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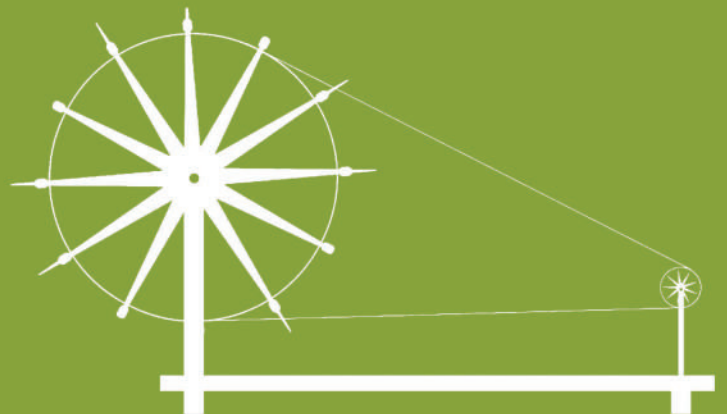
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# ***The Third Voice*** ***Reality and Vision***

The Official Journal of Centre for Third Voice Studies

CTVS







**Centre for Third Voice Studies (CTVS)**  
**Niladri Vihar**  
**Naya Bazar, Cuttack-753004**

Voice for voiceless is an organization which focuses for the betterment, wellbeing and upliftment of deprived and marginalized section of the society and to bring them into the mainstream of the society. Besides various socio-political and economic problems, the environmental problem has become a matter of grave concern for this organization. The organization is gear up to undertake a variety of socially relevant constructive work as per the need and/or demand of the situation. Realizing the need of involving the intellectuals, research scholars, writers, authors and public-spirited persons in academic and cultural activities of the society, a center named "Centre for Third Voice Studies"(CTVS) has been formed. While public is considered as first voice, the government and other machineries working for them reflect the second voice. The intellectuals who cannot remain as silent observer of their activities have the force of communicating the third voice. The aim and objective of this centre is to raise voice for voiceless, to alert the common man and to awaken authorities as well as civil society through the humble and soft power of pen. The organization publishes a research journal is "The Third Voice Reality and Vision" in order to pursue the research activities.

Centre for Third Voice Studies (CTVS) was established in the year of 2015 by Voice for Voiceless society to promote research in social sciences in the country. This society encourages projects, publications, capacity building programme etc. to promote research in social sciences in India. Moreover promoting powerful research environment through sharing and reuse of data among social science community in India.

**The Centre For Third Voice Studies (CTVS) aims to:**

- Review the progress of social science research;
- Provides social science research programmes and projects;
- Indicate areas in which social science research is to be promoted and adopt special measures for development of research in neglected or new areas;
- Arrange for technical training in research methodology and to provide guidance for research;
- Co-ordinate research activities and encourage programmes for interdisciplinary research;
- Develop and support centres for documentation services and supply of data;
- Organize, sponsor, and finance seminars, workshops and study groups;
- Undertake publication and assist publication of journals and books in social sciences;
- Advise the research scholars on all matters pertaining to social science research as may be referred to it from time to time;
- Take such measures generally as may be necessary from time to time to promote social science research and its utilization;
- To encourage research work on atrocity prevention and Gandhian way of life.



# THE THIRD VOICE: REALITY AND VISION

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## *Editorial*

### ACADEMIC PUBLISHING: BEYOND CITATIONS, INDEXING AND QUANTIFICATIONS

*Prof. Bikram Keshari Mishra*

Professor & Head, Department of Sociology  
Ravenshaw University, Cuttack

The year 2025 has commenced with a number of changes in various realms of life. The change in leadership in Delhi assembly elections is just an indication. The domain of higher education is no exception. The UGC based on recommendations of an expert committee has now decided to discontinue UGC CARE (Consortium for Academic and Research Ethics) listing of journals. This is bound to have a number of ramifications.

As one looks at the world of academic publishing in contemporary times, one comes across a series of conjectures, which run in the following manner in public imagination: research papers published in CARE-listed journals/ Scopus-indexed are meritorious papers and are worth reading; only the CARE-listed and Scopus-indexed journals have got the mandate to certify quality; rest of the research papers being published outside the realms of CARE and Scopus are not worth pursuing; serious questions and suspicions are often raised regarding their academic qualities.

#### Against Hierarchies

At the outset, the latest UGC decision of its expert committee regarding the CARE-listed journals tends to dispute a series of conjectures. It tends to deconstruct the positivistic understanding of the journal papers that often regards CARE and Scopus as sacrosanct. Such journals used to boast of a different kind of aristocracy: they are the champions, their papers the best ones. It is no more surprising to observe the emergence of a sort of publishing capitalism in the market. Many agencies have erupted overnight to capitalize one's desperation for elite publication. In other words, many private firms/ companies have appeared in the scene that have been utterly aggressive in their marketing: they are openly offering publication assistance; they are expressing their readiness to extend all kinds of publication related services starting from writing to publication in CARE/ Scopus journals. They assure to get one's paper written and to publish the same in the elite journals. Of course, they charge heavy amounts for such services. They communicate such offers to the students/ research scholars/ faculty members through emails, apart from online advertisements in the websites including facebook. To put it simply, to some extent, publications are on sale. If you are not capable of writing standard papers either owing to your poor vocabulary, low intelligence or poor language skills, you are not going to be a loser if you have the purchasing power. You hire such publishing farms and they will write for you, publish for you. It's sheer business, which is mutually profiting: a win-win situation for both the parties. One succeeds in getting a publication and the other one earns hefty money. In such a scenario, it becomes difficult to make out which paper is one's original manuscript and which paper is one's fully-hired publication.



In other words, at a time when the market has entered the realm of journal publications, the boundary line between one's own writing and fully-hired writing often remains blurred and ambiguous. This explains why often one comes across certain scholars having CARE/ Scopus publications though they may be lacking miserably in their vocabulary, language, writing skill and corresponding domain knowledge.

The entire obsession for CARE/ Scopus journal stems from the state policy that put formal emphasis on quantitative logic. In other words, the state is obsessive to judge one's academic productivity and it has devised its own conceptual categories to operationalize the quantification exercise. First, the API (Academic Performance Index) score. It has developed a formula to quantify one's publication by assigning a corresponding score. Second, the Impact Factor. The score for a journal paper is conditioned by the corresponding impact factor of the journal. Higher is the journal's impact factor, higher is the score of the papers published in it. Third, the High Power journals. Certain journals are considered high power journals. One's paper is rated highly if it has been published in a high power journal.

The way the modern state promotes the culture of quantification, one tends to witness a different form of academic stratification in the publication domain: a domain that reiterates the language of hierarchy and crass inequality. The way the modern state legitimizes such stratification in the realm of publication, it appears as if all those having high power/ high impact factor/ CARE-Scopus publications are original scholars; as if all those not having such creamy layer publications are twenty-four carat idiots, dogs, donkeys, vixens or millipedes; as if all those papers published outside such elite journals are not worth reading; as if all those scientists/ social scientists of global eminence not having papers in such elite journals are hicks and morons.

#### The Haunting Questions: Rising Beyond Quantification

The questions that continually haunt one's imagination are quite irresistible. Can there be a uniform index to ascertain the quality of publications taking place in all streams – Science, Arts, Commerce or Professional Courses? What do the streams represent – uniformity or difference? Should the quality monitoring parameter be stream-specific? Is the paper-based scoring system the only unproblematic mode to ascertain quality and one's academic worth? What about the questions of originality and authenticity (especially at a time when everything in the publishing world is on sale/ can be hired? Is the present scoring system a better method of selecting worthy faculty members/ academicians? If the answer is yes, does it mean that the method in which the academic performance was judged and academicians were inducted earlier was defective? In the same vein, does it denote that all our teachers who have never got a single paper published in the so-called high-power journals are worthless/ zero intellectuals? The moot question remains, can one's creative writing be quantified? Is it possible to judge one's academic worth beyond quantification?

The idea is not to be cynical of any change arbitrarily. Instead, one's intent is also not to indulge in anything new uncritically. This is especially significant at a time when the modern state is making a shift from one paradigm to another paradigm. We are operating in a system. That does not mean, one will not question the system. In the same way, the alternative system of performance appraisal (API) need not be treated finite, fixed and unproblematic. It must also be subjected to adequate degree of tests, verifications with an amount of organized skepticism in the best interests of academics.





**SARVODAYA**  
SOCIETY

# GOALS



**1**  
Stop  
Contaminating  
Water



**2**  
Stop  
Polluting  
Air



**3**  
Stop  
Plastic Use



**4**  
Save  
Earth



**5**  
Stop Drug  
Abuse and  
Alcoholism



**6**  
Stop  
Untouchability



**7**  
Help  
Dityanga



**8**  
Help Mentally  
Disable Person



**9**  
Help  
Senior Citizens



**10**  
Help  
Sick Person



**11**  
Help Poor  
Children



**12**  
Help Poor  
Women



**13**  
Planting  
Tree



**14**  
Protecting  
Animals  
and Birds



**15**  
Spreading  
Basic  
Education



**16**  
Women  
Empowerment



**17**  
Cleanliness  
Campaign



**18**  
Satya and  
Ahimsa



**19**  
Health and  
Hygienic



**20**  
Communal  
Harmony



**21**  
Vocational  
Education



**22**  
Cottage  
Industries



**23**  
Village  
Economy



**24**  
Self Help  
Groups



**25**  
Feed the  
Need



**26**  
Farming  
and  
Agriculture



## Economic Burden of Climate Change in India: A Review

Sumant Swain

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### ABSTRACT

The economic burden of climate change in India is a multifaceted challenge with wide-ranging implications across agriculture, health, infrastructure, water resources, and energy sectors. Rising temperatures, erratic monsoon patterns, and the increased frequency of extreme weather events—such as floods and droughts—are placing significant stress on the country's economy. Agriculture, which employs nearly 50% of India's workforce, is particularly vulnerable, with studies estimating a potential GDP loss of 1.5% to 2% annually due to declining yields and productivity. Health costs related to heat stress, vector-borne diseases, and malnutrition are also projected to rise, exacerbating social and economic inequalities. Coastal regions and megacities face mounting adaptation costs to protect infrastructure from sea-level rise, cyclone and flooding. The review highlights that the venerable populations, who contribute the least to greenhouse gas emissions—are disproportionately affected. The paper underscores the need for integrated economic modeling, region-specific adaptation strategies, and stronger climate finance mechanisms. It emphasizes the urgency of embedding climate resilience into development planning and highlights the long-term economic benefits of transitioning to low-carbon pathways.

**Keywords :** Climate change, economic burden, health, agriculture, food security, urban development, energy sector, social inequality, infrastructure, economic growth

### INTRODUCTION

Climate change is widely recognized as the most significant threat to human security and global economic stability. Its impacts extend beyond environmental degradation, posing serious economic challenges across multiple sectors. The economic costs arise from extreme weather events—including heatwaves, floods, droughts, and cyclones—rising sea levels, biodiversity loss, declining agricultural productivity, and mounting healthcare expenses.

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2021), without urgent global mitigation, climate change could result in economic losses amounting to trillions of dollars by the end of the 21st

century. Developing countries, especially in Asia and Africa, are particularly vulnerable due to their high

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dependence on climate-sensitive sectors such as agriculture, fisheries, and natural resources, combined with limited adaptive capacity (World Bank, 2022).

One of the most immediate economic consequences of climate change is damage caused by extreme weather events. In 2023 alone, global climate-related disasters led to economic losses exceeding \$313 billion, of which \$119 billion were insured losses (Munich Re, 2024). The increasing frequency and intensity of such disasters not only strain national budgets but also impede long-term development and economic growth. Historical examples underscore the magnitude of these losses—Hurricane Katrina (2005) inflicted over \$160 billion in damages to the U.S. economy, while the 2022 floods in Pakistan caused more than \$30 billion in losses, displacing millions and intensifying poverty (UNDRR, 2023).

Beyond immediate destruction, climate change contributes to long-term economic disruptions through sea level rise, loss of biodiversity, and a decline in ecosystem services. Rising temperatures and erratic precipitation patterns adversely affect agricultural yields and water availability, threatening food security and increasing the risk of famine. These disruptions affect both developed and developing nations, but the economic toll is particularly severe for low- and middle-income countries due to their economic reliance on agriculture and tourism. According to the World Economic Forum (2021), the global economy could shrink by up to 18% by 2050 if no action is taken. Furthermore, the financial sector faces growing exposure to climate-related risks, with increasing insurance claims, unstable investment portfolios, and rising costs of climate adaptation (Bank of England, 2020).

India, one of the world's fastest-growing economies, is especially vulnerable to climate-induced economic shocks. Rising temperatures, unpredictable monsoons, sea level rise, and frequent natural disasters threaten India's infrastructure, livelihoods, and GDP growth. A report by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI, 2023) estimates that climate change could reduce the country's GDP by 2.5% to 4.5% annually by 2030 in the absence of mitigation strategies. Sharma et al. (2022) projected that even with global warming limited to 2°C, India's GDP could decline by 2.6% by 2100, escalating to a 13.4% loss under a 4°C increase, primarily due to adverse effects on labor productivity, precipitation, and temperature.

The economic cost of climate-related disasters in India is already evident. For instance, floods alone have caused losses of approximately \$4.2 billion, with projected urban property damage ranging from \$157 billion to \$535 billion. The GDP impact could exceed \$84 billion, demonstrating the magnitude of economic vulnerability (Ganesh et al., 2024).

Key sectors such as agriculture, infrastructure, energy, and healthcare are especially at risk. Crop failures, damage to transport and power systems, climate-sensitive diseases, and heat-related illnesses collectively threaten economic stability and exacerbate poverty. Millions of livelihoods, particularly among informal workers and rural populations, are at risk.

## **PUBLIC HEALTH**

Climate change is emerging as one of the greatest public health challenges in India, significantly increasing mortality and morbidity rates, especially among vulnerable populations such as the elderly, children, women and those in low-income and informal labor sectors (Saunik & Shaw, 2024). The economic impact of climate-induced health crises is profound, with increasing healthcare costs, loss of productivity, and damage to livelihoods across sectors—particularly agriculture and urban informal employment.

The rise in extreme weather events—particularly heatwaves, floods, and droughts—has exacerbated health issues and overburdened India's healthcare infrastructure. Between 2014 and 2023, individuals over 65 experienced an average of 8.4 days of heatwave exposure annually, a 58% increase from the 1990s. In 2023 alone, heat-related productivity losses were estimated at \$141 billion, with the agricultural sector accounting for \$71.9 billion of these losses (The New Indian Express, 2024; Climate Connection, 2023). The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) reported over 24,000 heatstroke cases and nearly 3,000 deaths due to extreme heat in 2022 (MoHFW, 2023).

Rising temperatures also correlate with an upsurge in cardiovascular diseases and other heat-related illnesses. According to The Lancet Countdown (2021), more than 25,000 deaths occurred due to extreme heat between 1990 and 2020. These health emergencies are not only causing human suffering but are placing a severe financial burden on the healthcare system.

Vector-borne diseases like malaria and dengue are expanding their geographic and seasonal range due to



warmer and wetter conditions. The transmission potential of dengue-carrying mosquitoes has risen by 85% since the 1950s, escalating healthcare demands (CAG, 2023). Treating these diseases now adds approximately \$3 billion annually to India's healthcare expenditures (WHO, 2022). In 2023, over 90% of India was at risk from extreme heat, further compounding public health and vector-borne disease threats (Debnath et al., 2023).

Air pollution, intensified by climate change, remains a major contributor to premature deaths and economic losses. In 2019, air pollution caused approximately 1.67 million deaths, accounting for 17.8% of India's total deaths (Vohra et al., 2021). WHO (2023) estimates that air pollution contributes to over 1.6 million premature deaths annually, resulting in economic losses of <sup>1</sup> 7 lakh crore (approximately \$85 billion) each year.

Furthermore, climate change indirectly affects health by increasing food and beverage costs. Droughts in Vietnam and Brazil have caused coffee prices to hit 50-year highs, and similar climatic shocks have raised the prices of tea, cocoa, and rice (The Times, 2024). These price increases strain household budgets, especially among the poor, leading to undernutrition and long-term health consequences.

A Duke University study showed that India lost 259 billion labor hours annually between 2001 and 2020 due to global warming, costing the economy \$624 billion (CAG, 2023). Without urgent mitigation and adaptation strategies, cumulative climate-related damages could reach \$35 trillion over the next 50 years (CAG, 2023).

## **AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SECURITY**

Climate change poses a severe and escalating threat to agriculture and food security in India, where over 50% of the population relies on agriculture for their livelihoods. Being one of the most climate-sensitive sectors, agriculture is vulnerable to rising temperatures, erratic rainfall, frequent extreme weather events, and the growing unpredictability of the monsoon season. These changes have led to decreased crop productivity, increased economic burden on farmers, and greater stress on national food security systems.

India's agricultural output is critically dependent on the southwest monsoon, which contributes nearly 75% of the country's annual rainfall. However, due to climate change, this monsoon pattern has become increasingly erratic. According to the Ministry of Earth Sciences

(2020), there has been a 6% decline in monsoon rainfall over the last 60 years. This decline, coupled with rising temperatures, affects major crops like wheat, rice, pulses, and oilseeds. A study by ICRIER (2022) revealed that a 1°C rise in temperature could reduce wheat yields by up to 6%, significantly impacting national food production and rural incomes.

Extreme weather events have further compounded the challenges. Floods, droughts, and cyclones are becoming more intense and frequent, damaging standing crops and disrupting supply chains. For example, in 2023, unseasonal rainfall and floods caused crop losses across Maharashtra, Punjab, and Odisha, with estimated damages exceeding <sup>1</sup> 25,000 crore (~\$3 billion) (MoAFW, 2023). These losses force farmers to invest in costly adaptive measures such as irrigation systems, resilient seed varieties, and insurance coverage—expenses that most small and marginal farmers cannot afford.

Food inflation is another major consequence. Reduced agricultural output due to climate anomalies results in supply shortages, leading to higher food prices. The Reserve Bank of India (2023) noted that climate variability is a major driver of food inflation in fruits, vegetables, and cereals. This not only affects purchasing power among the poor but also worsens malnutrition, especially among children and women. According to ICAR (2023), wheat and rice yields could drop by 6–12% by 2050, leading to further food insecurity and economic stress.

The impact extends to allied sectors like livestock and fisheries. Rising temperatures reduce milk yields and increase the incidence of livestock diseases, while warmer oceans disrupt fish breeding, reducing fish catches. These combined effects weaken rural food diversity and income stability, adding to the economic burden.

Furthermore, studies show that climate change has already caused a loss of 259 billion labor hours annually between 2001 and 2020 due to heat-related stress, costing India approximately \$624 billion (World Bank, 2019). Heat stress is projected to significantly reduce labor productivity in agriculture and outdoor sectors, contributing up to 50% of future GDP loss in high-emission scenarios.

Overall, agriculture, which contributes around 18% to India's GDP and employs nearly 43% of its workforce,

faces an existential threat from climate change. Without urgent adaptive measures, India could witness a 16% drop in agricultural output and a GDP decline of 2.8% by 2030 (Sharma et al., 2022). Strengthening climate resilience in agriculture is thus vital for economic stability, food security, and rural livelihoods.

## **INFRASTRUCTURE AND ECONOMIC GROWTH**

Climate change has emerged as a formidable threat to India's infrastructure and economic growth, imposing a growing financial burden on both public and private sectors. As India urbanizes rapidly and pursues ambitious development goals, the country's critical infrastructure—including transportation networks, energy systems, urban housing, and water management—is increasingly vulnerable to climate-induced stresses. The rising frequency and intensity of extreme weather events such as floods, heatwaves, cyclones, and sea-level rise are already causing significant damage to physical assets and disrupting key economic activities.

According to the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA, 2022), India suffers average annual losses of around \$10 billion due to climate-related disasters, with infrastructure damage accounting for a major portion of these losses. Events like Cyclone Amphan (2020), the 2023 Mumbai floods, and the Chennai deluge have caused widespread destruction to roads, railways, power grids, housing, and water systems, resulting in significant reconstruction costs. In 2023 alone, urban flooding in India's metropolitan regions caused economic losses estimated at <sup>1</sup> 35,000 crore (~\$4.2 billion), severely impacting both livelihoods and regional productivity (Ganesh et al., 2024).

Urban centers such as Mumbai, Chennai, and Kolkata are particularly at risk due to their coastal locations and high population density. The World Bank (2020) estimates that by 2050, over 36 million people living in Indian coastal cities could be exposed to sea-level rise, necessitating over \$200 billion in investment to protect critical infrastructure. Moreover, increased rainfall intensity overwhelms outdated drainage systems, contributing to recurrent flooding, property damage, and transportation paralysis. The National Institute of Disaster Management (NIDM, 2023) projects that sea-level rise alone could lead to annual infrastructure losses exceeding <sup>1</sup> 1.5 lakh crore (\$18 billion) by 2050 if adaptation measures are not scaled up.

Heatwaves also pose a serious challenge. The structural integrity of roads, railway tracks, and buildings is compromised under high temperatures, while energy demand for cooling surges. This leads to grid stress and outages, especially in regions dependent on hydropower, which is itself affected by erratic rainfall and glacial melt. According to Debnath et al. (2023), the life span of key infrastructure assets is expected to decline due to extreme heat, escalating maintenance and replacement costs. The Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW, 2021) warns that disruptions in power supply from climate impacts could reduce India's GDP by up to 1.2% by 2050.

The broader macroeconomic implications are alarming. Climate-related damage to infrastructure and disruptions to production and trade reduce long-term growth and increase economic inequality. The Reserve Bank of India (2023) estimates that India could experience an annual GDP loss of 2.5–4.5% by 2030 due to cascading climate impacts. A long-term projection by Sharma et al. (2022) warns that in a high-emissions scenario, India's GDP could shrink by up to 13.4% by 2100.

Furthermore, adapting to climate change comes at a high cost. The Ministry of Finance (2021) estimates that India needs over \$200 billion annually until 2030 to build climate-resilient infrastructure. However, the financing gap remains significant, straining public budgets and diverting resources from essential development initiatives. Unless robust investments in climate-resilient infrastructure are prioritized, India's economic growth and sustainable development goals will remain critically undermined.

## **URBAN DEVELOPMENT**

Urban development in India faces mounting economic challenges due to the intensifying impacts of climate change. With over 35% of its population living in urban areas and this figure projected to rise to 40% by 2030, India's cities are at the frontline of climate-related risks such as floods, heatwaves, water scarcity, and sea-level rise (UN-Habitat, 2022). These climate-induced stresses impose a severe economic burden on urban infrastructure, housing, utilities, public health, and service delivery, threatening the long-term sustainability of urban growth.

One of the most direct impacts of climate change on urban areas is flooding, which severely damages roads, drainage systems, housing, and livelihoods. The



increased frequency and intensity of heavy rainfall events, coupled with poor urban planning and inadequate drainage systems, make Indian cities like Mumbai, Bengaluru, and Chennai highly vulnerable. In 2023, urban flooding alone caused economic losses estimated at <sup>1</sup> 35,000 crore (~\$4.2 billion) in major metropolitan regions, disrupting businesses, displacing residents, and damaging infrastructure (Ganesh et al., 2024). According to the National Institute of Disaster Management (NIDM, 2023), such incidents are expected to increase in frequency, with potential economic losses in urban areas exceeding <sup>1</sup> 1.5 lakh crore (\$18 billion) annually by 2050 without significant mitigation.

Heatwaves are another growing challenge, particularly in densely populated cities. The India Meteorological Department (IMD, 2022) reported a significant increase in the frequency and duration of heatwaves in urban areas. These conditions increase energy demand for cooling, strain water resources, reduce labor productivity, and elevate public health costs. According to a study by Singh et al. (2022), heat stress could reduce labor productivity in cities by up to 25%, especially in outdoor sectors like construction, waste management, and transport, directly impacting urban economic output.

Urban housing, particularly in low-income and informal settlements, is disproportionately affected by climate change. Slum areas are often located in flood-prone zones or heat islands, where exposure to environmental hazards is high. Climate events exacerbate housing insecurity, displacement, and public health issues, leading to increased demand for state-led rehabilitation, public health interventions, and emergency services (Bharadwaj & Pandey, 2023). According to the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (2022), over 68 million urban residents live in vulnerable housing, and the cost of climate-proofing slum housing could exceed <sup>1</sup> 2 lakh crore (\$24 billion) by 2030.

Water scarcity, exacerbated by erratic rainfall and groundwater depletion, further strains urban development. Cities like Delhi and Bengaluru are already facing periodic water crises that impact domestic consumption, sanitation, and industrial production. A NITI Aayog (2021) report estimated that 21 major cities in India could run out of groundwater by 2030, with urban water demand projected to double by then. The economic cost of addressing urban water insecurity through desalination, water recycling, and infrastructure upgrades is substantial, putting pressure on municipal finances.

The World Bank (2020) estimates that climate-related impacts could cost Indian cities \$1.5 trillion by 2050 if adaptive infrastructure and planning are not implemented. Despite growing awareness, many urban local bodies lack the financial and technical capacity to invest in climate-resilient infrastructure. This results in delayed development projects, cost overruns, and increased dependence on state and central government support.

## **SOCIO-ECONOMIC INEQUALITY**

Climate change has increasingly become a catalyst for deepening socio-economic inequalities in India, disproportionately affecting marginalized populations who possess limited adaptive capacity and economic resilience. As one of the most climate-vulnerable nations, India's existing disparities in income, education, access to health care, and housing are magnified by the adverse effects of a warming planet. Climate-induced challenges such as extreme heat, floods, droughts, and erratic rainfall have intensified the vulnerability of rural communities, informal sector workers, and socially disadvantaged groups, thereby perpetuating and widening existing social and economic divides.

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2022), climate change acts as a “threat multiplier” by exacerbating poverty, inequality, and social tensions. In India, this is evident as climate impacts are more pronounced among people who rely heavily on climate-sensitive sectors like agriculture, fisheries, and construction. A study by CEEW (2021) found that over 80% of India's poor live in districts that are highly vulnerable to climate extremes. These populations often lack insurance, savings, and access to quality infrastructure, making recovery from climate shocks far more difficult and slower compared to wealthier counterparts.

Rural populations, particularly smallholder farmers, are among the most affected. Frequent crop failures due to droughts, floods, and heatwaves have led to increased indebtedness and migration to urban areas, where informal jobs offer little social protection. Sharma et al. (2022) noted that these climate-induced displacements are largely unplanned and often result in migrants living in substandard conditions with limited access to water,

sanitation, and health services. Consequently, not only does climate change affect income security, but it also fuels urban poverty and puts additional pressure on public infrastructure.

Urban areas, too, are not immune. Climate impacts are unevenly distributed across cities. Informal settlements, often located in low-lying, flood-prone, or heat-prone areas, are at high risk. During heatwaves, for instance, residents in slums suffer higher exposure due to poor housing quality, lack of ventilation, and limited access to cooling systems. A report by the National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA, 2023) highlighted that the poorest urban households in cities like Delhi and Ahmedabad face higher mortality rates during heatwaves compared to wealthier areas, underscoring how infrastructure inequality amplifies climate risk.

Health inequality is another dimension of this burden. The Lancet Countdown Report (2022) pointed out that climate-related diseases such as vector-borne infections and respiratory issues from air pollution are more prevalent among the poor, who have limited access to healthcare facilities and insurance coverage. Climate change thus not only reduces their income and food security but also increases their health expenditures.

Additionally, gender inequality is reinforced under climate stress. Women, particularly in rural India, bear the brunt of water and food insecurity, as they are primarily responsible for household water collection and subsistence agriculture. UN Women India (2021) reported that climate stress increases women's unpaid labor and reduces their opportunities for education and income-generating activities.

## **ENERGY SECTOR**

Climate change poses a significant economic burden on India's energy sector, which is both a major contributor to greenhouse gas emissions and a critical victim of climate-induced disruptions. As energy demand continues to rise alongside economic growth and urbanization, climate-related challenges such as extreme temperatures, erratic rainfall, and glacial retreat increasingly threaten energy supply, infrastructure, and affordability. These disruptions affect both fossil fuel-based and renewable energy systems, resulting in higher production costs, reduced efficiency, and compromised energy security.

One of the most immediate impacts of climate change on the energy sector is the increased frequency and

intensity of heatwaves. High temperatures raise electricity demand for cooling, particularly in urban areas, placing stress on power generation and distribution systems. According to the International Energy Agency (IEA, 2021), India's peak electricity demand could increase by 45% by 2040 due to rising temperatures alone. This results in higher operational costs, frequent blackouts, and overloading of grids, particularly during summer months. In 2022, India experienced record-breaking heatwaves that led to severe power shortages in several states, affecting industrial productivity and household welfare (Ministry of Power, 2023).

Thermal power plants, which account for over 60% of India's electricity generation, are particularly vulnerable to climate change. Rising temperatures reduce their efficiency, while water scarcity—exacerbated by erratic rainfall and declining groundwater levels—limits their cooling capacity. A study by the World Resources Institute (WRI, 2020) found that nearly 40% of India's thermal power plants are located in water-stressed areas, making them increasingly vulnerable to shutdowns. These disruptions translate into financial losses and reduce the reliability of energy supply across sectors.

Hydropower, another key component of India's energy mix, faces risks due to changing rainfall patterns, glacial retreat in the Himalayas, and increased sedimentation caused by extreme weather events. Irregular monsoon rains and flash floods can lead to either water shortages or dam overflows, destabilizing hydropower output. According to the Central Electricity Authority (CEA, 2022), hydroelectric generation in India declined by over 5% in 2021 due to erratic rainfall, resulting in a shift back to coal-based generation, which increased costs and emissions.

The renewable energy sector, despite being essential for climate mitigation, is not immune to climate variability. Solar photovoltaic (PV) systems may experience reduced efficiency during prolonged heatwaves or dusty conditions, while wind energy output is affected by changing wind patterns. Moreover, extreme weather events such as cyclones damage infrastructure, as seen during Cyclone Tauktae in 2021, which affected wind farms and transmission lines along the western coast, causing power outages and infrastructure losses exceeding \$2 billion (NDMA, 2021).

The economic burden is further compounded by the financial requirements for climate adaptation in the



energy sector. According to the Ministry of Finance (2021), India needs over \$30 billion annually by 2030 to climate-proof its energy infrastructure. This includes investments in grid modernization, resilient transmission systems, decentralized renewable energy, and disaster-proofing generation plants. Without these investments, climate change will continue to erode the reliability and affordability of energy, ultimately hampering India's growth and development goals.

## CONCLUSION

Climate change presents a profound and multidimensional economic challenge for India, affecting key sectors such as agriculture, infrastructure, energy, urban development, and public health. The economic burden is not limited to immediate physical damages from extreme weather events like floods, droughts, heatwaves, and cyclones, but extends to long-term losses in productivity, GDP, and human development. According to the Network of Central Banks and Supervisors for Greening the Financial System (NGFS), if current global climate policies remain unchanged, India could face a GDP loss of up to 19% by 2050, significantly higher than the projected global average of 15%. By 2100, this could worsen to a staggering 30%, underlining the urgency of transformative action.

Acute physical risks—particularly droughts and heatwaves—are responsible for more than 75% of total losses in NGFS scenarios, further exacerbating India's vulnerabilities in agriculture, energy supply, and labor productivity. These cascading impacts fuel food insecurity, increase urban infrastructure strain, deepen socio-economic inequalities, and threaten national economic stability. Without effective mitigation and adaptation measures, India's aspirations for inclusive growth, poverty reduction, and sustainable development may remain unattainable.

However, this looming crisis also presents a strategic opportunity. The economic burden of climate change can serve as a catalyst for change—driving investment in green technologies, climate-resilient infrastructure, sustainable urban planning, and inclusive policy reforms. Strengthening early warning systems, promoting low-carbon energy, and building institutional capacity for climate governance can not only reduce climate-related losses but also foster innovation and generate green jobs.

Mitigation efforts, such as carbon pricing and transitioning to a net-zero economy by 2070, will be critical in reducing long-term damage. Simultaneously, adaptation strategies—like climate-resilient farming, water resource management, improved public health systems, and targeted support for vulnerable communities—must be accelerated to enhance resilience. These initiatives should be guided by integrated, multi-sectoral policies that align climate action with India's development goals.

Ultimately, the fight against climate change must be viewed not just as an environmental imperative but as an economic necessity. A globally coordinated response, supported by climate finance, technology transfer, and capacity building, is vital to mitigate the risks and secure a sustainable, equitable future. For India, the path forward lies in embracing a climate-smart development model that prioritizes both economic growth and ecological balance—ensuring prosperity for current and future generations.

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Not applicable.

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## Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

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## In Defense of Academic Standards Against Strange Hierarchies and Crass Quantifications

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### ABSTRACT

As one comes across the academic domain, one witnesses a strange hegemony in the publishing world: hegemony of high power, CARE-listed and Scopus indexed journals over the rest. It's no more surprising to discover the mass desperation for getting papers published in such elite journals. This has also contributed to the mushrooming of professional farms/ agencies/ companies in the market who are coming forward openly to extend complete publishing support: from writing the script till it gets published in the elite journals. The present piece represents a modest endeavour to problematize the civilizational anxiety for elite publications in the name of 'quality'.

**Key words:** Citation, Impact Factor, Quality, Quantification, Elite Journal.

The year 2025 has commenced with a number of changes in various realms of life. The change in leadership in Delhi assembly elections is just an indication. The domain of higher education is no exception. The UGC based on recommendations of an expert committee has now decided to discontinue UGC CARE (Consortium for Academic and Research Ethics) listing of journals. This is bound to have a number of ramifications.

As one looks at the world of academic publishing in contemporary times, one comes across a series of conjectures, which run in the following manner in public imagination: research papers published in CARE-listed journals/ Scopus-indexed are meritorious papers and are worth reading; only the CARE-listed and Scopus-indexed journals have got the mandate to certify quality; rest of the research papers being published outside the realms of CARE and Scopus are not worth pursuing; serious questions and suspicions are often raised regarding their academic qualities.

### AGAINST HIERARCHIES

At the outset, the latest UGC decision of its expert committee regarding the CARE-listed journals tends to dispute a series of conjectures. It tends to deconstruct the positivistic understanding of the journal papers that often regards CARE and Scopus as sacrosanct. Such journals used to boast of a different kind of aristocracy: they are the champions, their papers the best ones. It is

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no more surprising to observe the emergence of a sort of publishing capitalism in the market. Many agencies have erupted overnight to capitalize one's desperation for elite publication. In other words, many private firms/companies have appeared in the scene that have been utterly aggressive in their marketing: they are openly offering publication assistance; they are expressing their readiness to extend all kinds of publication related services starting from writing to publication in CARE/Scopus journals. They assure to get one's paper written and to publish the same in the elite journals. Of course, they charge heavy amounts for such services. They communicate such offers to the students/ research scholars/ faculty members through emails, apart from online advertisements in the websites including facebook. It's now a consumer market wherein everything including publications are on sale and everything including paper writing can be outsourced. To put it simply, to some extent, publications are on sale. If you are not capable of writing standard papers either owing to your poor vocabulary, low intelligence or poor language skills, you are not going to be a loser if you have the purchasing power. You hire such publishing farms and they will write for you, publish for you. It's sheer business, which is mutually profiting: a win-win situation for both the parties. One succeeds in getting a publication and the other one earns hefty money. In such a scenario, it becomes difficult to make out which paper is one's original manuscript and which paper is one's fully-hired publication. As Boeckstyns et al (2021) comments, "pay to publish" only tends to intensify the academic misconduct in a myriad ways. In other words, at a time when the market has entered the realm of journal publications, the boundary line between one's own writing and fully-hired writing often remains blurred and ambiguous. This explains why often one comes across certain scholars having CARE/ Scopus publications though they may be lacking miserably in their vocabulary, language, writing skill and corresponding domain knowledge.

