadia Lohar who have settled down provide a rare opportunity to observe the same community in the other extreme forms of human adaptation and to find out the interrelation of the various aspects of social life. Settled life is in complete opposition to nomadic life and is bound to bring a chain of changes. And it essentially tilts towards devaluing of their own traditional knowledge system and acceptance of other jobs such as scrap dealers, and so on.

Thus, in due course of time, it can be observed that Gadia Lohars originally from the state of Rajasthan have scattered all over India now. At present, they inhabit neighbouring states such as Uttar Pradesh. Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Maharashtra, Punjab, Gujarat, Delhi, as per our present study. Moreover, at present, in the states of Rajasthan, Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh, the Gadia Lohars continue their traditional occupation of ironsmithing, but they also engage in other occupations such as trading, labour work, and livestock rearing. However, due to the nomadic attribute, the Gadia Lohar community has faced various challenges, these include social discrimination, lack of access to education and healthcare, and difficulties in obtaining official documents such as voter ID cards and ration cards. In addition, their nomadic lifestyle makes it challenging for them to access government schemes and welfare programs that require a fixed address.

Rise of Neo-untouchability Among Gadia Lohars

Untouchability is a construct based on social and educational backwardness. However, with time the basic idea of untouchability has evolved and it now mainly revolves around ostracization and stigmatisation as seen in the case of Gadia Lohars. In pre-Independence times, the Gadia Lohars were absent from the list of criminal tribes notified by the then British Raj. According to Hollins (1914: 109), a criminal tribe known as the Aherias (also described in Shashi & Varma 1991: 60-64) pretended to be Gadarias when they were imprisoned. This clearly shows that Gadia Lohars became suspected of being a criminal due to their nomadic way of life and the similarity of names. Hollins (1914: 110) appears to infer that the British authorities started physically assaulting the Gadia Lohars after learning about this, treating them as criminals. A list of ex-criminal communities includes the names "Gadaria" for an ethnic group in Rajasthan (Shashi & Varma 1991: 118-122; Nimavat & Luhar 2022: 202) and "Gadalia" for Gujarat, however, there is no historical evidence that the Gadia Lohars were condemned by the British Raj (Nimavat & Luhar 2022: 202). This was also reaffirmed by us in our study on the Gadia Lohar community of Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, and Himachal Pradesh.

In post-Independence times, the abolition of the Criminal Tribes Act lifted all allegations. However, the community started to face a new set of challenges and opportunities. The Indian government implemented various welfare policies and programs aimed at the upliftment and empowerment of marginalized communities, including the Gadia Lohars. Efforts were made to provide education, healthcare, and socio-economic opportunities to the Gadia Lohars to improve their livelihoods and social status as part of affirmative action. In 1991, a Gadia Lohar Scheme was introduced by the then Government of Rajasthan which is still being implemented through the Social Justice and Empowerment Department of Rajasthan. A social reservation tag of OBC was also attached to the Gadia Lohars of Uttarakhand and Rajasthan to aid the vertical mobility of the Gadia Lohar community. However, social stigma and discrimination against the community persisted, and they continue to face challenges such as poverty, lack of access to education and healthcare, and limited economic opportunities.

Table 1. Distribution of the Gadia Lohar community concerning the prevalence of untouchability faced by the community members in aforesaid Three States

Untouchability	Number	%
Yes	75	13.88
No	465	86.11
Total	540	100

The data showcases that, 13.88% reported instances of untouchability, indicating that a subset of the community encountered discriminatory practices related to their social status. In contrast, a significant majority of 86.11% reported no experiences of untouchability, suggesting that a substantial

proportion of the community did not face such discriminatory treatment. There are complex social dynamics and challenges faced at play which creates latent barriers for the Gadia Lohar community, shedding light on the persistence of neo-untouchability.

Table 2. Distribution of the Gadia Lohar community concerning the exploitations faced by the community members in the aforesaid Three States

Kind of Exploitation	Number	%
Social	141	26.11
Financial	6	1.11
No exploitation	393	72.77
Total	540	100

The data reveals that 26.11% of households reported instances of social exploitation, suggesting challenges in interpersonal or communal interactions. Financial exploitation was reported by a minimal 1.11% of households, indicating a relatively lesser prevalence in economic domains. Encouragingly, a substantial 72.77% of households reported no exploitation, underscoring instances where community members did not face discernible forms of mistreatment or abuse.

Table 3. Distribution of the Gadia Lohar community concerning the prohibition in assessing public places in the Three States of Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, and Himachal Pradesh

Prohibition in Assessing		Yes	No	Total
Drinking water facilities	N	10	530	540
	%	1.81	98.14	100%
School	N	15	525	540
	%	2.77	97.22	100%
Temples	N	9	531	540
	%	1.66	98.33	100%

The table specifically addresses three essential public facilities: drinking water facilities, schools, and temples which are a part of Right to Life with dignity. Across the three states, a minimal percentage faces prohibition from accessing these public places. For drinking water facilities, 1.81% of the surveyed households reported restrictions, while the majority (98.14%) did not encounter such barriers. In the same way, in the case of schools, 2.77% faced prohibition, while 97.22% did not. During our fieldwork, Angrezo a Gadiya Lohar woman from Dehradun City asked a question that Padh likh ke kya kar lenge?.....Main apni beti ko school bhejna chahti hun…….par ham logo ke pass ghar bar nehi hain…..koi kagaz nehi hain to usse bhej nehi payi(What will we do by reading and learning. We wanted to send our daughter to school. But we do not have any form of government documents to certify our domiciliation in the region. So, we were unable to send our daughter to a school). The local administration is lacking apathy which is also a part and

parcel of neo-untouchability which is being discussed. However, temples exhibited a slightly higher restriction percentage, with 1.66% facing barriers and 98.33% reporting no prohibitions.