The entire obsession for CARE/ Scopus journal stems from the state policy that put formal emphasis on quantitative logic. In other words, the state is obsessive to judge one's academic productivity and it has devised its own conceptual categories to operationalize the quantification exercise. First, the API (Academic Performance Index) score. It has developed a formula to quantify one's publication by assigning a corresponding score. Second, the Impact Factor. The score for a journal paper is conditioned by the

corresponding impact factor of the journal. Higher is the journal's impact factor, higher is the score of the papers published in it. This is now taken as an index of quality to evaluate, rank and judge the journal standard, apart from identifying the quality of the individual papers published (Jain 2011). Skeptics tend to frown upon the sanctity of the 'impact factor on a number of counts: the journal impact factors are not statistically representative of individual journal articles; the journal impact factors correlate poorly with actual citations of individual articles; the database dominated by American publications carries an exclusive English language bias (Seglen 1997). 'Impact factor' had begun initially as a bibliographic research tool for retrieval of overlapping research which eventually emerged as a parameter for ascertaining paper quality: citation indicates quality. It employs a crass quantitative logic. That is, it counts citations without taking into account the context of the citations (Ophthof 1997). Third, the High Power journals. Certain journals are considered high power journals. One's paper is rated highly if it has been published in a high power journal. There exists a reductionist approach to the entire assessment of one's publication. That is, what is published in the so-called certified journals are considered pieces representative of top most quality; the rest of the write-ups are bereft of standards.

### THE CITATION QUESTION

Unambiguously, citations are taken as the index of quality. Higher is the number of citations, higher is the quality of the paper/ journal. That is, quantity (number of times cited) determines quality. The moot question is, do all publications get cited? Can citation guarantee quality? The truth is, a considerable amount of research publications are never cited. Does that render them worthless? On the contrary, there may be huge low quality publications carrying the highest number of citations for some reasons or the other. To take citations to assess the quality of a paper is always a questionable proposition. The following arguments shared by Ophthof (1997) appear worth learning: the impact factor may not truly assure quality of individual papers; it need not be taken as a parameter to assess quality of individual scientists.

The way the modern state promotes the culture of quantification, one tends to witness a different form of academic stratification in the publication domain: a domain that reiterates the language of hierarchy and crass inequality. The way the modern state legitimizes such stratification in the realm of publication, it appears

as if all those having high power/ high impact factor/ CARE-Scopus publications are original scholars; as if all those not having such creamy layer publications are twenty-four carat idiots, dogs, donkeys, vixens or millipedes; as if all those papers published outside such elite journals are not worth reading; as if all those scientists/ social scientists of global eminence not having papers in such elite journals are hicks and morons.

### **PUBLICATION: THE SURVIVAL QUESTION**

Not surprisingly, the reason why one is keen to publish is quite obvious. It's no more one's choice; rather, it's one's survival compulsion in the academic world. The educational administration links it directly to one's career progression. In today's academic world, publication is directly related to one's selection, promotion, grant, success and position (Singhal & Kalra 2021). Greater is the brand name of the journal, higher is the validation of one's scholarship. Needless to say, in the competitive race, one's identity, recognition and reputation is proportionate to one's publication visibility. This explains the mass desperation of many of the present day academic professionals for branded publications. It has become a kind of civilizational madness.

### **THE HAUNTING QUESTIONS: RISING BEYOND QUANTIFICATION**

The questions that continually haunt one's imagination are quite irresistible. Can there be a uniform index to ascertain the quality of publications taking place in all streams – Science, Arts, Commerce or Professional Courses? What do the streams represent – uniformity or difference? Should the quality monitoring parameter be stream-specific? Is the paper-based scoring system the only unproblematic mode to ascertain quality and one's academic worth? What about the questions of originality and authenticity (especially at a time when everything in the publishing world is on sale/ can be hired? Is the present scoring system a better method of selecting worthy faculty members/ academicians? If the answer is yes, does it mean that the method in which the academic performance was judged and academicians were inducted earlier was defective? In the same vein, does it denote that all our teachers who have never got a single paper published in the so-called high-power journals are worthless/ zero intellectuals? The moot question remains, can one's creative writing be quantified? Is it possible to judge one's academic worth beyond quantification?

The idea is not to be cynical of any change arbitrarily. Instead, one's intent is also not to indulge in anything new uncritically. This is especially significant at a time when the modern state is making a shift from one paradigm to another paradigm. We are operating in a system. That does not mean, one will not question the system. In the same way, the alternative system of performance appraisal (API) need not be treated finite, fixed and unproblematic. It must also be subjected to adequate degree of tests, verifications with an amount of organized skepticism in the best interests of academics.

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# Improving the Mental Health of Young People in India: A Social Inclusion Perspective

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## ABSTRACT

Young people, like all age groups, require mental health treatment. There is also evidence that young groups are more vulnerable. The Indian government, from time to time, implements several programs to address the issue of mental health. However, it is concerning to observe that mental health among young individuals, notably teenagers, is not well addressed. The mental health of young people cannot be treated solely in biomedical terms. Under such circumstances, the question is more about how India will handle young people's growing mental health needs while prioritizing development by constructing a truly inclusive India.

As a result, the purpose of the research is to thoroughly investigate the current state and existing policies relevant to the mental health of young people in India using the available literature. It will identify the gap between policies and implementation. Alternative solutions based on a comprehensive approach that considers both medical and social aspects will be studied. It will approach the problem from a social inclusion standpoint.

**Keywords:** *Mental Health, Young and Adolescents, Social Inclusion*

## INTRODUCTION

Young people with mental illness are often excluded from social networks, family gatherings, schools, and the workplace. As a result, mental health is a component of the whole health care system and needs to be given the attention it deserves. For a variety of reasons, adolescents and young people are increasingly dealing with mental health concerns. Exposure to adversity, peer pressure, exploitation, sexual abuse, harsh parenting, and other factors are among these causes. Certain teenagers are more prone to mental health issues because of their living conditions, such as stigma, discrimination, prejudice, isolation, or limited access to high-quality support services. In addition, chronic diseases, intellectual disabilities, emotional disorders, behavioral disorders, psychosis, suicide, risk-taking behaviors, and other issues are the results of this.

As we all know, mental health is one of the most important aspects of achieving overall development and well-being among young people across the world. On June 13, 2021, in an article titled "One of the youngest

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populations in the world—India’s most valuable assets,” published by the economic and diplomatic division of the Ministry of External Affairs, the Government of India claims that India has 1.3 billion people with an average age of 29. This indicates that India has a sizable global young population. If they are both physically and mentally fit, they will open up a world of chances to accomplish big national goals. Hence, achieving mental health and psychological well-being and the absence of mental disorders are prerequisites for every young Indian. The National Mental Health Policy of India released in October 2014 explains that the health and well-being of young people were contested with the World Health Organization’s (WHO) definition of health: “a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not the mere absence of diseases.”

About defining “young people”, it is a period in an individual’s life spanning the ages of 10 to 24, with adolescents falling between the ages of 10 and 19 and youth falling between the ages of 15 and 24, as explained by the WHO Report on *Global Accelerated Action for the Health of Adolescents (AA-HA’): Guidance to Support Country Implementation* (2017). Here, adolescents and youth are included within the broad rubric of young people.

About mental health, the recent release of a United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) report entitled “*The State of the World’s Children 2021: On My Mind: Promoting, Protecting, and Caring for Children’s Mental Health*” has highlighted the importance of mental health among adolescents. The alarming note in this report is that one in seven adolescents in India is depressed.

From time to time, different studies raise our awareness of the mental health state of India’s youth. Take, for example, Anuradha Mascarenhas, in The Indian Express article on August 6, 2022, entitled “A Sharp Rise in Depression among Youngsters, Especially Adolescent Girls,” explaining that a study by the Lancet found that there is a sharp rise in depression among youngsters, especially adolescent girls. *Similarly, in the same newspaper, another article written by Tabassum Barnagarwala on October 26, 2016, states that nearly 150 million Indians require mental health care services, according to a survey conducted by India’s National Institutes of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS). These studies explain that adolescents and young people face a lot of emotional stress, which affects their mental health. Therefore, a timely intervention*

requires implementing a broad strategy of social inclusion covering both medical and non-medical aspects that can prevent this worsening scenario.

India currently has a demographic advantage because one in three of its citizens are in the age range of 10 to 24 (Naik, 2022). According to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare’s population estimates, there are 252 million young people aged 15 to 24 years (Girase et al., 2022: 1–10). However, in order to fully realize the benefit, we must protect our young and adolescent populations from risk, particularly mental health. To grasp the gravity of the situation, we must examine youth mental health issues, which are critical and underappreciated but have far-reaching consequences for both young people in India and Indian society in general.

The available literature on the mental health of young people in India is mostly located in the public health domain (Mansfield et al., 2020: 1–14). Some literature has focused primarily on challenges relating to its implementation (Wainberg, 2017: 1–10; Singh, V. et al., 2022: 1–17). There is literature that focuses on the evolution of mental health policy in India and its importance in shaping the mental health of Indians in the near future (Gupta et al., 2021). But nobody thought of the Corona pandemic, an unprecedented event in the history of mankind that will impact on such a large scale that it changes the whole understanding of public health, which includes the mental health of normal human beings in an abnormal situation cut off physically from every public event and social life. Consider how to achieve psychological well-being in such circumstances, which is a little more difficult.

As a result, the objective of this paper is to understand the issues that young people in India face in terms of mental health, particularly in the post-pandemic period. It also proposed a strategy (promoting social inclusion) to address the growing challenges of mental health among youth by addressing social factors such as caste identity, gender, socioeconomic status, and location that act as barriers to accessing mental health services. To elaborate further, this paper is a modest attempt to provide a systematic analysis that is structured around five parts. The first section elaborates on the concept of social inclusion in greater detail. The second section attempts to conduct a comprehensive global study of young people’s mental health. Different reports and their findings need explanation and analysis to study the global trend on the young people’s mental health. The



third part discusses different policies and actions taken by the Indian government that need to be analyzed in relation to the mental health of young people in India. It will study different policies made by different ministries in India. The fourth part will study the current status of the mental health of young people in India, and the fifth part will elaborate on the medical and non-medical aspects of mental health. The final section will examine the current situation, critically study young people's mental health in India, and explore strategies for promoting social inclusion.

## **I. SOCIAL INCLUSION: THE CONCEPT**

Promoting inclusion is the need of the hour, and each and every country is now using this term in their official policy discourse as a basic requirement. As a result, social inclusion is more desirable than simply a reflex, and it depends on how we understand and address the problems of different kinds and categories of people who need inclusion. Hilary Silver says it is context-specific. She defines social inclusion as a multifaceted, relational process with the goal of increasing social participation opportunities, improving the capacity to carry out social roles prescribed by norms, expanding social ties of respect and recognition, and strengthening social bonds, cohesion, integration, or solidarity at the collective level (Silver, 2015: 3). With policy discourse shifting from exclusion to inclusion, it is used as context-specific labeling and as a symbol of solidarity, social capital, integration, etc. However, it is also conceived as a conception more relating to belongingness, membership, and citizenship (Silver, 2015: 3). However, Spandler explains that inclusion within a policy framework means identifying social structure, which is constraining individuals in realizing their choices for their lives (Spandler, 2007).

In the realm of mental health, a critical examination of the concept of social inclusion is absolutely necessary because it is being employed to redefine services and delivery in a way that may have beneficial effects on both the present and future of mental health. Hence, it is indispensable to inquire about the potential drawbacks of people affected by mental health and possible approaches to addressing their inclusion so that they can contribute substantially to themselves and society.

Social inclusion is all about promoting choice in living one's desired life in a community. The available literature on social inclusion in connection to mental health is predominated by the Sedwick notion, which

stresses a socialist, liberal, humanistic, and rights-based approach. Scholars such as Spandler recommend another idea based on a critical approach to policy practice in relation to mental health and psychiatry (Spandler, 2007: 4). Here, Bates's idea of the social model of disabilities influenced his thinking. According to Bates, disabilities are a social construction that is visible in contemporary policy and practice. To counter this coercive or oppressive system, Bates offers a non-stigmatizing, non-medicalized initiative that focuses on a recovery philosophy of care, integration, and accountability to achieve the genuine empowerment of people affected by mental illness (Spandler, 2007: 4). Spandler's primary contention is that there is a paradoxical nature to the way social inclusion has been applied to policy and practice. In one way, it represents a genuine desire to address inequality, while in another, it is used as a modern practice of governance that legitimizes through inclusion and consensus rather than conflict and coercion by adhering to the idea of moral imperatives.

Despite divergent approaches to addressing the inclusion issue of mental health, there is no single definition agreed upon by scholars. Rather, an emerging consensus has been developed by the United Nations in recent years to address genuine inclusion and empowerment by adhering to a human rights framework (Davey and Gordon, 2021: 1–14).

## **II. MENTAL HEALTH OF YOUNG PEOPLE: GLOBAL TRENDS**

According to a new WHO-led study, the majority of adolescents worldwide—more than 80 percent (85 percent of girls and 78 percent of boys)—are insufficiently physically active (WHO, 2019). Globally, one in every seven 10- to 19-year-olds has a mental disorder. This represents 13 percent of the global burden of disease for these groups. Among the leading causes of diseases among adolescents are behavioral problems, anxiety, and depression. The fourth-leading cause of death for people aged 15 to 29 is suicide. Ignoring to address adolescent mental health issues can have long-term consequences on an individual's physical and mental health, as well as their capacity to live a satisfying adult life.

Mental health problems represent the largest burden of sickness among young people among the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries (OECD, 2018). In a similar vein, the Naveed et al. study estimates that approximately 14.2 percent

of South Asians suffer from mental illness (Naveed et al., 2020). These mental diseases have a bigger social and economic impact. It is estimated that mental diseases such as depression and anxiety are expected to cost the global economy about one trillion dollars. The main issue here is that there is a significant disparity between the severity of the illness and the availability of treatment.

Now, mental health issues are acknowledged as part of the social inclusion strategy, which is illustrated in the sustainable development goal. To overcome the mental health challenge, the WHO Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan (2013–2030) commits all countries to concentrate on four objectives: integrated community-based care, effective leadership and governance, strategic promotion and prevention, and information based on evidence-based research.

To look into detail about adolescent health, an integrated global strategy for women's, children's, and adolescents' health (2016–2030) action plan guide is in the public domain to enhance the health of adolescents across the globe. This resource provides more information about youth mental health. Global institutions, particularly the WHO, which study the issue of young people's mental health across different countries, provide a detailed action plan relating to how to overcome the mental health problem among young and adolescent people.

### III. GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND ACTS RELATING TO YOUNG PEOPLE'S MENTAL HEALTH IN INDIA

In 2014, India introduced the National Mental Health Policy (NMHP). This is compliant with the WHO's mental health policy (2005). Acts from the present era, such as the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (RPWD, 2016), the Mental Health CARE Act (MHCA, 2017), etc., support NMHP. (Gupta and Sagar, 2021).

Prior to the implementation of the NMHP in 2014, India attempted to address Indian people's mental health issues through the National Mental Health Programme (NMHP, 1982) and later through the District Mental Health Program (DMHP, 1996). The NMHP focuses on the treatment, prevention, and rehabilitation of people with mental health problems, whereas the DMHP focuses on the integration of mental health with the public health system along with community-based mental health services. The objective of DMHP is to ensure that everyone has access to basic health care by promoting community participation in relation to mental health.

NMHP (2014) emphasized universal access to mental health care across the life span. It recommends the expansion of the DMHP to cover all districts in the country. This policy pays special attention to the mental health needs of vulnerable groups of people, such as orphans and mentally ill children. Different policies have been launched with different levels of performance. But an improved version came in the form of the Mental Health Care Act of 2017. This act gives importance to the role of the nominated representative (NR) (basically parents, guardians, or state-appointed persons) in all aspects of decision-making relating to minor mental health care. Another important point relevant to adolescents in this act is the decriminalization of suicidal behavior. It also promotes a rights-based approach to accessing mental health services.

Other mental health initiatives include Rashtriya Kishor SwasthyaKaryakarm (RKSK)(2014), focusing on adolescent suicide; Serva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)(2014), concerned with education, focusing also on learning disabilities; Yuva Spandan (2015), which focuses on adolescent welfare in the state of Karnataka, gave guidelines in mental health intervention at the family level (Roy et al., 2019); and Ayushman Bharat (2018). The school health program under Ayushman Bharat is a joint program by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare with the Ministry of Education that promotes children's physical and mental wellness through an integrated strategy that includes yoga and digital literacy. Various ministries of the government of India sponsored various other schemes for youngsters, but they did not address mental health issues. By incorporating preventive health care practices into the school curriculum and focusing awareness programs, the National Youth Policy 2021 safeguards the health and well-being of young people. It aims to provide high-quality treatment facilities for youth health by focusing on mental illness, sexual and reproductive health, and treatment and rehabilitation for substance use disorders.

Another important thing is that digital technology has brought a revolutionary transformation to the field of communication. According to an OECD report (OECD, 2018), most young children now spend more than two hours per week on the internet. But spending more time on the internet and social media has a negative impact. There are studies that show that greater use of social media is associated with poorer sleep and a higher level of anxiety and depression.



However, the positive aspect of digital technology is that it makes it easier for people to receive service facilities at their doorstep. Hence It was believed that a move to digital intervention was necessary to deliver services like health and education during the pandemic phase. Because of this, throughout these times, telemedicine, telepsychiatry, teleconsultations, and the use of health apps were all quite popular in the public during these periods. Given its widespread popularity and approval, the Indian government plans to establish a new national telemental health program in January 2022 (Girase et al., 2022). Previously, the National Digital Health Mission 2020 (NDHMM), Telepsychiatry Practice Guidelines 2020 and Telemedicine Practice Guidelines 2020 were passed to expand potential in the field of Indian medical care. These guidelines acknowledge the use of text, audio, and video modalities of consultation in day-to-day clinical practice. In April 2021, the Indian government released the Mental Health and Normality Augmentation System (MANAS) app for the population aged 15–35 years (Girase et al., 2022).

In addition to the initiative from the Ministry of Health, other ministries in India also focus on youth health, including mental health, as a priority. The National Youth Policy (2014), the National Education Policy (2020), and the Scheme for Adolescent Girls (SABIA) (2010) are different policies aimed at achieving specific goals for which they are initiated.

#### IV. Mental health of young people in India: current situation

In an article in the Business Line on December 2, 2023, entitled “A majority of Indian youth have poor mental health, and it is affecting their productivity,” Nimisha S. Pradeep claims that despite numerous policies being implemented in India, more than 50 percent of the youth (18–24 years old) have poor mental health. She also said, according to a report by the Sapien Labs Center for the Human Brain and Mind, 41 percent of young people between the ages of 15 and 24 need support for mental health issues (UNICEF, 2021). Major mental illnesses prevailing among the young in India in terms of percentage in descending order include depression, followed by agoraphobia, intellectual disability, autism spectrum disorder, psychotic disorder, anxiety, etc. (Hossain & Purohit, 2019). According to consultant psychiatrist Soumitra Pathare in India, an estimated 1.7 lakh suicides occur every year, as he revealed in an interview with Ketaki Desai of the Times of India on

February 4, 2022. The reason for poor mental health among young people, according to Sayce and Measey studies, is associated with minimal access to education, employment, and social networks (Mathias et al., 2019). The WHO estimates that the economic loss in India due to mental health conditions will be \$1.3 trillion between 2012 and 2030, a claim made by Nerja Birla in an article published on September 10, 2019, in the Economic Times. Hence there is a serious concern about the way the data expresses the gravity of the issues found in relation to young and adolescent mental health in India.

#### V. MENTAL HEALTH (BOTH MEDICAL AND NON-MEDICAL ASPECTS): DISCUSSION

People generally believe that mental health disorders or illnesses are dealt with solely in the biomedical domain. But there are few studies that suggest that non-medical counseling is effective in reducing depression symptoms, and its inclusion in the mental health care system has undergone a revolutionary transformation in recent times (Wainberg, 2017: 1–10). So, non-medical counseling is also essentially helpful for a life-changing event in young and adolescent life.

Because the National Health Policy made it clear in its report that 70 percent to 80 percent of people with mental disorders live with their families in India. This is true across demographic and social variables. But this is not visible in the public arena because public stigma is associated with the young people’s mental health. However, the general understanding in regards to mental health has improved over the years, but a larger understanding is needed. People choose to ignore symptoms because of a sheer lack of understanding. Till now, the magnitude of the diseases, their socio-economic significance, and gaps in the health system need to be discussed at the policy level (Gaiha et al., 2020; Hossain & Purohit, 2019). More and more health practitioners are to be trained in giving attention to the non-medical aspects of mental health, along with the medical aspects, by giving proper care to the needy. For example, group-based interventions for mentally afflicted children among school-going children provided positive results (Kermode et al., 2021). Hence, counseling, community involvement, participation, and engaging the patient in extracurricular activities with a lot of care, respect, and compassion are necessary to achieve positive outcomes. Not recognition, isolation, ignorance, or inadequate attention at both the individual, family, and societal levels must be overcome at the earliest to address the mental health issue of the young.

## VI. RESULT

Addressing the mental health of young people in India cannot be done with a conventional pattern; it requires a paradigm shift in thinking. A wide range of interventions are required, from public awareness to acute illness treatment. There are arrangements for family education, rehabilitation, and long-term care that are needed as measures to improve the mental health of young and adolescent people in India. Irrespective of their condition, each member of society is to be recognized with dignity, value, and respect. This is not just an ethical or moral requirement; it is also a societal goal and a practical necessity.

Five-pronged inclusion strategies are essential to tackling the mental health of young and adolescent Indians.

1. Mental health awareness constitutes a critical aspect of combating both public stigma and self-stigmatization. Early recognition and early intervention need to be given priority to combat the mental health issues of young and adolescent people in India. Detecting it early would help us prevent mental illness among youth. It is not just a simple public health priority; rather, it is an essential part of associated community life. Identifying, recognizing, and providing appropriate, timely intervention can help us reduce or control mental health among young people in India and around the world.

Therefore, education and awareness programs need to be implemented vigorously. There is evidence that mental health awareness campaigns have yielded positive outcomes (Srivastava et al., 2016). There is some evidence that group-based interventions are made to improve the mental health of youth in India and low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), but these interventions are implemented in schools, and none have particularly targeted young people with poor mental health (Kermode et al., 2021). But a feasibility study found an interesting insight: improving the mental health of affected young people by systematically encouraging participation in community activities, including fun and games and other public events (Mathias et al., 2019). A recovery-based care approach needs to focus on emphasizing individual strength and also on their purpose for living. In addition, stress-busting initiatives like teamwork, yoga, meditation, and emotional intelligence programs also help a lot to deal with

mental illnesses such as anxiety and stress. This leads to a greater recovery of their mental health and paves the way to genuine social inclusion. The increase in social inclusion and improvement of mental health among young people is only possible when greater avenues of opportunity are available for young people to form new friendship groups with frequent exchanges of communication. These are to be followed by greater encouragement from communities.

2. Collecting high-quality, evidence-based data enlightens policymakers to understand the sociological aspect of mental health issues rather than just relying on national crime records bureau data. This will help policymakers design policies conducive to reducing mental health issues. Take the case of dealing with the issue of suicide. Leading scholar and consultant psychiatrist Soumitra Pathare, who is one of the coauthors of the book entitled *Life Interrupted: Understanding India's Suicide Crisis* (2022), explained suicide as a serious mental health issue that needs more scientific exploration to address in the policy domain so that we can reduce the suicide rate. He said that in dealing with the issues of suicide prevention, we have to collect data on attempted suicide along with suicide.

Even in an interview with Ketaki Desai of *The Times of India* article, "Coaching centers are a symptom of the problem, not the problem itself," published on February 4, 2024, Soumitra Pathare asserted that attempted suicide rates are 5 to 20 percent greater than those of suicide. Comprehending the latent causes of suicide in India is also crucial. Hence the need for multipronged approaches and interventions to deal with different age groups, genders, and regions. For example, when it is women, you need to address domestic violence similarly; dealing with farmer debt is the main reason. To reduce suicide in India, there is a national suicide prevention strategy that aims to reduce suicide by 10 percent by 2030. However, it is not being implemented. So, its implementation must be backed up with evidence-based data. It is followed by using tactics like gatekeeper training programs that educate teachers and caregivers to recognize the warning signals of at-risk children and young people.

3. Combating the mental health of young and adolescent people does not fall into the individual domain but rather is a societal goal; hence, a social inclusion



approach is absolutely indispensable. Social inclusion is not just about objective participation, such as acquiring education and employment, but about subjective sensitivity, which means a sense of belongingness. This will be more appealing because people who are suffering from mental health problems need acceptance, care, and sensitivity (Gardner et al., 2018). The concept of social inclusion has various definitions and expresses many things, but the most meaningful and appropriate to note in this study is Lombe's idea that "inclusion is the realization that everyone has essential dignity and everyone has something to contribute" (Invent: Handbook on Inclusive Youthwork, 2022: 13). Hence, a combined effort is needed from parents, families, communities, and the media to work together as a support system to treat children's mental health as early as possible. Soumitra Pathare, in an aforementioned interview, said a study reported that the role of media is very important in cases like suicide; if it were timely reported, we could save two percent of lives in India, that is, 3500 people, in a year.

4. There is the mental health issue, which requires urgent medical intervention. In this case, the government must gradually and in a timely manner fill the manpower and material requirements to meet India's growing demand for mental health care. In reality, the acute shortage of psychiatry is a matter of concern in India, where data indicates that there should be 3 psychiatrists per 100,000 populations, but the current strength is only 0.75 psychiatrists per 100,000 (Garg et al., 2019:104–105).
5. The inclusion of digital technology also greatly bolsters the growing need to meet the physical requirements of medical resources and infrastructure. Scholars such as Hollis and others show that digital health interventions such as computerized cognitive and behavioral therapy (cCBT) for depression and anxiety among young people have shown some good results (Hollis et al., 2017). Different mobile apps and websites are designed to help lower depression among young people. In this way, it fosters a sense of social inclusion. But technology is just an instrument; it is the humane approach of human beings who are part of the patient's immediate surroundings that will do a lot to help him recover from his mental illness.

Hence, transforming mental health care needs the combined effort of the aforesaid points. It has been found that government programs are initiated to address specific objectives, but an integrated and holistic policy is the need of the hour and is responsible for dealing with both normal and abnormal situations. To deal with normal situations, it is essential to adhere to the basic health care system. But in abnormal situations like pandemics, wars, etc., how to deal with mental health issues is crucially important. An integrated approach to mental health care requires involvement from different actors and agencies, such as individuals, families, the government, the community, and civil society organizations. Overall, the issue of young and adolescent mental health in India at this juncture requires closing the gap at the institutional level and increasing the number of medical practitioners. At the same time, creating an environment that fosters a sense of belonging and a sense of community based on empathy, dignity, and respect for mentally ill people is also equally important.

## VII. CONCLUSION

India spends very little money on its healthcare system. On the other hand, its population is much younger. In such situations, the growing mental health issues among youth and adolescents need special attention. Policies and programs are enacted, but that is not sufficient. Much more is needed at this juncture. The issues pertaining to unemployment and drug addiction grapple with the mental condition of young people. Further, the socioeconomic condition is very precarious, and it pushes the young to take a negative step. The Medicare system provides much-needed precautions, such as the prevention and promotion of mental health.

Apart from this, the community, parents, and family need to play a bigger part and make them ethically sound to overcome such ills. Situations like the pandemic and post-pandemic period need to thoroughly address the emotional needs of individuals in different stages of life, particularly the young and adolescent period. In addition, adolescent experience and manifestations of adolescent behavior need to be handled carefully; the role of family in a crisis period is a learning experience.

Dealing with the mental health of young people with sufficient care and attention is important because they are part of our social life and have something to contribute to the betterment of society. They should be

treated as productive members of society. No society can afford to ignore people suffering from mental illnesses. Therefore, creating an enabling environment for their full recovery and helping them stand on their own two feet and meaningfully contribute to societal issues is the need of the hour.

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## Natural Resource Conflict and the Rise of Maoist Movement in Chhattisgarh

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### ABSTRACT

The Maoist movement has become one of the biggest threats to internal security in India, affecting nearly 165 districts across 14 states. The widespread discontent in rural areas, especially among tribal communities who have long faced economic hardship, social discrimination, and political exploitation, has allowed left-wing extremist groups to promote their violent political ideologies. Ecological issues, resource exploitation, and the failure to uphold the constitutional protections for tribal communities have further fuelled the growth of the movement. Chhattisgarh, in particular, is considered a major epicentre of the Maoist uprising, with the group exerting influence over 18 of its 27 districts at its peak. This paper aims to explore the situation in the state, highlighting the government's failure and possible ways to address the crisis, and propose effective strategies to tackle the Maoist violence and restore peace.

**Keywords :** *State Profile, Natural Resources, Maoist Movement, Maoist Attacks, Salwa Judum, Lon Varratu, Governance Issues*

### INTRODUCTION

India's remarkable economic growth over the past three decades has earned it the title of the world's fastest-growing economy. However, despite this progress, there are three major challenges that have emerged as formidable obstacles to the country's continued growth and leadership. These are cross-border terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir, the insurgency in the North-Eastern states, and the Maoist movement that began in the late 1960s. In 1967, inspired by the socialist movement, persecuted workers raised their bows and arrows against feudal landowners in Naxalbari. Among the numerous organizations that represented this movement, the Communist Party of India (Maoist) was founded in 2004, and since then, issues such as industrialization, mining, displacement, and tribal empowerment have remained at the heart of Maoist

politics in India. This banned organization has been responsible for human rights violations, mass displacement, and at least 12,000 deaths by 2018 (EFSAS, 2019).

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Chhattisgarh, a state in central India, has become one of the epicentres of the Maoist insurgency. At its peak, the Maoists had a strong presence in up to 18 of the state's 27 districts. The movement began in the late 1980s, and the 40,000 sq-km Bastar region—comprising the districts of Dantewada, Bijapur, Narayanpur, Bastar, and Kanker—became a war zone. Roughly 25,000 sq-km of this area, including the infamous Abujmar (the Maoist stronghold known as the Red Corridor), was considered a Maoist bastion. The rebels believed they were making significant gains in this territory. The Maoists in Chhattisgarh carried out some of the boldest attacks in the country's history, including the Chintalnar attack in 2010, where 76 CRPF soldiers were killed, and the assassination of top Indian National Congress leaders, including party head Nand Kumar Patel of Chhattisgarh, in 2013 (Sahoo, 2019: 7-8). The Maoist movement has been described as the single greatest threat to India's internal security, a sentiment echoed by the Prime Minister of the country. The Ministry of Home Affairs acknowledges that the movement spread across 76 districts in nine states, though this is widely regarded as an underestimate. According to the Institute for Conflict Management, nearly 165 districts in 14 states have been affected by varying degrees of Maoist violence and mobilization. Violence peaked in 2010, with 2,119 incidents resulting in 960 deaths. Although the violence subsided somewhat in 2011, the overall levels of unrest remain higher than a decade ago.

Peace and security are not mere prerequisites for economic growth and social development—they are the foundation upon which active participation and meaningful change can be built. Without these, people, who are both the instruments and the ultimate beneficiaries of change, cannot engage effectively. Across India's vast tribal regions, which have long been economically marginalized, socially discriminated against, and politically exploited, high levels of discontent persist. This prolonged exploitation, coupled with poor governance, has created fertile ground for left-wing extremist groups to advance their violent political agendas, further deepening the nation's instability and insecurity. While the causes of this violence are complex, three undeniable facts emerge: (a) left-wing extremism (LWE) seeks to seize power through force and improve the conditions of the impoverished; (b) the most vulnerable and impoverished groups in society are the primary victims of violence, exacerbating their suffering; and (c) many of those who fall victim to this violence have no ideological commitment to LWE but

are often drawn into the movement by anger, fear, or personal gain (Singh & Doval, 2014: 54-55).

Ecological issues have also played a central role in uniting Maoists in regions where marginalized areas are being exploited for rapid industrialization. Environmentalism in India can be understood in two ways: (a) as a concern for the ongoing degradation of natural resources and the need to protect them, and (b) as a call to respect the rights of tribal communities to these resources and ensure their fair distribution and sustainable use. Maoist philosophy, in this context, highlights the "atrocious exploitation" of forest resources, claiming that "radical powers have looted their forests and disrupted their way of life." The politics of ecological degradation thus becomes a focal point of conflict between local populations and those advocating for industrialization. On a smaller scale, ecological issues have sparked controversy due to attempts by the state and citizens to utilize natural resources for the nation's economic development. Logging through commercial forestry in the 1970s, for example, sparked a fierce reaction from the residents of the hilly regions, culminating in the famous Chipko Movement in Uttaranchal. In this and other similar ecological movements across the country, the clash between the state's monopolization of environmental resources and the growing demand among local people to assert their rights over natural resources becomes clear. This conflict represents a broader struggle between economic progress, as defined by the state, and the increasing desire of individuals to safeguard their environment from irreversible harm due to commercial exploitation (Chakrabarty & Kujur, 2010: 7).

The objective of this study is to analyse the relationship between natural resource conflicts and the rise of the Maoist movement in Chhattisgarh. It seeks to explore how the exploitation of natural resources, combined with poor governance and lack of tribal representation, has created a fertile ground for Maoist insurgency. Furthermore, the study will evaluate the state's response to this issue and propose effective strategies to counter the Maoist violence while addressing the root causes of the conflict.

The study employs a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods to examine the growth of the Maoist movement in Chhattisgarh. Primary data were collected through interviews with local government officials, tribal leaders and security personnel through field visits to Maoist-affected areas. Secondary data

sources include government reports, security agency assessments, and academic articles related to the Maoist movement in India. A comprehensive review of literature on the political and economic background of Chhattisgarh, as well as historical and sociocultural contexts, was also conducted to build a comprehensive understanding of the issue.

### MAOIST MOVEMENT: A HISTORICAL SOJOURN

The term *Naxalite* comes from Naxalbari, a small village in West Bengal, where in 1967, a group from the Communist Party of India (Marxist) led by Charu Majumdar, Kanu Sanyal, and Jangal Santhal began an uprising involving local tribal farmers. On May 18, 1967, the president of the Siliguri Kishan Sabha declared support for the movement started by Kanu Sanyal and announced their readiness to take up arms to redistribute land to the poor and landless. However, just a week later, a tenant farmer near Naxalbari was brutally killed by the landlord's men over a land dispute. On May 24, when police attempted to capture the peasant leaders, the police inspector was attacked and killed by arrows. This incident led many Santhals and other disadvantaged people to support the movement, and they began attacking local landlords.

The political philosophy of Mao Zedong gave the Naxalbari movement its ideological direction, advocating that Indian farm workers, peasants, and marginalized tribal people should overthrow the upper classes and the government. This philosophy resonated with many urban elites, especially through the writings of Charu Majumdar, particularly the "Historic Eight Documents," which outlined the core beliefs of Maoism. These documents helped spread Maoist ideas, focusing on the belief that the poor and oppressed should rise up and fight for their rights, challenging both societal structures and government authority (Narayan 2015: 20-21). Maoism, therefore, can be understood as an ideological framework that presents an alternative to both traditional Marxism and the Chinese version of socialism. It goes beyond the theoretical ideas of "armchair revolutionaries" and seeks to inspire the marginalized and dispossessed to fight for their rights and overcome their suffering. Maoism emphasizes the critical role of the oppressed in bringing about change, particularly at the grassroots level. As a doctrine, it aims to address the specific socio-economic challenges faced by people in Maoist-affected areas by promoting social balance, which remains the core goal of the movement. While the objective of achieving a just society may not

yet be fully realized, Maoists remain motivated by the belief that such a society can and will be achieved (Chakrabarty and Kujur 2010: 9). In the early stages, Maoist cadres relied on weapons seized from landlords. However, the situation today has evolved significantly. Groups like the PWG, MCC, and CPI Maoists have attacked police stations and seized weapons from several locations, repeatedly capturing large quantities of arms. According to an assessment by the Ministry of Home Affairs, the CPI Maoists are believed to possess around 6,500 firearms, including SLRs, rifles, carbines, and AK-47s, in addition to a large number of 12-bore guns. It is also likely that the PWG managed to acquire more AK-47 rifles from the LTTE (Rammohan et al., 2012: 32).

### CHHATTISGARH: BASICS ABOUT THE RED BASTION

Chhattisgarh, located in the heart of central India, covers an area of 135,194 km<sup>2</sup> and has a population of 25,540,196. The state shares its borders with six other states: Uttar Pradesh to the north, Jharkhand to the northeast, Odisha to the east, Madhya Pradesh to the west and northwest, Maharashtra to the southwest, and Andhra Pradesh to the southeast. Raipur, the largest city, also serves as the state capital. The official languages of Chhattisgarh are Hindi and Chhattisgarhi, with Urdu and Marathi also spoken by some communities. The state is known for its relatively high quality of life, with well-developed physical infrastructure, and has a literacy rate of 64.7% (Balasubramanian 2013: 2). The State currently consists of 27 districts and is predominantly covered by the Fifth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, which grants special rights to the local indigenous populations. The former Chief Minister, Shri Raman Singh of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), was elected for three consecutive terms, with the 2013 election marking his third win. Since 2003, Raman Singh's government brought political stability to Chhattisgarh and implemented various preventive measures to curb the Maoist insurgency, which had previously made the state one of the most affected by Left-Wing Extremism, with the highest number of casualties since 2005, including police personnel, activists, and civilians. Despite these efforts, however, the state continues to face significant challenges, including high rates of violence and brutality caused by Naxals. Chhattisgarh ranks poorly in terms of the Human Development Index, living standards, health, sanitation, and hygiene. Furthermore, the state's road infrastructure is one of the worst in the country, with road density (measured in kilometres of road per 100 km) falling below national standards (Shapiro et al., 2017: 36).



According to the 2001 Census report, Chhattisgarh's population was 2.08 crore, with 80 percent of the population residing in rural areas and 20 percent in urban areas. The state is richly endowed with mineral resources and forests, including diamonds, gold, iron ore, coal, corundum, bauxite, dolomite, lime, tin, and granite. The people of Chhattisgarh have a deep connection with the land and its forests, treating them with great respect and reverence. Over centuries, communities in the state have developed a way of life based on these natural resources, relying on them for daily sustenance. Indigenous knowledge, especially related to rice cultivation and the use of herbal medicine, has flourished over time. However, this valuable knowledge is rapidly disappearing due to the influence of modern technical practices and pharmaceuticals, and there is little documentation of these traditional systems (Chhattisgarh Human Development Report 2020).

### **THE ORIGIN AND GROWTH OF MAOIST MOVEMENT IN CHHATTISGARH**

Chhattisgarh, located in the Dandakaranya region, has been the center of Maoist activities since the beginning of the People's War. It was Seetharmaiha, known as the father of the People's War (PW), who proposed the idea of establishing a Guerrilla Zone in Dandakaranya, particularly in the Bastar region, due to its unique geopolitical and socio-economic conditions. In 1979, Maoist leaders identified this area as crucial for their roadmap, and a small team of six members, later joined by five others, was sent to create progressive awareness in the region. The significance of the area became more apparent in the late 1990s when the Maoists successfully built a strong guerrilla warfare network in Bastar and Surguja. By 1995, the mass movement in the Dandakaranya region had grown to include over 60,000 participants, and today, this number exceeds 150,000 (Kujur 2006). A government intelligence report from May 2005 stated that Maoists had established dominant control in nine of the 16 districts of Chhattisgarh (now 27), specifically in Kanker, Dantewada, Bastar, Surguja, Balrampur, Rajnandgaon, Koriya, Kawardha, and Jashpur, with growing influence in four other districts. The Police Director of Chhattisgarh, Mr. O.P. Rathor, noted that Maoists were operating across more than 40,000 square miles, covering 10 out of the 16 districts in the state. According to sources within the Chhattisgarh administration, there were approximately 3,000 Maoists in the state, organized into two main units: 'Dalamas' and 'Sanghams.' The Dalamas are responsible for armed attacks, while the Sanghams consist of a larger network

of overground cadres. Most members of the movement are tribals or Adivasis, and the Maoists have adopted a strategy of forcibly recruiting one person from each Adivasi family. If no male family member is available, young girls are often recruited. The leaders and key decision-makers of the Maoist movement are mostly from outside the Bastar district (Asian Centre for Human Rights 2006: 12).

### **MAOIST MOVEMENT IN CHHATTISGARH: MAPPING THE NATURAL RESOURCE CONFLICT.**

Before delving into the discussion of Maoism and the movement, it is essential to first understand the key factors that have driven the youth in rural and tribal regions of Chhattisgarh to wage war against the state's mechanisms. There are several socio-economic indicators that can help determine the standard of living, including education, health, housing, livelihoods, employment, accessibility to basic services, and the overall level of development in these areas (Kumar and Singh 2015: 223). These factors contribute significantly to the grievances and unrest among the local population, particularly in marginalized and underdeveloped regions. Chhattisgarh is the ninth largest state in India, covering a geographical area of nearly 135,000 square kilometers. It is one of the wealthiest states in terms of mineral resources, with an abundance of essential minerals, including precious diamonds. The state is home to major industries such as steel, electricity, mining, aluminum, and cement, contributing significantly to India's industrial sector (India Brand Equity Foundation 2008: 4). Chhattisgarh represents about two percent of India's total population, with 20 percent of the state's population living in urban areas, while the remaining 80 percent reside in forested regions. The state's total population is approximately 20.83 million, of which 43.4 percent are from scheduled tribes and scheduled castes. These communities largely depend on forest products and land for their livelihoods, as they have historically lived in dense forest areas (Ibid: 4).

Agriculture has traditionally been the primary source of livelihood for most people in India. However, after gaining independence, the country adopted an industry-based development strategy to achieve rapid economic growth, which required large tracts of land. While this approach contributed to improving India's economic condition, it also led to the forced displacement of marginalized sections of society. As land was acquired for industrialization, many people were uprooted from their property and access to natural resources, causing

significant hardship for these communities (Rathod 2019). Forests play a crucial role in the livelihood of many tribal communities, providing jobs and income through various forest products like Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs), such as Tendu leaves, Mahua flowers, and honey. These products are consumed by the tribal people and also sold to government-run cooperatives, societies, and commercial traders. For generations, forests have served as a guardian, especially during the harsh horticulture seasons. Harvesting and selling forest products often provide employment for at least 40 days a year, and these activities are increasingly important for cash benefits, including wages and other rewards. In addition to providing cash, NTFPs offer food security (through mushrooms, fruits, tubers, and leaves), medicines, and access to resources that might otherwise require payment. However, in recent times, these forest products are steadily declining. The land traditionally used by tribal communities has become a source of ongoing conflict, with their legal rights frequently contested by government officials. This has created a sense of insecurity, displacement, and injustice, highlighting the flaws in India's development model (Green 2015: 2). The Government's own investigations highlight the marginalization of poor communities, particularly tribal populations who have lived near forests for generations, developing a deep dependency on the rich natural resources in these regions. However, violations of land and forest rights often lead to their resettlement or alienation, disrupting their economic relationships and social practices. These harsh realities, including the loss of traditional livelihoods and cultural practices, are common in the lives of marginalized communities. The expansion of industrialization and mining has exacerbated these challenges. According to government reports, between 2006 and 2012, around 21,000 hectares of land were allocated by the Chhattisgarh government—more than any other state, including Madhya Pradesh—for coal mining and other developmental projects (Ibid: 2). For more than 70 years, India has been implementing developmental projects, resulting in the displacement of over 50 million people, with tribal communities often bearing the brunt of these displacements. It is estimated that around 40 to 50 percent of the displaced people have not received any rehabilitation to date. As a result, many of these displaced individuals have turned to Maoism as a means of asserting their constitutional rights. In short, the displacement of tribal people from their ancestral lands and forests is a primary driving force behind the rise of Maoism in India (Rathod 2019). The natural resource

conflict in India can be attributed to the non-fulfilment of the Fifth and Ninth Schedules of the Indian Constitution. These schedules were designed to provide a limited form of tribal independence, yet they fail to adequately address issues such as the tribes' access to natural resources on their lands, including medicinal plants and quarrying rights. Additionally, the schedules overlook important aspects like land ceiling laws, the restriction of property ownership by landlords, and the allocation of surplus lands to landless farmers and workers (Narayan 2015: 21).

#### **MAOIST ATTACKS IN CHHATTISGARH: THE FEAR FACTOR**

In November 2002, Madhya Pradesh was divided, resulting in the formation of Chhattisgarh. During this time, Chhattisgarh became a focal point for Maoist operations, particularly in the Bastar region. In February 2000, a devastating landmine blast claimed the lives of 22 security personnel, including an additional Superintendent of Police. The People's War Group (PWG) infiltrated Chhattisgarh after being squeezed out by the well-equipped Greyhounds, an elite police force from Andhra Pradesh. The PWG received special training from a former guerrilla commander-in-chief, renowned for leading forces capable of battling the Maoists. When the PWG retreated to Chhattisgarh, they found the local tribal communities to be largely inactive and unwilling to join the fight against the government. Many villagers refused to participate in the training or battle, and as the PWG resorted to forceful recruitment, many people fled rural areas for urban centers to escape the conflict.

Meanwhile, ambitious tribal leaders, aligned with the Congress party, began organizing the local population to voice their opposition to the guerrilla forces. This led to the formation of the Salwa Judum movement, which initially played a significant role in advocating for equality. However, over time, the movement was halted due to the tragic loss of innocent tribal lives at the hands of Maoists. (Narayan 2015: 21). Let's examine some significant incidents that occurred between 2005 and 2015, as outlined in the table below.

#### **(Fatalities in Left-Wing Extremist Violence in Chhattisgarh: 2005-2015)**

Year	Civilians	SFs	Naxals	Total death
2005	52	48	26	126
2006	189	55	117	361

2007	95	182	73	350
2008	35	67	66	168
2009	87	121	137	345
2010	72	153	102	327
2011	39	67	70	176
2012	26	36	46	108
2013	48	45	35	128
2014	25	55	33	113
2015	8	9	2	19
Total	676	838	707	2221

(Source- Kumar. Praveen and Singh, Manoj Kumar. (2015). *Chhattisgarh: Naxalism, Human Rights and Role of Media, International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Development*)

Between 2005 and 2015, Chhattisgarh saw a tragic toll from Left-Wing Extremist (LWE) violence, with a total of 2,221 fatalities, including 676 civilians, 838 security forces personnel, and 707 Maoists. Civilians were the most vulnerable group, making up 30.4% of the deaths, while security forces accounted for 37.7% and Maoists for 31.9%. The highest casualties occurred in the early years, particularly in 2006, which recorded 361 deaths, driven by intense violence. 2007 and 2009 also saw significant fatalities, especially among security personnel, reflecting the ongoing conflict and military operations aimed at countering the insurgency.

However, from 2010 onwards, there was a noticeable decline in fatalities, particularly among Maoists, with 102 deaths in 2010 dropping to just 2 in 2015. This shift suggests that government counterinsurgency efforts became more effective over time, leading to reduced Maoist activity and casualties. Although civilian and security force deaths remained significant in the early years, the overall trend towards lower fatalities by the end of the decade points to a shift in the conflict's dynamics. Despite this, the total loss of life underscores the enduring human cost of the violence, emphasizing the need for continued efforts toward peace and stability in the region.

During its operations, the People's War Group (PWG) covered the entire undivided Bastar region, which included the districts of Bijapur, Bastar, Dantewada, and Kanker. In 2003 alone, there were 103 gunfights, resulting in the deaths of 31 security personnel. On May 7, 2005, the Maoists attacked Hindalco Industries officials in Saridihi, located in the Surguja region. Later

that year, on March 3, 2005, a landmine blast at Kupjemala in Bastar killed 22 CRPF personnel. Around this time, the People's War Group imposed strict bans on tribal people, prohibiting them from worshipping Hindu or Christian gods. In 2010, the Maoists ambushed five CRPF units in Dantewada, killing 86 police personnel, marking the region as one of the deadliest zones for security forces (Ibid:29). On March 11, 2014, Maoists launched an attack on security personnel during their daytime patrol in Sukma, killing 16 police officers, including 11 CRPF jawans. This attack occurred in the same area where, in 2010, the Maoists had killed 76 CRPF personnel (Live Mint, 2014). Later that year, on December 1, Maoists killed 14 paramilitary forces in Sukma district while they were conducting a raid in a forested area. Following the attack, the rebels declared that they were fighting for tribal rights and the welfare of the rural poor (BBS News, 2014). In response, Chhattisgarh police stated that they had enhanced their use of technology and adopted new strategies to counter left-wing extremism. By then, 202 encounters had taken place, resulting in the deaths of 133 Maoists, 55 civilians, and 41 security forces. Additionally, around 1,202 Maoists surrendered, while 881 were arrested (Mishra, 2016).

In 2017, one of the deadliest years for security forces in the past seven years, 26 security personnel were killed in Sukma district. In total, 72 police personnel lost their lives that year, while 20 civilians were also killed, and 70 Maoists were neutralized (Saha, 2017). On March 13, 2018, a security team en route from Kistaram to Palodi in Sukma district was ambushed, leading to the deaths of 9 CRPF jawans and the injury of 2 others from a group of 212 security personnel (Mishra & Ahuja, 2018). Later that year, on July 13, another attack in Sukma district resulted in the deaths of 24 security personnel. Initially reported as 11 deaths, the toll was later revised to 24 jawans killed, with several others wounded (The Economic Times, 2018). On March 23, 2020, Maoists attacked a CRPF unit in Sukma, killing 17 personnel. This attack, one of the deadliest in the region, came almost two years after a similar attack in 2018, where 24 security forces had been killed (Das, 2020). Finally, on April 4, 2021, a large-scale anti-Maoist operation was launched by a joint force comprising the CRPF, CoBRA, DRG, and STF in the dense forests of South Bastar. During a patrol in the forests near Jonaguda, a security team was ambushed by the People's Liberation Guerrilla Army (PLGA). The encounter, which lasted for about four hours, led to the deaths of



22 security personnel, the injury of 32 others, and the disappearance of one officer (The Times of India, 2021). Since then, there have been no major casualties reported between Maoists and police forces in the state.

#### **SALWA JUDUM: A SAGA OF FAILED EXPERIMENTS.**

The Salwa Judum, which marked the beginning of the anti-Maoist movement in Bastar, emerged in June 2005 as a response to growing anti-Maoist sentiments within the local population. The movement was triggered by a meeting of eight villagers in Toemar, near SP Kutru in the Bijapur police region, where local people expressed their frustration with the disruptive tactics of the Maoists, which led to disturbances and widespread hunger due to the loss of employment opportunities. In response, the Salwa Judum mobilized villagers and tribals against the Maoists through rallies, gatherings, and padayatras (foot marches) in the Maoist strongholds of the Bijapur and Bhiramgarh blocks in south Bastar. What began as a peaceful and local movement rapidly expanded to the regions of Bijapur, Bhairamgarh, Usoor, Sukma, and Konta in the Dantewada district. The Salwa Judum's activities included over 150 anti-Maoist marches (Agrawal 2014:97), significantly contributing to the growing resistance against the Maoists in the region.

The term Salwa Judum is derived from the Maria dialect, where "Salwa" refers to the sprinkling of holy water over an ailing person with the hope of restoring their health, and "Judum" means community. Thus, Salwa Judum essentially signifies the act of sprinkling holy water over a community that has been affected by the "sickness of Maoism" (Narayan 2015:100). The movement was initiated by Mahendra Karma, who quickly garnered support and assistance from the Chhattisgarh government. Many young men joined the Salwa Judum movement, receiving military-style training and were designated as Special Police Officers (SPOs).

However, the movement faced significant challenges. Tribal communities endured torture and killings by Maoists, and several innocent children were also killed when their parents were away. These atrocities, along with the loss of innocent lives, led to the formation of the anti-Maoist Salwa Judum. As reports of violence and killings emerged, Salwa Judum members were increasingly viewed as an unregulated force, often engaging in violent retaliation with the support of the government. Eventually, the Supreme Court suspended the movement, and Mahendra Karma, the leader of Salwa Judum, was killed by Maoists (Kumar and Singh 2015:224).

#### **LON VARRATU: THE HEALING TOUCH**

The police in Chhattisgarh are continuously working to guide Maoists back to the right path, and the Dantewada police have launched a unique initiative known as Lon Varratu, which means 'return home'. As part of this initiative, the police have released a list of the most wanted 13 Maoists. Several senior police officers have been designated to assist in encouraging Maoists to take advantage of the government's surrender policy. The campaign started in Chikpal, under the jurisdiction of the Katekalyan police station. Through this campaign, the police are appealing to the Maoists to return to their communities (Zee Media Bureau, 2020).

Sundarraaj P., the Inspector General of Bastar, emphasized that Lon Varratu is a special initiative by the Chhattisgarh government and the police forces, aimed at encouraging Maoists, particularly those who are local villagers, to return home and begin a new life with government assistance. He highlighted that unlike previous policies that were focused on subjugation, Maoists who surrender are not only offered employment opportunities by the police but are also given access to bank loan facilities and support from other government departments. Officials say that the Lon Varratu campaign is being piloted in Dantewada as a project, and its progress will be thoroughly assessed by the end of the year. If it yields positive results, the campaign will be expanded to other Maoist-affected regions of the state. Authorities have also stated that this initiative is different from the Salwa Judum, which was an anti-Maoist operation launched in 2005 (Singh, 2020).

#### **GOVERNANCE ISSUES: A CAUSE OF WORRY**

Good governance is typically defined by the rule of law, people's participation, transparency, flexible administration, accountability, economic efficiency, and services that inspire confidence in the fairness and effectiveness of institutions. However, surveys conducted in some remote areas of Chhattisgarh reveal a lack of trust in the government, with its representatives often being perceived as corrupt (Singh and Doval, 2014:68). The tribal population has a deep emotional connection to the forest, which plays a central role in their lives. If the transparency regarding the spatial and functional jurisdiction of the Gram Sabha and the PESA Act is clarified, this connection can be better nurtured. The forest is integral to the livelihoods of tribal communities, and the PESA Act recognizes their constitutional rights in this regard. However, government interventions regarding small forest

products have a long history, initially aimed at ensuring that the tribals received their fair share, as these forest products were considered state property (Sharma, 2014:138).

Tribal communities in India have historically been self-governing, a system that often brought them into conflict with the state's formal governance. The establishment of government regulation and development programs after 1947 led to the gradual erosion of the traditional systems of governance. Tribal self-administration traditionally involved managing natural resources, financial matters, and social practices, but these responsibilities were shifted to the state system from 1947 to 1995. To counter this, the PESA Act was introduced in 1996 to restore tribal self-governance, yet its implementation remains inconsistent across many states (Mehrotra, 2014:16).

Forced evictions of tribal people from their lands and natural resources have been an ongoing issue. Displacement is often the result of government-led development projects such as large irrigation systems, industrial and mining operations, power plants, and the creation of private parks and national parks. As a result, ancestral communities lose their land, employment, and way of life, while others benefit from these developments, often at the expense of marginalized groups. The lack of adequate compensation and rehabilitation for displaced tribal families exacerbates their hardships, leaving them without resources, jobs, or a sense of security. The disruption of their culture and communities further deepens their suffering, as they struggle to deal with the loss of resources that directly threaten their livelihoods. In this way, national development projects often have a profoundly negative impact on the traditional rights of tribal communities (Sankaran, 2014:156).

#### COUNTERING MAOISM: A DISCUSSION

The state of Chhattisgarh has become a focal point of Maoist insurgency, largely due to the deep-rooted issues surrounding tribal communities and their struggle for rights over natural resources. Approximately 80 percent of the state's population resides in forested areas, heavily dependent on land and forests for their livelihoods. Unfortunately, these communities have often been displaced and deprived of these critical resources, leading to a growing sense of injustice and alienation. When tribal people feel neglected by the state and denied justice, many are increasingly drawn to Maoist ideologies as a means to assert their rights and fight against perceived oppression.

To address this, it is crucial for both the Union and State governments to effectively implement laws like the Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act and the PESA Act, which were specifically designed to protect tribal communities' rights. These constitutional provisions provide the legal framework for ensuring tribal self-governance and control over local resources, which, if properly enforced, can alleviate much of the discontent fuelling the insurgency.

In parallel, the government must prioritize the socio-economic development of Maoist-affected regions. This should include the expansion of basic infrastructure—such as education, electricity, roads, and employment opportunities—that directly impacts the tribal communities. By investing in these regions, the government can rebuild trust and demonstrate its commitment to the well-being of its citizens. Additionally, adopting a rehabilitation policy similar to Andhra Pradesh's successful model, alongside launching initiatives like the Lon Varratu campaign to rehabilitate surrendered Maoists, could significantly contribute to peace and reconciliation.

A sustainable approach to development is also essential. The government should prioritize eco-friendly mining technologies, forest conservation, and community-based tourism. These initiatives would provide economic benefits to tribal communities without causing further environmental degradation, ensuring that development does not come at the expense of the people's traditional way of life. By focusing on sustainable development, the state can foster long-term growth that is both economically viable and environmentally responsible.

Moreover, fostering political trust and dialogue is key to resolving the conflict. The government must engage in direct conversations with local tribal leaders and grassroots organizations, ensuring that their voices are heard in the decision-making process. Decentralized governance will give these communities a greater say in matters that directly affect their lives, further bridging the gap between the state and its citizens.

Finally, the government must adopt a balanced security strategy that integrates human rights protections with law enforcement. Rather than relying solely on force, security operations should focus on winning the support of local populations by ensuring justice and maintaining public trust. A strategy that combines security, socio-economic development, and political inclusion will not only address the root causes of the Maoist insurgency but also lay the foundation for a more peaceful, prosperous Chhattisgarh. By empowering tribal

communities and restoring their faith in government institutions, a lasting solution to the Naxal issue can be achieved.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

Maoism is one of the main problems in India. In all those years of existence the Movement has never shown any sign of fading away from the canvas of India's Internal Security. Among the infested states Chhattisgarh is the worst affected state. Maoists have chosen Chhattisgarh as their zone and they claim that they are fighting for tribal rights. The movement attracts so many young tribal to take up arms against the government by choice or force or greed. So, there is constant struggle between Government and Maoists to influence the tribal to choose their paths. As noticed above that around 80 per cent of population of the state lives in predominantly tribal villages and these tribes totally depend on common natural resources as their source of income and livelihood. But many a times some developmental schemes drive them out from their lands and homes. Therefore, the governments must deeply rethink upon these issues and adopt appropriate measures to bring young minds into the governments' mainstream by rendering quality education, employment opportunities for tribal youths, better medical facilities, sanitation and non-interference in common natural resources. If these measures are adopted properly followed by their proper and time bound implementation then the Maoist threat may automatically disappear and make roads or sustainable peace.

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### Availability of data and materials

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The authors declare no competing interests.

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## The Future of Online Teaching: Trends and Predictions

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### ABSTRACT

This study focuses on assessing the utility and limitations of online teaching platforms and tools, to determine their value to teaching. Conducting a primary quantitative survey among 100 educators, the study adopts a positivist philosophy, exploratory research methodology, and deductive analytical approach. The results indicate that students have a fairly good attitude toward the media through which online classes are conducted, and there is a preference for features such as Interactive Whiteboards and File Sharing. However, several challenges such as students' attention, technology problems, and issues related to the use of tools remain. As found in the research, there is a constant demand for the development of the attributes that define the platform and the necessary technical soundness. The suggestions are made both for developers and educators to increase the efficiency of online teaching, based on the challenges, described in the thesis, and the desire to improve the quality of online education.

**Keywords:** *Online teaching, online teaching platforms, Technology, ICT*

### INTRODUCTION

As the use of the internet advances as a medium for learning, the quality of online teaching platforms or tools is an active area of study. However, much research is still needed to explain various uses of technology in teaching and learning and the effects of uses. To fill these gaps, this paper presents an assessment of the features, usability, and efficiency of the available online teaching platforms and tools. Thus, based on the analysis of the existing practices and concerns, the study will contribute to identifying the best approaches to support the digital environment in education and further promote effective educational processes for teachers and learners.

The objective of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of online teaching platforms and tools, identify the challenges faced by educators and students, and provide recommendations to optimize their use.

### RESEARCH GAP

Technology advancements in the delivery of online instruction have brought a host of innovations designed to improve remote learning. However, there are still considerable gaps in knowledge regarding the

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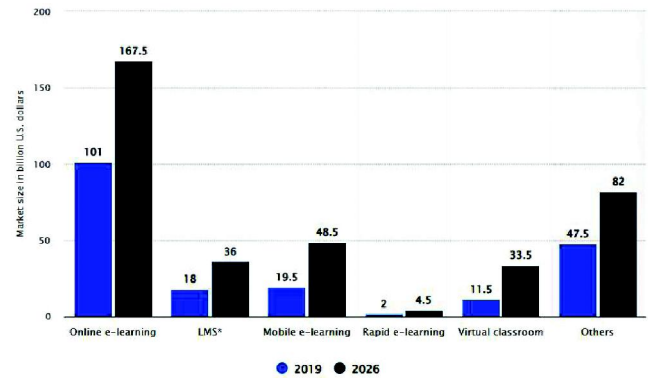
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comparative efficacy and real-world applications of these tools. For example, Sun, Anbarasan, & Praveen Kumar (2021) consider artificial intelligence capable of developing intelligent online teaching platforms but point out the absence of wide reviews of such platforms' effectiveness in different educational contexts. Likewise, Ramadani & Xhaferi (2020) describe the teachers' use of the Zoom platform pointing to such concerns as low interactivity and engagement problems but they do not conduct a comparative investigation of multiple platforms. Samoylenko, Zharko, & Glotova's (2022) systematic review of ICT tools and teaching strategies focuses on the design of online learning spaces but does not capture the integration issues that teachers experience. In addition, Ouadoud, Rida & Chafiq, (2021) discuss platforms for e-learning but do not give much detail about assessing the efficiency of certain tools in those platforms. Sofi-Karim, Bali, & Rached (2023) explicate innovative teaching methods through media platforms, but the study fails to provide an in-depth analysis of the real-time application and effectiveness of these methods in diverse learning environments. Filling this gap will offer insights into improving digital education and learning experience for the better.

## RESEARCH PROBLEM

The central issue in research on online teaching platforms and tools relates to a lack of a coherent picture regarding their efficiency and effects on the users. Education has been changed by development of the online teaching platforms and tools, but the problems are still there (Hassan, Mirza & Hussain, 2020). Some of the areas include accessibility, interaction, and usefulness to the learners with different learning difficulties of these tools. Moreover, the digital divide magnifies learning disparities, and no benchmark exists to assess the effectiveness of platforms. Statistically, figure 1 shows that it is estimated that by 2026, the global e-learning market is likely to be valued at around 400 billion U. S. dollars, compared to 200 billion US dollars in 2019. The learning management system (LMS) market, for instance, was valued at about 18 billion US dollars in 2019, proving the continual growth and demand for digital learning solutions across the international context (statista.com, 2022).



Global e-learning market size

(Source: statista.com, 2022)

The sudden switch to online learning has highlighted important issues that may hinder efficient teaching and learning. Using applications like Zoom, Google Classroom, or Microsoft Teams for remote learning is possible but the integration and implementation of such tools are not effective and consistent. The instructors and students encounter issues in the course concerning the service features that create inconsistencies in the interactions (Simamora et al. 2020). Besides, the inconsistency of internet connection and devices also widens the digital deficit; it continues to prevent education from being inclusive and equal. The lack of clearly defined guidelines on how to utilize these applications to enhance teaching and learning due to inadequate training for educators has also led to poor utilization of the platforms and, therefore, low ROI. Meeting these challenges is essential for improving the effectiveness of online education and ensuring that technology is used to its maximum potential to build learning environments that are equitable as well as effective. Further, this research is intended to assess the advantages of these platforms and enhance their utilization and training.

Thus, the research examines online teaching tools and platforms with emphasis on assessment of their efficiency, analysis of problems met by the users, and suggestions for improvement. The context relates the research to the increasing tendency to use the Internet for educational purposes and scarce solutions for enhancing the process (Hofer, Nistor & Scheibenzuber, 2021). Regarding the primary objective of evaluating the effectiveness, the shared information indicates that educators have found online teaching platforms to be useful even though a variation in the level of satisfaction exists. Facilities such as Interactive Whiteboards and File Sharing are considered valuable features, which



contribute to the significance of interactivity (Al-Kahlan & Khasawneh, 2023). However, the study also reveals important barriers like engaging students and managing technical problems. It means that these problems demonstrate the necessity of constant work on improving platforms' development and features. The study also finds that educators experience challenges with tool integration, which supports the literature stating that it is essential to integrate the tools fluidly into education (Ouadoud, Rida & Chafiq, 2021). Therefore, the study points to the need for balancing the use of online teaching technologies by matching them with the educators' and students' current and future needs.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### RESEARCH DESIGN

In this research work, the positivism paradigm has been adopted whereby the subject matter under study has involved empirical data and factual features of online teaching platforms and tools (Park, Konge & Artino, 2020). This approach has also focused on evidence and facts, to the extent that it supports the idea that knowledge can be acquired through the facts and evidence of the real world. The research design has been descriptive and has sought to examine the benefits and difficulties that accompany the various online teaching tools. This has included acquiring some initial background knowledge to lay the groundwork for future research. Also, the research analysis has integrated a deductive framework, whereby the theories have informed the research rather than the opposite.

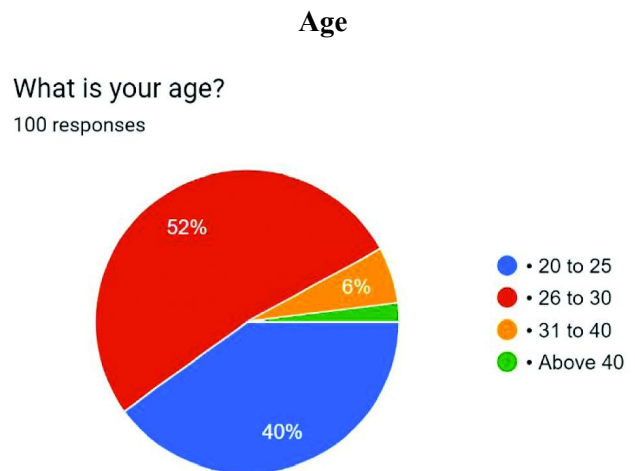
### DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS TECHNIQUE

The research has applied a primary method of quantitative research, collecting data through a survey to obtain numerical values from educators (Skinner, 2020). An online structured survey has been created using Google Forms, which contains five questions that have been designed to assess the efficiency and problems associated with online teaching platforms. Since the targets are respondents in the employment sector, the survey has been conducted through social media to cover a wide group. Consequently, purposive sampling has been used in order to obtain 100 participants who are currently teaching online, thus obtaining purposive and specific data. Quantitative analysis has been conducted on the collected data and figures and graphs have been used in developing graphical analysis. This analysis technique has helped the study to gain a clear understanding of the educators' experience and their

perception towards it, which assisted the study goal of assessing the impact and performance of the different platforms and the challenges faced.

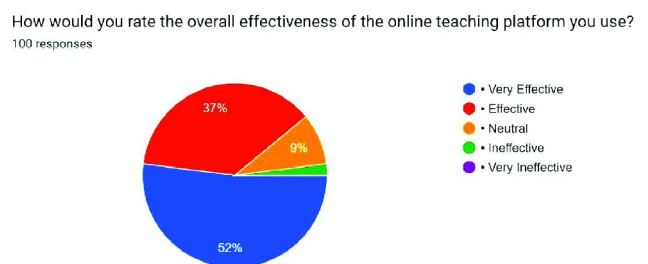
## RESULT

### INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS



The pie chart reveals a notable age distribution among respondents, with 40% aged 20 to 25 and a significant 52% in the 26 to 30 brackets. This indicates a strong prevalence of younger adults in the survey population, suggesting that the findings may reflect the preferences and experiences of this age group. Conversely, only 6% of respondents are aged 31 to 40, while those above 40 are minimal. This skewed distribution highlights a potential bias toward the perspectives of younger individuals, emphasizing the need for caution when generalizing the results to a broader demographic.

### Effectiveness of online teaching platforms

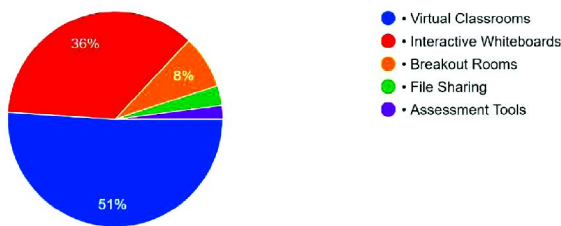


From the pie chart, one can make a positive account of the effectiveness of the online teaching platform. An overwhelming majority of the respondents stated that the platform is either "Very Effective" or "Effective" with 52% and 37% respectively. A mere 9% are in the middle, which shows little confusion when using the devices. Specifically, it is worth mentioning that the responses related to dissatisfaction are rather scarce; few

of them are classified as “Ineffective”, and none of them are categorized as “Very Ineffective.” Such a positive response implies that the platform has the capacity to meet the needs of the users to enhance confidence and belief in the quality education delivery while at the same time having areas to improve on as has been dated by a minority of the users.

#### *Most liked feature of online teaching platforms*

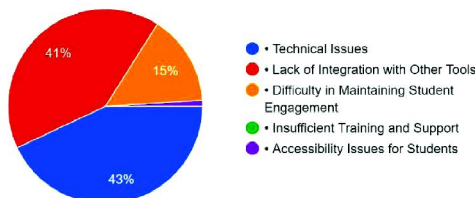
Which feature of your online teaching platform do you find most valuable?  
100 responses



The pie chart shows that the preferred feature of the online teaching platform is File Sharing because 51% of the respondents chose it. This means that the participants valued the ease of sharing documents and learning resources more which is important in the online learning environment. The importance of interaction in real-time ranks Virtual Classrooms with 36%. However, many such features such as Interactive Whiteboards and Assessment Tools were barely mentioned, and this may imply that these features may not fully satisfy the user’s requirements to the desired level. Thus, the values proposed for Breakout Rooms also confirm possible deficiencies in the application and reassert the desire for a more involving collaboration tool.

#### *Challenge of online teaching tools*

What is the most significant challenge you face when using online teaching tools?  
100 responses

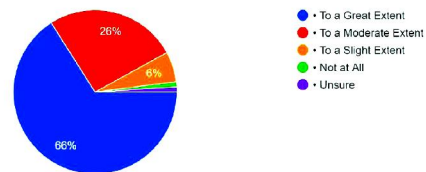


The pie chart reveals that the most significant challenge faced by respondents using online teaching tools is Technical Issues, cited by 43%. This indicates that problems with connectivity, software, or hardware significantly hinder the learning experience. Following closely, 41% of respondents identified Lack of

Integration with Other Tools as a major concern, suggesting that the inability to seamlessly use various applications impedes functionality. Difficulty in Maintaining Student Engagement, reported by 15%, highlights the challenge of keeping students actively involved in a virtual environment. Notably, there are no concerns regarding Insufficient Training and Support, indicating that users feel adequately prepared to navigate the platform.

#### *Level of student engagement and participation*

To what extent do you believe that the online teaching platform enhances student engagement and participation?  
100 responses



respondents regarding the online teaching platform’s ability to enhance student engagement and participation. A significant 66% believe it does so “To a Great Extent,” indicating high satisfaction with its interactive features and capabilities. Additionally, 26% feel it enhances engagement “To a Moderate Extent,” suggesting that while they recognize benefits, there may be room for improvement. Only 6% reported enhancement “To a Slight Extent,” and very few respondents felt it did not enhance engagement at all or were unsure. This overwhelmingly positive feedback underscores the platform’s effectiveness in fostering active student involvement.

### **DISCUSSION**

The survey results from the online teaching platforms and tools provide several insights consistent with prior literature on the subject. The discussion of these findings shows the combination of positive perceptions and various obstacles met by educators, with findings showing similar patterns in more recent investigations. Among the findings, the overall satisfaction with most of the online teaching platforms stands out as significant. Several teachers also showed satisfaction and efficiency of these platforms in terms of improvement of their teaching skills with some expressing extreme satisfaction. This perception aligns with Chen, Chen & Lin’s (2021) studies, where they explain how artificial intelligence makes teaching online more flexible and interactive. Their research raises awareness that stimulating platforms can enhance learners’ experience by providing features suited to their preferences. This

is in agreement with the opinion of the current survey whereby other interactive features like the whiteboards and file sharing were acknowledged by the users emphasizing the utility of such tools in creating an interactivity that is acknowledged as important in a learning process.

However, the survey also exhibits several problems and issues. This has led to the identification of one of the significant concerns about teaching and learning that of student attentiveness. This challenge aligns with previous studies where they observed that interaction still presents a considerable difficulty in online learning contexts (Goldberg et al. 2021; Ramadani & Khaferi, 2020). Their work reaffirms that teaching in virtual classrooms is not just about technology but that creative solutions and constant communication are essential. It shares this concern with the current survey, as engagement challenges indicate that platforms should include elements encouraging participation and interaction.