In general, in terms of receiving health care from local hospitals, they themselves noted that "Hamare kapde ke pehnave ke wajah se ham se bohot budi tarah se bartav karte hain aur bhaga dete hain" (Due to our dress patterns, the health officials of local clinics/hospitals treat badly with us and they drive us away). "To humlog private mein zyada kharcha kar ke dikhana padh ta hain" (So, we use private clinics and hospitals to cure diseases which cost us dearly from our pockets). The negative image associated with their blacksmithing is leading to the devaluing of their cultural practices due to the present global influences. Nonetheless, the destitute living conditions have made them impervious to most kinds of diseases which is not a sweeping statement. Herein a curious case was unearthed by our team during our ethnographic study that no one from the Gadiya Lohar community was affected (i.e., health conditions worsened) by the coronavirus during the pandemic which was also reflected in media reports (PNS 2021). However, improper sanitation facilities unavailable to them due to their livelihoods of selling iron tools and implements near the streets are causing most of the distress in our three surveyed states which was also noted in a media house report (Outlook 2022).

The perception of the Gadia Lohar community as "criminals" has resulted in their ostracisation from mainstream society. They are often viewed with suspicion and fear, leading to social exclusion, discrimination, and limited opportunities for employment, education, and social interactions. The criminal stereotype has also led to negative labelling and discrimination against the community's children, perpetuating the intergenerational cycle of stigma and marginalisation. These had essentially created a vicious cycle of poverty yet the members of the Gadia Lohar community say that they have never resorted to begging which indicates their pride of being a Rajput. In Rajasthan and New Delhi, permanent houses were constructed for the members of the Gadia Lohar community. However, the houses in Rajasthan were multi-storeyed wherein they had lamented how they would make tools and implements, moreover, the spaces were far away from marketplaces which created a gap in selling their tools and implements to their neighbouring communities. This essentially showcases the need for proper research to financially support the members of the community and socially uplift them from their sad state of affairs or else even after giving them permanent residence they will move to tents or jhuggis near the street to carry out their hereditary vocation of blacksmithing.

Conclusion

To conclude, the ideas put forward by Dr. Ambedkar still resonate with the contemporary context considering its astuteness in identifying the degree of brokenness after losing a war. The Gadia Lohars are essentially the

broken people who are socially stigmatised and are faced with constant social discrimination, exclusion, and negative labelling by the mainstream population (Singh 1998: 356). In our ethnographic survey, it was discovered that all of these had led to psychological distress, including low self-esteem, depression, anxiety, and a sense of hopelessness among the members of the community. Moreover, the lack of privacy, social support, limited access to mental health services, and the internalisation of negative perceptions have further exacerbated the psychological impact on community members, affecting their overall mental well-being. At present, most of the members of the Gadia Lohar community from the three states i.e., Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, and Himachal Pradesh are very reluctant to interact with the government of the day on these particular issues due to a lack of social awareness in the community about their fundamental rights. All of these had led to the devaluing of their own cultural traditions which is further leading to cultural ethnocide of their earlier social practices evident in marriage, functions, and so on.

The recommendation section of our work tried to delve into the multifaceted and multidimensional problems and redress them with a bottom-up approach. Through periodic interviews, it was discovered that despite belonging to lower socio-economic status they are forced to take up private services such as health and education because they are mostly kicked out or not looked after by the individuals associated with governmental facilities or the governmental facility is located far off from their place of temporary residence. So, for every minor treatment and however high may be the cost, they go for private health centers just to circumvent social stigmatisation (based on apparel, body odour, etc). Apart from these, the traditional medicinal practices, especially the practice of home remedies from *bhopa* (traditional healer) were also significantly noticed in the studied population in the three states of Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, and Himachal Pradesh. *Bhopa* (traditional healer) played a critical role in the community but is disappearing in numbers day by day due to the devaluing of their own traditional knowledge systems and with the advent of modern-day allopathic practices prevalent in the mainstream community.

In terms of relationships with mainstream society, "roti-beti ka sambandh" (food and marriage-related alliance) is not present with the mainstream community due to the notion of purity and pollution which is prevalent among neighbouring community members. This quintessentially showcases neo- untouchability at play which is marginalising the Broken People and exacerbating their brokenness. In essence, marrying with the same community but out of the same gotra can also lead to a small gene pool due to their small numbers. In the near future, this might lead to a prevalence of recessive traits in certain sections of the Gadia Lohar populace.