Another problem identified in the survey is integration with other tools. This issue corresponds with the findings by Samoylenko, Zharko, and Glotova (2022), who point out that the integration of different educational technologies should be smooth to establish an efficient online learning environment. In addition, previous research has shown that if platforms are incompatible with other tools, there are usually problems and inconveniences in the working processes of educators and students (Coman et al. 2020). This is in line with the survey results which pointed to the fact that educators encounter challenges because of integration issues meaning that improving interoperability among the tools enhances teaching and learning. Technical challenges are also a problem that some educators face. This is in line with the studies that have been done by Simamora et al. (2020) as they talk about how often technical issues can interfere with the process of teaching and learning in an online class. Unfortunately, this is a problem that many students face in online classes and it emphasizes the importance of developing better stable, and efficient technologies (Abdulmajeed, Joyner, & McManus, 2020). Another point of concern that the survey has revealed is technical difficulties and it underscores the need for developing reliable and efficient platforms to enhance the effectiveness of online learning.

The current study also reveals that a considerable number of educators are either indifferent or unhappy with some features of online teaching tools. This is in

conjunction with Ouadoud, Rida, and Chafiq (2021) who give detailed information about the different e-learning platforms confirming the fact that most of the e-learning platforms have some useful features of the platform but lack this or that option that may be necessary for the needs of the user or they work as half of effective platforms. The survey findings revealed that the respondents were relatively neutral and negative towards the online teaching tools, thus stressing the importance of carrying out constant assessment and enhancement of the tools to ensure that they meet the users' expectations and needs. Regarding the features, the respondents recognize the benefits of using interactive whiteboards and file sharing. This finding concurs with the literature, where it is acknowledged that the use of interactive components improves the teaching and learning process. Such tools as interactive whiteboards, allow for the creation of several workspaces during an online lecture, generating new ideas as a matter, of course, is key when teaching online (Handley, 2023). Thus, effective mechanisms of file-sharing are also essential for sharing the materials and providing the conditions for the asynchronous model of learning.

The inclusion of these features in the survey under consideration corresponds to the identified advantages in the literature to emphasize the role of these elements in effective online education platforms. This discussion of engagement and feature effectiveness also highlights an important area for improvement (Khoruzha et al. 2022). Whereas some instructors experience a highly positive impact, others post little interaction, some experience technical issues, and others face integration problems. This clear division refers to the necessity to combine the new functions with the actual issues faced by the users. The results imply that, even though useful resources are now available through online teaching platforms, the constant evolution of the educational environment requires further refinement of these platforms.

## **IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY**

### **Enhancing Platform Features**

As highlighted in the study, it is high time that researchers focus on enhancing the features of teaching online platforms. The results of this study show the strong preference for Interactive Whiteboards and File Sharing entails a high importance for the delivery of efficient online lessons. For example, Interactive Whiteboards enable real-time interaction, which is paramount for capturing learner attention and ensuring that lessons are engaging and interactive (Prasetya, Herwanto & GI, 2023). There are similar tools like Zoom and Microsoft Teams that have similar features, proving



that these tools are highly appreciated in the context of online education (Samoylenko, Zharko, & Glotova, 2022). The suggestion here is that developers of these platforms should pay attention to these features and optimize them for ease of use and integration with other tools for the best results.

### **ADDRESSING ENGAGEMENT CHALLENGES**

The study reveals a problem with students' engagement in the learning process and states that it is difficult to maintain it. Teaching students in an online setting also involves technology as well as effort and creativity in coming up with techniques as well as effective content (Bereczki & Kárpáti, 2021). Communication features, for example through game aspects or real-time feedback have to be integrated to foster activity on a platform. For instance, applications such as Kahoot! and Quizlet offer practice quizzes, which can be used in live lessons to engage students more effectively. The implication for educators is that they should look for learning environments that facilitate such interactions and also, ensure that they employ these strategies to keep learners engaged.

### **IMPROVING TECHNICAL RELIABILITY**

Other communal and technical difficulties have been raised as a problem that aligns with the literature findings regarding the significance of dependable IT systems (Sofi-Karim, Bali, & Rached, 2023). Inconsistent learning sessions are counterproductive and may cause stress among the teachers and learners. Thus, the stability and reliability of platforms become the priorities of platform developers. Updating frequently and having strong support systems are key to reducing technical issues. For instance, Blackboard and Moodle are well-reputed for technical support and regular updates that ensure their operational reliability.

### **FACILITATING INTEGRATION**

The issue of tool integration therefore opens up the question of improved compatibility between distinct technologies in educational processes. Teaching in distance education settings often requires the integration of different technologies for communication, instruction, and evaluation (Faisal & Kisman, 2020). Specifically, platforms must interact with other education instruments and with Learning Management Systems (LMS) in particular to minimize the obscurity in the teaching process. For instance, adding Google Classroom to other applications in Google Workspace can make everything easier and learning more enjoyable.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

Based on these considerations, it is suggested that both developers of the platforms and teachers should pay

attention to the improvement of online education tools. While providing features to support interactivity and affiliation, it is crucial to consider technological stability and compatibility for developers (Graniæ, 2022). In this regard, educators should harness these advanced features, and embrace new forms of teaching practices to handle the engagement issues.

### **CONCLUSION**

The research on the use of online teaching platforms and tools widely indicates the benefits and contributions to education in the context of the development of interactivity and resources. However, other challenges like student engagement, technical reliability, and integration of the tools are still areas of concern. Solving these problems is vital in enhancing the quality of online learning. Platform developers should consider optimization of the interactivity as an essential element, stability of the technical support, and compatibility with other tools. Some of the features need to be tackled concerning engagement challenges and educators have to change their approach concerning the mentioned tools. Thus, constant enhancement of the technology and pedagogy aspects is vital for the further enhancement of the online learning process. However, concerns such as the digital divide and digital literacy may pose significant challenges. Governments at both the national and state levels are organising digital literacy campaigns and making ongoing efforts to guarantee that the internet's potential in the education sector is fully explored.

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No datasets were generated or analysed during the current study

### **Declarations**

### **Ethics approval and consent to participate**

Not applicable.

### **Consent for publication**

Not applicable.

### **Competing interests**

The authors declare no competing interests.

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## Queer Theory: Origins, Evolution and Application

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### ABSTRACT

Thus, this chapter gives a brief history of queer theory, its assumptions and use, and various fields of study. Having originated at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, queer theory seeks to unsettle fixed gender and sexual identities by subverting the conventional oppositions like male/female and heterosexual/homosexual. Derived from post-structuralism and cultural feminism in alliance with psychoanalysis, queer theory sparked more from Foucault, Butler, and Sedgwick on how power relations and institutions regulate sexual identity. The current chapter discusses how Queer theory displaces fixed identitarianism where gender and sex rate as sui generis stressing heteropatriarchal assumptions that regard heterosexuality as homosexuality's antithesis proffered as a natural orientation.

Thus, besides making theoretical interventions, queer theory has functioned as the influential framework of cultural, social, and political discussions. They include literature sociology anthropology and education, which offers relevant aspects of the analysis of identity, resistance, and justice. The chapter also expounds on how queer theory relates to present activism in this regard especially in movements that aim at subverting the oppressive structures instead of wearing them. Thus, turning queer theory is an empowering tool in academia and activism as it provides innovative ways of reading and challenging the regulatory norms of society. This chapter is set within these parameters with a focus on indicating that queer theory remains an important lens through which continues to address current questions of gender, sexuality, and power.

**Key Words:** *Queer theory, Deconstruction, Performativity, Queer Spaces, CaseStudies*

### INTRODUCTION:

Queer theory can be described as a queer critical perspective that aims at transforming the prevailing social norms about gender and sexual orientation. Coalescing in the last quarter of the twentieth century in direct reaction to the perceived inadequacies of both the "feminist" and gay and lesbian studies – queer theory plants questions about the multiple facets of praxis that demands conformity to activist identity categorisations. Essentially, queer theory seeks to resist and challenge structures of dualism as well as fundamental and often powerful divisions of masculinity/femininity, homosexuality/heterosexuality, and nature /culture.

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Thus, queer theory disperses ‘categories’ like ‘heterosexual’ or ‘homosexual’ as artificial constructs since it denies the wholeness of the identity and the desire. Instead, it refers that these categories have been socially created and culturally governed hence they can be criticized and reconstructed.

Queer theory is an offshoot of post-structuralism and has assimilated elements of feminism, psychoanalysis, and deconstruction. Most of its main concepts and ideas have been developed through the works or influenced by such great scholars as Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in “The History of Sexuality” (1978), Foucault’s theorisation of power and sexuality disproves the discursive construction of sexuality as an intrinsic, biological attribute of sexuality. Instead, he said sexuality is rooted in institutions such as medical law and education that define what is normative or pathological. In “Gender Trouble” (1990), Judith Butler went further in her assault against fixed gender identity claiming that gender is not something one ‘is’ but something that one ‘does’ For Butler, gender is performative – constructed through the act of performances which conform with cultural expectations. This idea counters the concept of gender as fixed, and innate, as it supposes that genders are changeable and are not inherent.

Not only has the queer theory provided theoretic insights, however, it has greatly influenced the modern social, cultural as well as political context. Drawing on the epistemologies that involve the challenge of the norms that define a people’s existence, queer theory offers new ways of comprehending sexuality, gender, and power. It has thus arguably become an important antidote for challenging hetero-sexism –the discursive regime that posits heterosexuality as the only acceptable form of sexual orientation while disregarding the rights and existence of the lesbian gay bisexual and trans (LGBTQ+) person. Queer theory has also been applied in activism, especially in movements which consider assimilation into mainstream queer politics as a strategy. While categories of queer theory, often demand entry into mainstream structures, queer activism leans towards the total transformation of these structures.

The value of queer theory is in such impacts as the reflection of power through norms and categories that result in subversion of oppression systems. Thus, it gives some key to understanding how the process of constructing identities takes place and how the constructed identities can be destabilized and re-

imagined. This has implications for the present socio-political climate, especially where issues of gender and sexuality and resulting rights, for example, the queer community are more assertive. The negation of dualism and normality that forms the basis of Queer theory enables the greatest inclusion on the levels of identity beyond the binaries.

Queer theory, as an important theoretical perspective, has a complicated historical timeline and various theoretical and applied developments; therefore, the goal of this chapter is to present chronological, theoretical, and practical overviews of queer theory studies. It starts with an account of the history of queer theory, relating it to feminism, postmodernism, and gay and lesbian theories. This will be followed by an analysis of the major principles of queer theory such as the rejection of heteronormativity, performativity of gender and the consideration of space and time. The last section of the chapter will therefore discuss how the concept of queer has been adopted in different fields such as literature and cultural studies, sociology, anthropology, and education among others. When discussing these topics, this chapter is intended to give the reader an understanding of the development of queer theory, and how it has revolutionized the various academic disciplines and social justice issues.

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:**

The queer theory originated from the historical social movements such as the gay and lesbian movements of the 1970s and the post-modernist movements of the 1990s. The field of the so-called Queer theory, which has investigated how sexual and gender categories are constructed as opposed to natural, emerged from the interaction between critical theory with social activism in the 1980-1990s. Among these are Michel Foucault who provided an academic basis for critical understanding of power, sexuality, and the body.

### **1. 1 Early Influences**

Foucault’s work done in “The History of Sexuality” is seen to be one of the most primer works in queer theory. Foucault (1978) established that sexuality is not biological but has a historical connotation which is portrayed through power relations. He has been very helpful in demythologizing essentialist discourses of sexuality through his account of how modern society has sought to control and classify sexual acts as aspects of power. Instead of focusing on sexuality and identity,

it moved to a critique of the discursive and institutional politics of sex and power enabling and constraining our knowledge of ourselves.

On the same note, early attempts at gay and lesbian critiques conducted in the 1980s were some of the initial elements of queer theory. Eve Osofsky Sedgwick one of the foremost pioneers of gay and lesbian studies, shifted focus in the discipline for a purely literary and cultural analysis of the representations of same-sex desire. Some of her work was published in her book “Epistemology of the Closet” in which Sedgwick looked at how Western thinking partitions individuals based on sexual preference and by doing so sustains the homosexual/heterosexual binary that supports the larger system of dominance (Sedgwick, 1990). Sedgwick’s work became important for challenging binary thinking and erasing the rigid distinction between hetero and homosexuality as the sexual orientation is constructed socially and culturally.

## 1. 2 The Emergence of Queer Theory:

“Queer Theory” as a definite title was used for the first time by Teresa de Lauretis in 1990, at the conference that aimed at uniting scholars who worked in the field of sexuality studies. De Laurites (1991) has named the strategy of existing queer theory to defy heterocephalous suppositions and to express the assimilationist trend in gay and lesbian studies. More importantly, her critique of gay and lesbian politics as being insufficiently critical of the category of identity signalled the official launch of queer theory as an independent field of study. Another influential work that was published the same year as Queer Times was Judith Butler’s “Gender Trouble”, which also helped to construct queer theory based on the deconstruction of gender norms. Gender performances were proclaimed by Butler (1990) as a set of rules on how every subject performs his or her gender and reacts to the gender performances of the other. Butler’s contributions to the queer theory about sexuality extended it beyond mere sexuality to include, a critique of gender binaries and the normalizing practices that regulate it.

## 1. 3 Early Critiques and Expansions:

When queer theory emerged, it had critics inside of it. Warner (1993) drew the sense of a more flexible approach of identity that went beyond identity politics, where the claims of such politics were based on the stable categories of sexuality and gender. Warner called for a queer critique that counters the methodological

quarantine of the politics of recognition and one-dimensional anti-assimilationism support. At the same time, intersectionality became a historically contextualized and greatly expanded concept within queer theory. Through intersectionality, Crenshaw (1991) made societal queer identities cognate by race, class, as well as gender. She pointed out that in her framework one could not discuss the experience of queer people with other kinds of oppression. Therefore, queer theory came into being from a cross-over between critical theory, activism, and the prior theories regarding gender and sexualities. Advancing from the works of Foucault and the initial framework supplied by Sedgwick, de Lauretis but especially Butler, expanding through Warner’s critiques as well as including Crenshaw’s intersectionality – queer theory persists in problematizing the assumptions about identity and power.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

**Queer theory can be said to have several theoretical underpinnings:** Queer theory intervenes in and navigates the gender and sexual systems of a society and provides others means of comprehending identity, desire, and space. In its essence, queer theory works to expose the heterosexual and binary gender underpinnings of the current ways of thinking and practices.

## 2. 1 Deconstruction of Normativity:

Mainly, queer theory has addressed heteronormativity as a societal assumption that heterosexuality is the only correct form of relationship. Heteronormativity was challenged by Rich (1980) in her idea of ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ which means that heterosexuality is compulsory and comparable to race. In this vein, Rich’s work provides the groundwork for queer theory’s more sweeping challenge to how institutions over-naturalize heterosexuality and assign it primary status in society. As such queer theory challenges those paradigms providing new ways of analysis of desire and identity. Halperin (1995) takes it further by pointing out that because queers exist and are sexual, they necessarily exist outside of gay/straight and male/female binaries, and therefore queers always deconstruct traditional sexual and gender categories.

## 2. 2 Performativity and Identity:

Performativity as the poststructuralist philosophy of Judith Butler is a fundamental concept in queer theories’

analysis of identity. Butler (1993), in “*Bodies That Matter*” posits that gender is the creation of a subject that is disciplined by a set of norms. Thus, it will be more accurate to deem gender as a process of constant construction that results from daily performances that meet the expectations of a given society. This concept challenges the existing ideas of maintaining the proper identities and their stability, revealing how these identities are built regarding power relations and discursive practices. Furthermore, queer theorists such as Halberstam, (2005) have taken on extending and criticizing temporal modes. Like the notion of queer time by Judith Halberstam for the concept of queer temporality that navigates outside of the structured ‘time regimes’ based on the procreative timeline of straight marriage and family, it suggests different timelines or life cycles for queer existence.

### 2. 3 Queer Places and Spaces:

Queer theory also examines how and/or places are configured by and against structures. According to Bell and Valentine (1995), queer space is areas that are resistant to conventional social formations and personality structures. About the favelas, discos abertos operate as spaces that do not conform to heteronormativity and offer spaces to sexuality that is marginalised. In the same manner, Jon Binnie (2004) discusses the extent to which urban spaces contain elements of queerness through community and activist works where queer people can change and queer the public space, so as not to be writing within erasure to dominant epistemologies.

### EVOLUTION OF QUEER THEORY:

Queer theory as an area of sociology has chosen to embrace as many views as possible since its formation this has helped in enriching it by adding new perspectives. Especially significant to this process are critical race theory, disability studies, and, most notably, feminism to let queer theory work through intersectional subjects and types of oppression.

### 3. 1 Expanding the Scope:

A new aspect of the queer theory that was introduced was the “queer of colour critique”, which incorporated race and ethnicity into sexual identities. According to Ferguson (2004), in the early stages of the elaboration of Queer Theory, the latter largely omitted colour queer people and their lives and experiences. The major critique of Ferguson is to point out that race, class, and

sexuality are co-constituted structures of power that require an understanding of the intersections to evaluate the full spectrum of queer existence. Combining queer theory with critical race theory, Ferguson broadens the field to include racial and sexual minorities and calls on scholars to think about how different scripted minorities interrelate.

In the same way, global queer theory as a theory arose to respond to the problem of Western-centric conception of sexuality. Gopinath (2005) in her article, insists on the necessity to consider a queer theoretical framework which is at once postcolonial, and transnational since it seeks understanding queer sexualities outside the Anglo-American context in relationship to global power formations. This perspective underlines that Queer needs to go beyond the contexts of Western culture and the United States specifically as it must address colonial histories, migration, and globalization as the shaping forces of queer experience in different cultures.

### 3. 2 Queer Theory and Disability Studies:

A combination of Queer theory and Disability studies has also led to the development of what is referred to as “crip theory”, which seeks to explain how the society builds and polices the able body. McRuer (2006) argued that queer theory’s category of compulsory heterosexuality has much in common with the ‘compulsory able-bodiedness,’ which dominates and marginalizes disabled bodies just as heteronormative regime marginalizes queer ones. Crip’s theory argues against these norms asserting a new seam of epidemiologically enabled body imagery – Queer and Disabled.

### 3. 3 Feminism and Queer Theory:

Analyzing the interaction of Feminist theory and Queer theory, it is possible to point out that these theories have conflicted, as well as cooperated. These are the tensions discussed by Hemmings (2011), especially regarding the early queer theorists who accused second-wave feminism of essentializing gender and sexuality along binary categories. However, queer theory has also drawn from the knowledge of feminism, especially in the areas of destabilization of hetero-sexism and hence the construction of gender.

In our attempt to stage a dialogue between queer theory and feminism, the latter as introduced by Grewal and Kaplan (2001) does the trick. It acknowledges the existence of queerness and the constant changes in one’s



gender and sexuality while keeping an ear to the ground for patriarchy and gender oppression as raised by feminism. Smerged in queer feminist epistemology, two theoretical paradigms are mutually beneficial in both revealing how gender and sexuality pertain to power and identity.

#### **APPLICATIONS OF QUEER THEORY:**

Queer theory has provided misleading theories to different fields that helped in influencing discourses in literature, cultural studies, Sociology, education, activism, and law. Queer theory in turn subverts these ordinary reflections and provides counter-discursive descriptions of identity, power, and subversion in these domains.

#### **4. 1 Queer Theory in Literature and Cultural Studies:**

In literary studies, queer theory provides a method for performing a “queer reading” of texts – or for reading aesthetically subversive elements of texts Sedgwick (1993). Applying Sedgwick’s ideas in ‘Tendencies’ one can learn how it is possible to discover the repressed or oppressed sexualities in literature and look at the characters, the plots, and themes from the queer perspective. The readings queer reveals the scope and possibility of desire and identity in texts and challenges conventional approaches to literature.

In film and media studies, queer theoretical framework has also been used in the critical interpretation, especially on matters to do with gender and media representation. Richard Dyer (2002), hence, in his publication ‘Media, Gender and Popular Culture’, said that while gender and sexualities are consistently on display and are reinforced by film and media, it is also possible to find a degree of opposition. Queering media analysis means how scholars try to see how representations that provide and destabilize norms offer vicarious possibilities for identities, desires, and gender workings.

#### **4. 2 Queer Theory and Gender and Sexualities Studies in Sociology and Anthropology:**

In sociology and anthropology, Queer theory has been utilized to examine ethnographies to investigate the existence and routines of queer people. Weston (1991) conducted research where queer ethnography was used to understand how queer subjects construct their identity within social worlds. My chosen author’s work

demonstrates how people and their experiences queer the categories and defy binary logic well-known to social scientists.

Queer theory has also played its part in appreciating the relations of kinship and family. In *Disrespectfully Quoted*, Butler (2002) offers a critique of what she considers to be the limitation of the prevailing theories of kinship that dignify specific heterosexual arrangements that do not respect the diverse forms of union and the ties that individuals have with one another. Thus, gender and sexuality that underlines queer perspective reshapes kinship as a loose, non-blood related, and queer different from the heteronormative focus on biological reproduction and the nuclear family model.

#### **4. 3 Queer Theory and Education:**

Queer pedagogy has had a role in education, especially in the encouragement of the adoption of queer theory in mainstream curriculum and classroom settings. Britzman (1995) in her paper has discussed and coined the concept of queer pedagogy which poses heteronormative challenges to educational texts and practices by raising urgent questions about gender and sexuality. As for queer pedagogy, it involves critical analysis of the identity and challenges to students’ conformity to the stereotypes.

On the same wavelength, Pascoe (2007) also discussed how schools can provide the aspects of the LGBTQ community or perspective. Her work is on the need to offer queer perspective to educational reform in particular curriculum policies accommodating sexual and gender minorities. Queer theory, therefore, underpins the attempts to combat exclusion in schools and create equality so that children have equal chances of becoming successful learners, motivated citizens, and effective contributors to society.

#### **4. 4 Queer Activism and Politics:**

Queer theory has been a significant part of the contemporary activism of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, trans, queer, and intersexuals since the 1990s and thus it supports the political movements that necessitate radical social transformation and decline the assimilationist approach. Shepard (2010) describes how queer theory helps activism by challenging the gay / lesbian movement to avoid mainstream goals of same-sex marriage. However, queer activism acknowledges intersectionality and speaks against oppression in all its forms including racism, and sexism among others in

addition to its advocacy for equal rights of individuals within the queer community.

Queer theory has also incorporated the study of law, with an emphasis on sexual rights, especially concerning the marriage and anti-discrimination. Spade (2011) uses a queer lens to raise a pertinent argument by positing that litigation for marriage equality is somewhat irrelevant because of the continued marginalization of queer persons even within existing structures of justice. According to Spade, what is required is a fundamental transformation of the law beyond a 'rights' model of approach which targets the deficiencies of queer and marginalized people only.

### **CASE STUDIES:**

Queer theory has played a major role in matters about social movements' debates and media portrayal. However, through critical case analyses, we can understand how queer theory applies and theorizes on 'matters of concern' proximate to gay marriage activism, queer spatiality configuration of queer urban districts, and queer media representation.

#### **5. 1 Case Study: Marriage Equality Movement:**

Queer theory has been one of the agents through which marriage equality has been debated. Another scholar Warner (1999) made similar remarks pointing to the error of the mainstream gay and lesbian politics, which centers on same-sex marriage because the legitimized form of union is marriage. Warner is quite critical of queer in its advocacy for marriage equality where he argues that such a move poses a threat to those who are outside the so-called conventional relationship structures. However, what replaces such a framework, queer theory cautions against the endorsement of marriage as the normal way of partnering while questioning the presuppositions of this framework.

#### **5. 2 Case Study: Queer Spaces in Urban Settings:**

It is also critical to note that lesbians, gays, and bisexuals have been very much affected by the issues of regeneration and urban development. Hanhardt (2013) looks at how queer places become gentrified and how queers are pushed out of the areas that they once inhabited. This study shows as cities have emerged and redeveloped queer spaces function as has been places of togetherness and queer resistance, they have been subject to their removal because of capital. Queer theory is interested in the relationship between space politics

and identity that seeks to know how spatial changes impact on queer subjects; queer space is a valuable cultural and political territory that must be saved.

#### **5. 3 Case Study: Queer Representation in Media:**

Society's homosexual characters depiction are among the biggest advances in popular culture I have witnessed in my lifetime. Miller (2016) analyzes how the TV and movie industries gave more room to queer characters in recent years but how these characters were portrayed is still often stereotyped or one-dimensional. Nevertheless, improvement has been seen over time, however queer theory puts a focus on how queer people portrayals should be scrutinized so that it is not a reiteration of stereotyped perceptions but a progressive representation of queer lives.

### **QUEER THEORY: FUTURE DIRECTIONS:**

Queer theory is constantly growing and developing; therefore, it can be applied to new fields like digital media and environment, and artificial intelligence. These developments add to the theoretical repertoire and bring new questions and opportunities for queer work.

#### **6. 1 Queer Theory and Digital Media:**

The digital media has emerged as a new space where queer people can create the formation and organizations that they want. Gray (2009) notes that the development of what has been referred to as 'digital queer spaces' through social media facilitate the formation of a collective identity, organizing and engagement in queer politics besides offering an opportunity for identity formation to those who may be geographically or socially isolated. Such spaces present the nonconventional opportunity to articulate queer existence and unity, which also extend beyond structural architecture. Marwick (2013) extends how social media affects the creation and representation of queer sexualities. These include Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter; wherein certain aspects of self-expression and identity can be contested and reconfigured in a much more overt manner. However, these platforms also suggest several problems, connected with the fact that corporate algorithms risk limiting the representation of queer identity online by offering more conventional images of queer subjectivity.

#### **6. 2 Environmental Queer Theory:**

One of the discussed and rather promising transdisciplinary frameworks is the combination of

queer theory with environmentalism called “queer ecologies, which Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson (2010) have explained as the investigation into the ways through which dominant environmentalism discursively constructs sexuality, nature, reproduction, and purity. These queer ecologies disrupt the histories by providing critiques of both the naturalization of heterosexuality and environmental discourses. This approach not only redefines the relations of people with environment but also emancipatory environmental ethics where the ethics of sexual and gender and ecological diversities are integrated.

### 6. 3 Queer Theory and AI:

Similarly, there is scope for applying queer theoretical paradigms in developing contexts as well as in the emerging field of AI. Carly Kocurek speaks about “queer AI”, with a focus on how the AI systems can reinforce or disrupt the masculinity-femininity binarism and hetero-patriarchal logic, in 2018. Queer theory also provides ethical questions because it refers to the construction and application of artificial intelligence systems concerning non-normative sexualities. according to Kocurek, the emergence of AI technologies creates a space to challenge the conventional definitions of identity to promote pluralism and openness of digital spaces. However, this also presents the need to be careful to avoid AI reiterating prejudice or any sort of bias.

### CONCLUSION:

Queer theory has developed from its early roots in the latter part of the twentieth century as a radical critique of heteronormativity and binarism in gender and sexualities to a diverse and burgeoning paradigm. Although queer theory originates from the writings of Michel Foucault, the subsequent studies by other theorists such as Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick have broadened a field’s scope, and it became critical in addressing questions to race, class, disability, and postcolonial discourses. This is evident in areas of literature, sociology, anthropology, education, and media studies where it challenges or employs normalcy and other essences of identity and power relations.

Thus, the development of queer theory brings up several issues for further research and practice. Several exciting areas of study have already been identified such as digital humanities, artificial intelligence, and the environmental humanities where queer theory can be

applied. For example, digital queer existence and the digital identities’ construction with the help of artificial intelligence give new contexts and opportunities to think about the effects of technological advancements on queerness. Further, the application of queer theories within the environmentalism context particularly via the lens of queer ecologies rethink the interaction between sexuality and the environment beyond the normalcy of heterosexual environmentalism.

Therefore, queer theory’s resilience is in its constant focus on critical disassembling of power and normativity, fight for justice, and alternative approaches to the social world. But it remains an important instrument in subverting oppression and unfair treatment of women, people of colour, people with disabilities etc. Researchers and social justice advocates are urged to go on employing and adapting queer theory in creative and context-sensitive manners to produce a lasting effect on sundry scholarly fields and cultural practices and assist in the envisioning of a culture that embraces and empowers all identity subjects. Thus, queer theory ably maintains its function as a source of progressive thought beyond the confines of the academy, and as a way of usefully engaging with the ongoing fight for justice.

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## Sculptural Expressions of Naga Worship: A Study of Nagamatha and Odisha's Sacred Sites

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### ABSTRACT:

This report presents a comparative study of the sculptures at Nagamatha, a sacred site near Nemalo in Odisha, focusing on its detached sculptures and their archaeological, historical, and cultural significance. The site features a Nagi (serpent goddess) image, along with other sculptures, such as a horse rider, Chamunda, and a fragment of a Navagraha panel. Naga worship in Odisha, deeply rooted in ancient traditions, is explored, with references to various deities and festivals associated with serpents. The sculptures at Nagamatha are compared with similar ones found at other Odisha sites, including the Svarnajaleswar Temple and Patamundai Hill, revealing shared themes in Naga worship across different religious traditions. The study highlights the importance of Nagamatha in understanding the region's diverse religious practices, with particular emphasis on the integration of Naga worship in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism.

**Key Words:** Nagamatha at Chitrakula river side, Nemal Road, Detached Sculptures

### INTRODUCTION

Odisha has played a significant role in Indian history from ancient times to the present. It is a land of diverse religious traditions, where many village deities are worshipped under specific names. A tradition known as "Swapnadesa" has led to the establishment of numerous sacred places. Over time, sculptures have been introduced, gaining special significance in local beliefs. These sculptures often evolve into famous gods or goddesses, deeply revered by the local communities. For example, in Kadala village of Dharماسala block, Jajpur district, an Umamaheswar image is worshipped as Duarasuni, a village deity. Similarly, many villages in Odisha have gods and goddesses with unique names and origins.

The Citrakula Valley offers a glimpse into Odisha's ancient heritage. Near this valley lies Nemalo, home to a site called Nagamatha, where a Nagi (serpent goddess) image and other detached sculptures are worshipped by

local villagers. I conducted a survey of this site and prepared a brief archaeological report, gathering information from the locals. This study aims to compare the sculptures at Nagamatha with those at other sites in Odisha, providing insights into their archaeological, historical, and cultural significance.

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## THE NAGA CULT IN INDIAN RELIGIONS

The worship of the Naga (serpent) was a prominent aspect of primitive cults in ancient India. However, with the rise of higher religious orders, the independent status of the Naga cult diminished. Over time, various religious thoughts and beliefs assimilated, reflecting the integration of diverse races and cultures in India. This process led to the incorporation of Naga worship into major religious traditions, where it often found a prominent or even dominant place. Odisha, known for its rich repository of relics and antiquities, offers significant evidence of the Naga's association with Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and other religions.

### HINDUISM

#### Aryans and the Naga Cult

There is a belief that the Aryans, the progenitors of Hinduism, were opposed to the Naga cult. Instances such as the Indra-Vrita myth and the serpent sacrifice of King Janamejaya are often cited as evidence of this opposition. However, the Indra-Vrita myth, rooted in the Rigveda, is thought to reflect the Babylonian myth of Marduk and Tiamat and has little connection to Aryan beliefs. Moreover, during the serpent sacrifice by King Janamejaya, the Aryan god Indra acted as the protector of the serpent king Takshaka. Folk tales, such as those from Punjab, further interpret the serpent sacrifice as rooted in personal conflicts rather than outright rejection of Naga worship.

The Aryans ultimately assimilated aspects of Naga worship into their religious practices. Vedic religion underwent significant transformations, leading to the emergence of Hinduism. Among Hindu sects, the association of the Naga is most evident in Vaishnavism, Shaivism, and Shaktism.

### Vaishnavism

Vaishnavism, which venerates Lord Vishnu, incorporates significant elements of serpent worship. The serpent Shesha Naga is considered a manifestation of Vishnu, often depicted as supporting Vishnu as he reclines and contemplates the creation of the world. Iconography of Vishnu reclining on Shesha Naga is widespread, particularly in Odisha's temples, such as the unique Vishnu temple at Sambalpur and others in Bhatra, Bhubaneswar, and Kakatpur.

Balarama, the elder brother of Krishna, is also associated with Shesha Naga. At the time of his death, Balarama's

soul is said to have exited his body in the form of a serpent. Images of Balarama with serpent hoods have been discovered across India. The worship of Baladeva during the full moon of Shravan in Odisha reflects the assimilation of the Naga cult into Vaishnavism.

### Shaivism

The Naga is closely associated with Lord Shiva. In some instances, the Naga replaces Shiva as the primary deity in Shaiva temples, such as those in Varanasi and Nagpur. In Odisha, temples like the one at Maneswar feature brass idols of the Naga as presiding deities. The Nathas, traditional Shaiva worshippers, carry Naga idols made of copper or brass as they collect alms and offer blessings.

### Shaktism

The worship of the Mother Goddess, popular during the Bhaumakara reign in Odisha, also incorporates Naga elements. Temples such as the Vaital temple and the Chandi temple at Belkhandi highlight this connection. Goddesses like Mahishamardini Durga, Viraja, Chamunda, and Kali are often depicted with serpents as weapons or as integral parts of their iconography. For instance, the serpent appears on the head of Goddess Viraja at Jajpur and over the head of Chamunda at the Vaital temple in Bhubaneswar.

### Buddhism

It is believed that Gautama Buddha had connections to the serpent lineage. Some scholars suggest that the ruling dynasty of Magadha during Buddha's time belonged to the Naga race, which helped propagate Buddhism. Artistic representations of Naga figures in association with Buddha, such as the serpent king Muchalinda sheltering Buddha during meditation, are found in sites like Sanchi and Amaravati.

While early Buddhist monuments in Odisha lack extensive decorative motifs, remnants such as the Janguli serpent goddess of Mahayana Buddhism have been discovered in places like Kenduli and Sambalpur. These figures are now worshipped as local deities.

### Jainism

In Jainism, the 23rd Tirthankara, Parshvanatha, is closely associated with the Naga. He is often depicted with a seven-hooded serpent over his head or seated on a serpent's hoods. According to legend, the serpent king Dharanendra protected Parshvanatha during meditation by sheltering him with his hoods. Such depictions are found in Jain monuments at Khandagiri and Udayagiri in Odisha. Modern Jain practices also include the worship of trees and serpents.



## Others Representations

A recurring theme in Hinduism is Krishna's fight with the serpent Kaliya, symbolizing the suppression of the primitive Naga cult by the newer Krishna cult. This episode is celebrated through fairs and sculptural representations in Odisha, such as those seen during the Dhanu Yatra in Bargarh.

## NAGA WORSHIP IN ODISHA

Naga worship in Odisha dates back to ancient times and continues to be celebrated today. A significant festival, Naga Chaturthi, is held annually. In modern Hinduism, Naga Panchami, celebrated in the month of Shravana (July–August), honors the birth of serpents. According to the *Mahabharata* and *Varaha Purana*, the sage Kashyapa fathered seven great serpents—Vasuki, Takshaka, Karkotaka, Padma, Mahapadma, Shankhapala, and Kulika—with Dakshayani, the daughter of Daksha. These seven Nagas are detailed in the *Mayasilpa*.

The Sanskrit word “Naga” means serpent. Naga images are found in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism, often depicted as semi-divine beings with half-human, half-cobra forms. They are associated with water bodies, fertility, treasure, and protection. Notable Nagas include Shesha or Ananta, Vasuki, and Takshaka. Female Nagas (Naginis) are often depicted as beautiful serpent princesses.

In Buddhism, Nagas are seen as door guardians or minor deities. The Naga king Muchalinda famously sheltered the Buddha during his meditation. In Jainism, the Tirthankara Parshvanatha is depicted with a canopy of Naga hoods.

## Details of Sculptures at Nagamatha

- **Main Deity (Naga) or Manasa**
- **Location:** 20°27'27" N, 86°9'49" E, 72 km from Bhubaneswar.
- **Description:** A Nagi in Padmasana pose with Namaskar Mudra, holding a pot. The seven-headed serpent canopy adorns her head. The sculpture made of Khondalite stone, measures 53.5 cm in height, 24 cm in width, and 25 cm in thickness.
- **Horse Rider or Kalki Abatara of Lord Jagannatha**
- **Description:** A horse rider holding a sword in the left hand, possibly a hero stone or a depiction of Kalki, the future incarnation of Lord Jagannatha. The figure has a hallowed hairstyle and a large earring. The sculpture measures 66.5 cm in height, 36 cm in width, and 17 cm in thickness.

- **Chamunda**

- **Description:** A rare Chamunda image sitting on a Vishwapadma with a dead body beneath. Two Ganas and Pretas are depicted in a standing pose nearby. The sculpture measures 43 cm in height, 24 cm in width, and 14 cm in thickness.