To end, and to counter all these aspects, a mental reformation regarding such a historical community is the need of the hour which can be only done by

glorifying the past of the community and making it available for all masses and classes to understand. And for social upliftment, the government of the day must inoculate a specially tailored hand-holding scheme wherein the voices of the community would be integrated for policy formulation to tailor specific and assign specific needs at the turn of the 21st century.

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CASTE IN THE BHAGAVADGITA

In this paper, I propose to write what Bhagavadgita has to say about the caste which will be followed by a simple correlation of different verses and at the end I will make a few concluding remarks based on my understanding of caste as a student of anthropology.

My response to the question as to why I am attempting to do it is as follows:

As a student of anthropology I have been reading a lot about caste. The literature on caste based on its systematic study in anthropology is huge besides numerous writings from the scholars from various other disciplines and lay writers. The anthropologists and sociologists have made immense contribution to it and are still counting. Here, I must make a personal confession. Though I am a Hindu born to a specific caste and in my childhood we lived in a traditional locality of Lucknow, I was not conscious of the dimensions of caste. Subjectively, I can say (as I do not belong to a depressed caste) that the domains I operated except for my home, I thought caste was not a factor or irrelevant say in my school, play grounds etc. My father was educated in a Christian college the impact of which on his thoughts and values were quite evident. He was strongly and openly critical of many Hindu beliefs, practices and rituals. Till I read the literature on the caste I thought we were a sort of liberated people except when it came to the people who cleaned the dry latrines in our home and locality. I was not acutely conscious of untouchability- certainly it was a subjective unawareness of a practice which we took it for granted as normal.

This subjective innocence began to be seriously jolted when I began to read the literature on caste and the discrimination which was openly and discreetly practiced by the members of the caste society. I began to get aware of stratification, the concept of purity and pollution within it and the practice of extreme forms of untouchability (see Misra 1999). I was not aware of how deeply caste notions were embedded in me unless I got immersed in the literature on the caste, exposure to the western society and most significantly delving into Marxian literature which pumped in me a sort of rebellion against all forms of institutionalized inequality such as caste, class, religion, race,

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ethnicity etc. Each one of these legitimizes inequality one way or the other. However, it can be said rather safely that it is in the caste system that the ideas of inequality are systematized to the minutest details others do the same thing more crudely. While I am writing this the images of the scavengers and numerous other untouchable castes cross my mind- the images which have been formed in the process of my growing up and reading about caste.

Having been immersed in these thoughts it occurred to me that what our sacred books say about the caste has not been much discussed in anthropological literature. Since for years I have been reading Bhagavadgita, I thought to begin with I should list out wherever Bhagavadgita refers to caste. I must confess that though I have been studying caste in India I realize that my knowledge about it is rather superficial. I am of the opinion that if one is studying a society one should have a sound knowledge of the literature, folk and literary, sacred and secular of the region. For example, if caste is the subject matter of study, the knowledge of the Hindu sacred literature on caste is necessary for those are the sources which legitimize its ideology and practices and also numerous rebellion against it. Not doing that would mean something like studying the visible aspects of a plant without knowing a thing about its roots.

Limitations

Though I have launched myself to the study of the caste in Bhagavadgita, I must underline my limitations. I do not have any knowledge of Sanskrit. My knowledge about vernacular language too is rather thin. My Bhagavadgita source is Srimad Bhagavadgita by Jai Dayal Goenka, published by Gita Press, Gorakhpur which has simple translation in Hindi.

Since my learning and researching about the Indian society has been in English, I needed to understand the full import of the *verses* of Bhagavadgita I took recourse to the **Bhagavadgita by S. Radhakrishnan.** Dr. Radhakrishnan was a great scholar who had a command over Sanskrit language as well as English and was philosopher of wide repute. But let us not forget that he like anybody else, as I am too, was a product of history. His treatise on Bhagavadgita was published in 1948 by the Oxford University press. Then we had just gained independence. The impact of colonial rule was there in almost all fields more so in the field of higher education and research. Imagine that in many universities in India Sanskrit was taught through English medium. Radhakrishnan himself writes, "The intellectual expression and psychological idiom are the products of time while the permanent truths are capable of being lived and seen by a higher than intellectual vision at all times" (1948:6). Thus though I am writing on the caste in Bhagavadgita, it reflects limitations of my learning and training.

In the first section, I would just enumerate what Bhagavadgita has to

say about the cast in the second section, I will try to connect the dots.

For the benefit of the readers who may not be aware about Bhagavadgita I may briefly state that it is the most important sacred book of the Hindus. The context of which is Mahabharata- a great battle between Kauravas and Pandavas, the two were paternally related to each other, fighting for the throne of Bharata. Pandavas were the aggrieved party. By deceit Pandavas were exiled from kingdom for 14 years. On the completion of their exile the Pandavas wanted their share in the kingdom. Kauravas refused to give any part of the kingdom. Therefore, the war between the two became imminent. It is called a great war because kings of smaller states of Bharata aligned with one or the other party. Sri Krishna who is considered to be incarnation of the Lord Vishnu though sided with Pandavas decided that he would not fight for any party. But he agreed to be the driver of Arjuna's chariot in war. Arjuna was considered to be the greatest archer. In the battlefield the two armies stood face to face. Arjuna asked Sri Krishna that before the war began, let he be taken to the front so that he could see as to who all he had to fight. Seeing the army on the other side he became desponded and refused to pick up his weapons. That is the occasion when Sri Krishna gave sermons to Arjuna to pick up his weapons and fight. The compilation of those sermons is Bhagavadgita.

First Section[1]

Chapter 1, 28/29 seeing his uncles, parental grand and great grandfathers, Gurus maternal uncles, brothers, sons and grandsons, friends and in-laws and well-wishers standing arrayed in the battlefield Arjuna The order in which the different kin have been named is significant to understand the social structure of the society. was overcome with great compassion and uttered this in sadness to Krsna, "when I see my own people arrayed and eager for fight, my limbs quail, my mouth goes dry, my body shakes and my hair stands on end". The word that has been used is *swajanam* which Radhakrishnan has translated as my own people

The words *svabandhavan* and *swajanam*[2] occur in verse 37. Radhakrishnan's translation is "So, it is not right that we slay our kinsmen, the sons of Dhrtarastra. Indeed how can we be happy, O Madhava (Krsna), if we kill our own people"? In other words no distinction has been drawn between kinsmen and our own people

The verse 38 refers to *kul* which has been translated as family. It is Arjuna who is wondering, "Even, if these whose minds are overpowered by greed see no wrong in the destruction of the family and no crime in treachery to friends." Arjuna continues to lament, "Why should we not have the wisdom to turn away from this sin, O Janardana[3] (Krsna), we, who see the wrong in the destruction of the family?"(Verse 39). In verse 40 there is a strong warning

that once the *kul* is lost there is widespread lawlessness. "In the ruin of the family, its ancient laws are destroyed: and when the laws perish, the whole family yields to lawlessness". The consequence of this lawlessness is that the women of the family get polluted, "And when lawlessness prevails, O Varsneya (Krsna), the women of the family become corrupted confusion of castes arise." (Verse 41). It may be noted that in the verse of Bhagavadgita the word that has been used is *varnashank*ar which literally means whose *Varna* is in doubt but Radhakrishnan prefers to call it as confusion of caste. In the verse 42 the consequences of confusion of caste are further elaborated, "And to hell does this confusion bring the family itself as well as those who have destroyed it. For the spirits of the ancestry fall, deprived of their offering of rice and water". The word that has been used is *luptapindakriya* that is extinguishing of the lineage owing to non-performance of the rites for the ancestors. This refers to the belief that annually the deceased ancestors require these offerings for their welfare for their existence in the other world. This is a critical statement as to why one's lineage has to be preserved. The verse 43 says," By the misdeeds of those who destroy a family and create confusion of *varnas,* the immemorial laws of the cast and family are destroyed". Here Bhagavadgita refers to *kul-dharma* and *jati-dharma* but does not elaborate the distinction between the two however makes it clear as to why the ideals enshrined in immemorial traditions have to be maintained. The verse 44 says "And we have heard it said, O Janardana (Krsna) that the men of the families whose laws are destroyed needs must live in hell". The consequence of not following the traditions which is living in hell is for indefinite time. And lastly the verse 45 says," Alas, what a great sin have we resolved to commit in striving to slay our own people through our greed for the pleasure of the kingdom!" The word that has been used is *swajanam* that is a clear distinction is being made between 'our own people' and others.

It may be noted that in this chapter that the words that have been used to identify kinsmen are *swajanam, svabandhavan, kutumbha, varna and jati.* The word *pinda* refers to lineage. As against this the word *varnashankar means* whose lineage is not determined.

Chapter 2

The despondent Arjuna lays down his arms and refuses to fight against his own people thus begins the discourse of Krsna to Arjuna who rebukes Arjuna and exhorts him to be brave. The first reference of the caste of Arjuna is in the verse 31 which says, "Further, having regard for thine own duty, thou shouldst not falter, there exists no greater good for a Ksatriya than a battle enjoined by duty".

Radhakrishnan explains what the duty of a Ksatriya is, "His *svadharma* or law of action, requires him to engage in battle. Protection of right by the acceptance of battle, if necessary, is the social duty of the Ksatriya and not

renunciation. His duty is to maintain order by force and not to become an ascetic by shaving of his hair. Krsna tell Arjuna that for warriors there is no more ennobling duty than a fair fight. It is a privilege that leads to heaven"

The verse 32 further underlines the essential duty of a Ksatriya, which is, "Happy are the Ksatriyas, O, Partha (Arjuna), for whom such a war comes of its own accord as an open door to heaven".

Radhakrishnan explains, "A Ksatriya's happiness consists not in domestic pleasure and comfort but in fighting for the right". The verse 33 warns Arjuna the consequences of not fulfilling his *svadharma,* "But if thou does not this lawful battle, then thou wilt fail thy duty and glory and will incur sin". The verses 34, 35, 36 and 37 further state that by not fulfilling his duty Arjuna would earn a bad name which for a self-respecting person is worse than death. It goes on to state that people would think that he abandoned battle owing to fear. Krsna tells Arjuna that if he was killed in the battle he would go to the heaven or if he was victorious, he would enjoy ruling over the earth. Therefore he was advised to arise and resolve to fight. The rest of the verses in this chapter enjoin Arjuna to perform his duty without any attachment. He is further advised to work without concern for the result. In the famous verse 47 Krsna tells Arjuna," To action alone hast thou a right and never at all to its fruits, let not the fruits of action be thy motive; neither let there be in thee any attachment to inaction". This particular verse clearly stresses that the lamentation of the Arjuna is focused on the result of his action but in reality he does not have any choice which is reaffirmed in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3.