- **Navagraha Panel Fragment**

- **Description:** A broken part of a Navagraha panel, with a two-armed deity in Padmasana poses. The fragment measures 15 cm in height, 21 cm in width, and 15 cm in thickness.

## Comparison with Other Naga Sculptures in Odisha

Naga sculptures from Nagamatha share similarities with those found at other sites in Odisha. For example:

- A seven-headed Naga figure from Svarnajaleswar Temple in Bhubaneswar.
- The Naga dynasty of Mayurbhanj worshipped Naga as their tutelary deity, with notable sculptures at Patamundai Hill.
- A headless Naga Raja sculpture in the Odisha State Museum.
- Naga columns at Chateswar Temple near Salepur.
- A rare Nagi image from Tundura, Balasore, holding a child with a seven-headed serpent canopy.
- The Muchalinda Buddha from Ganiapali is distinct, showcasing unique features compared to other Naga sculptures.
- Similar type of Manasa image recovered from Dharmasala area of Jajpur which was now preserved at state museum Bhubaneswar.

## CONCLUSION

The Naga cult, once an independent form of worship, became deeply integrated into India's major religions through a process of cultural and religious assimilation. From Hinduism to Buddhism and Jainism, the serpent holds symbolic and ritualistic significance, reflecting its enduring legacy in Indian spirituality and art. Nagamatha's sculptures are significant in understanding the cultural and religious heritage of Odisha. While the site currently has limited sculptures, it is part of a broader historical landscape, including nearby Buddhist and Brahmanical temples. The comparative study highlights the diversity of Naga worship and its integration into various religious traditions across Odisha. It is a rare image of Odisha and Naga image worshiped there a special faith and believer of local peoples.



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AM & AKT was responsible for the first manuscript draft. All authors contributed to subsequent drafts and approved the final version.

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## A Study Government Policies on Wetland Conservation: with Special Reference to Deepor Beel, Kamrup (Metro) District, Assam.

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### ABSTRACT

Wetlands are dynamic ecosystems characterized by the presence of water, either permanently or seasonally, and are crucial for biodiversity, climate regulation, and community livelihoods. Effective conservation of these areas is essential for maintaining ecological balance and supporting local economies. In India, wetlands cover approximately 15.26 million hectares, yet rapid urbanization and pollution have led to significant degradation. In Assam, one such Wetland is Deepor Beel, that has been recognized as a Ramsar site and is particularly significant for local communities, supporting livelihoods and biodiversity. Existing literature has largely concentrated on ecological observations and policy frameworks but has overlooked the socioeconomic dimensions and community involvement in conservation practices. This study aims to fill this gap by analysing the role of local populations in conservation efforts, assessing the effectiveness of government policies, and exploring the socio-economic consequences of wetland conservation in Deepor Beel. Through an examination of the relationship between conservation policies and the dynamics of the local community, this study aims to offer important insights into how good governance can improve community well-being and environmental sustainability. This study adds to the ongoing conversation about community empowerment, environmental concerns, and the sustainable development goals (SDGs) within the context of wetland conservation in Assam. Eventually, the study will help generate a more comprehensive knowledge of wetland conservation strategies that balance socioeconomic development and ecological integrity.

**Keywords :** *Wetlands, Biodiversity, Community Engagement, Socio-economic Impact, Government Policies, Deepor Beel*

### INTRODUCTION

Wetlands are among the most vital ecosystems on Earth, providing crucial ecological, economic, and social benefits. However, they are also one of the most threatened habitats, disappearing at an alarming rate due to human activities such as urbanization, pollution, and climate change. Wetlands play a critical role in maintaining a balanced ecosystem by supporting biodiversity, regulating water cycles, and acting as natural carbon sinks. Yet, they are often undervalued, leading to their degradation and loss.

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India is home to numerous wetlands with immense ecological and cultural significance, including Deepor Beel in Assam. Recognized as a Ramsar site in 2002, *Deepor Beel* serves as a vital habitat for diverse plant and animal species and sustains local communities that rely on it for their livelihoods. However, this wetland faces significant threats from urban expansion, pollution, and other developmental pressures, despite its protected status. These challenges highlight the urgent need for robust conservation strategies and community participation.

This study explores the impact of government policies on the conservation of Deepor Beel in Kamrup Metro District, Assam. The objectives include understanding the role of wetlands in maintaining ecological balance, analyzing the socio-economic impacts and contributions of local communities in conservation efforts, and evaluating the effectiveness of government initiatives in protecting Deepor Beel's ecosystem. Through these objectives, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities achieving sustainable wetland conservation.

## CONSERVATION OF WETLANDS

*Article 1 of the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar, Iran, 1971)* defines wetlands as regions of marsh, fen, peatland, or water, whether natural or artificial, permanent or temporary, characterized by static or flowing water, which may be fresh, brackish, or saline, including marine areas where the depth at low tide does not surpass six meters. The Convention's definition of wetlands thus encompasses a broad range of inland habitats, including marshes, peatlands, floodplains, rivers, and lakes; coastal habitats, including saltmarshes, mangroves, intertidal mudflats, and seagrass beds; coral reefs and other marine areas that are no deeper than six meters at low tide; and man-made wetlands, such as reservoirs, dams, rice paddies, wastewater treatment ponds, and lagoons.

Moreover, *Article 2.1* stipulates that wetlands must be listed on the Ramsar List of internationally significant wetlands in order to preserve coherent sites: "may incorporate riparian and coastal zones adjacent to the wetlands, and islands or bodies of marine water deeper than six meters at low tide lying within the wetlands."

Wetlands are the most endangered environment on Earth and are disappearing three times faster than forests. Since the 1700s, around 90% of the wetlands on Earth have deteriorated. Thirtyfive percent of the world's wetlands

have disappeared since 1970, or fifty years. Wetlands are lost as a result of pollution, overfishing and resource exploitation, invasive species, climate change, draining and infilling for construction and cultivation, and other human activities. Because wetlands are incorrectly viewed as wastelands rather as vital sources of jobs, incomes, and ecological services, a vicious cycle of wetland loss, threatened livelihoods, and growing poverty results. Changing attitudes to motivate communities and governments to prioritize and respect wetlands is a major problem.

Misconceptions about wetlands as wastelands rather than vital ecological services, employment, and incomes have resulted in a vicious cycle of wetland loss, jeopardized livelihoods, and growing poverty. Changing people's perspectives to motivate communities and governments to prioritize and respect wetlands is a significant problem.

Wetlands are vital ecosystems that support freshwater availability, biodiversity, global economies, climate adaptation and mitigation, and more. Raising awareness of wetlands on a national and international level is crucial to halting their rapid destruction and promoting conservation and restoration efforts. The perfect opportunity to raise awareness of these vital ecosystems is during World Wetlands Day.

In an effort to increase awareness of wetlands, February 2nd is designated as World Wetlands Day. The Convention on Wetlands, which was ratified as an international agreement, was also established on this day. Adopted in the Iranian city of Ramsar in 1971, this intergovernmental agreement—known as the Convention on Wetlands—went into effect in 1975. It offers the foundation for protecting wetlands and their resources and using them responsibly. Since then, about 90% of UN member states from every continent have joined as "Contracting Parties."

The Convention gives nations the ability to take action to preserve and responsibly use their wetlands through the creation of protected areas, the application of efficient regulations, and the exchange of information. A total of 172 nations have accepted this. The list of Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar sites) must include at least one wetland designated by each nation that ratifies the Convention. On August 30, 2021, the UN General Assembly passed Resolution 75/317, designating February 02 as World Wetlands Day. This made the 2022 observance of World Wetlands Day

particularly noteworthy. It also served as a celebration of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, which was signed in 1971.

In order to promote sustainable development globally, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands establishes the framework for the preservation and prudent use of all wetlands through regional, national, and international collaboration.

A number of initiatives that are directly relevant to sustainable development are included in the Convention Strategic Plan 2016–2024, including those that deal with carbon sinks, water, livelihoods, biodiversity, disaster risk reduction, and resilience. A particular framework on water, encompassing groundwater, water allocation, and river basin management, has also been approved by the parties. The Secretariat is involved with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), serving as co-custodian with UNEP of Goals 14 and 15 as well as indicator SDG 6.6.1. It actively attends Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goals (IAEG-SDGs) meetings.

Through the preservation of its ecosystem components, processes, and benefits, the Ramsar list seeks to “develop and maintain an international network of wetlands which are important for the conservation of global biological diversity and for sustaining human life.” Today, there are more than 2,400 Ramsar Sites worldwide. They are more expansive than Mexico, spanning more than 2.5 million square kilometers. All kinds of inland and coastal wetlands are part of the Ramsar Sites network. Reversing wetland loss and degradation is the goal of the Convention on Wetlands.

### **WETLAND CONSERVATION IN INDIA**

Indian customs and culture are closely linked to wetlands. While Khecheopalri Lake in Sikkim is known as the “wish fulfilling lake,” Loktak Lake in Manipur is referred to by the locals as “Ima” (Mother). One of the most distinctive manifestations of the connection between people, culture, water, and wetlands is the Chhath celebration in northern India. Popular tourist destinations include Kodaikanal in Tamil Nadu, Nainital Lake in Uttarakhand, Khajjiar Lake in Himachal Pradesh, and Dal Lake in Kashmir. Wetlands are even mentioned in Chankaya’s Arthashastra, where they are revered and referred to as “anupa,” or matchless regions.

The legal framework for wetlands found in forests and protected areas is established by provisions of the Indian

Forest Act of 1927, the Forest (Conservation) Act of 1980, and the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act of 1972. India has improved its overall approach to managing its wetlands and has made sustainability a priority for growth. As a result, there are currently 75 Ramsar Sites around the nation. This is the biggest Ramsar Site network of any South Asian nation. A Ramsar Site is a wetland location that has been recognised as having global significance. Wetlands are essential to India’s yearly migratory bird migration, which brings millions of birds.

Water drainage, pollution, unsustainable use, invasive species, deforestation, and soil erosion are just a few of the factors threatening wetlands worldwide. On February 1, 1982, the Ramsar convention came into effect in India. There are already 75 Ramsar sites (Wetlands of International Importance) in India, which represent 13,26,677 hectares of land. In South Asia, India is home to the most Ramsar sites. Seven wetlands in India—two in Himachal Pradesh, two in Jammu & Kashmir, one in Tripura, one in Uttar Pradesh, and one in Gujarat—were designated Ramsar Sites between 2004 and 2014. India has designated 49 wetlands as Ramsar Sites between 2014 and August 2022. In the 75th year of its independence, India added 11 wetlands to its list of Ramsar sites on August 13, 2022, bringing the total number of Ramsar sites in the nation to 75. Four (4) sites in Tamil Nadu, three (3) in Odisha, two (2) in Jammu & Kashmir, and one (1) each in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra are among the eleven new locations. India already added ten wetlands to the list of Ramsar sites on August 3, 2022. The ten additional locations consist of one (1) each in Goa, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, and Odisha, and six (6) in Tamil Nadu.

The majority of issues concerning India’s wetlands are caused by the country’s population. Despite making up only 2.42% of the Earth’s area, India is home to 16% of the world’s population. There are fewer natural wetlands in the Indian terrain. Once these locations are used for purposes other than wetlands, it becomes increasingly challenging to restore these converted wetlands. Therefore, as the population grows, so does the demand for wetland products (such as water, fish, timber, fibre, medicinal plants, etc.). Wetland loss is the term used to describe a physical reduction in the wetland’s spatial expanse or function. The impact of losing 1 km<sup>2</sup> of wetlands in India will be far greater than that of losing 1 km<sup>2</sup> of wetlands in areas with a high concentration of wetlands but a low population.

## **ISSUES OF WETLAND CONSERVATION IN ASSAM**

Assam's Brahmaputra and Barak valleys are endowed with thousands of ponds and tanks to store the state's enormous rainfall, as well as countless freshwater lakes (Beels), oxbow lakes (era-suti), and marshy regions. Both the production of food and our need for water depend on these wetlands. In addition, these provide habitat for thousands of different types of plants and animals. There are 1,400 square km of Assamese wetlands. The entire state is home to about 3000 large and small wetlands. However, there are a number of reasons why wetlands are under danger, including pollution, weed invasion, siltation, unlawful encroachment, and a lack of action by law enforcement.

Wetlands are essential to the preservation of the local ecosystem because they control and purify the climate and surroundings. Water quality protection, habitat for fish and wildlife, natural floodwater storage, and a decrease in surface water erosive potential are all benefits of a healthy wetland. The estimated total size of Assam's wetlands is 7,64,372 hectares, or roughly 9.74% of the state's total land area.

There are around 3513 wetlands in Assam, according to the Assam State Remote Sensing Application Centre. But a large number of these wetlands are rapidly disappearing. The loss of natural wetlands has been the fastest. Recent assessments in the state have shown that there are no more than 50 wetlands, either as a result of the influence of climate change or the conversion of these wetlands for other uses.

A study conducted by the North Eastern Space Application Centre (NESAC) in Assam found that the wetland ecosystem covers more than 5900 square km. In Assam, both the valleys are home to numerous wetlands, including freshwater lakes (beels), oxbow lakes (era-suti), marshy regions, and pukhuris. These wetlands collectively continue to form an incredible and distinctive ecology. Several years ago, the Assam Remote Sensing Application Centre identified more than 3500 wetlands in Assam, excluding the regions that are inhabited by rivers. Eighty-one of these are oxbow lakes of cutoff meanders (era-suits). In addition to the hundreds of marshlands, all of these initially gave the Brahmaputra, Barak, and their roughly 100 tributaries the necessary room to rise during the monsoon season. However, a significant amount of these wetlands have been overrun throughout time.

Rapid and unplanned urbanisation, along with the encroachment of indigenous people, must result in urban areas such as Guwahati, Jorhat, Tinsukia, Bongaigaon, Nalbari, Nagaon, Morigaon, and Silchar, among others, becoming so crowded that there is no room for the rainwater from the residential areas to escape. In Guwahati, one only needs to consider the fast declining condition of Deepor Beel and the imminent demise and disappearance of Bondajan, Borsola Beel, Sarusola Beel, and Silsako Beel.

Every ecosystem is under risk due to climate change. Wetlands are the least protected ecosystem, making them the most vulnerable. Due to habitat destruction and breeding site loss, many migratory birds have had to completely alter their travel routes. Many marshy birds are losing their home due to climate change. Water bodies and swampy areas are drying up due to rising temperatures. As the temperature rises, more evaporation occurs, which lowers the surface water level and thus reduces aquatic life and vegetation cover. Experts warn that several mega-herbivores, including rhinos, elephants, and Asiatic water buffalo, may become critically dependent on their declining habitat due to climate change.

Another significant factor in the disappearance of wetlands is siltation. Wetlands are being filled with silt from heavy floods. A lot of wetlands turn into grasslands and forests as a result of significant siltation. Consequently, the management of wetlands and protected areas has made the majority of land cover its top goal. Mapping wetlands is the first step in keeping an eye on this crucial ecosystem component. With the use of geospatial techniques, it is possible to correctly map wetlands with little expense or labour.

## **DEEPOP BEEL, ASSAM**

The Deepor Beel Wildlife Sanctuary is a perennial freshwater lake outside of Guwahati, Assam, in the Kamrup (Metro) district of the lower Brahmaputra valley. The Deepor Beel, a popular tourist destination and the only primary storm-water holding basin for Guwahati, was designated as a Ramsar site in 2002. According to the Ramsar Convention, an international agreement signed in Ramsar, Iran, in 1971, a Ramsar site is a wetland of worldwide significance.

The 4.1-square-kilometer Beel, which translates to "lake" in Assamese, is home to both locals and migratory birds. Herds of Asiatic wild elephants may be seen there, drawn by the aquatic flora of the lake. To get to the lake



for their favorite meal, they go from the four elephant corridors in the Rani-Garbhangha Reserve Forests in Kamrup East to the beel. Deepor Beel receives the most birds during the winter, making it an essential staging location on migratory routes. The Deepor wetlands are home to about 200 different species of birds, including 70 migratory species. The spot-billed pelican (*Pelicanus philippensis*), Baer's pochard (*Aythya baeri*), and lesser and greater adjutant storks (*Leptoptilos javanicus* and *dubius*) are among the species that are visible. The lake is home to 38 different kinds of amphibians and reptiles, about 50 different types of fish, some of which the locals gather, medicinal plants, nymphaea nuts and flowers, ornamental fish, and the highly valuable seeds of the big water lily *Euryale Ferox*, also known as makhana.

The lake is on several protected lists and is a Ramsar site. Deepor Beel has been designated as an Important Bird Area (IBA) site by Birdlife International. Even though Deepor Beel was designated under the Guwahati Water Bodies (Preservation and Conservation) Act, 2008, untreated sewage still enters the area from Guwahati city through the Basistha-Bahini and Bharalu rivers. The Khandajan rivulet, the lake's outflow, merges with the Brahmaputra. The lake suffers from excessive siltation from the surrounding deforested hills, municipal trash accumulation, uncontrolled fishing, and invasion of aquatic weeds like water hyacinth or *Eichhornia crassipes* due to encroachments from industrial growth.

### **SIGNIFICANT THREATS IN DEEPOR BEEL**

In any waterbody, human activity results in vegetation destruction, pollution inputs, and hydrological changes. One of the water habitats that is most endangered in the entire planet is wetlands. The loss of wetlands lowers biodiversity because animals and plants that are acclimated to wetland ecosystems frequently can't adapt to and compete in new environments. The loss of harvestable resources, deterioration of water quality, and flow control are additional effects that could lead to more severe flooding. In many regions of the world, wetlands are still under a lot of stress and are deteriorating. Deepor Beel is in the same state and situation. is currently experiencing severe social, cultural, artistic, and political pressures after being named a Ramsar Site.

The construction of permanent structures at both the industrial and residential levels, human encroachment, the dumping of urban waste, the inclusion and extension of railway lines, unlawful earth cutting and quarrying, excessive uncontrolled picnicking, and many other issues are all connected to Deepor Beel. All of these actions, whether desired or not, have seriously disrupted the ecosystem's ability to support itself. And as a result, this waterbody has rapidly shrunk and the water quality has gotten worse.

Deepor Beel has encroached due to Guwahati City's rapidly growing population and land expansion. Human settlements and structures from the public and private sectors have heavily encroached upon and occupied its northern and eastern edges. In the end, this has negatively impacted the Beel's natural drainage and spatial water patterns. According to estimates, the permanent lake water area shrank from 7.1 square kilometers in 1991 to 5.2 square kilometers in 2001 and 4.2 square kilometers in 2010. Inappropriate farming methods and the issue of soil erosion have increased the pace of sedimentation in the Beel. The spread of weeds is another growing issue in the Beel.

The construction of the Guwahati Garbage Dump in Boragaon, on the eastern bank of the Beel, is one of the biggest threats to this body of water. The garbage that has accumulated around Guwahati city seeps into the beel's hydrology and contaminates it. Additionally, trash from the Guwahati oil refinery is sent to the beel via the Basistha and Kalmoni rivers. The main sources of water for the wetland are these rivers and monsoon runoff. In addition, the channels transport additional hospital and industrial trash to the Beel.

The 1990 construction of Assam State's southern railroad along the southern boundary is another significant factor influencing the Deepor Beel-Rani Garbhanga terrain. The marsh has been divided into over three subsystems by this railroad. As of right now, it has an impact on the relationships between wetland animals and the safe migration of endangered Asiatic elephants between water bodies and forested areas. Even though Asiatic elephant deaths from rail collisions have decreased recently, the species has developed an odd road avoidance behavior as a result. Additionally, the rail road has made it simple to visit several formerly inaccessible regions.

The areas of vacant land between the railroad and the marsh have also recently seen the emergence of new illegal immigrant population. Illegal fishing practices and the hunting and trapping of wild animals are also having an impact on how well the Beel ecosystem functions.

### ROLE OF THE LOCAL COMMUNITIES

The majority of the over 1,200 households that live in the neighborhoods around Deepor Beel are from several ethnic groups, such as the Rabha and the Karbi. The natural elements are intricately interwoven with their culture and economic existence. The Rabha people of Satargaon, which is located very close to Deepor Beel, celebrate Johong Puja, which is based on appreciating the value and beauty of the environment, especially the wetland.

The social, economic, and cultural fabric of the local population around Deepor Beel is significantly influenced by community fishing during such celebrations. In addition to fishing, the beel provides the residents with wood for fuel, fodder, grazing, herbal medicines, and edible herbs and other foods. The majority of the materials used to build their homes, including bamboo and reeds for thatch roofing, come from the nearby forests. These community activities don't seem particularly novel, but the threat of Guwahati's haphazard urbanization and the impending urban trash crisis might be.

In a recent report from *Down to Earth*, it was highlighted that while the tranquillity of Deepor Beel has faced challenges in recent years, the government's development initiatives, including extensive road networks and factories, aim to enhance regional infrastructure and economic growth. However, this progress has also led to pollution, disrupting the delicate balance between development and environmental preservation.

As a result, local fish populations have been significantly affected, leading to a decline in their numbers. Consequently, communities that rely on the beel for their livelihoods are experiencing increased difficulties. Despite these challenges, there is a growing recognition of the need for sustainable practices that can harmonize development with the preservation of this vital ecosystem.

The headman of Keotpara village noted in the same report that nearly 825 people live in the area, many of

whom have relied on fishing for their livelihoods for generations. He pointed out that the dumping site in Boragaon has contaminated the water in the beel, further hindering the growth of fish.

A group effort by six ladies from Keotpara, *Simang* means dreams in their native tongue. They have been succeeded in turning water hyacinths, an unwanted weed, into lovely artifacts and yoga mats. Within a week, water hyacinths can grow fast, posing a continuous threat to the ecosystem. This effort has not only improved the beel's health but also given 38 local women jobs and opportunities. Simang's workers, who process raw materials from the Deepor Beel and weave the items on their own handloom, managed to make a living even during the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Another such project is *KumbhiKagaz*, a creative endeavor that aims to restore Deepor Beel environmentally while also giving the people of Keotpara alternate sources of income. The project turns water hyacinths into handmade, chemical-free, 100% biodegradable papers.

In a report, a member of KumbhiKagaz stated that the initiative has successfully removed 50 tonnes of invasive water hyacinths over the past two years. This effort has greatly enhanced the growth of makhana (prickly water lily) in the wetland, which is commercially valuable.

These projects demonstrate how the community is addressing the declining health of the marsh and managing the commons' property sustainably. A true lifeline woven into the local ecology, the beel is a magnificent example of how humans and environment are interdependent.

The villagers, who have traditionally relied on fishing and selling their catch at Godhuli Bojar, the nearest local market, are facing significant challenges due to the prohibition of fishing in the protected zones of Deepor Beel. While this restriction impacts their livelihoods, there is a desire for a conservation approach that recognizes and integrates their traditional knowledge. By combining this indigenous wisdom with modern scientific insights, the community can reduce dependence on a single resource, fostering a more sustainable future.

### ROLE OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS (NGOs)

Under the Living Lakes Biodiversity and Climate Project, the *Nature Environment and Wildlife Society of*

*India (NEWS)* is carrying out various initiatives to involve local communities, students, and stakeholders in conservation efforts focused on Deepor Beel, a vital wetland in Assam. NEWS aims to give students and community members a better awareness of environmental issues through its educational initiatives. NEWS promotes the value of protecting wetlands, the harm that pollution causes to the ecosystem, and the necessity of implementing sustainable practices to slow down environmental deterioration by hosting educational events and participatory workshops. Additionally, local communities and other allies gain important knowledge and skills from the capacity-building workshops, which empowers them to support alternative livelihood options and conservation activities. By means of these events and activities, NEWS is cultivating a sense of accountability towards Deepor Beel, a valuable ecosystem that urgently need conservation and restoration efforts.

### **MISSION LiFE (LIFESTYLE FOR ENVIRONMENT)**

As part of the “*Mission LiFE*” (*Lifestyle for Environment*) initiative, the Nature Environment & Wildlife Society (NEWS), in collaboration with the Integrated Regional Office in Guwahati under the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change, Government of India, organized a day-long program on June 9, 2023. The event was held at Azara Keotpara Primary School near Deepor Beel, aiming to promote an environmentally responsible lifestyle nationwide. Approximately 140 students and their parents participated in this Government of India-driven effort to foster a movement toward sustainability.

### **A TRASH CLEANUP**

On May 13, 2023, the NEWS team joined a trash cleanup drive around Deepor Beel to raise awareness about proper waste management and disposal. The event saw the participation of 50 individuals who, in just one hour, collected approximately 35 kilograms of litter—an alarming indicator of the waste problem in the wetland. Organized by the Guwahati Wildlife Division under the “Mission LiFE” initiative, the event was held in collaboration with the National Centre for Sustainable Coastal Management (NCSCM), Chennai, an autonomous center under the Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change (MoEF&CC).

### **INCREASING AWARENESS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF BIODIVERSITY**

On May 24, 2023, in observance of International Day of Biodiversity and World Turtle Day, the NEWS team in Guwahati organized awareness programs for students from two schools: 33 No. Primary School Chakardo and Chakardo Desh Bhakta Tarunram Phukan Middle English School. A total of 72 students participated in the events. The team conducted two interactive sessions: one highlighting the significance and role of biodiversity, and the other focusing on the diversity, conservation, and ecological importance of turtles. The students actively engaged with the presentations and discussions, making the event both educational and enjoyable.

### **CAPACITY BUILDING FOR THE LOCAL COMMUNITY**

A collaborative initiative brought together government agencies, local communities, and NGOs. In June 2023, as part of the Living Lakes Biodiversity and Climate Project (funded by the International Climate Initiative, or IKI), the Nature Environment and Wildlife Society (NEWS) organized a stakeholder consultation workshop. The event, themed “Low-cost Bio-mechanical Remediation to Improve Water Quality in the Pamohi River,” aimed to implement bioremediation as an affordable solution for treating polluted water flowing into Deepor Beel. The project concentrated on a critical 500-meter segment of the Pamohi canal before it enters the wetland, marking a vital effort to reduce the ecological damage caused by pollution.

To tackle the pressing issue of solid waste management, the Nature Environment and Wildlife Society (NEWS) adopted a proactive stance. On September 26, 2023, NEWS convened a stakeholder consultation workshop titled “Synergies for Sustainable Cities: Identifying Collaborative Actions to Mitigate Waste Management Issues.” This event marked the first instance of uniting government representatives, local communities, NGOs, and experts to devise comprehensive strategies, highlighting the importance of collaboration in overcoming waste management challenges.

The comprehensive management of Deepor Beel relies on a coordinated effort among diverse stakeholders, including government agencies, local communities, and NGOs. This collaborative approach reflects a collective dedication to protecting Deepor Beel, with the NGO,



NEWS, serving as a key facilitator, spearheading initiatives that effectively integrate environmental conservation with community participation

### **GOVERNMENT POLICIES FOR THE CONSERVATION OF DEEPOP BEEL**

The conservation status of Deepor Beel reflects its ecological importance and the need for continued protection. Recognized for its rich biodiversity, the wetland has been the focus of various conservation efforts over the years.

- In 2002, Deepor Beel was designated as a Ramsar site due to its environmental and biological significance, providing habitat to a wide range of aquatic species and 219 bird species.
- The National Green Tribunal (NGT) further emphasized the urgency of conservation when it instructed the Assam government to declare the surrounding area as an Eco-Sensitive Zone following an RTI petition.
- Additionally, the site was selected as an Important Bird Area (IBA) by Birdlife International, acknowledging its vital role in supporting avian life.
- The Assam government also declared 4.14 square kilometers of Deepor Beel as a Bird Sanctuary in 1989.
- Furthermore, to protect the ecosystem from damage caused by unsustainable practices, community fishing has been prohibited under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.
- These conservation measures highlight the importance of preserving Deepor Beel as a critical wetland ecosystem

The government of Assam has implemented several initiatives for the development and management of Deepor Beel, focusing on both conservation and community support. Here are the key roles:

- **Wetland Regeneration:** The government has completed the regeneration of approximately one kilometre of the wetland area, creating embankments and fencing to protect the regenerated zones. This area is being developed for eco-tourism activities, enhancing both conservation and local economic opportunities.

- **Alternate Fishing Grounds:** To reduce pressure on the core area of the wetland, the government is promoting the development of alternate fishing grounds in the fringe areas. This initiative supports local fishing communities by providing them with sustainable livelihoods while minimizing their dependency on the core ecosystem.
- **Erosion and Silt Control:** Measures have been initiated to control incoming silt from the surrounding hills, including the construction of gully controls. This helps maintain the wetland's ecological balance and water quality.
- **Infrastructure Development:** A watchtower designed with indigenous bamboo technology has been constructed to attract visitors and promote bird-watching, supporting eco-tourism.
- **Water Quality Monitoring:** Ongoing water analysis is conducted at various points in the wetland to monitor water quality, ensuring the habitat remains suitable for aquatic species.
- **Weed Management:** The government is actively managing invasive species, particularly water hyacinth, across around 2,000 square meters of the wetland to maintain its ecological integrity.
- **Community Engagement:** Tree plantation initiatives have been launched in collaboration with local communities, enhancing biodiversity and promoting environmental stewardship.
- **Drinking Water Support:** Recognizing the importance of community well-being, the government has provided drinking water facilities at three locations for local villagers, addressing a critical need in the area.

A report from *The Print* emphasizes the critical role of the Assam government in the conservation of Deepor Beel, a Ramsar site. The government, has proposed eco-tourism plans aimed at enhancing the area's infrastructure and promoting both economic development and environmental awareness. These plans include developments like cycling tracks, boating facilities, and other amenities to attract visitors. However, a Rs 14 crore fund allocated for the wetland's development remains unutilized, raising concerns about effective resource management. Government officials have stressed the importance of finding a balance between eco-tourism and conservation, with figures like

Padmapani Bora of the Assam Tourism Development Corporation emphasizing that development should not harm the wetland's ecological integrity, as it serves as a vital wildlife corridor. Additionally, the government is tasked with ensuring that Deepor Beel retains its protected legal status under the Ramsar Convention and the Wildlife Protection Act. It is also urged to engage local communities in addressing concerns about the ecological impacts of development, ensuring that eco-tourism respects traditional livelihoods and the ecosystem. Furthermore, the government is expected to conduct feasibility studies and environmental impact assessments to inform sustainable decision-making and safeguard the wetland's ecology. In summary, the government's role extends beyond promoting eco-tourism at Deepor Beel to ensuring that development initiatives do not compromise the wetland's ecological health.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This research is primarily based on secondary data obtained from pre-existing sources, both published and unpublished. Published sources encompass books, academic journals, articles, government reports, public records, historical and statistical documents, business records, and technical or trade publications. Unpublished materials include theses, dissertations, and other related resources.

## **RESULT**

- Deepor Beel is a significant riverine wetland in Assam, designated as a Ramsar site in 2002 due to its ecological importance. The wetland supports a rich biodiversity, including 232 bird species, and plays a crucial role in flood management for Guwahati.
- Human activities, including urban encroachment, have severely impacted the wetland, leading to habitat destruction and pollution. The permanent lake area has decreased significantly, from 7.1 km<sup>2</sup> in 1991 to 4.2 km<sup>2</sup> in 2010.
- Major pollution sources include industrial waste, urban runoff, and illegal dumping, particularly from a nearby garbage dump.
- Local communities, such as the Rabha and Karbi, rely on Deepor Beel for fishing, agriculture, and cultural practices, but face economic challenges due to urbanization and conservation restrictions.
- Community initiatives, such as "Simang" and "KumbhiKagaz," have emerged to manage invasive

species and provide alternative livelihoods, showcasing resilience and innovation.

- With fishing banned in the protected areas of Deepor Beel, the locals, whose lives were as simple as encircling around fishing and selling them in Godhuli Bojar (the nearest local market), are now devastated.
- The establishment of the Guwahati Garbage Dump (GGD) in close proximity to Deepor Beel has significantly degraded the water quality and overall health of the wetland ecosystem, contributing to the decline of both aquatic life and local biodiversity.
- The Nature Environment and Wildlife Society (NEWS) is instrumental in leading initiatives that combine environmental conservation with community involvement, fostering sustainable practices in the area.
- Programs like backyard poultry farming are being introduced as alternative livelihoods for local communities, reducing their reliance on Deepor Beel's natural resources while providing additional income sources.
- NEWS' educational initiatives, such as those focused on biodiversity and turtles, are successfully raising awareness among students and the community about the importance of environmental protection.
- NEWS is contributing to the "Mission LiFE" (Lifestyle for Environment) initiative, encouraging environmentally sustainable lifestyles and promoting eco-friendly practices within the local population.
- There is a critical need to balance infrastructure development with ecological preservation and effective resource management to prevent further degradation of the wetland.

## **DISCUSSION**

Protecting Deepor Beel requires the strict enforcement of regulations to prevent urban encroachment and pollution. Zoning laws should be established to restrict development in sensitive areas. Active participation of local communities is essential, integrating their traditional knowledge into conservation strategies and involving them in decision-making processes. To reduce dependence on the wetland's resources, alternative income opportunities such as eco-tourism and sustainable fishing should be developed.

Improved waste management is vital to control industrial and urban runoff, supported by regular water quality

monitoring to address pollution sources swiftly. Building eco-tourism infrastructure, including guided tours, bird-watching, and educational programs, can promote both conservation and economic development for local communities. Restoration projects aimed at reclaiming degraded areas, removing invasive species, and reintroducing native vegetation are equally important. Community workshops and awareness programs can educate residents about the importance of wetland conservation and sustainable practices, while encouraging farmers to adopt environmentally friendly agricultural methods. Partnering with NGOs and academic institutions can provide the expertise, funding, and resources needed to support these conservation efforts.

## CONCLUSION

Protecting wetlands is crucial for sustainable development since they are among the most valuable ecosystems on Earth and provide vital functions like flood control, water purification, and biodiversity conservation. For the protection of wildlife, ecological balance, and local residents' means of subsistence, Assam's Deepor Beel is an essential wetland. Urbanisation, pollution, and environmental deterioration, however, are becoming more and more of a problem.

Even with major conservation efforts, problems including improper trash management, encroachment, and low community involvement still exist. Achieving equilibrium between ecological sustainability and development is crucial. Government programs like ecotourism and habitat restoration should put the environment first, but community-based efforts that use invasive species demonstrate how traditional knowledge and creative thinking can coexist.

Securing the future of Deepor Beel requires a holistic and collaborative approach. This includes strict enforcement of environmental laws, consistent scientific monitoring, promotion of sustainable livelihood opportunities, and meaningful involvement of local communities in conservation initiatives. Safeguarding Deepor Beel is not merely about preserving an essential wetland but also about supporting the well-being of the communities reliant on its resources, serving as a global model for sustainable wetland management.

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## Availability of data and materials

No datasets were generated or analysed during the current study

## Declarations

## Ethics approval and consent to participate

Not applicable.

## Consent for publication

Not applicable.

## Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

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## HR for Hybrid Working: How to Adapt People Practices to Support Employees and the Organization written by Gary Cookson.

Published by Kogan Page Limited, United States, 2022. Pp. 287. ISBN:9781398605725.

Reviewed by Bandita Bhola


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### ABSTRACT

This book is one of the timely published literatures on human resources management during and after COVID-19 where all the public and private organizations struggle to manage their human resources and day-to-day activities while keeping in mind infectious diseases. This book investigates into one of the most significant shifts in the workplace—hybrid working. With the COVID-19 pandemic acting as a catalyst, organizations across the region were forced to reconsider traditional office-based work models. This book provides practical insights and strategies for HR professionals who are navigating this transformation. Author Gary Cookson, an expert in human resources and leadership, offers actionable solutions to adjust people's practices to the demands of hybrid work. Hybrid work that combines remote and in-office working has become the new normal for many organizations after the pandemic. Companies have been trying to adapt without having solid resources that could give them direction and a road map to thrive in this new environment. Cookson begins by setting the stage, discussing how the shift to hybrid work has emerged from the disruption caused by the pandemic. He emphasizes that hybrid working is not a temporary trend but a fundamental change in how organizations operate. The book contextualizes hybrid work within a broader work environment, highlighting its potential to reshape organizational culture, employee engagement, and business practices.