Arjuna asks Krsna if you deem that the path of understanding (*jnana)* is more excellent than the path of action (*karma*) then why you urge me to indulge in this savage deed to fight. Arjuna wants a decisive reply so that he was able to achieve the highest good. Chapter 3 is a discourse drawing a distinction between the two. Krsna replies (verse 3), " O, blameless one, in this world a two-fold way of life has been taught of yore by Me, the path of knowledge for men of contemplation and that of works for men of action". Radhakrishnan explains that the path of works is means of liberation quite as efficient as that of knowledge and these are intended for two classes of people but they are not exclusive instead are complimentary. The path is one whole including different phases. It is further clarified in verse 4, "Not by abstention from work does a man attain freedom from action, nor by mere renunciation does he attain to his perfection". The verse 5 is critical in understanding that Arjuna does not have any choice for it says, "For no one can remain even for a moment without doing work; everyone **is made to act helplessly by the impulses born of nature.** Verse 8 lays down, "Do thou thy allotted work, for action is better than inaction; even the maintenance of thy physical life cannot be affected without action". The verse 9

further reiterates that all works are to be done without any attachment, "Save work done as and for a sacrifice this world is in bondage to work. Therefore, O son of Kunti (Arjuna), do thy work as sacrifice, becoming free from all attachment". The explanation given by Radhakrishnan is that all work is to be done in a spirit of sacrifice for the sake of divine. The Bhagavadgita is stating that action needs to be done without entertaining any hope of reward. That is inevitable action has no binding power because in the verse 10 it is stated, "In ancient days the Lord of creatures (Brahma) created men along with sacrifice and said, 'By this shall ye bring forth and this shall be unto you that which will yield the milk of your desires'". The verses 11, 12, 13 and 14 explain the interdependence of god and men and cycle of *karma*. In verse 14 this cycle is clarified," From food creatures come into being; from rain is the birth of food; from sacrifice rain comes into being and sacrifice is born of work". It is further clarified in verse 15," Know the origin of *karma* (of the nature of sacrifices) to be in Brahma and Brahma springs from imperishable. Therefore the Brahma, which comprehends all, ever centers round the sacrifice". Having stated that origin of *karma* is rooted in Brahma the verse 19 urges, "Therefore without any attachment, perform always the work that has to be done, for man attains to the highest by doing work without any attachment". The inevitability of *karma* is rooted in nature which is clearly stated in verse 27, "while all kinds of works are done by the modes of nature, he whose soul is bewildered by the self thinks 'I am the doer'" The verse 28 further clarifies, " But he who knows the true character of the two distinctions (of the soul) from the modes of nature and their works , O Mighty-armed (Arjuna), understanding that it is the modes which are acting on the modes, does not get attached". Radhakrishnan further explains "Prakrit and its modes represent the limits of human freedom such as the force of hereditary and the pressure of environment". Here the eternal tussle between the essential qualities *(guna vibhag)* and the actual conduct (*karma vibhag*) is indicated. And ultimate advice is given in verse 30, "Resigning all the works to Me, with thy consciousness, fixed in the Self, being free from desire and egoism, fight, delivered from thy fever". The advice is that Arjuna should surrender the consequences of his action to the higher self and fight which is his duty. The verses 31, 32, reaffirm the advice in no uncertain terms and in the verse 33, it says," Even the man of knowledge acts in accordance with his own nature. Beings follow their nature. What can repression accomplish"? The doubt in the mind of Arjuna is decisively dispelled in verse 35, "Better is one's own law though imperfectly carried out than the law of another carried out perfectly. Better is death in (in the fulfillment of) one's own law for to follow another's law is perilous". These verses lay down a strong foundation as to why one should follow *svadharma* (the duty of the self) and that too without any attachment.

Chapter 4

The verse 13 is categorical as far as the issue of caste is concerned. Krishna tells Arjuna, "The fourfold order was created by Me according to the

divisions of quality and work. Though I am its creator, know Me to be incapable of action or change". The last clause of the verse is explained by Radhakrishnan as, *"akartarm:* non-doer. As the Supreme is unattached. He is said to be a non-doer. Works do not affect His changeless being, though He is unseen background of all works". The rest of the verses in this chapter till 39 inform Arjuna how not to get tied with the *karma.* He should do what his *dharma* is without any attachment. In verse 40, Krsna warns Arjuna, "But the man who is ignorant, who has no faith, who is of a doubting nature, perishes. For the doubting soul, there is neither this world nor the world beyond nor any happiness". Finally in the verse 42 Krishna tells Arjuna, "Therefore having cut asunder with the sword of wisdom the doubts in thy heart that is born of ignorance, resort to yoga and stand up, O, Bharata (Arjuna)". Radhakrishnan's explanation is, "Arjuna is here called upon to perform action with the help of knowledge and concentration. The doubt in his heart whether it is better to fight or abstain is the product of ignorance. It will be destroyed by wisdom. Then he would know what is right for him to do".

Chapter 5

In this chapter the whole discourse is on the issue of renunciation of works and unselfish performance of one's duty. The simple conclusion is that in the process of living, doing works as ordained by one's *swabhava* cannot be avoided. The verses 8 and 9 reaffirm that works **done without any attachment is actually the work of the God.** In the verse 10, it says," He who works, having given up attachment, resigning his actions to God, is not touched by sin, even as a lotus leaf (is untouched) by water". The verse 14 further underlines, "The sovereign Self does not create for the people agency, nor does He act. Nor does He connect works with their fruits. It is the nature that works out (these)". The word that has been used in the verse is *swabhava* which has been translated by Radhakrishnan as nature. It may be recalled that in 4.13 verse, the Lord says that he had created fourfold order based on quality and work. That is *swabhava* is formed by the quality and work. The verse 18 explains that the learned understand this law and therefore, "Sages, see with an equal eye, a learned and humble Brahmin, a cow, an elephant or even a dog or an out caste". That is the creator does not make any judgment on the divisions of works. At this stage I will like the readers just to make a note of the names that have been identified as a learned and humble Brahmin, a cow, an elephant, a dog and a Chandal. Of these five two are human beings one of which is a learned and humble Brahmin the other is a Chandal for which no qualification has been attached that is a Chandal is a Chandal. Radhakrishnan has translated Chandal as outcaste that is outside the fourfold division of the *Varna* system. Among the animals the elephant and a cow both are herbivores but one is a forest animal and revered in the Hindu mythology whereas the cow is a sacred, gentle and domesticated animal. But the status of dog in the Hindu mythology is ambiguous. It is a carnivorous animal and is a

mount of dreaded god like *Kalabhairva* associated with death and other side of life. What is the significance of identifying these five creatures but of course the injection is that the wise see them equally irrespective of their status or quality. Ultimate message is that one should do one's work without attachment as *sanyas;* the ultimate goal is not possible without doing works. Doing works without any attachment can be achieved by gaining wisdom.

Chapter 6 to 18

The chapter 6th is about detachment and doing work without expectation of the results. One should remain calm under all circumstances. The chapter 7th is about God and the World. The Chapter 8th is about the Cosmic Evolution and in the 9th the discourse is about wisdom and knowledge. The chapter 10th is about "God is the Source of all; to know Him is to know all". The Chapter 11th is about 'Lord's Transfiguration'; Arjuna wishes to see the Universal Form of God. The Chapter 12 is 'Worship of Personal Lord is better than Meditation'. The Chapter 13 is 'The Body called the Field, the Soul called the Knower of the Field and Discrimination between them' The Chapter 14 is 'The Mystical Father of All Beings; The Highest Knowledge'. The Chapter 15 has discourse on 'Tree of Life'. The Chapter 16 is a discourse on 'The Nature of Godlike and the Demonic Mind'. The traits of the two Godlike and Demonic have been identified. Having identified the traits the verse 24 extols Arjuna, "Therefore let the scripture be thy authority for determining what should be done what should not be done. Knowing what is declared by the rules of scripture thou shouldst do thy work in the world". The 17th Chapter begins with a question asked by Arjuna, "Those who neglecting the ordinances of scriptures, offer sacrifices willed with faith-what is their position, O Krsna? Is it one of goodness or of passion or of dullness? The Lord replies (verse 2), "The faith of the embodied is of three kinds, born of their nature, good, passion and dull. Hear now about it". And then in Chapter 18 verse 40 it is clearly stated, "There is no creature either on earth or again, among the god in heaven, which is free from the three modes born of nature". And in verse 41 ," Of Brahmins, Of Ksatriyas and Vaisyas as also of Sudras, O Conqueror of the Foe (Arjuna), the activities are distinguished in accordance with the qualities of their nature". The verse 42 identifies the qualities of Brahmin namely, "Serenity, self-control, austerity, purity, forbearance and uprightness, wisdom, knowledge and faith in religion, these are the duties of the Brahmin, born of his nature". The verse 43 identifies the qualities of Ksatriyas namely, "Heroism, vigor, steadiness, resourcefulness, not fleeing even in battle, generosity and leadership, these are duties of a Ksatriya born of his nature". The verse 44 identifies the qualities of Vaisya and Sudra which are, "Agriculture, tending cattle and trade are duties of a Vaisya born of his nature; work of the character of service is the duty of a Sudra born of his nature. Finally the verse 45 says," Devoted each to his own duty man attains perfection. How one devoted to one's own duty, attains perfection, that do thy hear". The verse 46 says, " he from whom all beings

arise and by who all this is pervaded- by worshipping Him through the performance of his own duty does man attain perfection". Then it cautions in verse 47, "better is one's own law though imperfectly carried out than the law of another carried out perfectly. One does not incur sin when one does the duty ordained by one's own nature". The verse 48 cautions," One should not give up the work suited to one's nature, O Son of Kunti (Arjuna), though it may be defective, for all enterprises are clouded by defects as fire by smoke". The emphasis is that every work has some blemish in it. Bhagavadgita further reiterates in verse, 49 "He whose understanding is unattached everywhere, who has subdued his self and from whom desire has fled- he comes through renunciation to the supreme state transcending all work". That is restraint and freedom from desire is essential to spiritual perfection. In verse 59 Krsna warns Arjuna, "If indulging in self-conceit, thou thinkest 'I will not fight,' vain is this, thy resolve. Nature will compel thee".