**Key word :** *hybrid working, human resources, COVID-19 pandemic, office working, Recruitment*

This book is one of the timely published literature on human resources management during and after COVID-19 where all the public and private organizations struggle to manage their human resources and day-to-day activities while keeping in mind infectious diseases. This book investigates into one of the most significant shifts in the workplace—hybrid working. With the COVID-19 pandemic acting as a catalyst, organizations across the region were forced to reconsider traditional office-based work models. This book provides practical insights and strategies for HR professionals who are

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navigating this transformation. Author Gary Cookson, an expert in human resources and leadership, offers actionable solutions to adjust people's practices to the demands of hybrid work.

Hybrid work that combines remote and in-office working has become the new normal for many organizations after the pandemic. Companies have been trying to adapt without having solid resources that could give them direction and a road map to thrive in this new environment. Cookson begins by setting the stage, discussing how the shift to hybrid work has emerged from the disruption caused by the pandemic. He emphasizes that hybrid working is not a temporary trend but a fundamental change in how organizations operate. The book contextualizes hybrid work within a broader work environment, highlighting its potential to reshape organizational culture, employee engagement, and business practices.

The author situates hybrid work as a flexible solution that addresses employees' demand for autonomy while balancing organizational needs. He also acknowledges the technological advancements that made this transition possible, such as video conferencing, collaboration tools, and cloud-based systems. By referencing research and real-world examples, Cookson solidifies the idea that hybrid work is here to stay, and HR must evolve to meet the challenges it presents. Still, many national and international organizations are following this model after the over of the pandemic.

This book highlights many key points through various case studies mentioned below:

### **FLEXIBILITY AND PRODUCTIVITY**

One of the central themes of the book is how organizations can strike a balance between flexibility and productivity in hybrid working models. Cookson recognizes that while hybrid work offers employees greater flexibility, it also raises concerns about maintaining productivity and accountability. The book outlines several strategies for managing flexible work arrangements without compromising performance. He highlights the importance of clear performance metrics, regular check-ins, and trust-based management. He discusses how HR professionals can develop systems that focus on outcomes rather than micromanaging employees' time. This shift towards results-oriented management is essential for hybrid models, where employees may not be present in the office.

### **MAINTAINING ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE**

Cookson addresses the challenge of maintaining a cohesive organizational culture in a hybrid setting. With

employees distributed across various locations, traditional methods of adopting culture—such as in-person meetings and office-based team-building activities—become less effective. Cookson argues that HR must play a proactive role in preserving culture by creating intentional touchpoints for collaboration and communication. He offers several practical suggestions for keeping employees engaged and aligned with company values, such as virtual team-building exercises, regular feedback loops, and promoting shared values through digital platforms. The book emphasizes that culture in a hybrid world requires deliberate effort and cannot be left to chance.

### **EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AND WELL-BEING**

The book explores how hybrid working models impact employee engagement and well-being. Cookson discusses the dual-edged nature of remote work—it can increase work-life balance but also lead to isolation, burnout, and disengagement if not managed properly. He advocates for HR to develop well-being programs that cater to the specific needs of remote and hybrid workers. Cookson stresses the importance of regular communication and check-ins to gauge employee sentiment. He also suggests using employee engagement surveys and pulse checks to ensure that HR has a real-time understanding of employee needs. Mental health support, flexible working hours, and fostering a sense of belonging are crucial elements in sustaining employee well-being in hybrid models.

### **HR'S ROLE IN HYBRID WORK**

The core of Cookson's book revolves around how HR professionals can adapt their people practices to support both employees and organizations in hybrid environments. The role of HR, according to Cookson, is evolving. HR is no longer just about policy-making; it is about shaping employee experiences in a way that aligns with the future of work.

### **TALENT MANAGEMENT AND RECRUITMENT**

Cookson emphasizes that hybrid work expands the talent pool, allowing organizations to recruit talent from across the globe. However, this also presents challenges in terms of recruitment processes and onboarding remote employees. He provides insights on how HR can adapt recruitment strategies to attract and retain talent in a hybrid work environment. This includes leveraging digital recruitment tools, virtual interviews, and remote onboarding processes. He also touches upon the importance of building an employer brand that resonates with remote workers. By offering flexible working arrangements, organizations can attract top talent who prioritize work-life balance and autonomy.



## **TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT**

In a hybrid workplace, traditional training and development programs need to be reimagined. Cookson discusses how HR can use technology to deliver training that is accessible to both in-office and remote employees. He encourages HR to invest in digital learning platforms that allow employees to develop skills at their own pace. The book stresses the importance of continuous learning in a hybrid model, where employees must stay adaptable to evolving technologies and work practices. This book addresses the role of leadership in hybrid work environments, particularly how leaders must be trained to manage distributed teams effectively. Leadership development programs should include remote management skills, communication strategies, and emotional intelligence training to ensure leaders are equipped to handle the unique challenges of hybrid work.

## **PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT**

One of the most complex areas HR must navigate in hybrid work is performance management. The author argues that traditional performance management systems, which often rely on physical presence, need to be overhauled. He suggests that HR should implement systems that prioritize results and outcomes rather than time spent in the office. The book provides actionable advice on setting clear expectations, using data to track performance, and offering regular feedback. Cookson highlights the importance of transparency and trust in managing remote employees. He encourages HR to build a performance culture that is adaptable to the hybrid model, where employees are empowered to work autonomously but are held accountable for their results.

Cookson's approach is practical and grounded in real-world examples, making the book accessible to HR professionals at all levels. He draws on case studies from organizations that have successfully implemented hybrid work models, offering insights that are both strategic and tactical. While the book is primarily solution-oriented, it also references research and data, ensuring that the advice is evidence-based. The strength of the

book lies in its ability to combine theory with practice. Cookson not only discusses the theoretical implications of hybrid work but also provides concrete steps that HR can take to adapt their practices. His holistic approach covers various aspects of HR, from recruitment to performance management, making the book a comprehensive guide for navigating the hybrid work landscape.

While HR for Hybrid Working offers valuable insights, there are some areas where the book could have delved deeper. For instance, Cookson touches on the potential downsides of hybrid work, such as employee isolation and the erosion of work-life boundaries, but these topics could have been explored more thoroughly. A more detailed discussion on how organizations can mitigate these risks would have added depth to the book. Additionally, the book focuses primarily on knowledge-based industries where hybrid work is feasible. However, it could have addressed industries where hybrid work is more challenging, such as manufacturing or healthcare. Providing sector-specific examples or solutions could have broadened the book's applicability.

HR for Hybrid Working by Gary Cookson is an essential read for HR professionals who are grappling with the challenges of hybrid work. The book offers a comprehensive guide on how to adapt people practices to support both employees and organizations in this new landscape. With practical strategies, real-world examples, and evidence-based insights, Cookson provides HR with the tools needed to navigate the future of work successfully.

While the book could have explored certain challenges in more depth, its strengths lie in its actionable advice and holistic approach to HR. As hybrid work continues to evolve, HR for Hybrid Working will serve as a valuable resource for organizations looking to thrive in a flexible work environment.

Overall, this book is a valuable resource for HR professionals aiming to thrive in the evolving landscape of work and the shaping of the future of work within their organization during a pandemic or other normal times.

## “Women Reservation Bill” 2023: A Way to Political Change in India

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### ABSTRACT

The term ‘women’ encompasses both genders, as both men and women contribute to the standard of life and nation-building within a society; the political sphere serves as the foundation for any transformation. Women in the social sphere have consistently been sidelined from ancient times to the present. It is not solely about her social sphere; rather, it encompasses all aspects of her existence. It integrates the social, economic, and political frameworks affecting women, which necessitate fortification. Therefore, she must advocate for her community and assert her rights. In this setting, women must be empowered across all sectors, with political engagement and leadership being crucial for their progress. This article will discuss the necessity of a reservation bill for women, their political position in society, and their advocacy for the community. This paper primarily concerns the historical and contemporary standards women must achieve in India. The initiation of the Reservation Bill and its implications in India will be reviewed for the advancement of women. The advantages and disadvantages of this Bill will be elucidated through numerous reports.

**Keywords:** *Women, Reservation, Empowerment.*

### INTRODUCTION:

The Women Reservation Bill of 2023 signifies a crucial milestone in India’s persistent endeavors to attain gender equality, especially within the political domain. The objective of this innovative legislation is to enhance the representation of women in the making decisions at the national and state levels by making sure that women have a third of the places in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies. The objective is to empower women politically, providing them with a forum to influence policy, engage in governance, and significantly shape the nation’s political landscape. India has had an imbalance of power in its leadership for years because there aren’t enough women in political roles. Despite considerable advancements in sectors like education and employment, women’s involvement in politics has continued to be restricted. The Women Reservation Bill

is regarded as a significant measure in tackling this issue and advancing gender equality in politics. The Women Reservation Bill is not the inaugural attempt to

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implement gender-based reservations in India. Prior endeavors, like the 108th Constitutional Amendment Bill in 2008, encountered substantial resistance from diverse political factions and elicited apprehensions regarding potential disruptions to established political frameworks. Notwithstanding these challenges, the Women Reservation Bill of 2023 has rekindled significant discourse regarding the role of women in India's political and governance frameworks. This bill may be perceived not merely as a mechanism to enhance women's representation in politics, but also as a prospective catalyst for extensive political transformation. If enacted, it might alter India's political landscape by advancing more women into leadership positions, resulting in a more inclusive and diversified democratic framework.

This study will analyze the prospective implications of the Women Reservation Bill 2023, emphasizing its potential to transform India's political structure, the societal obstacles it may face, and its enduring consequences on gender parity in governance. As the bill progresses, it is essential to rigorously assess both its prospective benefits and its constraints, considering the intricacies of India's political landscape and the varied viewpoints on female quotas. This research aims to elucidate how the Women Reservation Bill may influence the future of political involvement and representation in India. The Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Eighth Amendment) Bill, 2023, officially referred to as the Women Reservation Bill, is a substantial legislative measure that is designed to enhance the representation of women in India's political sphere. The law, which was enacted by both chambers of the Indian Parliament in September 2023, supports the idea of reserving 33% of seats for women in the Lok Sabha, which is the lower chamber of Parliament, as well as in State Legislative Assemblies. This action is regarded as a critical step toward the improvement of gender equality within the political framework of the nation.

This essay will examine the necessity of the reservation law for women, their political roles in society, and the significance of their voices within the community. The paper will examine the historical trajectory of women in India, emphasizing the obstacles they have encountered in attaining equality and acceptance. The analysis will also consider the introduction of the Reservation Bill and its prospective effects on enhancing the status of women in the nation. The essay will examine the advantages and disadvantages of the bill,

utilizing insights from diverse publications and research to offer a thorough grasp of its consequences.

### **PROVISIONS OF THE BILL**

The proposition proposes a 33% reservation of seats in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies to increase the opportunities for women to participate in electoral politics. It also includes provisions for sub-reservation within the 33% for women from vulnerable communities, such as Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC). This ensures that the reservation benefits women from these regions as well.

The law also includes a delimitation clause that mandates the reservation of a specific number of seats for women in each constituency. These designated seats may rotate frequently, providing various districts the opportunity to elect female MPs over time. This approach seeks to offer a range of options for women in different locations and communities.

### **CONTEXTUAL HISTORY**

The Women Reservation Bill has incited prolonged discourse for several years. Initially presented in Parliament in 1996, it did not obtain approval owing to resistance from multiple political factions. Over time, there have been multiple attempts to reintroduce the bill, but it continued to face significant challenges. Issues such as caste-based reservations, political will, and the representation of women in local governance have been major hurdles in advancing the bill. Despite these setbacks, the bill remains a central topic in the debate for greater gender equality in India's political landscape.

**Ancient and Medieval Periods:** In ancient India, women held certain political authority, as seen in historical figures like Rani Durgavati of Gondwana and Rani Lakshmi Bai of Jhansi, who led their armies into battle. Nevertheless, as Indian civilization progressed, the participation of women in public life became increasingly constrained. The rise of patriarchal systems, coupled with the influence of colonial rule, further diminished women's opportunities in leadership and governance. During the medieval period, women's political presence shrank even further, as practices like purdah (veiling), child marriage, and other gender-based restrictions took hold. Cultural and societal constraints markedly diminished women's visibility and their capacity to participate in politics and public life.



**British Colonial Era:** The British colonial era saw the introduction of reforms intended to promote legal equality for women, such as the abolition of sati and the encouragement of widow remarriage. However, these reforms were often framed within the context of ‘civilizing’ Indian society from a Western perspective, rather than genuinely empowering women.

During this time, notable Indian women like Sarojini Naidu, Kamini Roy, and Kasturba Gandhi became actively involved in the independence movement. Despite their significant contributions, their roles in leadership positions remained restricted, and their political representation continued to be minimal. Their involvement marked an important step, but the broader political space for women remained limited during the colonial period.

**Historical Underrepresentation:** Women in India have historically been underrepresented in political decision-making roles. Despite making up nearly half of the population, their presence in legislative bodies remains limited. For example, in the 16th Lok Sabha, women represented only 14% of the total Members of Parliament, which is far below the global average of 25%. This disparity highlights the ongoing challenges in achieving gender equality in political representation, underscoring the need for reforms to ensure women have a stronger voice in shaping the country’s future.

### **EMPOWERING WOMEN AND BREAKING STEREOTYPES:**

**Role Models:** The inclusion of women in political spaces challenges the traditional belief that leadership is primarily a male domain. Women Members of Parliament and legislators can serve as role models, inspiring younger generations to follow in their footsteps and pursue careers in politics, leadership, and public service. Their presence in these roles sends a powerful message about the potential of women to lead and shape society.

**Shifting Gender Norms:** The bill plays a key role in shifting societal views by normalizing the perception of women as leaders and decision-makers. By ensuring greater female representation in governance, it helps challenge and break down patriarchal norms that have historically limited women’s roles and opportunities. This progressive move not only opens doors for women but also promotes a more equal and inclusive society.

### **ENCOURAGING WOMEN’S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION:**

**Breaking Barriers:** Women have long faced significant challenges when trying to enter the political arena. The Women Reservation Bill in India shows a major phase forward in addressing the longstanding underrepresentation of women in political and decision-making roles. Throughout history, from ancient times to the present, women have encountered numerous social, cultural, and political barriers that have limited their involvement in governance and leadership. The introduction of the Women Reservation Bill aims to directly address these inequalities. This document will explore the historical context that highlights the need for the bill, and it will also consider the further steps required to achieve true gender equality in political representation.

There is clear potential to uplift women in the political sphere, which is essential for their overall development. However, this struggle for representation has been ongoing since ancient times, with progress occurring in phases. Despite rigorous efforts by women over the years, it is only now, through legislation like the Women Reservation Bill, that significant changes are being made in the political landscape, creating opportunities for greater inclusion and equality.

The Women’s Reservation Bill suggests the incorporation of three new Articles and one clause into the Constitution:

On Tuesday, the Women’s Reservation Bill, also known as the 128th Amendment Bill, was introduced during the inaugural session of the newly inaugurated Parliament building. This initiative represents a substantial advancement in the ongoing endeavor to improve and guarantee women’s representation in the political arena. The primary goal of the proposed amendment is to enhance the involvement of women in decision-making processes, thereby granting them a more significant and influential role in the development of the nation’s political landscape..

Three new Articles and a new clause will be incorporated into the Constitution by the forthcoming legislation.

A significant provision in Article 239AA will guarantee that a specific number of seats in the Delhi Legislative Assembly are reserved for women. In particular, female candidates will be allocated one-third of the seats reserved for Scheduled Castes. Additionally, the legislation granted by Parliament will reserve one-third

of the total seats to be filled through direct elections for women. The objective of this initiative is to increase the representation of women in politics and to guarantee their increased participation in governance.

**New Article – 330A:** A new provision has been introduced to reserve one-third of the seats currently allocated to Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) for women in the Lok Sabha. Furthermore, women will be allocated one-third of the seats in the Lok Sabha that are filled through direct elections. The purpose of this action is to guarantee that women, particularly those from marginalized communities, are afforded a more significant and engaged role in the legislative processes of the country, thereby fostering a more equitable gender distribution in political representation.

**New Article – 332A:** This provision requires that each state legislative assembly have designated seats for women. In particular, female candidates will be allocated one-third of the seats that are designated for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs). Furthermore, women will be allocated one-third of the total number of seats to be filled through direct elections in the legislative assemblies. This endeavors to guarantee increased female representation at the state level, thereby fostering gender equality in regional governance.

**New Article – 334A:** The implementation of these reservations will begin once the delimitation process is completed, which will occur after the release of data from the first census. Following this, the reserved seats for women will rotate after each subsequent delimitation exercise. This system ensures that women have the opportunity to represent different constituencies over time, promoting broader participation and diversity in political representation.

The Women's Reservation Bill establishes a groundbreaking 33% quota for women in the Lok Sabha and all state legislative assemblies, with the objective of diminishing the long-standing obstacles to women's political engagement and fostering a more representative and diverse legislative process. The measure includes a clause that mandates the rotation of reserved seats among various constituencies during general elections. This ensures that the constituencies designated for women are periodically updated and that there is a fair distribution. A critical transition period for women to enhance their political influence will be provided by the reservation, which will remain in effect for 15 years following the Act's initiation.

The measure also maintains the principle of reserving seats for Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST), thereby guaranteeing that marginalized women are incorporated into the political process. Furthermore, in accordance with parliamentary law, the allocated seats for women will be rotated following each delimitation exercise. Nevertheless, it is crucial to acknowledge that the measure does not include any provisions for the reservation of seats for Other Backward Classes (OBCs).

**Addressing Gender Imbalance:** The reservation law aims to rectify the gender disparity in political representation by guaranteeing that a specific percentage of seats in legislative bodies are allocated to women. This initiative is vital for fostering a more equitable political environment, especially for women who often face systemic barriers in politics due to deeply rooted patriarchal structures. By guaranteeing women a more prominent presence, the bill aims to level the playing field and create opportunities for women to actively participate in decision-making processes.

#### **ENSURING WOMEN'S VOICES IN POLICY-MAKING:**

**Women's Issues Representation:** Women face unique challenges that demand specific attention in public policy, such as healthcare, education, safety, economic empowerment, and gender-based violence. By increasing the number of women in political roles, we ensure that these important issues are prioritized and addressed effectively in legislative processes. Greater female representation in politics brings diverse perspectives to the table, allowing for more comprehensive and inclusive solutions to the problems women face.

**Diverse Perspectives:** More inclusive and well-rounded legislation is the product of legislatures that reflect the diversity of their constituents. By incorporating women into the legislative process, the reservation bill will help ensure that laws reflect the needs and aspirations of all genders. This broader representation promotes more balanced policymaking, addressing issues from multiple viewpoints and fostering a more equitable society for everyone.

#### **IMPACT ON POLITICAL CHANGE:**

**Enhanced Female Representation:** The primary outcome of the bill will be a significant increase in women's representation within legislative bodies, helping to address the ongoing gender disparity. Currently, women make up around 14% of the Lok

Sabha, which is much lower than the global average of 25%. This legislation aims to amplify the voices of women in India’s legislative processes, ensuring that their perspectives are better reflected in the decision-making that shapes the country’s future.

**Empowerment of Women:** This bill acts as a powerful tool for empowering women, both in policy formulation and in inspiring them to take on leadership roles in politics. By ensuring that one-third of all seats are reserved for women, it aims to gradually challenge and transform traditional gender roles in Indian politics, fostering a more inclusive and equitable political environment. This change will help dismantle long-established gender barriers and inspire more women to take an active role in creating the future of the country.

**Heightened Political Awareness:** The bill is expected to inspire more women to actively engage in the political arena. As they see more women candidates contesting elections, female voters may feel more motivated to participate in the electoral process. This increased representation could also encourage political parties to nominate a greater number of women candidates, helping to create a more inclusive and balanced political environment. Ultimately, this shift could lead to a stronger presence of women in politics, influencing policies that better reflect the needs of all citizens.

#### **Social Change and Gender Equality:**

In the long run, this bill could play a pivotal role in advancing gender equality within Indian society. By putting more women in positions of decision-making, it holds the potential to drive meaningful social change, addressing issues that disproportionately affect women and ensuring their voices are heard in key policy decisions.

In 2023, the bill was finally enacted, marking a significant turning point in the political commitment to enhancing gender equality within India’s political framework. This significant achievement shows a rising commitment to establishing a more equal and inclusive political climate for all citizens.

#### **LOOKING FORWARD**

It is a big step forward that the Women Reservation Bill was signed into law, but its full potential will require continued advocacy and effective implementation strategies. As more women occupy seats in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies, A change could happen in the way policies are made, with more attention paid to

problems that directly affect women. But it’s important for political groups to choose women candidates based on their political skills and qualifications, not just because they’re women.

In conclusion, the Women Reservation Bill 2023 represents a crucial initiative with the potential to bring about substantial political change in India. The short-term effects might not happen right away, but the long-term effects could lead to a more open, diverse, and fair political system that helps everyone.

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## Shifting portrayal of women and their relationships in Bollywood Films

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### ABSTRACT

Bollywood films have always had a major influence on societal values and have played an important role in promoting Indian culture. It has not only created, but also communicated a shift in social transformation to a level that no other kind of visual art has ever achieved.


However, even when the Hindi film industry has undergone a paradigmatic technological shift in the way stories are told, the representation of women remains clichéd. Of the multitude of movies produced by Bollywood, a vast majority of them continue to be hero-centric with the female lead having limited screen space and in some cases just to provide gloss to the movie.

This paper attempts to lay out the discriminatory and unchanging roles given to women in Hindi cinema (also popularly known as Bollywood), despite the fact that there has been an abundance of talented female actors in each decade. Furthermore, the chapter will weave together the exemplary work displayed by women actors over the years whose work was widely recognized and at the same time did successfully at the box office. The depiction of strong woman characters have not only influenced to bring about a change in the traditional conservative prevailing mind-set of society but at the same time changed the lens through which the women were looked through.

**Keywords;** *Bollywood cinema, women characters, societal impact, change in mind-set*

Besides cricket, Hindi cinema is another important and popular medium that brings our country together. Bollywood films have had an enormous influence, and despite the burgeoning TV channels and OTT platforms, there is still a large number of regular moviegoers who head to theatres to experience the magic of films on the big screen. Cinema is designed to entertain, transporting the audience to an altogether different realm providing an escape from the everyday grind of existence.

Cinema is a widely consumed media that plays a critical part in shaping attitudes, defining images, and reinforcing prevalent cultural norms. The focus and trends of today's cinema have changed dramatically with

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the integration of cutting-edge foreign technology, but one fixation that has remained practically unchanged in Bollywood is the representation of women in particular.

## **INTRODUCTION:**

India has a rich illuminating history, with sagas of strong and powerful women from the mythological Draupadi to the present-day Kalpana Chawla, which are told to youngsters as part of the process of instilling the proper values. Patriarchy continues to dominate the thinking set to some level, and despite the worship of a profusion of deities, the respect and attitude toward women has not changed significantly. To be honest, women face a great deal of discrimination because it is considered that they are incapable of self-rule and cannot manage on their own. Bollywood effectively encourages this illusion, which is why, even today, 80 per cent of Hindi films have a heroine just to provide glamour and vitality to the narrative.

Films and cinema are the most widely used mass media for connecting with the public. Cinema's ability to communicate social realities, personal dreams, community concerns, and individual goals elevates it to a humanistic discourse with the power to affect our daily lives. (Jain & Rai, 2002). However, adopting media-related content can lead to a loss of identity, sense of autonomy, cultural background, nationality, and sexuality and divisions between 'us' and 'them' (Dines & Humez, 2003). Although the media, particularly television and movies, are frequently regarded as social mirrors, they frequently distort social reality.

Cinema can shape an individual's behaviour, perspective, and status in society. It includes all areas of society. Women's projection has a particular significance since they encounter a variety of challenges in society, including inferiority, identity development, psychological and economic dependence, denial of rights discrimination, harassment, and sexual exploitation (Dasgupta, 1996, p. 178). On the same note, women's representation and status within media power systems are long-standing issues in all societies. It might be argued that the media is critical in the construction of gender beliefs and gender socialization.

The internationalization and Hollywood's profound effect have had a profound effect on India as well, but only on exotic locations, usage of the most advanced techniques to create special effects, the most advanced musical gadgets, a commercial method for film advertisement and marketing, and fashion shifts in the

look of the characters, but the change in representation of the key characters played by women continues to be unchanged in most of our movies with a few deviations.

Efforts have been made in Indian cinema to change the limited portrayal of women and give them a more significant role. Women's roles in traditional Indian cinema differ from those in theatre, which critiques the construction of womanhood and femininity. Modern Bollywood films also deviate from traditional gender roles, especially in terms of sexuality (Virdi, 2003). Despite the long journey that Hindi cinema has taken to achieve its current zenith, there is still a long way to go in showing women as they are, devoid of preconceived stereotypes (Panda, 2018).

However, cinema is increasingly becoming an important medium for women empowerment by freeing women roles from being centrally tied to the male protagonist's romantic interest to having an independent existence. The trajectory has begun over the years and is being reflected in shifts in mainstream movies, such as *Bahubali* (2015), featuring strong female characters alongside their male counterparts.

## **INFLUENCE OF CINEMA**

The perception of watching film varies for each person, as does the influence that movie produces on the mind-set. Movies are a reflection of the society as well as have the potential to bring about change in it. The sway that cinema holds on all aspects of American culture; ideology, politics, gender, class, race and war (Ross, 2014). Movies (pornographic, violent, smoking or drinking, romantic, musical and comedy movies) have a strong influence on adolescent behaviour (Udofiya and Anyim, 2017). Movies are not only tools of entertainment but in contemporary times becoming agents of responsible portrayal of social and cultural transformations (Kumar and Sarkar, 2022).

Sartorial choices have been determined by movies (Singh and Gupta, 2014), the ultra-tight fitting churidar suits worn by Asha Parekh and Saira Banu in the 1960s, the purple embroidered sari worn by Madhuri Dixit in *Hum Aapke Hain Koun* (1995) to the T-shirt with Patiala salwar worn by Kareena Kapoor in *Jab We Met* (2007). Even the fringe haircut sported by Sadhana Shivdasani became popular as the eponymous Sadhana cut. The strong influence that movies have on the populace can be gauged from the popularity of Hindi movie dialogues in common parlance such as "Pushpa, I hate tears" from *Amar Prem* (1972) and "Mere paas Ma hai" from

Deewar (1975). “Me Madhuri Dixit BannaChahti Hun” (2003) was the manifestation of the aspiration of a common girl to be like her favourite actress.

Rao (1989) finds films to be “calculated blend of reality and fantasy that holds a mirror to society but filters the reflected image.” They are also being recognised as invaluable historical document as they are strong mediums of social significance. The typical audience enjoys fantasy or intimidating characters, but interacts with or sympathizes with characters who elicit emotions akin to those of the average person. By and large, the producer is more concerned with the male counterpart, the HERO, who is expected to earn revenue at the film office. The HEROINE’S role and presence are normally to bring in the glamour and a de-stressing moment through thematic songs, as well as to add the romance element to the image. The female protagonist’s appearance changes with the latest fashion, as demonstrated by her costumes, hairdos, language, and so on, but there are very few films that have been tailored to bring out her true spunk and character.

Films are portraying changes in society with regards to the ideas of love and marriage, live in relationships, choice of career options, attitude, mental and physical health, ethics and belief system. Kya Kehna (2000), Salaam Namaste (2005), Pink (2016), DearZindagi (2016), Mimi (2021) were some of the female centric mainstream Bollywood movies which brought important social and cultural changes to the forefront.

Verma and Ansari (2024) have traced the way women have been depicted in Bollywood movies. A lot of female characters were depicted as epitomes of sacrifice with many a reference to Nirupa Roy’s roles who has been termed as “queen of misery”. However, her role in Deewar (1975) where she chooses to be with her poor but righteous son, meanwhile reprimanding the other son, Vijay, who is coercing her to choose a life of luxury with him has not been appreciated enough. In a similar vein, Nargis’s role in Mother India (1957) who single-handedly fought against all obstacles to bring up her two sons and did not hesitate to kill her own son when he tried to dishonour another woman has been hailed as a trailblazer.

There have been a slew of movies which show women with agency such as Mirch Masala (1986), Drishti (1990), Rudaali (1993) and Daman (2001) among others which have been side-lined as art films. In the earlier movies, there was a direct contrast between the good

and bad woman as they depicted the female characters as long-suffering mothers, wives, and love interests on the ‘correct’ road, as opposed to the ‘modern’ woman who goes clubbing, drinks, and expresses her desire for the hero openly. These preconceived ideas were thoroughly examined in Nandkumar’s thesis (2011).

Movie scenes which objectify women are found to significantly influence the way people, especially men, perceive women.”Fevicol se”, “chiknichameli” and “Sheila kijawani” saw mainstream Bollywood actresses such as KareenaKapoor and Katrina Kaif grooving to item numbers which was earlier a niche area for “item girls” such as RakhiSawant (Mohabbat he mirchi) and MalaikaArora (Munnibadnaamhui). When men watch movies objectifying women they perceive women’s sexual desires to be secondary to men and that women derive pleasure from being raped. It increases the likelihood of the men acting as perpetrators (Milburn, Mather and Conrad, 2000). Koch and Silberman (1982) discuss and critique voyeurism, identification and transference in great detail to understand why women watch movies.

### **FAR AND BETWEEN: STRONG ROLES OF WOMEN IN BOLLYWOOD MOVIES**

There was an obvious demarcation between characteristics of good and bad women, with the good woman being sacrificial, pure, and virginal, and the evil woman being contemporary, uncontrolled, and self-centered. Butalia contends that films that look at a woman as a human being in her own right are few and far between. In majority of the movies, women are shown as helpless victims because of a preconceived notion of the physicality of strength. In majority of the movies, the women characters are projected as sex objects (Butalia, 1984).

On the contrary, they are taking control of the situation. In 1980, BR Chopra ‘s Insaaf KaTarazu (Scales of Justice), highlighted the challenges of character assassination and miscarriage of justice that a female rape victim experiences when seeking justice for herself. She goes on to kill the rapist after he rapes her sister with impunity. In contrast, Rekha in Jeevan Dhara (1982) takes on all of the family’s responsibilities and sacrifices her wants in the face of hardships. Women characters in movies are no longer willing to suffer and wait for someone to rescue them. Khoon Bhari Maang (1988), Anjaam (1994), Ek HasinaThi (2004), Mom (2017), Maatr (2017) show the female protagonist



transforming into anarchic lawless vengeful people when they were wronged.

Kahaani (2012), Raazi (2018) and Black (2005) subvert the images of the pregnant, the newly wedded bride in a new home and a visually impaired girl respectively which are generally caricatures of the woman in her most vulnerable position to take on the defined villains in their lives and finish the job at hand.

The feisty “sikhni of bhatinda” Geet from Jab We Met (2007) ran away from home because she wanted to live life on her own terms, and her mistakes and regrets should be hers alone, not someone else’s. The film did not portray her as a fallen woman because she fled. Chandramukhi (played by Kalki Koechlin) of Dev D (2009) is a student by the day and a sex worker by night but she is not hapless. She is very much in control just like Paro (played by Mahie Gill) who though very much in love with Dev does not put up with the humiliation and chooses to move on with a man who respects her. They play real women in real world who make their choices and live them and change according to situations.

The gender dynamics in the institution of marriage was questioned in Thappad (2020), which depicted the story of Amrita, whose seemingly perfect life is shattered when her husband slaps her once at a party, and that one slap in public causes her to reconsider her relationship and what it stands for. Damini (1993), Mrityudand (1997), Lajja (2001), Daman (2001), and Pink (2016) brought gender injustice to the forefront by depicting strong female characters who fought against the patriarchal discrimination.

In the epic film Sahib Bibi Aur Ghulam (1962), Meenakumari’s character is undoubtedly a path breaking representation of a woman who wanted her husband to stay at home with her and went to any length to attract him, even drinking herself to self-destruction. The song “Na ja o saian”, she boldly demands sexual fulfillment from her husband, an audacious move at that time and age. Seema in Chetana (1970), Paro in Dev D (2009), Veronica in Cocktail (2012), and the characters in Lipstick under My Burkha (2016) are the female protagonists who unapologetically own up their sexuality and do not hold back their carnal desires. In earlier movies, the vamps, portrayed by Bindu, Helen and Nadira were allowed to be provocative and maleficent to contrast with the innocent and passive beneficent Indian woman.

Action scenes in Hindi movies continue to be a male bastion. Rekha and Hema Malini were the yester year actresses who did action sequences in a few movies such as Desh Ke Dushman (1989) and in Phool Bane Angarey (1991). Roma in Don (1978, 2006) was a woman of action. In Mardaani (2014) and its sequel in 2019, very uncommon female-led action films have the dynamic SP Shivani Roy, played aptly by Rani Mukherji, a policewoman on a mission to unravel a child-trafficking cartel, and in the second part brings to justice a psychopath. JaiGangaajal (2016) an Indian crime drama film directed by Prakash Jha, a follow-up to the 2003 crime film Gangaajal and stars Priyanka Chopra who played a capable cop battling prejudices in small town India. In these movies, the female protagonist is mostly a cop who fights injustices in a highly contextualized environment and the action scenes are never gory. In contrast, movies like Pushpa (2021) and Kill (2023) feature grisly, brutal and blood spattered scenes catering to a predominantly young male audience.

Biopics on women who have marked their presence in society have also seen a rise in the recent past. Umrao Jaan (1980) was a milestone in Hindi cinema as well as in Rekha’s career who played the titular character impeccably. Bandit Queen (1994), Godmother (1999), Mary Kom (2014), No One Killed Jessica (2011), Manikarnika: The Queen of Jhansi (2019), Chhapaak (2020), Gangubai Kathiawadi (2022) are some of them. In the same genre, Padmaavat (2018) is problematic because the Rajput queen chooses to self-immolate herself (the practice of jauhar) to uphold the honour of her community guided by the patriarchal mindset that a man’s honour is paramount and is more important than even the life of a woman (Fitria, 2023; Hannula, 2020).

However, this contrasting black and white division is slowly merging with grey shades of women being depicted more and more in Hindi cinema. Kishore (2014) also finds that the “lead actress can be actively interpreted as the merger of the classic heroine and vamp characters.”

In the age of male villains, the vamps performed by lead heroines have different colors and are still remembered by moviegoers. Simi Grewal, famed for her grace and elegance, played the critically lauded role of Kamini Verma, the murderous wife from a previous life, which earned her a Filmfare nomination for Karz (1980). The suspense film is remembered by audiences as one of the best films based on incarnation, lyrical

melodies, and Simi Grewal. In Gupt (1997), Kajol played a psychopathic killer, despite her sweet girl next door persona. Urmila Matondkar's performance in *Pyaar Tune Kya Kiya* (2001) as a fervent, envious mistress who eventually becomes an attacker after countless charming girl next door roles was nothing short of brilliant. In *Aitraaz* (2004), Priyanka Chopra played a dominating boss who tries to seduce her subordinate, one of the first movies where a powerful woman was shown exploiting her subordinate for sex.

In the horror genre, Ramsay movies were the staple diet for a long time where women were fetishized as both victim and the monster. A feminist tone in the supernatural was introduced in *Stree* (2018) and *Bulbul* (2020) where instead of a white saree clad female ghost who is controlled by an evil male 'tantrik' who terrorizes the people who have antagonized the tantric, we have a young woman in all riches and finery who terrorizes the men who perpetuate violence against women.

The shift toward women-centered roles began slowly but was evident in every decade of cinema. The simple fact is that society was resistant to change due to an enduring patriarchal ethos.

### **DEPICTION OF WOMEN CONNECTIONS IN MOVIES**

Evolution of roles played by women has gradually become more thought provoking and has substance. In the latest release of 2023, *Salaar: Part 1 - Ceasefire*, an Indian Telugu-language epic action thriller, Sriya Reddy played the bad part, and looking stunning, dangerous, and beautiful, with audiences admiring her appearance more than the leading lady toppling the prevailing mindset that only the positive characters can look attractive and steal the limelight.

A majority of the mainstream (masala) movies depicts the woman as someone whose only relevance in the movie is because of the romantic interest that the male protagonist has in her. Her existence is secondary to the male protagonist and her desires and ambitions do not merit independent essence. She is shown to the audience through the hero's eyes (Sharma, 2014). Even her relationships are non-existent; the only primary relationship in her life is that which she has with the central male protagonist which is strictly romantic. In some movies, the brother-sister bond has been explored as in *Kaajal* (1965) even though romance is the main thing. A few movies have also shown a beautiful father-daughter bond, albeit always on a secondary plane, on the fringes of the main romantic theme.