Radhakrishnan's explanation is, "The desire 'not to fight' will only be the expression of his surface nature: his deeper being will lead him to fight. If he casts down his arms for fear of suffering and holds back from fight, and if the war proceeds without him, and he realizes that the consequences of his abstention would be disastrous to humanity, he will be impelled to take up arms by the remorseless pressure of the Cosmic Spirit. He should try therefore to further and cooperate with the cosmic evolution instead of denying and opposing it. If he does so, he will change from an essentially determined to a determining factor. It is Arjuna's lower nature that will cause the confusion and the fall from the greater truth of his being. Now Arjuna has seen the truth and he can act, not for selfish ends, but as conscious instrument of the Divine. The disciple must put aside all selfish fear and obey his Inner Light which will carry him past all dangers and obstacles" (p.373). The verse 60 says, "That which, through delusion, thou wishest not to do, O, Son of Kunti ((Arjuna), that thou shalt do even against thy will, fettered by thy own acts born of thy nature,". That is Radhakrishnan explains "you will be driven to do it by the compulsive power of your nature" (p.374). In verse 63 Krsna tells Arjuna, "Thus has wisdom more secret than all secrets, been declared to thee by Me. Reflect on it fully and do as thou choosest," Radhakrishnan's explanation is, "do as thou choosest. God is seemingly indifferent, for He leaves the decision to Arjuna's choice. His apparent indifference is due to His anxiety that each one of us should get to Him of his own free choice" (p.375).

Finally, Arjuna submits, the verse 73 says, "destroyed is my delusion and recognition has been gained by me though Thy grace, O Acyuta (Krsna). I stand firm with my doubts dispelled. I shall act according to Thy word". Radhakrishnan explains," Arjuna turns to his appointed action, not with an egoistic mind but self –knowledge. His illusions are destroyed, his doubts are dispelled. The chosen instrument of God takes up his duty set to it by the Lord of the world. He will now do God's bidding" (p.381).

The reading of caste in Bhagavadgita is clear and unambiguous. A clear distinction is made between 'us' and 'they'. 'Us' are tied with family links, killing of whom is not only sin but it may lead to the destruction of the family and loss of lineage. The Lord says he is the creator of division based on the nature of the people and lays down the duty of each division without making any distinction between Brahmin, a cow, an elephant or even a dog or even a Chandal, and there cannot be any deviation from it on account of 'remorseless pressure of the cosmic spirit'. Therefore the final conclusion is that one will have to follow one's swabhava despite whatever doubts one may have.

Notes

1 Hereafter all translations of the verses are from Radhakrishnan's The Bhagavadgita and are given in quotes. Besides translations of verses his explanations too are given in quotes.

3 Svabandhavan has been translated as kinsmen and Swajanam as our own people.

4 In Bhagavadgita Krsna and also Arjuna both have been addressed by different names by both which must be quite significant but a discussion on that is beyond the scope of this paper.

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THE RIGHT TO BE COUNTED: THE URBAN POOR AND THE POLITICS OF RESETTLEMENT IN DELHI, by SANJEEV ROUTRAY. 2022. Stanford: Stanford University Press. 347 pp. ISBN: 9781503630840 (cloth); ISBN: 9781503632134 (paperback); ISBN: 9781503632141 (E-book) INR 2937.

Sanjeev Routray's book under review delves into an ethnography that considers how the poor residents of Delhi deal with local governance in the context of relentless displacement, enumeration and resettlement. The book provides details about the often-neglected political aspect of counting and documentation processes related to the citizenship of the urban poor. The research has been conducted over two years of fieldwork within three distinct settlement types: a transit camp, a slum cluster, and a resettlement colony. As noted by Routray, the notion of 'numerical citizenship' is a key form of contestation through which poor people try to claim access to adequate infrastructure, social acknowledgement, and basic human rights. This review highlights the primary arguments of the book and evaluates its theoretical contributions alongside its methodological strengths and weaknesses, ultimately emphasizing its importance to scholars of urban politics, planning, and social justice.