In contrast, romance is on the fringes of the bickering father-daughter duo in *Piku* and the competing mother-daughter in *Neel Batte Sannata* (2015). When her fiancé refuses to go ahead with the wedding, Rani of Queen (2013) emboldened by her sassy Dadi embarks on a journey of self-discovery by going on her honeymoon tour alone. The complexities of a mother daughter relationship have been the focal point for *Tribhanga* (2021) and *Darlings* (2022).

For years, the sister in Bollywood films has been the most helpless character, constantly abused or raped after which she commits suicide, leaving her powerful brother to revenge her murder. However, there have been a few films that have highlighted a unique sibling bond and have been well received by audiences. In the period of clichéd movies, *Hare Rama Hare Krishna* (1971) showed a different brother-sister relationship and highlighted that love between siblings withstands even when their parents separate. Dev Anand embarks on an emotional journey to find his separated sister Zeenat Aman, who is mired in substance abuse. The film broke the monotony of our dreary flicks and was ahead of its time. 'Ek hazaron mein meri behnahai' is still a popular bhai-behen song. *Dhanak* (2015) explores sibling love where a responsible elder sister in her teens embarks on a journey through the desert of Rajasthan so that she can help her visually impaired brother reach the avenue for an eye operation. Similar themes have been delivered into in *Jigra* (2024) and *Do Patti* (2024).

Another outstanding film starring two tremendously gifted performers, Rakhee Gulzar and Rekha, depicted the fight between two sisters' emotions as a result of unfortunate circumstances in *Basera*. Rakhee's realization of life after 14 years of absence, along with the intuition that something is amiss, drives her to pretend to be insane and return to the mental asylum so that others, particularly her sister, can continue to live normally. This ground breaking picture was developed in 1981 with a fresh mind set, focusing on the portrayal of woman with substance. In a similar vein, Rekha in *Jhuthi* (1985) plays the main protagonist for whom romance takes a backseat when her sibling's honour is at stake.

Aditi in *Astititva* (2000), portrayed to the hilt by Tabu, a two-time national award winner, discussed the male ego and the predicament of women in society today, who are responsible to everyone, including their children. Shamed, deserted, and side-lined by her husband and son, Aditi's goes on a journey of self-

discovery, leaving behind her family and the highlight of the movie was that her would-be daughter-in-law, helps her to arrive at a decision, breaking her relationship with her boyfriend, Aditi's son.

A beautiful friendship between the women was depicted in *Dor* (2006) and *Cocktail* (2012) where the bond of the women is tested over the man they love. *Fashion* (2008) depicts the journey of a small town girl who strives to reach the pinnacle of success and is betrayed by the man and the system surrounding the fashion industry when she refuses to play by their rules. The film is noteworthy in showing how the female protagonist rises again from the nadir with the help of other women friends whom she had riled up on her way down.

Films are no longer afraid of showing women in "bad" light. The effervescent and genteel Deepti Naval with a girl-next-door image was quite a revelation in *NH 10* (2015) as the unassuming and kind-looking Ammaji, the architect of the nightmare that Meera (the female protagonist) finds herself in. Ammaji, the village sarpanch, has orchestrated the killing of her own daughter by a gang of violent men headed by her son because she defied the village norms by loving outside her caste. She doesn't hesitate to kill Meera who is a witness to the killing who valiantly defends herself. The pitching of the two women who are on opposite sides of the patriarchal system is a strong indication of the brave new face of mainstream Hindi cinema which does not hesitate to hold up a mirror to the gender dynamics where women themselves are upholders of the patriarchy. Similarly, the dominating Dina Pathak locks horns with the chaotic Rekha in a family drama in *Khubsoorat* (1980) where the highlight of the movie was not the romance but the relationship dynamics between the two women.

Alizeh in *Ae Dil He Mushkil* (2016) reprimands the male protagonist when he cannot bear the cold and collapses on the snow all the while wearing a jacket whereas she is in a chiffon sari grooving to a song. This scene is a critique of the scores of Hindi movie scenes where the woman has no warm clothing in cold environments and is dancing happily in just sari and heels around the hero who is standing and posing in warm clothes. In this movie, a platonic relationship was celebrated between the female and male protagonists. In contrast, *Fire* (1996) openly addressed homosexual relationships between the characters of Shabana Azmi and Nandita Das. There was a lot of controversy after its debut, but critics and

spectators praised the explicit portrayal of a homosexual relationship as fearless, turbulent, and innovative.

However, this pattern has been slowly shifting over the years, and women have broken the monotony and demonstrated time and again that if given the correct role, they can perform admirably and garner accolades as well as break box office records. Many films in which women play bold and strong roles have not performed well commercially but have been receiving rave comments and full appreciation from all sectors.

The characters, which challenge the stereotype that women are typecast in Hindi films, were previously performed by women who never played the female protagonist. Mainstream actresses previously failed to challenge the stereotype of the "sabyabharatiyanari" image because the general audience rejected them, as is evident with the extremely gifted Rehana Sultan. As a result, a few women were cast in these parts, becoming clichés of "bad modern women". However, times have changed, and grey and negative roles are now being played by mainstream actresses and accepted by the public.

Today's modern woman balances her life between work and family, but many want to stay at home to care for the duty, which does not mean that she should be less valued. To depict this tug of war between her and her position in the family, an independent woman character was shown in the film

## CONCLUSION

The mainstream media has long been seen as society's watchdog, and this tradition imposes a moral obligation on them to reflect on the direct the process of social transformation. However, due to many difficulties, mass media has become the exclusive commercial channel in modern India, failing to reflect everybody's social problems or objectives, particularly women's challenges. As a result, the representation of women in Indian media, whether in films, television shows, visual advertising, or newspapers and magazines, has sparked widespread concern among social researchers and scholars. Today's electronic and print media frequently portray women as commodities, sex objects, or victims (Maqbool, 2022).

Men control Bollywood movies, as they do in every other sphere, but it's time that it should stop staying male-centric. The central character is always played by a male character as a lead who is the protector of



humankind, and almost a super hero, who can save his mother, sister, or girl friend from the villain prison unhurt after beating about hundred armed goons without backup. The heroine has an insignificant part to play, some dialogues to mouth, sing a romantic song getting drenched in the rain or in snow filled mountains providing the romance to the movie with the hero and break the monotony of fight sequences songs, and in the end of the film and have a coy smile on her face since she is included in the family group photo at the end of the film.

Cinema is a reflection of society as well as a harbinger of change. Women's representation in movies has changed dramatically. Previously, women were viewed as flag bearers of virtue, which was wearing traditional clothes like saris or salwars and not questioning the status quo. It was a very black and white world. Cigarette smoking, drinking, going to the club, and having fun with male friends were all considered vices, and women who engaged in those activities were obviously not righteous women.

Views were so ingrained that actresses who desired to play mainstream heroes were either not offered these roles, did not accept them, or were discouraged from playing characters with these flaws. These were portrayed by a small number of actresses, who were then typecast in these conventional negative parts throughout their careers. or relegated to performing them exclusively. Even then, women characters were depicted to have influence over their lives, though these films were few in number.

However, these roles that show reality rather than a specific manner of presenting women are now seen as meaty roles that mainstream actors are gradually taking on. Women are now writing roles that portray women as they are rather than what they should be, living up to a specific standard, as was the custom in the early decades when men wrote women's roles. The society is also valuing the flesh and bone women who are seen around us. Even today, glamour is a vital element of an actress's presence but more and more real-life are manoeuvring their lives in the direction they desire, thus becoming agents of change and at the same time are appreciated by the society.

Actresses depicting small town girls with minimal make up, going about their lives and taking decisions have seen a great boost to their popularity indicating that the society is now more acceptable of real time women who are working hard to provide for their families coexisting

with the fantastic world where women dance to the music in chiffon saris in the snow covered mountains being coveted by their heroes.

The women are shown as complete personalities in their own right, with independent lives outside of the romance. They are doctors, engineers, architects, aviators, cops, spies, unemployed, maids, sex workers, and drug addicts. These women are dedicated to their careers, and are fighting against all odds to live a life of dignity and respect. The border between good and evil is fading away, and the women in movies are compelling society to confront hard realities. When the world is talking about gender equality, it's encouraging to see that not only Bollywood, but film as a whole, is gradually accepting that if given the opportunity, a woman can portray any character with the same kind of talent, conviction, and potential.

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The authors declare no competing interests.

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## Gender Sensitization & Participatory Democracy among Tribals: A Study of Kalingnagar Industrial Complex of Jajpur District

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### ABSTRACT

**Background** Gender sensitization is the process of creating awareness regarding gender equality issues and modifying the behaviour and views that people hold about themselves and other genders. Participatory democracy is a form of government in which all citizens participate equally irrespective of class creed and sex. The present study has been carried out in Kalinga Nagar, Jajpur district of Odisha and attempt has been made to collect the information from displaced women and their participation in politics.


**Methods** The study is definitely having a strong empirical bias. The scientific method has been followed to design the whole content of the study. Different testing methods for identifying different sets of relationship among the variables have also been executed. The study is both explanatory and experimental. Data have been collected so far through schedules participant observational method and focus group discussion and a thorough scrutiny of the so far assembled data has been made.

**Results** The tribal people are physically and mentally not sufficient to compete with the other nontribal people in the society. Deprivation is a stage of life, which contributes only violation of someone's right. Tribal women are getting less opportunity to participate in the politics, due to displaced from own land.

**Conclusion** As the research project intended to study Gender Sensitization & Participatory Democracy of resettlement and rehabilitation of displaced women, it has been decided to give coverage to the women from pre-displacement and post displacement period. The post displacement scenarios have shown a very distressing picture of socio-political harmony. The affected people are suffering from multiple plight which are necessary to address.

What is already known?

- The impact of displacement is devastating particularly on women.

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- It is a very complex issue with far reaching consequences.
- It is a process which, women get less opportunity in politics.
- Women have to face tough challenges from the opponent.

What this article adds?

- Women became vulnerable while losing cultural identity and traditional knowledge.
- Women having no alternative, compels to face violence, discrimination, exploitation uncertain future in their new environment.
- Due to breakdown of the traditional protection mechanism, displaced women are at a higher risk of experiencing gender-based violence.
- Tribal women are unable to justify their political rights.

**Keywords :** *Gender, Displacement, Resettlement, Participatory Democracy, Tribal Women*

## INTRODUCTION :

Gender sensitization is the ongoing process of raising awareness about gender inequality and discrimination, ultimately aiming to create a society where everyone has equal opportunities and experiences respect, regardless of their gender identity. It's about dismantling the walls built by stereotypes and biases that limit people's potential based on their gender. Gender sensitization goes beyond surface-level ideas of equality between men and women. It acknowledges the spectrum of gender identities and expressions that exist, and the importance of respecting them. We all have unconscious biases, formed through societal norms and upbringing. Gender sensitization helps us recognize these biases in ourselves and others. Traditional gender roles often dictate what behaviours, activities, and even professions are appropriate for men and women. This not only limits individual choices but also reinforces stereotypes. Gender sensitization encourages us to question these roles and create a more flexible society. The benefits of a gender-sensitive society extend far beyond creating a fairer playing field. When everyone has the opportunity to pursue their goals and interests freely, it unleashes a broader range of talents and perspectives that benefit society as a whole. Gender stereotypes can be harmful

to everyone. For example, the pressure on men to suppress emotions can negatively impact their mental health. Conversely, the expectation for women to be solely responsible for childcare can lead to burnout. Gender sensitization fosters a more supportive environment where everyone can express themselves authentically and access the resources they need to thrive. When there's less discrimination and everyone has the chance to contribute their full potential, society as a whole prospers. It leads to a more just legal system, a more innovative workforce, and a more vibrant and inclusive culture.

Gender sensitization is a continuous journey, but through ongoing efforts to educate, challenge biases, and celebrate diversity, we can move towards a future where everyone has the freedom to be themselves and reach their full potential. But women participation in the democratic process is vital for gender equality. However Participatory democracy is a system of governance that strives to bridge the gap between direct and representative democracy. While a traditional direct democracy would have every citizen voting on every issue, which becomes impractical in larger societies, participatory democracy looks to empower citizens beyond simply picking their representatives. Active Citizen Engagement including women is the cornerstone of participatory democracy. Citizens have opportunities to directly participate in shaping policy and legislation, not just through electing officials. This can take many forms, from citizen assemblies to online forums where people can discuss, debate, and propose ideas. In addition to by incorporating citizen input, the idea is to create a more informed and representative decision-making process. Citizens with firsthand knowledge of the issues at hand can provide valuable perspectives that elected officials might not otherwise consider. When citizens feel they have a stake in the decisions that affect their lives, it fosters a greater sense of trust and legitimacy in the government. This can lead to higher rates of civic engagement and a more stable political system.

Participatory democracy is an evolving concept that offers an alternative to the limitations of purely representative systems. It can lead to more informed decision-making, increased civic engagement, and a stronger sense of ownership among citizens over the direction of their communities and country. Participatory Democracy is the essence of the Tribal Communities. Tribal societies often have a strong foundation for participatory democracy due to their traditional

emphasis on consensus-based decision making and community involvement. Tribal communities frequently have well-established systems for collective decision-making through village councils or elder deliberations. Participatory democracy can build upon these existing structures, fostering a sense of continuity and empowering traditional leadership. Tribal communities possess a deep understanding of their environment and needs. Participatory mechanisms can ensure their voices are heard in matters concerning resource management, development projects, and land use. Moreover, by encouraging participation from all community members, participatory democracy can strengthen social bonds and promote a sense of shared responsibility for the well-being of the tribe. The village assemblies in India, mandated by the constitution, can be a powerful tool for tribal participation in local governance. Here, tribals can discuss issues, voice concerns, and influence decisions related to their villages. In addition to, Projects where tribal communities are directly involved in managing their forests through decision-making processes exemplify participatory democracy in action. This fosters sustainable practices and protects tribal rights.

#### **TRIBAL WOMEN AND DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION:**

Tribal women have historically been marginalized from political participation, facing a multitude of challenges that stem from social, cultural, and economic factors. However, there has been a growing movement in recent decades to increase their representation and voice in decision-making processes. In no country do men and women have equal social, economic and legal rights. Women still possess less of a range of productive resources, including land, education, and financial resources (World Bank:2000). The gender gap is a major challenge for power distribution and representation. It also contributes to inequality, poverty, unemployment, illness, deprivation and adverse impact on life. There is a marked “invisibility” of women’s lives and their problem in tribal ethnographies, (Mehrotra:2008:107) and they are viewed as either active participants in conservation of their cultural or helpless victims of forces of globalisation, cultural change and modernisation. They have to acquire a legal and social status as a category by themselves. In tribal community gender relationships were seen as relatively egalitarian.

Traditionally tribal women are enjoying better opportunity compared to their male counterparts in

communities. Tribal women having greater economic independence and land rights as well as play a significant role in the domestic economy. But industrialisation and other development projects are the major factors due to which tribal people have been gradually deprived of their habitat and subsistence economy. Migration to other areas in search of work opportunities make them exposed to economic and physical exploitation. Hinduization and Christianization are affecting the value system of tribals. These new cultural values are seen to be putting more restrictions on women in terms of choice of mate/spouse, marriage practices and transition from bride price to dowry and withdrawal of women from work in quest of acquisition of status (Mehrotra: 2008:110)

#### **CHALLENGES FACED BY TRIBAL WOMEN IN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION:**

- Traditional gender roles: In many tribal communities, traditional gender roles often confine women to domestic spheres, limiting their opportunities to engage in public life and politics.
- Lack of education and awareness: Limited access to education and information can hinder tribal women’s understanding of political processes and their rights to participate.
- Socio-economic disadvantage: Tribal communities often face higher levels of poverty and social exclusion, which can further marginalize women and limit their access to resources and opportunities needed for political participation.
- Discrimination and violence: Tribal women may be subjected to discrimination and violence, both within their communities and in the wider political sphere, which can create a hostile environment for their participation.

#### **TRIBAL WOMEN OF KALINGNAGAR INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX:**

The gender-based division of labour dictates the tribal women of Kalingnagar Industrial Complex of Jajpur District, to play their role as care-taker of the families. They have to collect water, fuel for cooking and to prepare food for the family. They suffer most due to lack of infrastructural facilities and basic amenities of life in the settlement colonies. Due to insufficient water-pots or tube-wells, they have to wait for hours together only to collect few pots of water. They have to walk a long distance to collect fire-woods. The restricted and

compact areas become unattractive due to their neglect of socio-cultural aspects of tribal life. Tribal women do not find a free land for their social and religious congregations and for their dance. Studies found that due to poverty and malnutrition, women are unable to think about their political rights. Only trying to gather the bread and butter in the newly resettlement and rehabilitation colony. The nontribal people and landlords of that locality hardly allows the innocent tribal women to participate in the electoral process. Though the reservation system provides opportunities a few women to participate in the local self-government and Panchayat election, usually the male member of the taking decision all decisions.

It is evidenced from the analysis of the field data collected from the household survey of the oustee families of the Kalinga Nagar Industrial Complex through a random sampling that majority of the women belonging to Schedule Tribe and others are Schedule Caste and some of them belongs to General Caste. However, when the educational level of persons in the oustee households is analyzed, it indeed gives a discouraging picture of the quality of human capital which indicates socio-economic vulnerability and susceptibility to poverty and livelihood insecurity of the oustees. It has been found that around 85 per cent of the tribal women excluding 0-6 age group population are illiterate. Moreover, those who are literate are only literates from the official record with less than 10 years of formal school education. Most of them only can write their names. Among the oustee families very rarely women have been qualified upto graduation degree. It is because of the low level of education, very few among the earning members of the oustee families at present get employed in the formal and organized sector economic activities. Most of the women are employed as class IV group employees in the industries. In the other hand they are deprived of the agricultural products. Their land in rehabilitated areas is too small to cultivate any crops as result of which for all such family's agriculture is no longer a major source of livelihood. Some other people do small and micro business and others have taken up self-employed type informal sector services such selling formatted country liquor (Handia), collection of minor forest products like honey, kendu leaves etc. The poor economic condition of the tribal people contributes the less participation in the politics.

#### **LIFE AFTER DISPLACEMENT:**

Displacing the tribal people from their homeland the government and company authorities heave a sigh of relief that the displacement work is over

and they would get a better chance to construct industries in this locality. But the real suffering comes to the life of displaced people in general and women in particular in the rehabilitation colonies. With a limited locality they have to adjust forever which is against their way of life. Generally tribal people prefer to moves freely in a large peripheral and lead their livelihood. But in rehabilitation colony they became exhausted with the so called modern confined and limited way of life.

The displaced persons who have shifted out from the affected villages and either moved to the resettlement colonies or are in the process of constructing their houses in the colonies expressed their utter dissatisfaction over the inadequate space for burial of the deads and lack of provision of grazing land in the colonies made by the company. Most of the displaced persons asked for larger area for burial purpose and a big patch of land close to the rehabilitation colonies for use as grazing land. In fact, providing space for grazing land in the Rehabilitation colonies is a mandatory provision and it was reported by all the displaced persons that the demands for providing space for Grazing Land and adequate space for burial purpose is a dire necessity in the project sponsored colonies for the restoration of their earlier pattern. While making field study, the researcher found that no tribal women come out to interact primarily due to lack of exposure. Very few of them open their door but hesitated to share their experiences. Therefore, data has been collected from only those women who finally agree to share their experiences of displacement and resettlement.

#### **KAMALI MUNDA:**

Kamali Munda at the age of fifty-five is staying in the Gobarghati Colony. She is displaced from the village Madha Pur, Khurunt Panchayat, by Nilachallspat Ltd. She has lost her husband in the prime time of her life. She has only one son and two daughters. Her son is the only earning member of her family. The authorities provided compensation money and land in Gobarghati colony, which is inadequate to build a house. Now she is staying in a thatched house in her land. They are unable to maintain privacy in a single room. In her room only few utensils and certain cooking materials are found. When asked about her present state of living, she openly condemned this life and urged the authorities to settle them in the colony. She has been cut off of all relationship with her other relatives due to displacement. Moreover, she complained that the authorities are not providing food stuff as promised to them. The life in



transit camp being confined, they are only remembering free tribal life of the past. She is unable to describe about the political participation. She never visited any political representative, only reminded the election period, while large number of people gathered in a same place.

#### **HARA JAMUDA:**

Thirty-seven years old Hara Jamuda has been displaced from the village Chandia. At present, she is working as Group IV employee in the Gobarghati government school. She has lost her husband AtiJamuda in the tribal agitation of 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2006. He was killed by police firing while opposing the acquisition of land for the TATA Steel. Hara is the only earning member of her family as her parents-in-laws are so old to do any work. At the same time, she has the responsibilities of two daughters and two sons. At present, she is earning Rs. 12000/- per month. It is somehow enough to maintain a simple tribal life. But she is feeling helpless with the loss of her husband. For her, life is only full of struggles and she is deprived of communitarian tribal way of living. Now Hara does not see any future for her family and being an illiterate lady she reconciles to her fate. She does not dream, unlike others, to get a job for her son and daughter in the steel plant, nor any miracle to rescue the family from its present predicaments.

#### **TULASHI BAWEA:**

Tulashi Bewea is now 70 years old. She is resettled in Trijanga colony coming from village of Bangargadia. In Bangargadia she was having a good life. She lost her husband and her only son in an accident. She has not yet received her pata of 10 decimal homestead land in the resettlement colony and leads a very miserable life in transit camp, with very few aluminum utensils and other household belongings. She feels lonely being detached from her kith and kin. She is getting only old age pension (Rs300/) per month. The living condition of Tulashi is miserable and she is compelled to lead a life in scarcity. Tualish virtually started weeping when, asked about her previous land holdings and living condition before being shifted to the Trijanga resettlement colony. This illiterate lady has been compelled to live solitary life of sufferings and destitute. She admitted that, she never cast her vote in the election, but now she understand few things about the politics, while representatives visit their displacement colony.

#### **CONCLUSION & SUGGESTIONS:**

Involuntary resettlement experience suggests that its impact on tribal people in general and tribal women in particular has become disastrous. Development creates both winners and losers, but it is the tribal women who invariable end up as losers in comparison with their male counterparts. In the resettlement colonies of Kalinga Nagar, the data collected by the researcher prove that majority of the tribal women have ended with lower incomes, less work opportunities, inferior housing and less access to the resources of the commons such as fuel wood, worse nutrition and physical and mental health. The state of affairs or the paradigm of rehabilitation and resettlement policy could change drastically only with the adoption of human rights approach into developmental endeavours. It would not only have effects on the structure of the economy, but also influence societal growth on the basis of equality and justice. The economic hardship restricts tribal women to participate in the democratic process. As a result, tribal women are unable to participate in the mainstream democratic process. The need of hour is, increased participation of tribal women in politics is crucial for ensuring that their voices are heard and their needs are addressed in decision-making processes. It is also essential for promoting gender equality and social justice within tribal communities. Overall, participatory democracy holds immense potential for empowering tribal communities and ensuring their voices are heard in matters that affect their lives. However, careful consideration needs to be given to addressing existing inequalities and ensuring inclusive participation for all tribal members. The government should adopt constitutional provisions and legal frameworks to reserve seats for women in local government bodies, specifically for tribal women. This has led to an increase in the number of tribal women holding elected positions. At the same time take affirmative action programs to encourage the participation of tribal women in politics and take stringent action, those people are involved in the hijacking the power of the women. These programs may include capacity-building workshops, leadership training, and financial support for campaigns. Civil society organizations should play a crucial role in raising awareness about the importance of tribal women's political participation and mobilizing them to participate in the electoral process. Integrating gender equality concepts into school curriculums from a young age is crucial. This can involve discussions on gender stereotypes, celebrating diverse role models, and

fostering an environment of mutual respect. Creating open dialogues about gender issues and promoting positive narratives through public awareness campaigns can significantly shift social attitudes. This can involve featuring diverse representations in media, showcasing successful women and men in non-traditional roles, and highlighting the importance of gender equality. Individuals also play a critical role, advocating for equal opportunities, we can all contribute to a more gender-sensitive world.

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## Understanding the Perception Behind the Creation of 'Sacred Spaces' in the Profane World

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### ABSTRACT

Sociologists in many ways have tried to understand religion in terms of sacred and profane as it tries to be more inclusive than just limiting our understanding of religion to God and other supernatural elements. Sacred and profane space in reality may present in the same place where one will take precedence over the other. The idea of modernization advocates for a secular outlook in terms of religious practices, belief and faith. Moreover, a space may become a sacred place temporarily to accommodate a sacred activity even when the profane present. Therefore in this way the sacred spaces become practicality based for life oriented outcomes. This paper explores the reality of the sacred and the profane. While taking into consideration how the people traveling in the metro create a sacred space amid a profane.

**Keywords:** *Sacred, profane, religion, space.*

### INTRODUCTION:

There is no one way of understanding what religion is; it is present in every known society in some form or the other. Social thinkers since times immemorial have been trying to understand what religion is, however it has always been difficult to come up with a broad definition of religion such that it is inclusive of everything that is understood as a religious belief or practice.

Religion is also understood by differentiating it from magic and science. Bronislaw Malinowski in his work, '*Magic, science, religion and other essays*' discusses about various religious ceremonies, and their functions. Ceremonies such as, initiation, marriage, birth, death etc. also point out at the idea of belief in spirit that indicates towards the very fact that there is belief in new life as well among the primitive population of Trobriand Island. Also, when we talk about magic and religion then if magic is made up of beliefs and

rites where what magician is to magic, the priest is to religion. And it has been argued that the line between magic and religion is one which is impossible to draw in many primitive societies.

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Religion is said to be a kind of cultural system of designated behaviors and practices, morals, worldviews, texts, sanctified places, ethics, prophecies or organizations that relates humanity to the supernatural or what we called spiritual entities. There have been a wide range of studies particularly on religion as mentioned in the above discussion, the study of religion comprises a variety of academic disciplines which includes theology, comparative religion etc. the various theories of religion which offers various explanations for the origins and functioning of religion.

One of the finest sociological study done on religion is by *Emile Durkheim* in his book '*Elementary forms of religious life*' where he defined religion as 'a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden - beliefs and practices which unite into a single moral community called a church'. According to Durkheim two of the essentials that build a religion are beliefs and rituals where rituals being the visible manifestation of beliefs. He tries to understand religion through the function that it performs in the society. Such an examination is done from the functionalist perspective where the role of religion is evaluated in terms of meeting the needs of society such as maintaining social solidarity, integration, and building value consensus. Such an approach however fails to critically evaluate the dysfunctional effects of religion where it acts as a disruptive force. If we look at anthropological explanation of religion then according to Clifford Geertz religion as a "system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic".

*The Marxist perspective* on religion looks at religion as the '*opium of the masses*'. It is nothing but an ally of the oppressing group to dull the pain of the oppressed group by promising them eternal bliss in life after death or by showing that suffering is a punishment from God. Religion also plays a very important role in acting as a mechanism of social control. *By providing false hope in hopeless situations, it prevents people from thinking about their actual situation and what can be done to change their situation.*

Many thinkers have argued that with the advent of globalization and industrialization, modern societies would embark on a journey towards secularization

resulting in eventual decline of religion. Far from seeing a decline we have witnessed that religion has permeated deeper into society. Religion has moved out from its assigned space of sacred religious institutions and sacred spaces within home to the everyday profane world. One such space is that of politics. One of the most used tactics by the politicians to maintain their vote bank is to campaign in the name of religion. In the Indian context the use of religion to create 'us' and 'them' is not something new. The creation of the Indian nation itself began with the demarcation of two separate spaces; the Muslim dominated Pakistan and India which though constitutionally is secular would be for the Hindu. One of the key reasons why religion has survived is because of its innovative nature. Religious innovations are seen as a departure from orthodoxy and provide room for fresh ideas and practices. In this paper we are making an attempt first to study the perception of spaces where people offer prayer, particularly in the context of Hindu religious beliefs and practices based on the observations that people are these days very often could be seen reading a particular chalisa during the time when they are traveling in the metro. Secondly, find out how much differences have been made in between the conventional form of offering prayers at temples and nowadays how people are making spaces in the public domain for what is considered to be their private choice i.e. religion.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The source of data incorporated from the interview of people who have been otherwise observed for quite a long period of time during their travel in metro. The interview has given the insight of how these people are trying to create spaces for the religion in their everyday profane life example during their travel in metro. Therefore, here in this paper we have tried to understand their perspective of religion by shifting it to the public spaces from their private spaces. As it is very well known that how much religion is being debated historically and in some of the very recent cases also, of it being a very personal and private matter but then with the sight of those people who are reading, watching and listening to various religious texts and bhajans during their everyday travel in the metro which is a public transport system creates a lot of question in the mind. What are the possible reasons behind performing certain practices in the public space which are otherwise labelled as matters of private choice?

This research is based on case study method. As per the nature of the research, purposive sampling or judgmental

sampling has been used. For this research it was essential to find respondents who are reading a religious book such as chalisa and who are involved in any such activity hence the most useful sampling method was purposive sampling because in this method the researcher has the agency to select the respondents most useful or fit for the research.

## RESULTS

The interview has been taken from the people traveling in the metro particularly for those who were very often seen reading various kinds of religious texts (the various chalisa's that are available for various Hindu gods).

The number of people who were interviewed is five. Out of five people who were interviewed four of them were female who are employed in various professions like teaching, counselor, as an assistant etc. one of them was a teacher who has been teaching in different schools. The other three were working in the private companies such as Vodafone service centre, Akash institute, and some pharmaceutical companies. They prefer commuting by metro in order to reach their respective working places. And the fifth person was a priest whom we have interviewed.

## NARRATIVES OF THE PEOPLE WHO WERE INTERVIEWED

### First respondent:

Religion is something that is a very personal matter in my opinion. Also, for me it is something which brings peace to my mind and it is something which gives me a hope that everything will be fine in the end because of the fact that I feel strengthened in order to face any hurdle that comes in my way.

For me it would be something a motivation to believe in the positivity of the universe. In the sense that religion provides us with the belief that there are sources of good vibes amid of all these uncertainties of the people in terms of them treating other people unfairly.

The rituals that I practice on a daily basis are I go to temple every morning to offer prayer after taking bath and then perform daily prayer at my own house. Also, reading hanuman chalisa is also a part of my daily routine.

I always had a very keen interest towards religious practices and rituals and I always take part in various events be it singing bhajans and organize certain religious events. Therefore, being surrounded in this

kind of environment that made me learn all these rituals and practices in my everyday life

I go to temple say on Tuesdays and Mondays and on rest of the days I use to pray at home only where we have kept the idols in our house.

The place should be kept apart from the other daily activities that are being performed within a household. It needs to be cleaned on a daily basis. And should be kept away from all kind of noises so that there should be an environment of peace

In my opinion there are certain parameters that is already there in order to establish a place of worship be it in the house or building a temple at some place. That is, one needs to keep in mind the direction of the place where are you offering the prayer because you need to face in the particular direction.

In my home there is this particular place in the north-east direction which was suggested by the priest being the best place to establish an idol there. Therefore, we consider that place as sacred

Although we do worship to almost all god but then majorly, we pray to goddess *Durga*, lord *Ganesh*, *Shiva*, *Hanuman*.

There is no such reason behind why I started reading *Hanuman chalisa* as it was basically learning came from my father as he always used to read *Hanuman chalisa* whenever he prays.

The feeling of fulfillment and satisfaction that I have after reading the chalisa is immensely soothing to my mind and if a single day I go without reading this chalisa I feel missed out on something the whole day therefore I think it has become necessary for me to read it every day despite of all the other things for which I used to read it.

Reading chalisa during my metro ride is my personal choice because of the fact that I use to travel for quite a long time i.e. 40 min and I think this is the best utilization of my time during the metro ride because the time which I save otherwise at home I do some work which is needed to be done there. And there is no such hard and fast rule which needs to be followed in order to read the chalisa.

I think sometimes it becomes difficult to read it in the metro because there is no place to stand because of the huge rush that is there very often. But then all in all it is nice only that because we don't really interact with our

co-travelers although most of us very often board the same metro which is weird sometimes but then nobody actually cares about what the other person is doing.

### **Second Respondent:**

‘*Bhagwan*’ is religion; it is everything no matter how much people try to deny this fact in the end everything comes back to god. According to me religion is something that teaches us the morals of life and if one is following it then that person will always have a happier living.

Religion guide us towards the path of truthfulness and righteousness which I think very important in today’s fast changing world where people are more into making money and thinking about profit through whatsoever means. Also, it teaches me to be content with what one has in life, which in turn enables a person to lead a happy life.

There are few of them which I perform on a daily basis. The first is what one would be say for example cleaning of the house because I need to lit a ‘*Diya*’ in front of the idols that is kept at the place where I pray. Secondly, I always water ‘*Tulsi*’ plant which I have kept in my balcony. And I read ‘Santoshi Mata chalisa’ on a daily basis.

It was taught from the very beginning of my socialization because I was told that it is a really good habit and over the years, I have learnt that it gives me a ray of hope in difficult situations and also fills me with positivity.

Usually I perform my daily prayers at home only but then on the occasions such as at times when I am fasting, I prefer to go to temple and perform these daily rituals.

The idea about the area where one offers prayer should be kept clean and one also the idols need to be kept clean and, in my opinion, one also has to have specific color cloth in order the idols and the pooja place such as for e.g. a red colour ‘*chunari*’ will work for that matter.

I think any place would be fine if one needs to offer prayer but on certain occasions one needs to follow certain rules such as during the time ‘*kanya puja*’ we are very particular about how the direction in which are making them sit and also take care of which rituals needs to be one first and subsequently the rest of it.

I do have a particular place where we have kept the idol without looking into the significance of the place but then ultimately it becomes sacred as we have kept idols

and we offer our daily prayer there but one thing is there we have kept it away from the places such as kitchen because we cook non-veg sometimes.

I pray to lord Shiva, goddess Durga, Laxmi and Santoshi Mata.

It was because we were facing some mental stress in our house therefore, we were suggested by some of our neighbors to talk to some priest so that he can give some solutions to it and then they talked to a priest and he then performed one ‘*havan*’ and then suggested me to read Santoshi Mata chalisa on Fridays. And from that time onwards I have started and continued reading this chalisait was when the priest suggested me to read Santoshi Mata chalisa on Fridays. And from that time onwards I have started and continued reading this chalisa and because I can feel and see the change it pushed me to continue reading it because in no ways it is creating any disturbance all it is doing is giving positive results.

### **Third Respondent:**

Religion is believing in supernatural powers. It is something for me that I usually keep away from the day to day normal works. That is keeping it as something which is sacred and also one needs to be very careful while carrying out several rituals and practice related to the religion.

Religion helps in promoting feeling of togetherness particularly during the time of religious festivals, which in my view is of great significance. It teaches me to have patience and not to demand for results in hurry all we need to have is faith.

Waking up early in the morning because I had to do certain daily task that are needed to be done in order to perform pooja lighting up a *Diya*, reading *Laxmi Mata chalisa* on a daily basis and then also the ritual of offering prasad to the family members after the prayer.

I have learned these various practices after my marriage because my it is really a kind of ritual which everybody at home needs to follow. Therefore, being a daughter-in-law of the house, I was obliged to perform all these rituals.

Inside my house there is this particular place which has been drawn out especially for this purpose. It should be kept away from the other mundane tasks of the household and should have designated space following certain directions which is considered as the good one in order to place the idols or other religious symbols.



I will not say that there should only be the place of worship which needs to have certain guiding principles rather it should be flexible with regard to the rigid structures that is usually being followed. I only pray to goddess Durga although we do visit temples of another god as well but at our home, we worship particularly goddess Durga

It was basically because the priest told me to do it in order to have an easy life that is a life free from stress and also because I was really having a tough time during the days when I was desperately searching for a nice job. And I think now it has been almost four years that I am reading Durga chalisa

Because it was only after when I started reading the Durga chalisa immediately within 6 months I got a job so to say in a good company with a better pay scale. And because reading a chalisa doesn't demand anything it is just that you have to read keeps me motivated to continue reading it.

#### **Fourth Respondent:**

According to me religion is very important part of an individual's life. In terms of the fact that it gives hope in the hopeless situation and also provides us with the strength to deal with all the odds of life. Therefore, according to me it is a belief that provides us a sense of happiness also it has been largely considered to be the last resort when nothing works religion comes to the rescue.

It is of a great significance in my life particularly because of an incident in our house where when everything was not going well and the situation was very tough and at that particular time we have lost all hopes in the fact that the situation will ever go well but then we went to a priest who told all the ills that is there in our life and also he talked about the 'graha' and 'nakshatras' being not in place and other such things. After that we have performed each and every rituals and practices as guided by the priest and things actually got better in our house. Therefore, it has been a real experience that made us belief in the presence of god.

The first task is to wake up early in the morning and after taking bath first thing I do is pouring water in front of rising sun, then offering prayer at home also reading *Laxmi chalisa* and on certain occasions I also visit temple with the purpose of doing some 'daan punya' (giving foods and cloths to the poor) as suggested by the priest.

I have learned these various practices after my marriage only and also because of the family crises which we have faced in the past year because it is really a kind of ritual which everybody at home need to follow. Therefore, being a daughter-in-law of the house, I was obliged to perform all these rituals.

Inside my house there is this particular place which has been drawn out especially for this purpose

I always keep it clean as in I always clean that particular area and also sprinkle 'ganga jal' time to time. Rest there should be silence when one person is praying as it needs concentration in order for one to feel the connectedness with the god. But sometimes it is good if we have some bhajans which are playing in the background while offering prayers

I think it is all about faith as one needs to be true about their devotion and dedication towards the god and then although in my home, we do follow certain specific rules and rituals when we offer prayer but then I personally believe a place of worship shouldn't be bound of anything.

There are certain distinctions that is being made one the basis of sacred and mundane tasks as one is not allowed to enter the area of worship with putting n slippers or shoes also nobody is allowed to take any food near the temple etc. so I think this much restriction I justifiable when we talk about creating a place particularly for offering prayers.

I pray to goddess Laxmi, Durga, lord Ganesh, Shiva and Hanuman.

It was only after that incident which has happened in the house, I started reading this chalisa

Because it has been an experience that god is there and one can alter the current situation of a person by praying and doing certain rituals and practices it is of no question that why I shouldn't continue reading it. It always gives me a sense of security in terms me being able to do my work thinking that nothing will go wrong.

Because of the schedule and sometimes when I fail to wake up early in the morning then I end up reading chalisa in the metro and now it happens very often because I do nothing while travelling so it is better that I complete it during this travel time.

I don't know actually because I have never thought about it but then I can say that amid of all the noise and

congestion there is this feeling that nobody knows me gives me a sense of comfort when I read chalisa also I am not bothering anyone. Therefore, all in all it's fine.

### Fifth Respondent (the Priest):

Religion is worshiping god. Believing in the fact that *god is omnipresent* i.e. his presence could be sensed in each and everything that comes your way. Also believing in the fact that no lie, deceive of a person will go unnoticed and will be punished in some or the other way. Other than that, one need to have a deep faith in the powers of the god and a person should always be motivated towards doing well to others.

For us religion is our life. Because this is what for which we are living, giving our service to god. Religion gives us hope that despite of all bad there is some power which is working towards mending the chaos that has been created in the society.

We use to wake up very early in the morning say around 4 or 4:30 without fail. Then clean the premises of the temple. Take a *holy bath* that is while taking bath we used to chant some mantras which is to purify the soul. Then the day starts with the morning aarti by lighting up with ghee in the Diya as ghee is considered to be the pure and sacred in some cases. Later distributing, prasad to the people who attend the aarti after that the day ends with an evening aarti. So, these are the basic daily rituals that we usually do.

This has been continued from generations and as this is what we live for giving our service to god by offering prayers organizing various events on various religious festivals. Basically, from the very childhood we have been taught that this is our main occupation and we have been observing all of the events very closely and carefully and this has ultimately developed my interest towards devoting my service to god.

Temple is the place where we do all the rituals and practices whatsoever it is and, on any occasion, also we decorate temple on some major festivals such as navratri, mahashivratri etc.

It is the temple only which is considered to be the place where one needs to offer the prayer. Because according to me it is the place which has been built keeping each and everything in mind be it *nakshatra*, *muhurta*, *disha* (direction) etc. hence, this is the most sacred and correct place to offer prayer. And this is according to me a place which could be termed as the most sacred place from all the other places that we visit in our everyday life.

There are so many chalisa that we have for almost every god we have some or the other sloka, aarti, doha and chalisa's reading chalisa brings you closer to that a particular god and it also depend upon the kind of dedication you are putting towards reading that. And different gods are known for different kind of powers which they possess and also the kind of strength and blessings they provide to a person such as for example. Reading *Ganesh chalisa* will help you to remove obstacles from all areas of life and also for the *accomplishments of desires; intelligence and fame*. Secondly goddess *Laxmi*, praying to her will *help in increasing wealth*. Thirdly, praying to goddess *Durga* that is *known for acquiring comforts, happiness and wealth*, for the *welfare of the family* and also for *attaining success in all walks of life* and for *acquiring authority and power*.

There are certain specific days for particular chalisa such as *Hanuman chalisa should be read on Tuesdays*, *Vishnu chalisa on Thursdays* etc. and there are other things which one needs to follow such as wearing a particular on that day such as *wearing a yellow color dress on Thursday's* and *orange color cloths on Tuesdays* etc. Then there is this particular month called '*savan*' in which one *prefers to wear green color dresses*.

There are certain stories which we read in chalisa and other religious scripts which shows some instances where it can be seen that when a person doesn't perform a pooja in accordance with the particular rules and rituals which are mentioned in the text itself or otherwise then there will be some or the other tensions will come into the life of that person. But I personally believe that it is not the case because god won't be angry if at all you are performing your prayer with the utmost devotion and truthfulness. Therefore, until and unless a person is fully dedicated towards offering a prayer to the god nothing will go wrong.

There are only positive points if you are reading a chalisa as it has so much power in it that if continued over a period of time one can even witness a miracle. Because so far there are many such cases that have come in front of me where people come to me tell their stories of witnessing a miracle in various walks of their life.

### DISCUSSION

So the finding from the above work which we have studied have provided us with a lot of new understanding of the religion so as to how the notion of sacred and profane have always been there and no matter how much

one fails to maintain it still some or the other way one do consider the fact that religion is the sacred part of their life although through the interviews which we have taken shows us that there are some part of the religious practices that people are performing in the public spaces between the crowded spaces where nobody had a clear idea about the direction in which they are standing or sitting while reading those chalisa and when we talk about the direction then as per the knowledge which the priest has suggest that one should really take care of the directions in which one is facing towards because of its significance during the time of offering prayer. Also according to the priest one needs to clearly take out time solely dedicated for the prayer but as mentioned by the respondents some of them mentioned that it is their personal choice to read chalisa in the metro whereas on the other hand some talked about their busy schedule and lack of adequate time so as to perform daily prayer at home therefore, because one thinks that reading that particular chalisa brings peace and positivity to their mind they cannot miss reading it. Therefore, although all of them have their own experiences and belief which they manifested during the time of interview suggests that all of them have some or the other idea of what being considered as sacred and profane but then some of them are really not clear about maintaining it on a daily basis mentioning reasons such as them being not able to manage time because they all were employed in some or the other occupation so we can also argue that modernization have to an extent have impacted the changing notions of belief and practices among people.

And also, religion for these people is not something that they are living for as in the case of the priest who is comparatively clear about the distinction between the two. Religion for the people has become a medium through which they tend to seek answers to the things which are happening around them over which they don't have any control.

## CONCLUSION

Therefore, in the popular imagination the busy metro spaces is associated with modernity and it has always

been assumed that public spaces should be separated from the religion and religious practices however we have made an attempt to challenge this common sense understanding of the relationship between modernity and religion in terms of the two spaces the sacred and the profane. Hence, modernity in this case needs not imply secularization in fact religion and modernity tend to coexist with each other. And the understanding of people about religion tends to reflect here in a very carefree manner in terms where to carry out certain practices as what we have discussed in this paper.

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## Role of Tribal Women in Administration

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### ABSTRACT

The participation of **tribal women** in India's democratic process has seen significant improvements over the years, but challenges persist. While government initiatives, constitutional provisions, and grassroots movements have increased their political engagement, socio-economic barriers still hinder their full and effective participation. This analysis explores their role in elections, governance, decision-making, and activism while addressing key challenges and suggesting ways forward.

**Key words:** *Tribal Women, community development, economic sustainability, socio-economic barriers*

### INTRODUCTION

The participation of tribal women in various socio-economic and political spheres has been a subject of growing interest in academic research. Studies highlight their crucial role in community development, governance, and economic sustainability despite facing multiple socio-cultural and economic constraints. This literature review synthesizes existing research on tribal women's participation, emphasizing their involvement in education, economy, governance, and social movements.

Academic research on indigenous women's involvement in many socioeconomic and political arenas has grown in attention. Notwithstanding several sociocultural and financial obstacles, studies emphasize their vital role in community growth, governance, and economic sustainability. This study of the literature summarizes the body of knowledge regarding the participation of tribal women, with a focus on their roles in social movements, education, the economy, and governance.

### 1. Economic Participation

Tribal women contribute significantly to household and community economies through agriculture, handicrafts, forest produce collection, and small-scale enterprises. According to Research findings tribal women in India and other developing nations are integral to the informal labour market, often engaging in non-monetized labour that remains undervalued. It is noted that microfinance initiatives and self-help groups (SHGs) have positively

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impacted tribal women's financial independence and entrepreneurial activities. However, challenges such as land ownership rights, wage disparities, and access to market linkages persist.

## **2. Educational Involvement**

Education is a crucial factor in enhancing tribal women's participation in broader socio-economic contexts. Studies indicate that despite increased governmental efforts, literacy rates among tribal women remain lower than national averages due to geographical, financial, and cultural barriers. It is found that initiatives like mid-day meal schemes and tribal residential schools have improved educational retention among tribal girls, yet dropout rates remain high due to early marriages and domestic responsibilities.

## **3. Political Participation**

Tribal women's political engagement has seen gradual growth, particularly after affirmative action policies such as reserved seats in local governance (Panchayati Raj institutions in India). It is argued that women's representation in local governance has led to increased community development initiatives. However, gender biases, patriarchal social structures, and lack of political training limit their effective participation.

## **4. Role in Social Movements**

Tribal women have historically been active in social and environmental movements, particularly in resource conservation and rights advocacy. The documents justify their participation in protests against displacement due to industrialization and large-scale development projects. This highlights their leadership in movements like the Chipko Movement in India, where women played a critical role in forest conservation efforts.

## **5. Health and Well-being**

Tribal women's involvement in social and economic activities is strongly influenced by their health. Major obstacles include malnutrition, inadequate sanitation facilities, and a lack of maternity healthcare. Access to high-quality healthcare is still a problem, despite recent research suggesting that community-based healthcare approaches have improved maternal and child health outcomes in indigenous areas.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW :**

Empowerment of Tribal Women: Dhanasree (2014) asserts that for any culture to have quicker socioeconomic improvement, women's active engagement is essential. To achieve their complete empowerment and engagement in a society like India's, tangible measures must be implemented at various levels. Empowerment, equal opportunities for resource ownership, increased participation in the business and economic sectors, awareness of one's rights and responsibilities, improved living standards, self-reliance, self-worth, and self-assurance are some of the concepts that have surfaced in relation to elevating women's status. As previously mentioned, around 8% of India's population is tribal, and in most of these states, poor tribal women experience, low incomes, poor nutrition, and restricted access to healthcare, education. The average native woman is an active member of our workforce. In their houses, they work for no pay, but when they work outside the home, they must do paid for their labour. Therefore, even with constitutional protection, tribal women have not reaped the benefits of modernization. They continue to be at the bottom of the developmental ladder and are constantly exploited.

Puttaraja and Heggade (2012) looked at how women are important in tribal societies' social, cultural, economic, and religious practices and are regarded as assets in their communities. They still lag far behind in a variety of spheres of life, such as work, education, economic empowerment, and good health.

Thakur (2009): The poorest, most economically and socially oppressed groups are thought to be tribal communities. Compared to their male counterparts, women in these social categories live in the worst conditions. It addressed women's status, arguing that although individuals are two distinct human beings with different genders at birth and are equally significant, women are consistently treated as the weaker and second-class segment of society. Tribal women are sometimes disregarded; this marginalized, oppressed, and underprivileged minority needs more attention.

Education should help people better manage the demands of a dynamic, ever-changing world, according to Rani, G. S., Rajani, N., & Neeraja, P. (2011). Educational systems should be changed to appropriately recognize the ability to seek and develop talent to whatever level one is capable of, which should also help to bridge socio-economic divides. Throughout India, the

indigenous minority has experienced many forms of deprivation, such as the alienation of resources and land. Despite being excluded from most aspects of national life, tribal women are still vulnerable to the effects of socio-economic shifts in society.

Birinder Pal Singh (2010) provided a detailed anthropological account of seven denitrified tribes, also referred to as Vimukthi jets, lawbreaker tribes, wedding, family, life cycle, and economic activities. Religious characteristics, the results of development projects, the history of criminal tribes, their arrival in Punjab, their establishment, and the reasons behind their reputation as criminals have all been thoroughly explained. Marriage, family, life-cycle rituals, food habits, social divisions, and the impact of development projects are just a few of the subjects that are discussed separately for tribes. Tribes are affected differently by development projects. Each tribe has a different literacy rate.

**Suri, K. (2014):** Women account for roughly half of the world's population. Without the involvement of women, no nation or culture can even consider progress and development. Education is the only tool that allows women to be empowered all over the world because it is the only schooling that stimulates the awareness and rational thought of human beings, including women. We cannot deny the value of education for women in today's world and India, as it has the potential to elevate them to the same level as their male counterparts. In a changing world in which women are actively participating in social, political, economic, and other fields, women in India remain illiterate, taken advantage of, and backward.

Women make up about half of the world's population, according to Suri, K. (2014). No country or culture can even think about progress and development without the participation of women. Since education is the only thing that raises awareness and encourages logical thought among all people, including women, it is the sole instrument that enables women to be empowered globally. In India and the modern world, we cannot undervalue the importance of education for women since it can help them reach the same level as males. In a world that is developing and where women are actively involved in social, political, economic, and other spheres, Indian women continue to be ignorant, exploited, and regressive.

Smriti Sharma and Ashwini Deshpande (2015): Among the many drawbacks this study has found for India ,

caste and gender are projected as prominent, which are thought to be two of the same social stratification factors. Women and girls from lower caste groups are impacted by disparities in access to resources and assets, occupation and ownership, management, education, incomes, and nutrition and health. One of several studies on women's contributions to India's economic growth this study looked into the challenges and problems that Indian women confront. The research identifies several significant obstacles to development and empowerment, including poverty, child marriage, hunger, and illiteracy.

Dr. Ramakrishnappa (2015): The article's primary focus was Karnataka's Scheduled Tribes' socio-economic status and female empowerment. The study discovered significant gaps between the real independence of tribal women and scientific and policy developments. Women's economic, social, and political identities, in addition to their weight, impact their level of empowerment. A significant number of tribal women live in remote areas with limited access to resources like as production, health care, and education.

Murmu, S. C., and Bhattacharya, S. (2019): Women in India always have "dual obligations" that extend beyond the home. Their roles are significant in both non-economic and economic processes. In the interior regions of India, tribal women are economically essential to their families and communities. The study supports the notion that women who engage in substantial participation in fundamental subsistence activities enjoy a high status. Their contributions to the subsistence economy have placed them in a significant and irrevocable position, despite their limited control over material or resources.

A common misunderstanding that tribal women held a higher social status in their civilizations than Indian women was assessed by Khan, S., & Hasan, Z. (2020). However, some legal study challenges this assertion. In tribal societies, women are vital and abundant. Tribal people make up about 8.6% of a nation's total population, according to the 2011 Census. Demographic data indicates that they have been at a disadvantage for many years because so many of them reside in rural areas.

A study by Azra Musavi and Juhi Gupta (2020) provided a comprehensive analysis of a number of topics pertaining to women's marginalization in India. It evolved into an intriguing discussion about the many levels of difficulty women encounter and the



complexities of life that accompany them. The study clarified the constitutional, legal, and political facets of the topic in addition to examining issues and challenges. It also provided the most recent insights into the understanding of the current state of marginalized women in India.

Research shows that although tribal women are important in the political and socio-economic areas, structural obstacles are still there to prevent them from fully participating. In order to increase their engagement and enhance the general well-being of the community, policies that prioritize political inclusion, economic empowerment, and education are essential. They should also address health inequities. Future studies ought to examine the long-term effects of grassroots initiatives and legislative changes.

## ROLE OF TRIBAL WOMEN IN ADMINISTRATION

Tribal women's administrative roles are changing, and they are becoming more involved in leadership, governance, and decision-making at all levels. An outline of their efforts is provided below:

### 1. Traditional Governance Roles:

- Women have long been integral to local governance and decision-making in many tribal societies.
- In certain tribal communities, such as the Khasi and Garo of Meghalaya, who adhere to a matrilineal system, women have a major say in social and political issues.

### 2. Engagement with Panchayati Raj Establishments (PRIs)

- Many tribal women participate in grassroots development as sarpanches, ward members, and district council members; the 73rd Constitutional Amendment (1992) guaranteed 33% of seats for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions, allowing tribal women to assume leadership positions in local governance.

### 3. Role in Policy Advocacy and Social Movements

- Tribal women have been at the forefront of various environmental and land rights movements, such as:

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- **Chipko Movement** (Uttarakhand)
- **Narmada Bachao Andolan**
- **Dongria Kondh's anti-mining protests** in Odisha
- They advocate for **land rights, forest conservation, and tribal autonomy**.

### 4. Leadership in Government and Politics

- Many tribal women have taken up roles in **state assemblies, Parliament, and administrative services**.
- Examples include **Droupadi Murmu**, the first tribal woman to become the President of India.

### 5. Representation in Tribal Councils & Self-Governance Bodies

- Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) and tribal self-governance institutions have increasing participation of women in decision-making.
- Tribal women actively engage in community dispute resolution and social welfare programs.

### 6. Challenges Faced

- **Patriarchal norms** still limit the participation of many tribal women in administration.
- **Lack of education and awareness** hinders their ability to take up leadership roles.
- **Political marginalization and exploitation** by dominant groups pose significant challenges.

### 7. Government Initiatives to Promote Tribal Women in Administration

- Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and Microfinance Schemes are put into operation to empower women economically;
- Scholarships and Education incentives are provided for tribal girls for receiving education ;
- Reservation of ST women in Parliament and Assemblies to increase the scope for Political Participation ; and
- Skill Development Programmes like Van Dhan Vikas Karyakram for Capacity-Building

Tribal women are playing an increasingly significant role in administration, from grassroots governance to national politics. With better education, legal support, and political empowerment, their participation can further strengthen tribal self-governance and community development.

## **ROLE OF TRIBAL WOMEN IN LOCAL SELF-GOVERNANCE**

Tribal women play a crucial role in **local self-governance**, particularly after the **73rd Constitutional Amendment Act (1992)**, which mandated **reservations for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs)**. Their participation has strengthened decision-making, social welfare, and community development at the grassroots level.

### **1. Participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs)**

#### **(a) Reservation for Women in PRIs**

- The **73rd Amendment Act** provided **33% reservation for women** in local bodies, including tribal areas under the **Fifth Schedule**.
- Some states, like Bihar and Madhya Pradesh, have **50% reservation** for women, encouraging greater tribal women's representation.

#### **(b) Roles Played by Tribal Women in PRIs**

- **Sarpanches & Ward Members:** Many tribal women serve as village heads and decision-makers.
- **Decision-Making on Key Issues:** Land rights, education, health, forest conservation, and women's empowerment.
- **Social Welfare Implementation:** Ensuring access to schemes like **MGNREGA, PDS, and health programs**.

#### **(c) Examples of Successful Tribal Women Leaders**

- **Phulwati Murmu (Jharkhand):** A tribal woman sarpanch who led initiatives for women's literacy and sanitation.
- **Dayamani Barla (Jharkhand):** An activist known for her role in tribal self-governance and land rights.
- **Nandini Sundar's Research:** Shows that tribal women in self-governance play a major role in resisting displacement and environmental destruction.

### **2. Role in PESA (Panchayats Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996**

The **PESA Act** empowers Gram Sabhas (village councils) in Scheduled Areas, strengthening **tribal self-rule**.

- **Tribal Women in Gram Sabhas:** They influence decisions on land use, forest management, and social justice.
- **Forest Rights Act, 2006:** Women participate in securing community forest rights and resisting illegal deforestation.

### **3. Challenges Faced by Tribal Women in Local Governance**

- **Patriarchal Norms:** Many tribal women still struggle for equal say in decision-making.
- **Lack of Education & Awareness:** Low literacy rates hinder their political participation.
- **Political Manipulation:** Male-dominated structures sometimes use women as proxies in governance.
- **Limited Resources & Training:** Many tribal women leaders lack administrative skills and access to funding.

### **4. Government Initiatives to Promote Tribal Women's Leadership**

- **Women's Reservation Bill (2023):** Proposed **33% reservation for women in Parliament & State Assemblies**, which will further empower tribal women.
- **National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM):** Encourages Self-Help Groups (SHGs) for economic empowerment.
- **Capacity-Building Programs:** Training for elected tribal women representatives to improve governance skills.

Tribal women are becoming **agents of change** in local self-governance, shaping decisions that impact their communities. While challenges remain, policies like **PESA, PRI reservations, and skill-building programmes** are helping them take on leadership roles. Strengthening their participation further can lead to **more inclusive, sustainable, and effective governance** at the grassroots level.

## PARTICIPATION OF TRIBAL WOMEN IN THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS IN INDIA – AN ANALYSIS

### 1. Political Representation of Tribal Women

#### (a) Reservation and Electoral Participation

- The **73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments (1992)** ensured **33% reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs)** and urban local bodies, benefiting tribal women in rural governance.
- Some states, like Bihar and Madhya Pradesh, have **50% reservation for women in PRIs**, leading to greater tribal women's representation.
- The **Scheduled Tribe (ST) reservations** in Parliament and State Assemblies have led to increased tribal women leaders in mainstream politics.

#### (b) Notable Tribal Women Leaders

- **Droupadi Murmu** – First tribal woman President of India.
- **Phulmati Devi (Jharkhand)** – Tribal sarpanch leading local development.
- **Jual Oram & Anusuiya Uikey** – Women tribal leaders who contributed to policy-making.

#### (c) Voter Turnout & Participation Trends

- In several tribal-dominated states (Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, and northeastern states), **tribal women have shown higher voter turnout** compared to urban women.
- Awareness campaigns, self-help groups (SHGs), and NGO initiatives have increased tribal women's electoral participation.

### 2. Role in Grassroots Democracy and Local Governance

#### (a) Participation in Gram Sabhas and PESA Act, 1996

- The Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA) gives tribal Gram Sabhas the authority to make their own decisions.

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- Tribal women take an active role in social welfare, forest management, and land rights programmes.
- Concerns concerning relocation and environmental preservation have been raised by women's collectives in Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, and Odisha.

#### (b) Forest Rights and Movements

- **Forest Rights Act, 2006** empowered tribal women to assert **community forest rights**.
- **Dongria Kondh (Odisha) and Gond (Chhattisgarh) women** have resisted mining projects that threaten their livelihoods.

### 3. Challenges to Tribal Women's Political Participation

#### (a) Patriarchy and Social Barriers

- Many tribal communities are patriarchal, limiting women's political involvement.
- In some cases, elected tribal women leaders serve as "proxies" for male relatives.

#### (b) Low Literacy and Awareness

- The literacy rate among tribal women remains lower than the national average, affecting their ability to participate in governance effectively.

#### (c) Political Marginalization and Violence

- Tribal women in conflict-prone areas (e.g., central India's Maoist-affected regions) face **threats, displacement, and violence**, discouraging political participation.
- Political parties often neglect tribal women's concerns in electoral manifestos.

### 4. Government Policies and Initiatives for Political Empowerment

#### (a) Women's Reservation Bill (Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, 2023)

- Proposes **33% reservation for women in Parliament and State Assemblies**, which can **increase tribal women's representation in national politics**.

#### (b) National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) and SHGs



- SHGs like **Mahila Sangathans** have strengthened tribal women's leadership skills, making them more politically active.

### (c) Legal and Policy Reforms

- More training programs and **capacity-building workshops** are being conducted for tribal women elected to local bodies.
- Special financial assistance is provided for women-led tribal enterprises and self-governance projects.

## 5. The Way Forward: Strengthening Tribal Women's Democratic Participation

- **Education & Awareness Campaigns:** Expanding literacy programs and leadership training for tribal women.
- **Economic Empowerment:** Providing financial independence through self-employment and entrepreneurship.
- **Stronger Legal Implementation:** Ensuring PESA and FRA laws are effectively enforced to benefit tribal women.
- **Protection from Political Violence:** Addressing security concerns in conflict-prone tribal regions.
- **Encouraging Youth Leadership:** More efforts to engage young tribal women in democratic decision-making.

Although reservations, grassroots activity, and policy changes have improved tribal women's involvement in the political process, obstacles still exist. Tribal women can have more role and play in governance and policy-making with improved training, awareness, and assistance, guaranteeing a more inclusive and representative democracy in India.

## CAUSES OR CHALLENGES OF TRIBAL WOMEN PARTICIPATION

Tribal women face several challenges that affect their participation in social, economic, and political activities. These challenges arise from historical marginalization, socio-economic disadvantages, and cultural factors. Here are some key causes and challenges:

### 1. Socio-Cultural Challenges

- **Traditional Gender Roles:** Many tribal societies have deeply ingrained patriarchal

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norms that limit women's participation in decision-making.

- **Early Marriage:** Child marriage is prevalent in some tribal communities, restricting women's education and economic opportunities.
- **Superstitions and Customs:** Some traditional practices discourage women from actively engaging in public life.

### 2. Economic Challenges

- **Poverty:** Many tribal communities face severe poverty, and women often have to focus on survival rather than participation in other activities.
- **Lack of Economic Independence:** Tribal women frequently lack access to financial resources, credit, and land ownership.
- **Limited Employment Opportunities:** Economic activities in tribal areas are often limited to agriculture and labor-intensive work, which offer low wages and poor working conditions.

### 3. Educational Barriers

- **Low literacy rates:** Many women in the tribe have less access to education due to school absence, distance, and cultural factors.
- **Language barriers.** Education is often provided in a basic language, complicating effective training for breeding women who speak Indigenous languages.
- **Navigation indicator:** Girls are more likely to be abandoned due to the absence of proper hygiene at school, home duties, early marriage, absence of women teachers or proper sanitation in schools.

### 4. Health and Well-being

- **Lack of Healthcare Facilities:** Tribal areas often lack proper medical infrastructure, leading to high maternal mortality and poor health outcomes.
- **Malnutrition:** Many tribal women suffer from malnutrition due to poverty and lack of access to nutritious food.
- **Lack of Awareness:** Many tribal women are unaware of their rights to healthcare and reproductive health services.

## 5. Political and Legal Challenges

- **Limited Political Representation:** Tribal women are often underrepresented in decision-making positions at the local, state, and national levels.
- **Lack of Awareness of Rights:** Many tribal women are unaware of their legal rights and government schemes meant for their benefit.
- **Violence and Discrimination:** Many tribal women face domestic violence, exploitation, and harassment, discouraging them from participating in public life.

## 6. Infrastructure and Connectivity Issues

- **Poor Transport and Communication:** Remote tribal areas often lack proper roads, electricity, and internet access, making it difficult for women to engage in economic and political activities.
- **Limited Access to Markets:** Women engaged in traditional crafts or agriculture struggle to reach larger markets due to poor infrastructure.

## 7. Environmental and Displacement Issues

- **Loss of Land and Livelihoods:** Many tribal communities face displacement due to deforestation, mining, and large-scale industrial projects, impacting women's stability and economic participation.
- **Climate Change:** Environmental changes often affect agriculture and forest-based livelihoods, which are crucial for tribal women.

## REASONS FOR NON-PARTICIPATION OF TRIBAL WOMEN :

The non-participation of tribal women in various social, economic, and political activities can be attributed to several factors, including:

### 1. Socio-Cultural Factors

- **Traditional Gender Roles** – Many tribal communities follow patriarchal norms where women are expected to focus on domestic responsibilities rather than public participation.
- **Early Marriages** – In some tribes, early marriage limits women's mobility and opportunities for education and employment.

- **Social Taboos and Restrictions** – Cultural taboos may prevent women from engaging in decision-making or public activities.

### 2. Economic Barriers

- **Poverty** – Many tribal communities face economic hardship, and women often have to engage in unpaid labor, limiting their time for participation in community activities.
- **Lack of Financial Independence** – Tribal women often have limited access to land ownership, credit, and financial decision-making.
- **Dependence on Traditional Livelihoods** – Dependence on agriculture, forest products, and informal labor can make it difficult for women to engage in broader economic or political activities.

### 3. Educational Constraints

- **Low Literacy Rates** – Many tribal women have lower literacy levels due to limited access to quality education.
- **Language Barriers** – Many tribal languages are not included in formal education, making learning difficult.
- **Lack of Awareness** – Due to low literacy, tribal women may not be aware of their rights, welfare schemes, or opportunities for participation.

### 4. Health and Well-being Issues

- **Poor Healthcare Facilities** – Lack of healthcare access leads to high maternal mortality and poor overall health, reducing participation in community affairs.
- **Malnutrition and Anemia** – High prevalence of malnutrition affects the physical ability of women to engage in public or economic activities.

### 5. Political and Legal Barriers

- **Limited Political Representation** – Tribal women have minimal representation in local governance and decision-making bodies.
- **Lack of Awareness of Legal Rights** – Many tribal women are unaware of their constitutional rights, such as land rights, voting rights, and protection against discrimination.

- **Fear of Exploitation** – Tribal women are often vulnerable to exploitation and harassment, discouraging active participation.

## 6. Geographical and Infrastructure Challenges

- **Remote Locations** – Many tribal communities live in remote areas with poor connectivity, making it difficult for women to engage in mainstream activities.
- **Lack of Transport and Communication** – Inaccessibility to markets, schools, and government offices restricts mobility and participation.

## 7. Discrimination and Social Exclusion

- **Marginalization by Mainstream Society** – Tribal women often face discrimination in education, employment, and governance.
- **Caste and Ethnic Biases** – In some regions, tribal communities face discrimination from dominant caste groups, further restricting women's participation.

## 8. Burden of Domestic and Community Responsibilities

- **Excessive Workload** – Tribal women often perform multiple roles, including farming, fuel and water collection, and childcare, leaving little time for participation in social or economic activities.
- **Lack of Support Systems** – Limited access to childcare and support from male members restricts their ability to engage in external affairs.

## KEY ASPECTS OF SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT

- **Education and awareness**: Provides access to quality education, raises awareness of social issues, promotes critical thinking skills, and allows individuals to make informed decisions and make arguments that affect their lives.
- **Health and well being** : Ensures access to health services, information and resources that enable individuals to maintain excellent physical and mental health, and enables them to take proactive action in a variety of social activities.

- **Civil Participation**: Encouraging active participation in public and civil matters, including participation in decision-making processes, public projects and local administration.

- **Equality of Gender and Diversity** :Promote equal rights and opportunities for all individuals, regardless of their sex, their ethnic origin, their religion or their other characteristic, and discrimination and prejudices .

- **Social networks and support**: Promotesocial connections and networks that provide individuals with emotional support, information and resources to deal with challenges and seize opportunities.

- **Media and Communication**: Ensure access to a variety of media platforms that improve unresolved voices and outlook, allowing people to share their stories and experiences.

- **Legal and Human Rights**: Legal and Human Rights protection of all members of the Society.It allows individuals to protect their rights and aim for justice when necessary.

- **ommunity Development**: Community promotion – oriented initiatives that solve local problems, strengthen social cohesion and improve the general quality of life.

- **Capacity-Building**:Expanding the rights and capabilities of people to express their problems, needs and desires, both individually and collectively, in order to influence politics and practices that affect their lives.

## KEY APPROACH FOR PROMOTING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF TRIBAL WOMEN:

- **Diversification of livelihoods**: Provides training and support to tribal women engaged in a variety of income-generating activities, including agriculture, breeding agriculture, crafts, weaving, and small and medium-sized businesses.
- **Skill Development**: Provide tribal women with skill development programs with marketable skills, allowing them to access better employment opportunities and start their own business.
- **Access to Finance**: Promote access to microfinance, credit and savings services tailored to the needs of



tribal women, invest in activities and manage their finances effectively.

- Legal Rights and Land Ownership: Protect the safe land rights of tribal women, ensuring access and property for productive resources. This is often essential for economic activity.
- **Gender - Sensitive Policies:** Play for the gender - sensitive policies that contributes to equal economic capabilities and solves specific problems faced by women.
- Supporting child and mother management: Provide access to services to children and mothers that allow tribes to balance their responsibilities for the care of economic activities.
- Adding value to traditional skills: Recognize and Promote traditional skills and knowledge owned by tribal women, helping them add value to their products and generate income thanks to cultural heritage .
- Education and Training: Provides education and vocational training programs that enable tribal women to acquire modern skills and knowledge by increasing employment and earning potential.
- Awareness and Financial Literacy: To enhance women's conscience with tribal women with economic rights and capabilities, and to teach financial literacy to improve financial management skills.
- Monitoring and Assessment: Monitor and evaluate economic development programmes regularly and make necessary coordination with tribal women to assess their impact on well - being.

### **KEY STRATEGIES AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR PROMOTING POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT OF TRIBAL WOMEN:**

- Legal and Policy Reform: Advocate for legal and policy changes that ensure equal rights and opportunities for tribal women in politics. This may include reforms related to election representation, seat reservations and countermeasures against discrimination .
- Potential Expansion: Training and Potential Building is a programme to generate political skills, leadership abilities, and knowledge about tribal women. This

will allow them to effectively participate in political activities and decision-making.

- Awareness and education: Raises awareness among tribal communities about the importance of women's participation in politics and how this can be provided for community development and management.
- Support networks: Create platforms for women for tribes in order to exchange experience and support each other in their political efforts. These networks can ensure mentoring, encouragement and a feeling of solidarity.
- Seat Reservations: Advocate for reservation of seats in legislative Bodies for tribal women, ensuring that there is guaranteed space for them to represent the community and contribute to policy discussions.
- Local Governance: Promotes the participation of Tribal women in local governance agencies such as village councils and Panchayats.
- Cultural Sensitivity: Recognise and Respect the cultural standards and traditions of tribal communities while promoting gender equality and female participation. They will interact with community leaders to ensure that efforts to expand rights and opportunities are culturally sensitive and fully available.
- Leadership Development: Identify and nourish women from emerging tribes, providing the possibility of mentoring, leadership training and exposure to the political process.
- Advocacy and Expression: Encourage Tribal women to express their concerns and defend questions that are important to them, both within their communities and on more important political platforms.

### **WAYS TO IMPROVE PARTICIPATION**

- **Promoting Education and Skill Development** – Encouraging literacy programs and vocational training.
- **Strengthening Government Policies** – Ensuring tribal women benefit from welfare schemes and reservation policies.
- **Enhancing Political Representation** – Encouraging women's participation in local governance through reserved seats and leadership training.

- **Improving Infrastructure and Healthcare** – Providing better roads, healthcare centers, and financial support for tribal women.
- **Encouraging Economic Empowerment** – Promoting self-help groups (SHGs) and entrepreneurship opportunities.
- Increasing **awareness programs** about women's rights and legal protections.

## CONCLUSION

Empowering tribal women politically not only benefits their individual rights and well - being but also contributes to more inclusive and effective governance, diverse policy perspectives, and the overall development of tribal communities. It requires a multi - faceted approach that addresses social, cultural, and structural factors while promoting active participation and representation. Promoting the economic development of tribal women requires a comprehensive and culturally sensitive approach that takes into account their unique social, cultural, and economic contexts. Collaborative efforts involving government agencies, non - governmental organizations, community leaders, and tribal women themselves are essential to achieving meaningful and sustainable economic empowerment. Social empowerment aims to create a more inclusive and equitable society where all individuals have the opportunity to thrive and contribute. It involves shifting power dynamics, challenging social norms, and dismantling barriers that hinder the full participation and well - being of marginalized groups. Efforts to achieve social empowerment often require collaboration between governments, civil society organizations, community leaders, and individuals themselves. By fostering a sense of belonging, agency, and shared responsibility, social empowerment contributes to stronger communities, improved social cohesion, and sustainable development. Efforts towards tribal women empowerment in India need to be context - specific, culturally sensitive, and sustainable. By addressing economic, social, and political dimension, these initiatives contribute to the holistic development of tribal women and create amore inclusive and equitable society.

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## Declarations

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## Consent for publication

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## Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

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