The work is organized into two interconnected pieces , the first one is called "The Politics of Planning," which examines the state's calculative rationalities, undermining bureaucratic logics, systematic violence, mass evictions, alongside partial resettlement operations in Delhi. In this section, Routray discusses the various demolition drives that have taken place in the so-called world class city initiatives, where close to 1.3 million slum dwellers were displaced between 1990 and 2009. A tiny fraction of these people received some form of plots in resettlement colonies, which were located a great distance away and were only granted under hire-purchase terms which meant they were essentially tenants. The second part of the book "Politics from Below" analyses the Rann-nities (tactics and counter tactics) urban poor devise to manage their precarious condition such as collaboration with local Pradhan and Samaj Sevaks, legal mobilization, and protest performances. Routray focuses on three pseudo-locations, Gautam Nagar (slum), Sitapuri (transit camp), and Azad Nagar (rehabilitation colony) and outlines sequential processes of claim-making in six empirical chapters. In every section, he illustrated how residents apply and utilize their documents such as ration and electoral rolls, court petitions, then form alliances to make themselves visible so that their enumeration can transform into entitlements. A few vignettes illustrate how these fragile achievements can be just as easily undone: the caprice of surveyors, bureaucratic blunders, and middle-class hostility all undermine the presence that the count affirms.

The author's core theoretical contribution is his elaboration of "numerical citizenship," which is the idea that political inclusion into state registers is citizenship in itself and is different from more juridical status or a set of rights. Rather than Holston's notion of insurgent citizenship, Routray shifts attention to patron-client relations, especially to Indian clientelist structures where local brokers mediated through networks invite access to entitlements far beyond rights-based claims. This shift moves the debate from citizenship normativity to the practices of material enumeration like counting, measuring, surveying,

filling out documentation, or hearings where power relations are struggled over and reworked. The work is the outcome of over twenty-five months of fieldwork, Routray practiced participant observation at demolition sites, transit camps, resettlement colonies, courts and political rallies. He also conducted more than 140 in-depth interviews with residents and bureaucrats and studied archival materials and legal documents.

A salient aspect of Sanjeev Routray's analysis is the intermediaries that include pradhans, social workers, and well-meaning government officials, who serve as a link between the rural unprivileged and the state apparatus. They provide some level of access to the enumeration campaign, guide the people to municipal offices, influence surveys, and at times, engage in self-serving malpractice. Routray's careful depiction avoids simplistic metaphors of corruption; rather, he situates intermediaries within the intertwining dependencies of political society—where brokers gain power from their ability to schematize deals and where residents must rely on them to navigate through dense bureaucratic fog. This account deepens our understanding of subaltern agency. It severs agency from formal structures of organizational presence and rights-based mobilization and illustrates the use of informal, local systems people employ to make claims. Simultaneously, Routray offers a balanced critique on the patronage effect. While these systems may furnish pathways to opportunity, they also, and perhaps more troubling, entrench dominant socio-political systems, impose clientelistic constraints, and curtail residents' freedom.

Resistance, Performance, and Everyday Politics

Sanjeev Routray has showed that counting issues are like a big stage show: protests, petitions, and court appearances are basically political theater that shift how people see things and push the government to respond. He talked about how folks use fake polls to stop evictions, throw sham "counting festivals" to flex their collective strength, and even file lawsuits to flaunt their rights-based status. These acts are a testament to how creative and resilient marginalized communities are, turning the census into a stage for grassroots political drama. Routray points out that women, young folks, and lower-caste people are often the ones leading these protests, shaking up the patriarchal and caste-based power structures in their communities. This internal community drama adds a big piece to the puzzle of urban informality, showing how fights over counting can also rattle power dynamics at home and in the neighborhood.

Policy Implications and Practical Relevance

In *The Right to Be Counted*, Routray doesn't just dive into theory—he lays out practical lessons for urban policy and planning. He slams one-fits-all resettlement schemes, like those shoving people onto tiny, far-off plots with rent-to-own conditions, and pushes for more thoughtful, community-driven approaches that actually consider how people live and earn. He pushes for counting methods worked out together with communities, open and clear ways to handle complaints, and slow, steady upgrades instead of tearing everything down. These ideas click with the new global wave of pro-poor urbanism and could light the way for changes in Indian cities dealing with the same struggles.

Limitations and Areas for Further Research

Routray's work is seriously impressive and covers a ton of ground, but there are a few areas where he could've gone deeper. First off, the book could've dug more into big ideas

about justice—like how philosophical stuff about recognition ties into numerical citizenship. He nods to justice debates, but with all the juicy real-world data he's got, that part feels a bit light. Second, it'd be cool for future research to explore how digital tools, like Aadhaar or GIS mapping, are flipping the script on counting practices and power dynamics—something that's become a big deal since he did his fieldwork. Lastly, comparing Indian megacities or looking at India alongside other global South cities could show whether Routray's numerical citizenship idea holds water in different places.

Conclusion

The Right to be Counted is an ethnographic and theoretical milestone examining the intersection of urban poverty, citizenship, and planning. Sanjeev Routray's concept of numerical citizenship reframes the act of counting people as far more than a mundane bureaucratic duty; it is a political act deeply intertwined with ongoing struggles for rights, recognition, and spatial justice. Through well-documented case studies stunning firsthand accounts, this book depicts the daily resourcefulness and stubborn determination of Delhi's urban poor while simultaneously exposing the systemic injustices of resettlement planning. Its relevance extends beyond South Asian cities, speaking to anyone aiming to understand and transform the politics of inclusion in the context of rapid urbanization. In short, Routray's work is essential reading for urban sociologists, planners, development workers, and activists. It challenges us to recognize counting as a contested area of citizenship and to create more humane policies that respect the freedoms of those who have long been considered uncountable.

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